

Land to the West of Wood Lane and Stocking Lane, Gotham Landscape Review

Prepared for: Rushcliffe Borough Council

Date: October 2022

Application Reference: 22/00319/FUL

Land to the West of Wood Lane and Stocking Lane, Gotham Landscape Review

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Application Documents	3
3	Proposed Site Layout	3
4	Review of the Submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA)	4
4.1	<i>Methodology and Baseline Assessment</i>	4
4.2	<i>Landscape Effects</i>	5
4.3	<i>Visual Effects</i>	5
5	Effects on the Green Belt	6
6	Cumulative Effects	6
7	Conclusions	7
8	Appendices	9
8.1	<i>Appendix A – Photo Location Plan</i>	9
8.2	<i>Appendix B – Viewpoint Photos</i>	10

Version Control

Version	Author	Changes from previous version	Checked by	Date checked
PL00	RB	None	GWW	12/10/22

1 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Robert Browne, Chartered Landscape Architect, in response to a brief from Rushcliffe Borough Council. The report reviews landscape related documents submitted in support of planning application 22/00319/FUL for an 80.65ha solar farm on land west of Wood Lane and Stocking Lane, Kingston Estate, Gotham. In addition, the report considers whether the landscaping proposals illustrated on the submitted landscape masterplan will be sufficient to mitigate the landscape and visual effects of the development in the long term.

In order to provide an opinion on the proposed development, a site visit was undertaken to make observations on the site character, the visibility of the site and the potential landscape impact of the proposals.

2 Application Documents

The following submitted documents that describe the design, landscape and visual impact, and mitigation of the proposals have been reviewed:

- Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (Sheets 1-3) Rev C –Neo Environmental (January 2022)
- Site Layout Plan 04533-RES-LAY-DR-XX-001 REV 5 –RES Group (November 2021)
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal –Neo Environmental (February 2022)
- Design and Access Statement –Neo Environmental (February 2022)
- Response to Concerns –Neo Environmental (August 2022)

3 Proposed Site Layout

The proposed development site is long and linear, with new solar panels shown in two large clusters spread across the site, but separated by dense woodland that is part of Leake New Wood. Built development is proposed in 16 different fields that are currently predominantly in use for agriculture. Vehicular access is to be achieved from a single existing entrance point off Kegworth Road, with an internal track to provide maintenance access throughout the site.

Associated infrastructure indicated within the LVA includes:

- 1 Grid substation
- 2 Equipment containers
- 20 Inverter substations
- 15 Inverter substations hardstanding areas
- 9.88km of 2.4m high deer fencing
- 106 CCTV cameras mounted on 3.5m high poles

- 5.42km of 4.5m wide roadway
- Underground cabling and trenching
- 2 temporary construction compounds measuring 50x60m

Proposed soft landscaping includes a combination of heavy standard trees, native shrub planting, native hedge planting (combination of transplants and instant 1.2m high hedging), and feathered trees. Two different species rich grassland seed mixes are also proposed. Proposed biodiversity enhancement measures comprise herptile hibernaculas, hedgehog houses, bird boxes, bat boxes, and invertebrate hotels.

4 Review of the Submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA)

4.1 Methodology and Baseline Assessment

The LVA submitted with the application considers the landscape effects of the development and the potential visual impact. The report includes a methodology in line with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3) and Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002). The LVA includes the necessary level of information for a development of the size proposed.

The report considers an initial 5km study area based on a digital Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). The method for this is outlined in the LVA and is sufficiently thorough. Within the identified study area, the existing conditions and context are appraised through a review of the local designations and baseline landscape character studies. The correct local baseline documents are referred to and relevant sensitivities have been highlighted. Although the report does not refer to national scale precedent landscape studies, this does not undermine the baseline assessment of landscape character.

When considering the existing landscape value of the site and surroundings, the report appears to rely on elements suggested with GLVIA3 Box 5.1. This methodology has been superseded by Technical Guidance Note 02-21 Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations, published by the Landscape Institute in 2021. Utilising this newer guidance would encourage a finer grained assessment of landscape value, however it is not likely to lead to a different conclusion. I agree with all assessments of landscape sensitivity provided in Tables 1-7, 1-8, 1-9, 1-10, and visual sensitivity in Table 1-11.

4.2 Landscape Effects

An aspect of the LVIA report which is unclear is the predicted level of landscape effect on the site as a whole. Landscape effects are assessed at specific viewpoints alongside visual effects. Although general summaries relating to each landscape receptor group are also provided, the approach can be somewhat confusing. Nevertheless, I am in agreement with the main summaries of landscape effects provided in Table 1-12 of the report.

An area that could be clearer in the report is the predicted level of landscape effect that is generally predicted for the site itself as a whole. This is not specifically stated. Using the descriptors within the Applicant's methodology, I assess the significance of landscape effects on the site itself to be major adverse during operation. However, as highlighted within the LVA, it is important to note that, although landscape effects will be long term, they are also considered temporary as the site could reasonably be returned to the existing state after decommissioning. I agree that the proposed planting and biodiversity enhancement measures would result in a minor beneficial landscape effect for the site following decommissioning. However, this will rely on successful management of the landscape in line with the principles set out in the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan.

4.3 Visual Effects

When considering visual effects of the proposals, the LVA uses representative viewpoints that were agreed in advance with the Local Authority, this is good practice. Viewpoint photography is clear and well labelled.

I am in agreement with predicted effects for the majority of viewpoints (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10). I also agree with the assessment of visual effects at viewpoint 5, but it is my opinion that the rating of minor-moderate adverse is limited to views from the PRow at the northern end of development field 15. I assess the significance of effects from views along the same PRow towards the southern end of field 15 to increase to a moderate-major level at Year 10.

The assessments that I disagree with are for viewpoints 6 and 7, where I consider the LVA to underestimate the adverse effects. For receptors represented by both viewpoints, the LVA assesses visual effects to be moderate-major at Year 0 and moderate by Year 10. It is my opinion that effects will be major at Year 0, reducing to a moderate-major significance by Year 10. This is illustrated by the visualisations of each viewpoint, provided in Figures 1.12 and 1.13, where it is clear solar panels and associated infrastructure will still present a striking change to the view by Year 10. Visual effects on receptors using PRows BW5/Midshires Way and BW13 would be

considerably reduced if the proposed solar panels were removed from development field 16 and the southern half of field 15.

The LVA correctly highlights that visual effects will be significant from residential properties adjacent to the proposed development, Cuckoo Bush Farm, Fox Hill Farm, Stone House, and The Cottage. I agree that intervening trees at The Cottage and Fox Hill Farm would screen views from the main dwellings. However, I am concerned by the potential visibility from Cuckoo Bush Farm and Stone House. My Photo 1 in Appendix B shows the view from close to Stone House and LVA viewpoint 3 illustrates the relationship between Cuckoo Bush Farm and development field 6. It is my opinion that a greater level of mitigation planting is needed to reduce effects on each property. This should be more in line with the proposed planting adjacent to Hillside Farm, at the northern end of the site, and include more native shrub planting as well as additional trees.

5 Effects on the Green Belt

The submitted LVA correctly highlights that the site falls completely within the Nottingham and Derby Green Belt. However, there is no specific assessment included within the LVA to determine the effects of the proposals on the openness of the Green Belt. Nevertheless, the conclusion states, “In relation to the landscape policy context therefore, (see Section 4), the findings of this LVA demonstrate that the Proposed Development ..protects the openness and characteristics of the Green Belt” (Page 63). This statement is made without justification. I am also not aware of any separate Green Belt Assessment being submitted with the application. I recommend that the Applicant carries out a Green Belt Assessment to assess the baseline contribution that sites make to the five NPPF purposes of the Green Belt, before considering how the proposals may affect this.

6 Cumulative Effects

This application is one of several solar farm proposals currently being considered by Rushcliffe Borough Council. I have also provided separate landscape reviews for 22/00809/FUL (Land at Church Farm, Kingston on Soar) and 22/00303/FUL (Land at Highfields Farm, Costock). Due to intervening vegetation, topography, and elements of built development, I do not identify any intervisibility between the three proposed sites and therefore do not consider there to be cumulative visual effects. In addition, if all were to be approved, I do not believe the scale of landscape change would lead to significant cumulative landscape character effects. There may be a low-level change noticed by people travelling by car or walking along the Midshires Way on routes that come close to multiple solar farm

sites, but this would be minor across the wider landscape character areas (the East Leake Rolling Farmland and the Gotham and West Leake Hills and Scarps).

7 Conclusions

This report has been commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the landscape impact of the proposals for an 80.65ha solar farm on land west of Wood Lane and Stocking Lane, Kingston Estate, Gotham. The scheme has been examined by reviewing the submitted documents and my own observations of the site and surroundings.

The LVA submitted with the application follows good practice guidance outlined in GLVIA3 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002), providing justified conclusions. It provides a detailed description of the existing site and context, as well as referring to the necessary precedent landscape character studies. I have raised a minor point about the methodology used to assess landscape value, as it is now common practice to use the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02-21. Nevertheless, I agree with all assessments of landscape sensitivity provided for identified receptors.

When considering the landscape effects of the proposed development I am in general agreement with the assessments offered within the LVA. It is my opinion that the report could be clearer when stating the level of landscape effects predicted for the site itself. I assess this to be major adverse during operation, but acknowledge that, although landscape effects will be long term, they are also considered temporary as the site could reasonably be returned to the existing state after decommissioning. I agree that the proposed planting and biodiversity enhancement measures would result in a minor beneficial landscape effect for the site following decommissioning.

When considering visual effects, I agree with the assessment of effects from most viewpoints. However, I assess the effects on receptors represented by viewpoints 6 and 7 to be more adverse. For people using BW5/Midshires Way and BW13 the LVA assesses visual effects to be moderate-major at Year 0 and moderate by Year 10. It is my opinion that effects will be major at Year 0, reducing to a moderate-major significance by Year 10. It is my opinion that these effects would be mitigated to a less than significant level if development field 16 and the southern half of field 15 were omitted from the proposals.

I have also raised concerns about the level of predicted visual effects for residents at Cuckoo Bush Farm and Stone House. It is my opinion that a greater level of mitigation planting is needed to reduce effects on each property. This should be more in line with the proposed planting adjacent to

Hillside Farm, at the northern end of the site, and include more native shrub planting as well as additional trees.

In addition, I have identified that the submitted LVA does not include a detailed assessment of effects on the openness of the Green Belt. As a separate Green Belt Assessment has not been submitted, I recommend that the Applicant produces one. This should assess the baseline contribution that sites make to the five NPPF purposes of the Green Belt, before considering how the proposals may affect this.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A –Photo Location Plan



8.2 Appendix B –Viewpoint Photos

Photo 1 –View from the access track adjacent to Stone House, looking south-west towards development field 13

Approximate extent of proposed development



wynne-williams associates
landscape architects & arboricultural consultants

