

Belvoir Solar Farm

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2430/W/24/3340258

LPA Ref: 22/00537/FUL

Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence Summary

August 2024

By LDA Design on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 10 Ltd

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This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2015.

1.0 Summary and Conclusions

- 1.1.1. My name is Alister Kratt. I am a Fellow of the Landscape Institute and have been in professional practice for approximately 30 years. I am an advisor to the Design Council and Design Commission for Wales and am appointed to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) as design advisor, sitting on the 'Design Group'.
- 1.1.2. I am a Director of LDA Design and former owner. I sit on the Board of LDA and lead the Infrastructure and Energy sector of our business. As a consultancy we have provided advice on major solar projects since approximately 2010. My team is currently leading on approximately 1 GW of solar power projects in the UK planning system.
- 1.1.3. LDA Design was appointed as landscape expert witness for the project in June 2024 in preparation for the Appeal. The incumbent landscape architects - Pegasus - were unable to continue working on the project due to lack of availability to attend the Public Inquiry.
- 1.1.4. I support the finding and recommendations of the Pegasus work, and agree with the overarching conclusion that while there will be some inevitably adverse landscape and visual effects; these effects are not considered to be significant; and that the Proposed Development can be successfully accommodated within the landscape. There are some minor differences between myself and Pegasus regarding specific sensitivity and magnitude judgements, but no differences in the overall 'level' of effects.
- 1.1.5. As such, two independent and highly experienced Landscape Planning consultants have come to the same judgments regarding likely landscape and visual effects. These conclusions are further collaborated and endorsed by the recommendations of the Case Officer, as set out in the Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1), who

concludes that "... the proposed development could be successfully accommodated within the existing landscape pattern and could be assimilated into the surrounding landscape without causing any long-term harm to the landscape character, visual amenity, or existing landscape attributes of the area" (Para 8.3.15)

- 1.1.6. Based on the evidence presented in this Section of my PoE, I conclude that the Proposed Development will give rise to some 'moderate' adverse landscape effects for the Appeal Site itself and its immediate context, however, these effects are generally contained to within around 1km of the Appeal Site and will not be widespread. The proposed planting (including infill to existing hedgerows, and new tree and hedgerow planting) - once mature - will strengthen landscape structure and fabric; and further reduce invisibility with Proposed Development from the surrounding landscape. Even at 2m high, the proposed hedgerows - in combination with proposed trees; existing (and sometimes) taller vegetation outside of the Appeal Site; and the undulating topography - all come together to provide an appropriate degree of containment and screening
- 1.1.7. I also conclude that the Proposed Development would not have a significant effect on the landscape character of the area when considered in combination with other solar developments in the locality. The Proposed Development itself does not result in a significant effect on landscape character; has relatively limited visual influence; the cumulative solar developments share little invisibility and cannot be readily seen in combination; and solar development will represent a very small proportion of the wider landscape.
- 1.1.8. Overall, I conclude that the Proposed Development would not have an unacceptable effect on the landscape character of the area.
- 1.1.9. Based on the evidence presented in this Section of my PoE, I conclude that the Proposed Development will give rise to some 'moderate' adverse visual effects for

those receptors in close proximity to the Site, and I accept that the retained, enhanced and new hedgerows will not fully screen development and will enclose views to a certain degree, but my professional experience; field work; and the visual representations prepared leads me to conclude that:

- The nature of views along PRoW within the vale landscape vary considerably, with some much open views but some already 'enclosed' by vegetation (some of which is taller than 2m) and the undulating topography. More 'enclosed' views are therefore not necessarily uncharacteristic of the network of PRoW.
- The view of users of PRoW will not solely be focused toward any adjacent development, hedgerow or other enclosing feature - there will often be alternative views along the alignment of route itself or in other directions.
- The proposed 'green lanes' - which would incorporate the footpaths routes, existing and new hedgerows and meadow grassland - will help ensure the PRoW do not feel excessively enclosed
- In many locations these green lanes will still allow for views over the adjoining hedgerows and solar panels, maintaining a sense of openness and - in places - views towards the Belvoir ridge.
- None of the PRoW will adjoin the Appeal Site / Proposed Development for the entirety of their length. The maximum length of PRoW adjoining the Proposed Development is circa 2km in length, which represents around a 20 minute walking time.
- The layout is such that no footpath is fully enclosed by the Proposed Development, with the Proposed Development only ever directly adjoining one side of a PRoW.
- While not directly mitigating for visual effects, the Proposed Development does include a new permissive footpath route and accessible open spaces which will further enhance and increase opportunities for recreation, interpretation and education.
- Specifically, the reduction in the extent of solar panels within Field 13 - retaining views towards the Belvoir ridge and creating associated open space and interpretation - is considered to be a very positive aspect of the design evolution.

- 1.1.10. I disagree with the conclusions of the independent landscape consultant that the Proposed Development will 'remove' the view of the wider Vale and that these PRoW will become 'passageways'. The layout of the Proposed Development, including the incorporation of 'green lanes' will ensure that the PRoW are not overly enclosed. There will remain views across the vale, either over and above the solar panels; in breaks in the Proposed Development; in opposite directions from the Proposed Development itself; and from those sections of PRoW that do not adjoin or are in close proximity to the Appeal Site.
- 1.1.11. The vast majority of the visualisations prepared in relation to the project - save the those that are immediately next to solar arrays or an existing / proposed hedgerow - show that even in relatively close proximity to the solar arrays, there will remain views of the wider Vale.
- 1.1.12. Overall, the Proposed Development will not have an unacceptable effect on the views and visual amenity on the public living in and visiting the area who are utilising the public rights of way, lanes and roads.
- 1.1.13. Notwithstanding my judgements that the Proposed Development will result in some adverse landscape and visual effects, I consider that the Proposed Development - incorporating the landscape strategy as outlined above - will deliver a number of long-term environmental and community benefits. The core benefits - in respect of landscape and visual matters - are summarised below.
- 1.1.14. **Retention and enhancement of landscape fabric:** The retention of existing landscape features and substantial new planting throughout the Proposed Development would positively contribute to the structure of the landscape and network of green infrastructure.
- 1.1.15. **Rest to farmland and biodiversity net gain:** The Proposed Development would benefit the natural environment on the Appeal Site itself by allowing soil that has

long been intensively farmed to rest and rejuvenate under grass for 40 years, and by bringing about a significant net gain (around a 144%) in biodiversity on the Appeal Site.

- 1.1.16. **New accessible routes and open spaces:** The Proposed Development would benefit users of the local PRow network by - through the new permissive route - creating a more extensive footpath network and improving east-west connectivity across the landscape. open space will also further enhance and increase opportunities for recreation, interpretation and education.
- 1.1.17. **Long term legacy:** as the Proposed Development is temporary in nature, hedgerow and tree planting proposed as part of the landscape strategy would leave a permanent positive landscape legacy of the Proposed Development upon decommissioning.
- 1.1.18. I also believe that change - resulting from a development of this nature - is not inherently harmful or unacceptable. If we are to achieve Net Zero - as legislation requires us to - a cultural shift in perceptions will be needed but this should be properly founded on good design and promoting the correct sites. This includes locations such as the Appeal Site where solar development can work within existing field parcels and benefit from topography - with a low lying, gently undulating site and containment afforded by more pronounced topography in the surrounding landscape.
- 1.1.19. The evidence presented in this PoE clearly demonstrates that the Proposed Development is one of good design and leads me to conclude this is an appropriate site for solar development, with an acceptable range of landscape and visual effects arising.

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