

Response to Updated LVIA: Land West of Bradmore Road and North of Wysall Road

Prepared for: Rushcliffe Borough Council

Date: February 2025

Application Reference: 24/00161/FUL

Land West of Bradmore Road and North of Wysall Road Landscape Review

Introduction

This report has been prepared by Louise Dolan CMLI, and reviewed by Robert Browne CMLI, in response to a brief from Rushcliffe Borough Council.

This report reviews the updated LVIA (2024) submitted in support of planning application (Ref. 24/00161/FUL) for the construction, operation and subsequent decommissioning of a renewable energy park comprising ground mounted Solar PV with co-located battery energy storage system (BESS) at the point of connection, together with associated infrastructure, access, landscaping and cabling on Land west of Bradmore Road and north of Wysall Road to the west of Wysall, Nottinghamshire.

The updated LVIA (2024) was submitted with some amendments made in response to the Landscape Review undertaken by Lewis Reynolds, June 2024, on behalf of Wynne-Williams Associates.

Summary of Comments in the Landscape Review

The original LVIA report was examined by reviewing the submitted documents and by taking observations from the site and surroundings. Below is a summary of the comments in the initial Landscape Review June 2024.

Methodology and Baseline

1. The LVIA included a methodology which is generally in line with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3). However, the methodology used to assess landscape value did not use the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02-21.
2. The LVIA did not appear to have been updated following more recent and accurate visual representations of the development proposals by The Landscape Practice.

Landscape Effects

3. The LVIA had reviewed National Character Area (NCA) 74: Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds as defined by Natural England but the NCA had not been assessed as a landscape receptor. The Landscape Review considered that the justification provided was acceptable, but it was noted that the site and surroundings exhibit many of the characteristics identified within the NCA Profile document.
4. With regards to the value of landscape receptors, the Landscape Review considered that the LVIA failed to provide an assessment for the individual factors in accordance with GLVIA3 and TGN 02/21.
5. Due to this lack of evidence for judging value in the LVIA, the Landscape Review considered that the judgements of sensitivity could not be relied upon and the assessment should therefore be provided for review. This also resulted in concern that

the landscape receptors' susceptibility, magnitude of change and the overall significance of landscape effects may also differ from that stated.

6. There are a number deviations from best practice guidance within the LVIA, for example, it is not clear whether the proposals would have direct or residual effects on the aesthetic, recreational or perceptual qualities of the Public Rights of Way or Long Distance Path particularly as they "...can be judged on their importance in their own right, including whether or not they can realistically be replaced" and that "They can also be judged on their contribution to the overall character and value of the wider landscape" (Para 5.30, GLVIA3).

Visual Effects

7. The Landscape Review noted that the assessment (Para 7.5) in the LVIA suggests that "...out of the assessed 8 viewpoints, Viewpoint 3, Viewpoint 5, Viewpoint 7, and Viewpoint 8 would be subject to major adverse effects at Year 1 in winter views only." The Summary Table – Viewpoint Assessment (Winter Views) however, states there would be Negligible-Neutral effects at Year 1 which conflicts with the later conclusions of the report.
 - Note: the updated LVIA (2024) clarifies that this is a misreading of the Summary Table and so this point raised in the Landscape Review is not relevant.
8. In the Landscape Review, high levels of intervisibility in the long to medium distance views were identified for people using the Public Rights of Way, and some of these had not been assessed within the original LVIA.
9. Although the existing vegetation and proposed mitigation planting may reduce some visibility to the lower parts of the solar arrays, the Landscape Review highlighted that this planting also resulted in the loss of longer distance views from the elevated countryside which represents a considerable reduction in visual amenity.
10. Due to the lack of assessment in the original LVIA it was not clear how effective / ineffective mitigation planting will be for people using this route. The assessment of Major Adverse effects was agreed with in the Landscape Response, however the response challenged whether these effects would reduce in the summer and reduce to Negligible by Year 15 as put forward in the LVIA.
11. The assessment (Table 2) in the LVIA also identified Major Adverse effects for other receptors, again the Landscape Response challenged whether these would reduce to Negligible by Year 15.
12. The LVIA acknowledged adverse visual effects but contends that those of most significance, are generally considered to be localised. The Landscape Response proposed that in fact adverse effects would not be restricted to localised areas and these effects would be experienced and felt by people using recreational routes and public footpaths from a number of longer and medium distance areas in the wider countryside.

Cumulative Effects

13. Neighbouring solar development sites were acknowledged in the LVIA, however the LVIA did not provide commentary pertaining to the assessment of cumulative landscape effects of the proposed scheme in combination with the other solar farm

developments. Owing to the relationship, nature, proximity and clustering of these proposals, it was considered in the Landscape Response, that the proposals could have additional and combined effects and / or increase the magnitude of change and therefore should have been included within a cumulative assessment.

14. The Landscape Response also considered that there will be adverse sequential cumulative effects on people using the network of PRowWs and Long Distance Paths were the proposals to be constructed together with the surrounding schemes. The Landscape Review therefore also recommended that a cumulative visual assessment be provided and supported by cumulative wireframes set beneath photographs and / or photomontages prepared from key viewpoints to illustrate the magnitude of cumulative visual effects.

The Updated LVIA (2024)

An updated LVIA was submitted for the application in October 2024. A summary of changes and responses to the revisions is outlined below.

Additions to contents

- **Section 7** Cumulative Assessment
- **Appendix 3** Photographic evidence: Public Footpath Costock FP4 & FP9 and Public Footpath Rempstone FP8 / Public Footpaths H61 and H62
- **Appendix 4** Extract from the LVIA Photomontages - application reference no. 22/00303/FUL Land To North East Of Highfields Farm, Bunny Hill, Costock, Nottinghamshire.
- **Figure 7** Pegasus' Photomontages
- **Figure 8** Photomontages prepared by The Landscape Practice

Landscape Effects

The original LVIA had reviewed National Character Area (NCA) 74: Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds as defined by Natural England but the NCA had not been assessed as a landscape receptor. The updated LVIA (2024) expanded upon the characteristics that are present in the NCA and bear relation to the site and proposal.

The updated LVIA (2024) states that value and sensitivity assessment is provided in Section 5. The methodology used in the original LVIA which gave an assessment of medium landscape value is not expanded upon. Instead, the report has abstracted the landscape value assessment taken from 'Solar Farm Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study' which was compiled by Arup and published by the Council in July 2024. The Arup report assesses character areas, these are a larger scale than the site itself and so this assessment is relatively broad. Although the assessment for landscape value within 'Solar Farm Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study' is in line with LI (TGN) 02-21, a landscape value assessment that applied specifically to the site would be more informative.

The evidence given for value from the Arup report goes some way to verify judgements of sensitivity, susceptibility, magnitude of change and the overall significance of landscape effects

may also be accepted. However, because the methodology for valuing the site itself is still under question, these cannot be affirmed.

Landscape Character Effects

It is noted that the original LVIA (5.17) has been updated to show that effects on character of the site were previously "high, with effects major adverse", whereas the updated LVIA (2024) (5.32) has downgraded this to "medium, with effects moderate adverse, with the residual effects diminishing to minor adverse given the proposed landscaping."

We agree with Pegasus' original conclusions as the solar array will appear as a new feature in the landscape, not in keeping with the current character. In addition, introduced vegetation through the landscape proposals will likely long outlast the solar array itself, these are specific to the scheme and are incongruent with existing field patterns.

The updated LVIA (2024) also states (5.49) that "the introduced landscaping, however, would remain in place becoming the legacy planting exerting positive influence over the character of the local landscape in the long term." We do not consider that the planting proposals will have a wholly positive influence on the landscape character for the above reasons.

Visual Effects

Section 6 has been updated in the LVIA (2024) to address comments raised in the Landscape Review. An additional visit was undertaken by Pegasus to review the 'southern study area', including additional verified view. The updated LVIA (2024) provides a rationale for the omission of this route in the original LVIA "Pegasus wishes to clarify that Viewpoint 3 had been judged to be illustrative of the worst case scenario of the visibility of the Development and was purposely positioned to illustrate views gained by high sensitivity PRoW users and medium sensitivity road users."

In the course of their review Pegasus have amended their judgement of the degree of effect at year 1, The original LVIA judged effects to be moderate to major at year 1, the updated LVIA (2024) judged effects to be negligible to moderate at most at year 1. The following justification is given:

"...this is based on the analysis of the PRoWs, character and nature of views, the availability of views in other direction, distance, and the fact that views are experienced in transition and not static. It is anticipated that, once the mitigation planting has matured at Year 15, the southern part of the site would not be visible at all or would be substantially screened. Receptors would potentially gain views of some of the solar panels located in the north western fields of the site - Field 2 and Field 3 seen above the maturing tree canopies. The solar modules in the north eastern part of the northern parcel would be almost completely screened with glimpses of Field 9. Overall, when judging the PRoWs in the round, the residual degree of change is considered to be negligible, given the predicted amount of maturing vegetative screening, distance, elevated nature of the views, and context."

The Landscape Review concluded that there were high levels of intervisibility in the long to medium distance views for visual receptors in this area, however the updated LVIA (2024) concluded that there was limited inter-visibility in the southern study area.

The Landscape Review queried whether visual effects would decrease from major adverse to negligible after 15 years, these concerns still remain.

The Landscape Review also raised the point that the mitigation planting itself would create a loss of longer distance views from the elevated countryside, which would represent a considerable reduction in visual amenity. This is most pertinent to the PRoW within the application site. It is considered that the mitigation planting will prevent people from appreciating their location within the valley landscape, changing the perceived sense of place and character, as open views would become enclosed and constrained. Again, these concerns still remain.

Cumulative Effects

Although this is not an EIA scheme, cumulative effects should be considered where it is proportional and reasonable and focuses on likely effects. It is rational to suppose that the immediately adjacent approved scheme (22/00303/FUL), also for solar arrays, will likely read together with the proposed scheme, and so we consider it is proportional and reasonable that the cumulative effects are assessed.

A section on cumulative assessment is added to the updated LVIA (2024). The updated LVIA (2024) states that developments at screening and scoping stages have been excluded from the assessment of cumulative effects which we do not object to.

The additional visit to consider the southern study area is accompanied by additional verified views. The assessment does not provide cumulative montages. Photomontages prepared for the adjacent solar farm application have been extracted and included in appendix 4. This is a suitable approach. The cumulative visual effects have been judged to be highly localised and limited.

Regarding cumulative landscape character effects, the updated LVIA (2024) states that "The Development fits well into the existing field pattern and scale of the landscape. It does not negatively alter the field boundaries, and is respectful of the existing landscape features that characterise this part of the landscape. The existing landscape character is considered robust enough to withstand the introduced cumulative change with the proposed landscaping introducing new landscape features and reinforcing the field pattern." The assessment goes on to state "the effects are judged to be limited and not material in character terms"

We consider that the introduction of solar arrays and associated infrastructure on the combined scale proposed by the two solar farms would represent a notable change away from baseline landscape character and visual amenity. This would be perceived from the south with limited ability to appreciate the two developments as separate. We therefore conclude that the Pegasus assessment underestimates the cumulative effects.