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1 Introduction

Outline

- 1.1 Influence Landscape Planning and Design Ltd is appointed by Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC) to provide Landscape Architecture consultation comments on the LVIA for the planning application called *Land to the West of Main Street, Kelham, Newark on Trent* for proposed solar development, BESS and associated works.
- 1.2 The planning application is supported by a Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) by Sirius Planning and Landscape Masterplan. The relevant reference is:
 - 23/01837/FULM - Land to the West of Main Street, Kelham, Newark on Trent, HC1002 02 01/LVIA & Landscape Masterplan HC1002 02 5/16.
- 1.3 Site visits were carried out on 13 February 2024 to look at the surrounding area, including the viewpoint locations, covering the study area.

2 Comments on the Application

- 2.1 Following a review of the information relevant to this application, comments are set out below.

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Baseline

- 2.2 The LVIA follows a very clear methodology. One important element to note is that the ZTV has been run to a height of 2m to allow for the solar panels and measured from points within the site excluding the BESS compound, and the associated heights of the attached BESS. The BESS compound is described as comprising of battery clusters at 3,2m high, two transformers – with typical height of 3m, 3m high concrete firewalls, DNO substations x 2 (not sure at what height), and a 4m acoustic fence to the east of the DNO, at ground level circa 13 aOD, a higher part of the site.
- 2.3 Within the LVIA the correct guidance has been followed and the relevant planning policies, designations and features have been referenced. The description of the site and the surrounding area is accurate.
- 2.4 Cultural heritage and ecological designations are also considered within the LVIA, with nearby heritage assets such as Kelham Country House and Kelham Hall given local and regional importance only. As listed buildings they can surely be classified as of national importance.
- 2.5 The LVIA does not include adjacent Conservation Areas when describing the function of the site, but states in the summary *Landscape Value of the site and immediate Area* that, *'the site's value is influenced by its location close to the nearby villages of Kelham and Averham to which it is a component part of their settings lying in close proximity to two Conservation areas'*¹. This is not adequately explained in the LVIA and signposts instead to a potential Heritage Assessment that is subsequently included in planning documents for the proposals. The LVIA was written without reference to a heritage report and relies heavily on judgements made through the archaeological desk based assessment when considering values regarding cultural heritage.
- 2.6 There is an overall judgement of 'low' recreational value of the site and immediate area, the recreational value of the site is described as, *'Low importance and rarity at local scale. The site itself does not present important public amenity value by way of views, quiet enjoyment and access but is part of an onward circular route'*², with the immediate setting described as follows *'presents some amenity value by way of views, access, biodiversity, cultural or opportunity for quiet enjoyment (tranquillity)'*.

¹ Table 4, p34, LVIA, Proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), HC1002 02 01/LVIA, Sirius Planning

² Table 4, p32, LVIA, Proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), HC1002 02 01/LVIA, Sirius Planning

- 2.7 It is considered that, the LVIA report downplays the importance of the site for recreational amenity as the PRoW within the site and adjacent Trent Valley Way, running next to the south eastern boundary of the site, and the extensive network of permissive paths at the site, are well used by recreational users. The current permissive route at the site links to PRoW within the site and is setback from the busy A617. The permissive route was part of Higher Level Stewardship funding and then linked to the Trent Valley Way, now re-routed along the A617. Part of this funding also allowed for species rich grass margins to the arable fields.
- 2.8 In the *Landscape Value Summary*³ within the LVIA, the landscape value of the site and immediate area is assessed as 'medium' and overall I am in agreement with this rating. It is proposed that in mitigation, there is *'suitable standoff from the proposed layout of solar panels so that this route will be physically unaffected by the proposed solar farm'*. It does not specify the amount of standoff to the PRoW route and permissive routes at the site.
- 2.9 There are 11 Viewpoints in total and it is agreed that these are representative of viewpoints within the study area for potentially sensitive visual receptors. For Viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 11, following the baseline photograph, a photomontage has been produced to illustrate the visual changes resulting from the proposed Solar Farm and BESS. It should be noted that these views are illustrative only (AVR3) and are not verifiable. For some of the most sensitive views we would recommend that it is appropriate to provide AVR4, Verifiable Views for complete clarity.
- 2.10 The sensitivity of affected receptors groups is set out for all viewpoints with the exception of Viewpoints 01 & 03. Later in the report, in the assessment of visual effects this oversight is remedied and included in tables for PRoW receptors (Table 8).
- 2.11 The **overall summary assessment** of the landscape of the site and surrounding area is assessed as 'medium', it is aligned with the published landscape character descriptions and sensitivities and also aligns with our own professional judgements.
- 2.12 We are satisfied that the landscape and visual assessor has identified an appropriate study area.

Landscape Masterplan

- 2.13 The retention of existing field boundary vegetation at the site is defined as an integral part of the proposed development. With reference to the Landscape Masterplan, the red line boundary lies inside of key vegetated field boundaries of the site and therefore not within the control of the applicant. The LVIA describes how all boundary hedgerows are to be maintained at 3m+ *'where appropriate'*. Presumably this pertains to newly planted boundary hedgerow within the site, as there is normally no control of hedgerow outside of a site boundary. On the landscape mitigation plan there is very little hedgerow planting to the site, with the exception of proposed hedgerow to the south eastern boundary where the site is close to the A617 and also to the western edge of the site, adjacent to the BESS. Hedgerow at field boundaries of the site are generally maintained lower than 3m and this proposed mitigation departs from this local characteristic.

³ P36, LVIA, Proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), HC1002 02 01/LVIA, Sirius Planning

- 2.14 Mitigation proposals for the BESS compound is described as a replacement hedgerow 'to help screen' the compound from the surrounding farmland, and the landscape mitigation plan also provides for earth bunding between the hedgerow and BESS compound.
- 2.15 Other mitigation is described, and consists of tree planting and scrub planting at certain locations, in particular to:
- the current open boundary at the intervening field separating the site from the grounds of Kelham Country House and the site and to the north east boundary of the upper field;
 - Gapping up hedgerow along the PRow route with hedgerow and trees; and
 - Strips of grass seeding proposed and earth bunding to the site where adjacent to properties along Broadgate Lane.
- 2.16 There is some intervisibility from the edges of Averham and Kelham Conservation Areas, which can be considered as within landscape immediately adjacent to the site. These are represented by VPs 07 & 05 respectively. VP 01 shows the extent of intervisibility from the edge of Kelham Conservation Area, next to the pond and the site. There are glimpsed views of properties north of Kelham Country House, references as residential receptor group R6: 'The Rutlands' in this view but greatly filtered by woodland vegetation, as well as the ground plane of the north eastern part of the site above low cut hedgerow. Greater mitigation could be provided for these Conservation Areas. Firstly, by extending screening planting next to the pond and secondly, by providing some screening planting to the south eastern boundary facing Averham. This mitigation planting should also take account of permissive routes and standoffs as outlined below.
- 2.17 Later in the report under Landscape Mitigation⁴, standoff is described in more detail, and quantifies standoff as '*a minimum 4m standoff from hedges/trees to the site security fence*', with some areas having a greater amount. Proposed permissive routes lie within the corridor between boundary vegetation and the security fence, and although difficult to ascertain from the landscape mitigation plan submitted⁵ it seems that the proposed perimeter solar fencing (further described as '*unobtrusive Deer security fencing*', timber post and mesh), does not reach a 4m minimum width for the recreational user at parts of the route. Particularly at the wooded boundary to Kelham Country House, to the west of the BESS and at the northern corner of the site. Admittedly some of these locations are extensions to the existing permissive path route, and are proposed to form an unbroken circular route around the whole of the site.
- 2.18 Similarly for PRow routes at the eastern edges of the site, there is a tight corridor between boundary vegetation and the proposed security fencing. PRow corridors should be 10m wide on either side of the PRow route⁶.

⁴ P38, LVIA, Proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), HC1002 02 01/LVIA, Sirius Planning

⁵ Landscape Mitigation, Kelham Solar Farm & BESS, HC1002 02 05 R3, 29.09.23, Sirius Planning

⁶ This is a precedent set in previous applications at Knapworth and Caunton

Assessment

- 2.19 Considering the effects, the LVIA states that upon completion there will be a moderate adverse effect on the site and the immediate environs but effects will decrease with increasing distance from the site and having a minor adverse effect over the study area generally. The LVIA judges construction phase effects to be of a higher magnitude of effect, but of a shorter duration and focussed on the site and immediate environs only.
- 2.20 Impacts of the BESS are mainly excluded in descriptions within the report, there is very little description of the effects of the BESS compound at the site upon landscape and visual receptors, apart from some description under Table 6. Descriptions of effects are mainly limited to the solar arrays at 2m height only and not that of the BESS compound.
- 2.21 It is our opinion that the culmination of magnitude of landscape effects upon the site and its immediate environs can be assessed as medium to high, and being of a higher magnitude of effect than 'medium' as stated in the report. Using the methodology of the LVIA and considering the reports' judgements of the solar arrays in terms of scale, geographical extent, and duration & reversibility, this would result in an overall moderate/major adverse level of effects, due the Proposals, when the BESS compound is also included in judgements. The report acknowledges that the change due to the Proposals would be 'diminishing the sense of place locally for users of the PRow crossing the north western areas of the site (and users of the permissive path)'⁷.
- 2.22 Although all visual receptors appear to have been recognised in the viewpoint assessment tables (Table 7: Residential Receptors, Table 8: Recreational Routes and Transportation Network & Table 9: Recreational and Cultural Destination), PRow receptors are not fully recognised in the Viewpoint Assessment Table (Table 6) for Viewpoints 01, 04 & 05, unlike other receptor groups such as residents and road users. Separate tables have been made for these higher sensitivity receptors and Table 7: Residential Receptors & Table 8: Recreational Routes and Transportation network, gives a more in depth look at impacts for these receptor groups.
- 2.23 Residential group R6 'The Rutlands' comprises of detached properties within Kelham Conservation Area directly south of the site. As shown in Viewpoint 01 – there is some intervisibility for properties within this group, albeit highly filtered, but in Table 7 they are describes as 'afforded high levels of screening for the woodland block bounding the east side of site' and therefore the magnitude of visual effect of the proposals upon this receptor group is assessed as 'none'. This should be reviewed.
- 2.24 A photomontage of the site would have been beneficial for Viewpoint 07, as was provided for Viewpoint 05, as this is where the tallest elements of the site are situated and the roadside hedgerow is gappy along this edge, which is also the edge of Averham Conservation Area and its settlement edge and where there is not any proposed mitigation planting for views from this direction. The lack of a rendered visualisation/photomontage at this edge of Averham (Viewpoint 07), particularly of the impact of the proposed BESS, does not lead to a clear enough understanding of the proposed change in views experienced by

⁷ Para 6.4.1, p47, LVIA, Proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), HC1002 02 01/LVIA, Sirius Planning

the few residential receptors nearby and also upon the Conservation Area. Refer to our previous point about the integrity of the montages.

- 2.25 Overall, we are in general agreement with the visual sensitivity ratings as set out in Tables 6, 7 & 8 & 9 of the LVIA.
- 2.26 However, the LVIA does not recognise any visual effects during the construction phase for sensitive visual receptors (section 8.1.2). This is due to *'vehicles accessing the site and on the proposed internal access tracks will be visible but from most situations away from the site boundaries and internal PRow these movements will be difficult to discern'*⁸. I do not feel that this section fully describes all aspects of construction of the proposals for local sensitive receptors, which are expounded more fully in an earlier section (6.6.3) of the LVIA.
- 2.27 The report does conclude that visually moderate- major adverse effects would be limited to PRow receptors within the site, or PRow receptors for a short distance of the Trent Valley Way directly adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site at year 1 of operation, and mitigation serves to reduce this impact for users of this section of the Trent Valley Way upon establishment of the proposed boundary hedgerow alongside the fence line of the southern part of the site.
- 2.28 Moderate-major effects are also given for one property R2: 'Colerne' overlooking the site access, reducing to moderate at year 10 of operation, with other residential receptors receiving lower impacts due to the proposals.
- 2.29 While the masterplan/layout does reflect findings of the LVIA in seeking to mitigate some of these impacts, the mitigating effect of allowing surrounding, retained and created hedgerow to reach 3+m in height does not go far enough in mitigating the BESS in views immediately adjacent to it, due to retained and surrounding hedgerow being outside of the site boundary.
- 2.30 Furthermore, it appears that the PRow routes through the site are not always afforded a minimum 20m corridor. This corridor should be 10m on either side of the PRow routes⁹.
- 2.31 The layout extends the solar panels to the limits of the red line areas in the main. There appears to be opportunities for a more considered landscape approach to mitigation.

Summary

- 2.32 Our recommendations are:
- Review low value rating for recreational value of the site and its immediate surroundings;
 - Impacts of the BESS should be more fully considered; and
 - Include construction effects for visual receptors.
- 2.33 Our other recommendations are:
- Consider AVR4 montages where appropriate

⁸ Para 8.1.2, p61, LVIA, Proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), HC1002 02 01/LVIA, Sirius Planning

⁹ This is a precedent set in previous applications at Knapworth and Caunton

- Photomontage for VP07 of the additional viewpoints, with greater description of the change in the nature of the view, as would be experienced, due to the proposals;
- Create a structural landscape buffer along the southern edge of the site to the BESS and at the pond edge next to Kelham Conservation Area; and
- Ensure that all PRoW, (including Permissive routes) through the site have a minimum 10m buffer either side to the solar panels/hedgerow/BESS.