Landscape Statement of Case

Land South of Park House Farm, Meriden Road, Fillongley

Installation of a 40MW solar photovoltaic array/solar farm with associated infrastructure.

On behalf of the Appellant, Enviromena

Date: 14/10/2024 | Pegasus Ref: P24-1827

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1. Author's Background and Particulars

1.1. Andrew Cook holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography (BA Hons) and a Masters Degree in Landscape Design (MLD). He is a Chartered Landscape Architect, Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI), Chartered Environmentalist (C Env) and Member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (M IEMA).

1.2. He is one of the founding Executive Directors of Pegasus Group which was established in 2003. Since then, the company has grown, establishing sixteen offices across the UK, employing approximately 400 planning and environmental planning professionals. He jointly heads the environmental planning division in which planning for renewable development accounts for a significant part of the business and his work. The company is a corporate member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and was a founding member of IEMA's Quality Mark scheme, which he managed.

1.3. He has gained over 35 years of landscape planning consultancy experience. Prior to Pegasus Group, he was an Environmental Director at RPS (formerly Chapman Warren Planning Consultants) where he specialised in addressing landscape planning issues related to a wide range of development projects. He has had considerable experience with and involvement in a wide range of renewable development and built infrastructure projects throughout the UK, many of which have involved Appeal Sites in Green Belts as well as statutory protected landscapes including National Parks (NP), and National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)) as 'valued landscapes'. He has presented evidence at public inquiries on many occasions to address various landscape and visual issues.

1.4. He is based in the Cirencester office of Pegasus Group where he manages a team of 22 environmental planners and landscape architects. Andrew and the Landscape Architects within his team at Pegasus Group undertake their work in compliance with the Landscape Institute's Code of Standards of Conduct and Practice for Landscape Professionals.

1.5. His landscape statement of case is based on his professional judgement and is presented in accordance with the guidance of his professional institution the content of which is true to the best of his knowledge and belief and is presented irrespective of by whom he is instructed.

2. Introduction and Scope of Statement

Introduction

2.1. In presenting this statement of case the author explains why, in landscape and visual terms, the scheme is considered acceptable given the character and appearance of the Appeal Site (Land 800 Metres South Of Park House Farm, Meriden Road, Fillongley), and its surrounding settlement and countryside context, recognising that the overall planning balance is for the planner, Steven Bainbridge, to comment upon.

2.2. An application for full planning permission (ref: PAP/2023/0071) was submitted to North Warwickshire Borough Council (NWBC or the LPA) and validated on 24th February 2023. The application was considered by NWBC Planning Committee on three occasions, twice recommended for approval but overturned on 8th July 2024by the Planning Committee.

2.3. The Decision Notice dated 10th July 2024 includes one Reason for Refusal (RfR):

> ***"The proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It is not considered that it would preserve the openness of the Green Belt as required by Policy LP3 of the North Warwickshire Local Plan 2021 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023. It would additionally cause landscape and visual harm such that it does not accord with Policies LP1, LP14 and LP30 of the North Warwickshire Local Plan 2021, or Policies FNP01 and FNP02 of the Fillongley Neighbourhood Plan 2019. The Local and Neighbourhood Plan policies require new development to conserve and enhance the landscape; to integrate appropriately into the natural environment, harmonise with its immediate and wider settings, as well as to protect the rural landscape of the Parish, the scenic aspects of the village and the setting of the Church. The cumulative harms caused are considered to be substantial because of the development's proposed size, its siting on higher land, there being no surrounding higher land and its public visibility over a wide area. It is not considered that this substantial harm is clearly outweighed by any benefits that the proposal might give rise to."***

2.4. Pegasus consider that the Appeal Site and the Proposed Development have been carefully considered by the Appellant and that the scheme would be suitable given its location and current development context and as such, the landscape and visual effects arising from this proposal are not considered unacceptable.

2.5. In preparing this statement of case the author has reviewed a number of documents, the principal ones of which are set out below:

- Decision Notice
- Committee Reports
- Consultee responses
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA)
- Landscape Strategy Plan (Drawing 17)
- Elevations of the proposed infrastructure

- Arboricultural Impact Statement
- Design and Access Statement
- Relevant published landscape reports
- Relevant planning policies
- Relevant correspondence
- Relevant Core Documents
- Other documents, not necessarily referenced here

2.6. Where appropriate, the author has drawn upon relevant information from these documents and has sought to avoid unnecessary repetition of the same information and therefore summarised his analysis in this statement.

2.7. The author has undertaken a detailed review of the LVA which was submitted as part of the planning application. He has reviewed this together with other supporting documents and also assessed the scheme with reference to the LVAs' viewpoints surrounding the Appeal Site together with the application visuals that illustrate the appearance of the scheme. Having reviewed the application LVA, the author understands and agrees with the broad conclusions set out in the LVA as far as scale and degree of effect are concerned with regard to effects on landscape elements, landscape character and visual amenity.

2.8. Notwithstanding the LVA's findings, the author has undertaken his own assessment regarding the character and appearance to inform his judgements. Consequently, he has come to slightly different professional conclusions which is not unusual, as rehearsed in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA3). The Proposed Development would result in effects ranging from adverse to beneficial where relevant and as stated. The analysis considers the landscape and visual effects with reference to the issues raised in the Reason for Refusal and makes informed professional judgements concerning such matters. Within the scope of his area of expertise, he has assessed whether the level of harm is deemed to be acceptable or otherwise from a landscape and visual perspective, mindful that the planning balance is for the planner.

Scope of Evidence

2.9. In line with the Appellant's overarching Statement of Case, the author shall discuss the following in his proof:

- how the proposals relate to the aims of the Green Belt, it's essential open characteristics and the five purposes of Green Belts,
- aspects of the Green Belt openness,
- how the character of the appeal site, coupled with the typology, temporary and reversible nature of the scheme, and proposed planting mitigate the harm,
- that the Appeal Site and its locality are not a 'valued' landscape in the context of the NPPF,

- effects on landscape character,
- effects on visual amenity,
- long lasting benefits of the proposed planting and its positive contribution to landscape character,
- increase in the quality of soils at the appeal site, and
- appeal site selection and design.

2.10. In short, the author's landscape statement explains how the proposal would affect landscape elements, landscape character and visual amenity, and in particular how these aspects relate to the sense of openness and the Green Belt purposes.

2.11. The author also relies upon the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) where the parties have reached a without-prejudice agreement.

2.12. The Landscape Strategy (Drawing 17) prepared by FPCR which was assessed as part of the LVA illustrates the layout of the development and landscape proposals which were considered by the planning committee on 8th July 2024.

2.13. Appendix 8 of this Landscape Statement includes a Landscape Strategy Plan prepared by Pegasus Group which reflects the Landscape Strategy (Drawing 17) but has been graphically refined to clearly illustrate the landscape proposals and better reflect the existing landscape features across the Appeal Site.

2.14. The author notes that as part of this appeal, the Appellant has submitted a Planning Layout (Revision H) which illustrates alternative drainage arrangements, and includes areas of panels and associated infrastructure such as fencing where there were previously attenuation basins in Fields 1, 5 and 9. No amendments would be made to the landscape proposals such as the proposed shrub, tree and hedgerow planting or the existing landscape features within the Appeal Site.

2.15. Whilst the author has prepared this Statement based on the Landscape Strategy Plan in Appendix 8, they note there would be no change to the assessment presented within this Landscape Statement as a result of Planning Layout (Revision H).

Representative Viewpoints and Visualisations

2.16. The author considers the LVA photographs as representative viewpoints in the landscape surrounding the Appeal Site. It is anticipated that the Inspector would visit these representative viewpoints set out in the LVA and use the visuals that have been provided as an aide memoire.

2.17. It should be recognised that it is not practical to include viewpoints from every possible location. The viewpoints which have been selected illustrate a range of visual receptors at different distances and directions from the Appeal Site. The locations of the viewpoints have been carefully considered and the photography has been undertaken when atmospheric conditions and visibility were good. The photography is considered appropriate given the type and scale of Proposed Development. The representative viewpoints and visualisations have been prepared in accordance with GLVA3 and Landscape Institute guidance relevant

at the time of production, however, it is recognised that there is no substitute for visiting the viewpoints in the field to gain a first-hand appreciation of the viewing context.

2.18. With regard to the history of viewpoint analysis, it should be noted that the LVA included a wide range of representative viewpoints supplemented by the additional viewpoints, by which to appropriately assess the application.

2.19. However, in correspondence between the Appellant and LPA during the appeal process, the LPA stated that some of the photography presented in the LVA was now of inadequate quality. As a result, the author has retaken all of the existing LVA viewpoints, these retaken viewpoints are presented in Appendix 11.

2.20. In addition during the correspondence noted above, NWBC stated that the Appellant should prepare a 'bare earth' Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), this is presented in Appendix 9 of the author's evidence. It should be noted however that GLVIA3 cautions against the over-reliance on computer-generated visibility mapping analysis and that the 'visual envelope' of a Proposed Development is best established during fieldwork, and this was communicated to the LPA.

2.21. The author notes, however, that although the ZTV indicates that there are large areas across the landscape surrounding the Appeal Site where views 'theoretically' could be experienced of the Development. That the opportunities to experience views are significantly reduced by intervening built form, areas and belts of well-established trees and, well-maintained and robust hedgerows. The actual area from which opportunities to view the Development are therefore possible is better reflected by the 'approximate visual envelope' presented at Figure 6 of the FPCR LVA. The Appellant therefore asserts that the Case Officer was fully informed of the potential visibility (and any anticipated adverse effects) of the Development when they recommended that Committee members grant planning permission.

Professional Judgement and Nature of Effect

2.22. Mindful of the GLVA3 and the recently published Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note (LITGN) 2024-01 (August 2024) Notes and Clarifications on Aspects and Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (GLVIA3) the author has reviewed the Proposed Development based on the viewpoints as part of the fieldwork and site visits. This has allowed the author to ascertain both the landscape and visual effects and make informed professional judgements concerning these matters and to establish the level and nature of change from a landscape and visual perspective. The assessment was based on winter/early spring views; however, the author has been mindful of summer views in the analysis upon which the judgement is based. It is noted that the Inspector is likely to experience winter views of the Appeal Site.

2.23. The degree of landscape or visual effect is identified by means of a descriptive scale as per the GLVA3 guidance. However, it is also necessary to consider the nature of the landscape and visual effects. GLVA3 assists by noting that with regard to landscape effects paragraph 5.37 states that:

> ***"One of the more challenging issues is deciding whether the landscape effects should be categorised as positive or negative. It is also possible for effects to be neutral in their consequences for the landscape. An informed professional judgement should be made about this and the criteria used in reaching the judgement should be clearly stated. They might include, but should not be restricted to:***

- ***The degree to which the proposal fits with existing character***

- ***The contribution to the landscape that the development may make its own right, usually by virtue of good design, even if it is in contrast to existing character***

The importance of perceptions of landscape is emphasised by the European Landscape Convention, and others may of course hold different opinions on whether the effects are positive or negative, but this is not a reason to avoid making this judgement, which will ultimately be weighed against the opinions of others in the decision-making process." (author's emphasis)

2.24. With regard to visual effects, paragraph 6.29 states that:

"As with landscape effects and informed professional judgement should be made as to whether the visual effects can be described as positive or negative (or in some cases neutral) in their consequences for views and visual amenity. This will need to be based on a judgement about whether the changes will affect the quality of the visual experience for those groups of people who will see the changes, given the nature of the existing views." (author's emphasis)

2.25. The author has reviewed the LVA that was prepared for the application and notes the effects that were identified with regard to landscape character and visual amenity. The author agrees with the general conclusions that are reached in this document. However, given the author is addressing the Reasons for Refusal, he has undertaken his own assessment as to how the Proposed Development would have an effect upon landscape elements, landscape character and visual amenity. The author's assessment is based on a methodology which is set out in Appendix 12. In undertaking this exercise, there are some differences between the author of this statement and that of the author of the application scheme LVA. Overall conclusions are not dissimilar. The original Proposed Development with its landscape design is acceptable from a landscape planning perspective.

2.26. In this instance and for the purposes of this statement, the effects upon the landscape are specifically considered in terms of effect upon firstly landscape elements and secondly landscape character, which considers the combinations of landscape elements. The author's statement also sets out how the Proposed Development would have a bearing upon the general visual amenity associated with the area. The proposed design includes green infrastructure which would be in character and in keeping with the rural area. The author is aware that people on the whole generally adopt an adverse reaction to change, particularly with regard to their local environments, with which they are very familiar irrespective of whether it's harmful or indeed beneficial. The author has adopted a precautionary approach here and as such considers that the Proposed Development would be adverse in terms of nature of effect in landscape character and visual terms unless otherwise stated. There would, however, be beneficial effects for some landscape elements as identified as appropriate.

Officer's Reports to Committee

2.27. The Officer's Reports (OR) to the planning committees prepared by NWBC provide a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the Proposed Development in terms of its landscape impact, the residential amenities of nearby properties, and on the local highway network.

2.28. NWBC found the Proposed Development to be acceptable in these regards and the Planning Officers also confirmed in the OR that the Proposed Development is acceptable in all other respects and recommended the Proposed Development for approval, subject to conditions. A detailed summary of the points raised in relation to landscape and visual matters are summarised in the FPCR Landscape Note in Appendix 1 of the Appellants overarching Statement of Case.

3. Effect on Landscape Elements

Introduction

3.1. This section of the statement assesses the effects on those landscape elements (features) that currently characterise the Appeal Site and provide the structural integrity of its environment. It particularly considers the introduction of the new elements that make up the scheme and how these will physically affect the existing features present within the Appeal Site. It also explains why the Proposed Development would in overall terms result in a beneficial effect as far as some landscape elements are concerned.

3.2. As illustrated by the Landscape Strategy Plan (Appendix 8), the Appeal Site is comprised of a series of 10 Fields.

Figure 1: Field Numbers

3.3. The solar panels and supporting infrastructure have been set back from the existing watercourse within the Appeal Site with generous buffers comprising swathes of native species-rich meadow grassland and wet-tolerant grassland. The existing PRoW footpath (ref. M294/1) runs between Fields 1,2 9 and 10 and will be maintained on its current alignment set within botanically diverse, species-rich wildflower meadow grassland, with new lengths of

native hedgerow proposed to aid in mitigating views of the Proposed Development. The external boundaries to the fields are also proposed to be infilled and reinforced with additional shrub planting. Proposed tree, hedgerow and shrub planting across the Appeal Site would use species which are native, and of local provenance, reflecting species present in the locality whilst also being compliant with the guidelines set out for the host Landscape Character Area.

3.4. Fields 1 and 10 are located to the west of PRoW footpath M294/1, and at the time of the site visit these two fields contained a crop of sweetcorn. The security fencing has been designed so that it encompasses both fields, offset from exiting boundary vegetation. As part of the landscape proposals the western boundary of the fields, adjacent to B4102 Meriden Road will be reinforced with additional shrub planting an attenuation basin is also proposed in the northern extent of Field 1. A field boundary is also proposed on an east-west axis between the two fields.

Figure 2: View from PRoW footpath M294/1 within the Appeal Site, looking north with the sweetcorn in Field 10 visible

3.5. The route of PRoW footpath M294/1 has been accommodated on its current alignment and is proposed to be set within a 'Green Lane' with native species-rich hedgerows proposed along either side, creating a wide green corridor. The placement of these new hedgerows to form the green lane reflects historic field boundaries visible on the 1778 mapping (Appendix 7)

3.6. Fields 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9 are grouped together and surrounded by a continuous length of security fencing. Fields 2 and 9 will be contained along their western boundary by new lengths of hedgerow which reflect historic field boundaries. A new hedgerow is also proposed on a broad northwest, and southeast axis and then a second hedgerow on a north-south

orientation through this area, which will aid in breaking up the appearance of the solar panels, as well as reintroducing a smaller-scale field pattern across the Appeal Site. The eastern boundary of Field 5 would be reinforced by additional shrub planting an attenuation basin is also proposed in the northern extent of the field and the southwestern corner of Field 9.

Figure 3: View from PRoW footpath M294/1 within the Appeal Site, looking southeast across Fields 8 and 9 towards M6

3.7. At the northern extent of Field 2 adjacent to PRoW footpath M294/1, a Community Garden is proposed which would include scattered native trees.

3.8. Fields 6 and 8 are in the far southern extent of the Appeal Site. For both of the fields, their southern boundaries are defined by vegetation alongside the M6 motorway, where gaps exist, these are proposed to be infilled with shrub planting. To aid in mitigating views form the Coventry Way Long Distance Footpath, new shrub planting is proposed in the eastern corner of Field 6, and additional shrub planting punctuated with trees is also proposed along the western boundary of Field 6.

3.9. In the far western extent of Field 8 an area of hard standing would accommodate both the customer substation and the Distribution Network Operator substation. Access into the Appeal Site would utilise the existing agricultural access off B4102 Meriden Road.

Effect upon the Land Cover/Land Use

3.10. The Proposed Development would introduce a new type of development into an area which, at the time of the Appeal Site visits in August and October 2024, comprised arable crops. The existing ground cover is considered to be of medium value being characteristic of the

local landscape yet of low susceptibility, being a managed vegetation. In terms of its sensitivity to the proposals, it is considered to be medium.

3.11. The existing ephemeral farmland and grassland that characterise the Appeal Site would be temporarily removed and/or disturbed across the majority of the Appeal Site. Following the completion of the construction stage, the area beneath and between the solar panels would be sown with a suitable grazing grassland mix to benefit biodiversity. This would be managed as permanent pasture. The grassland margins beyond the security fencing would be sown with species-rich grassland mixes as illustrated in the Landscape Strategy Plan, appropriate to the ground condition and soil type.

3.12. The proposals would allow the land to effectively rest from arable use for the life of the Proposed Development. With the land managed for grazing, the sheep droppings would add humus and allow the soil to become more enriched in soil habitat terms. At the end of the operational period, the soil resource would be a better-quality enriched resource for farming as a consequence.

3.13. On balance, taking into account the enhancement measures and extent of the infrastructure, the proposals would result in a medium magnitude of change upon land cover. The effects are therefore considered to be moderate adverse.

3.14. The analysis set out above is based on a number of considerations relating to this aspect of the Proposed Development and is noted in the following paragraphs.

1. The land is predominantly currently used for pasture and silage. The land management can change to pasture as a good farming practice without the requirement for planning permission.

2. With the scheme as proposed, the land would be managed as pasture where the solar panels are located within the existing fields.

3. This land cover would be retained across the entire Appeal Site, with the solar panels superimposed over this managed grassland, in contrast to other forms of development which remove agricultural use and are permanent.

4. Sheep grazing will be undertaken to ensure that the grassland is appropriately managed and maintained for the lifetime of the project. Sheep are able to effectively graze across any of the grassland whether it is under the panels or between the panels themselves.

5. Throughout the life of the project, the land would be farmed based on sheep grazing and therefore would remove any intensive arable farming practice but maintain agricultural use.

6. The amount of actual loss of agricultural land as a result of the scheme would be negligible given the overall size of the Appeal Site. As set out in the application documentation, the actual land that would be temporarily lost to accommodate the proposed built form such as the access tracks and substation would equate to approximately 0.0446 hectares (ha) - the Appeal Site covers approximately 61 ha in total.

7. It is good practice to break the agricultural cultivation of the land, with the land left fallow and retained as pasture to allow the soil ecology to recover. With the land managed for grazing, the sheep droppings would add humus and would allow the soil to become more enriched in soil habitat terms. At the end of the period, the soil resource would be a

better-quality enriched resource for farming as a consequence. There will be as a result, long-term benefits for the soil from being rested for 40 years. Furthermore, with the land managed for pasture with sheep grazing present, the proposal would allow carbon sequestration with regard to the soil resource within the Appeal Site.

8. The physical form of grassland would remain with the solar panels in place.

9. The fields are currently free of built development and therefore have a sense of openness associated with the field units. The introduction of the solar panels whilst extending across the topography at a maximum height of 2.3m (2266cm) above ground, would nonetheless result in some reduction concerning the sense of openness associated with the field units. It is this particular aspect that would result in an adverse nature of effect as it relates to land cover, as the actual physical impact and loss would be limited in scale across the entirety of the Appeal Site as described above.

3.15. No land will be permanently lost as a result of the proposals. The installation of the solar arrays would not seal the land, nor would it cause any downgrading of quality. Only a small area for access tracks, infrastructure and substation compound would be physically lost but this land would be restored on decommissioning. The installation and decommissioning process would not have any significant or long-term adverse effects on soils subject to the Proposed Development following good practice in terms of pasture management and maintenance.

Effect upon Topography in the Appeal Site

3.16. The sloping nature of the Appeal Site is considered to be uncomplicated and forms part of the wider gently undulating vale landscape. The existing levels across the Appeal Site mean that only limited earthworks would be necessary to accommodate the Proposed Development. The susceptibility of the topography to the type of development proposed is considered to be medium, which combined with a medium value, would result in an overall medium sensitivity.

3.17. Due to the light footprint of the proposed solar panels and their character, the prevailing ground levels and indeed the perception of the landform would continue as currently experienced. The arrangement of the solar panels would follow the topography of the Appeal Site and reflect any variation in its contours. Some ground disturbance would occur during the construction of the access track and foundations for the ancillary elements including the fencing, with the panels pile driven into the ground and not requiring any footings or foundations. Any changes would be minimal and limited, with the area reinstated to the existing ground levels. The magnitude of change is therefore assessed as negligible resulting in a negligible effect across the Appeal Site.

Effect upon Hedgerows and Shrubs within the Appeal Site

3.18. Hedgerows represent a traditional but typical field boundary treatment in this area. For this reason, the value of shrub vegetation is considered to be medium. In terms of susceptibility of hedgerow vegetation, this is considered to be medium to the proposals with this type of vegetation requiring some time to mature and establish as a landscape element. Overall, the sensitivity of hedgerow vegetation is medium.

3.19. As illustrated by the Landscape Strategy Plan (Appendix 8), no sections of existing hedgerow or shrubbery are required to facilitate the Proposed Development.

3.20. The proposals would bring about a net gain in the Appeal Site's hedgerow resource through the creation of a substantial amount of native species-rich shrubs and native hedgerows. Therefore, the proposed planting would result in a medium magnitude of change and moderate beneficial effects upon the hedgerow resource.

Effect upon the Tree Resource

3.21. None of the trees within the Appeal Site's boundaries are part of a designed or designated landscape. However, mature and well-established trees are present within and along the boundaries of the Appeal Site. As a whole, the value of trees within the Appeal Site is considered to be medium alongside high susceptibility given the difficulty of their replacement. Overall, therefore the sensitivity of the trees is assessed as high.

3.22. The proposals would bring about a net gain in the Appeal Site's tree resource as illustrated by the Landscape Strategy Plan. Therefore, the proposed planting would result in a medium magnitude of change and major beneficial effects upon the tree resource.

Figure 4: Existing hedgerow and trees along the northern boundary of Field 1.

Effect upon Public Rights of Way (PRoWs)

3.23. There is one Public Right of Way (PRoW) reference M294/1 which crosses north to south through the Appeal Site (Appendix 2) the Coventry Way Long Distance Footpath also grazes the southeast corner of the Appeal Site; all of those beyond the Appeal Site would be physically unaffected by the scheme in place. None of the PRoWs near or passing through the Appeal Site would have to be closed or diverted. The Proposed Development therefore would not have any direct effects upon these assets. The PRoWs within the Appeal Site would be retained and for much of their length be accommodated within 'green lanes' framed by hedgerows and hedgerow trees (refer to the Landscape Strategy Plan). With a high susceptibility, value and sensitivity combined with no magnitude of change, there would be

no physical degree of effect on the PRoW as a resource and facility. The effect upon the amenity of these routes is addressed later.

Effect upon Water Features

3.24. As noted in the LVA and confirmed by the Appeal Site visit, a small watercourse is present within the Appeal Site. The Proposed Development has been designed to allow a separation buffer between this feature and the Proposed Development. In short, the existing water features would be retained and not physically affected.

3.25. The value, susceptibility and sensitivity of water features are assessed as high. As part of the proposals, the existing waterbodies are proposed within generous buffers, and additional attenuation basins and swales are also proposed (Appendix 8) which would contain a wet-tolerant grassland mix resulting in a low magnitude of change, and subsequent moderate beneficial effect.

If the proposals were assessed based on the Planning Layout (Revision H), the magnitude of change would remain as low, due to the introduction of swales, resulting in moderate beneficial effects.

Summary of Effects upon Landscape Elements

3.26. The Proposed Development would have a moderate adverse effect on the land use/ land cover of the Appeal Site, taking into account the associated enhancement measures and extent of the infrastructure. In terms of the Appeal Site's topography, the effects would be negligible. With regard to the tree and hedgerow resources, the landscape proposals would bring about moderate beneficial effects upon hedgerows and major beneficial effects upon the tree resource. Other existing landscape features, such as the PRoWs, would be retained and would not be affected. The overall effect on water features is assessed as moderate beneficial.

3.27. The Proposed Development would result in some beneficial effects with regard to landscape elements that currently define the landscape character of the Appeal Site. However, the elements that currently contribute to defining the field character of the Appeal Site, namely trees and hedgerows, would be retained and enhanced to form a solar farm within farmland managed for pasture. Furthermore, the proposed hedgerows would reflect some of the historic field boundaries and a sense of scale across the Appeal Site which have been lost due to the intensification of farming practices.

3.28. It is also worth reiterating that the scheme can be described as long-term in nature (i.e., 40 years), with the land cover being temporary; meaning that it will be possible for the land to return to solely agricultural use. Solar farms are characterised by their low profile, light footprint and reversible nature. The timescale of 40 years is similar for some other elements in the landscape such as timber crop production.

3.29. After 40 years, at the decommissioning stage, all infrastructure would be removed. However, all the new planting introduced would have matured along with the ongoing management and maintenance of the other retained features and as a result, there would be a clear beneficial legacy from this project in terms of landscape elements which collectively would also enhance landscape character as noted in the published Landscape Character Assessments.,

3.30. The author recognises that the Proposed Development would bring about an inevitable change to the character of the Appeal Site itself, introducing solar panels and associated infrastructure superimposed over grassland managed as pasture and grazing. However, such a change would in physical terms be confined within the Appeal Site boundaries.

4. Effect on Landscape Character

Introduction

4.1. This section of the statement explains how the Proposed Development would have a bearing upon the landscape character of the surrounding area. As defined in the GLVIA3 glossary, landscape character is ***"A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different to another…".***

4.2. To further clarify a distinction in the use of terms, Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape, as opposed to Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which are defined in GLVIA3, page 157 as follows:

> ***"These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical lands use and settlement pattern, and perceptual and aesthetic attributes"***

4.3. A number of landscape character assessments have been undertaken in recent years to identify landscape character types and areas and published to assist professionals in understanding how decisions can affect landscape character.

4.4. The preceding chapter provides some narrative to explain how the Proposed Development would have a bearing upon the landscape elements which form the landscape character of the Appeal Site. The author agrees with the detailed analysis set out in the FPCR LVA that the Appeal Site is assessed as medium value based on the criteria set out in Technical Guidance Note 02-21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations given that it is located within an undesignated landscape, the landscape condition is fair with the landscape features generally well-maintained, noting there are gaps in some of the boundary hedgerows; and although not rare elements, the topography, scale and vegetation within the Appeal Site is typical of the local landscape character.

4.5. The susceptibility of the Appeal Site to the type of development is assessed as medium, due to the level of enclosure provided by existing vegetation along the boundaries of the Appeal Site, combined with the gradual variations in topography within the immediate locality.

4.6. A medium value and medium susceptibility equate to a medium sensitivity.

National Level – National Character Area 97: Arden

4.1. The Appeal Site and the surrounding area are located within the National Character Area (NCA) Arden number 97.

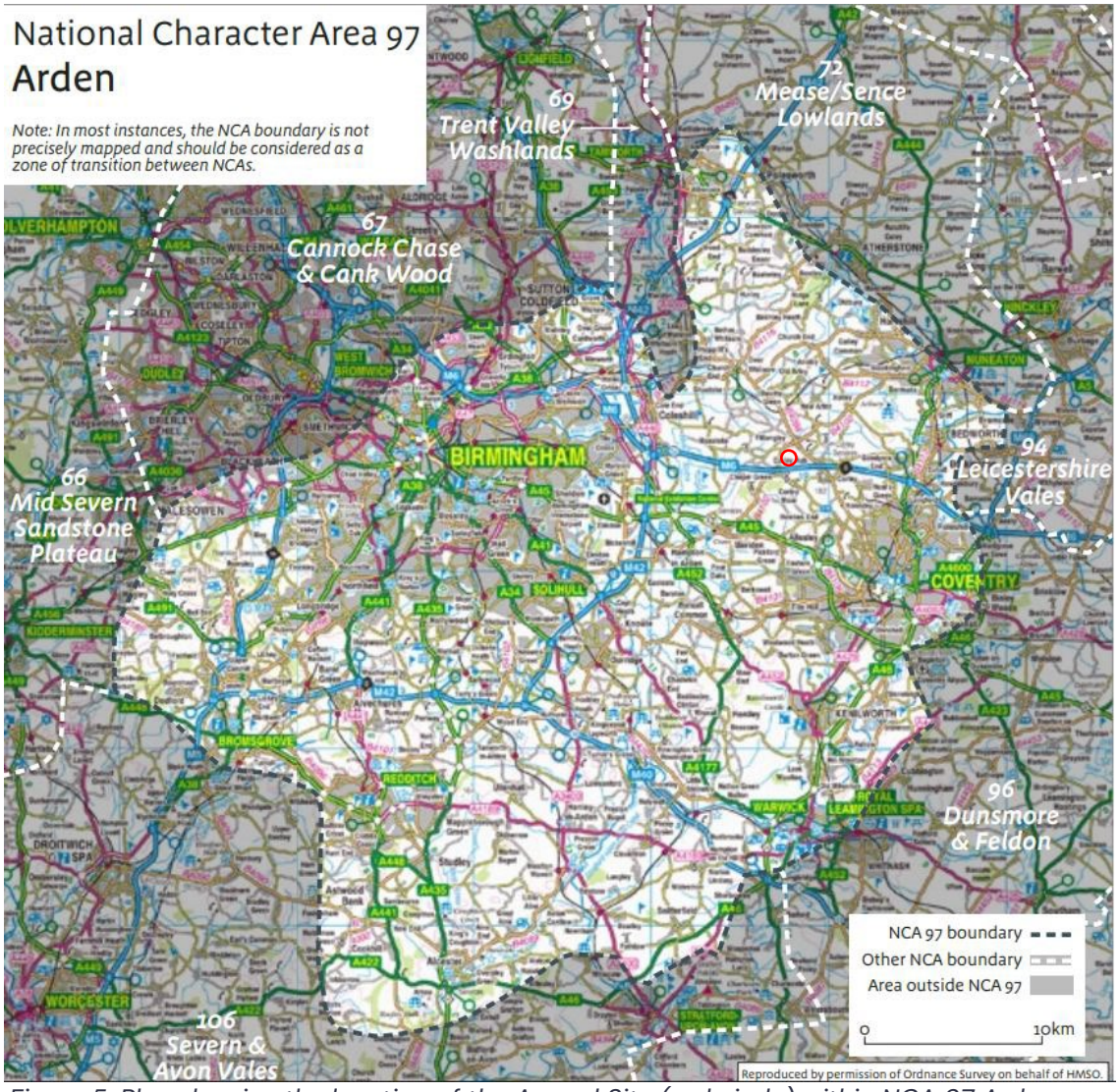

Figure 5: Plan showing the location of the Appeal Site (red circle) within NCA 97 Arden

4.2. This NCA forms part of an assessment of the character of England's landscape, first undertaken by the Countryside Agency but now the responsibility of Natural England. The key characteristics of this NCA are described on page 5 of the document as follows:

- ***"Well-wooded farmland landscape with rolling landform.***
- ***Geologically diverse with rocks ranging from the Precambrian to the Jurassic and overlain by superficial Quaternary deposits.***
- ***Mature oaks, mostly found within hedgerows, together with ancient woodlands, and plantation woodlands that often date from the time of enclosure. Woodlands include historic coppice bounded by woodbanks.***
- ***Narrow, meandering clay river valleys with long river meadows…***
- ***Numerous areas of former wood-pasture with large, old, oak trees often associated with isolated remnants of more extensive heathlands. Village greens/commons have a strong association with remnant lowland heath. Fragmented heathland persists on poorer soils in central and northern areas.***

- ***Diverse field patterns, ranging from well hedged, irregular fields and small woodlands that contrast with larger semi regular fields on former deer park estates…***

- ***Complex and contrasting settlement pattern with some densely populated where traditional settlements have amalgamated to form the major West Midlands conurbation while some settlements remain distinct and relatively well dispersed.***

- ***Transport infrastructure, the M42, M40, M6 and M5 are major transport corridors that sit within the landscape of this NCA.***

- ***Shakespeare's 'Forest of Arden', featured in 'As You Like It', is still reflected through the woodland cover, mature oaks, small ancient woodlands and former wood pasture."***

4.3. All of these key characteristics identified above would remain and prevail beyond the Appeal Site itself with the Proposed Development in place. Any landscape effects would be negligible beyond the environs of the Appeal Site.

4.4. The author notes that the following Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) are identified in the description of the NCA 97 Arden:

> ***"SEO 1: Manage and enhance the valuable woodlands, hedgerows, heaths, distinctive field boundaries and enclosure patterns throughout the NCA, retaining the historic contrast between different areas while balancing the needs for timber, biomass production, climate regulation, biodiversity and recreation.***
>
> ***SEO 2: Create new networks of woodlands, heathlands and green infrastructure, linking urban areas like Birmingham and Coventry with the wider countryside to increase biodiversity, recreation and the potential for biomass and the regulation of climate." (underlining is my emphasis)***

4.5. The Proposed Development retains and enhances the existing field boundaries with an increase in the tree and woodland cover, and the scheme responds positively to the above-quoted Statements of Environmental Opportunity SEO1 and SEO2.

4.6. Furthermore, the field pattern, hedgerows and hedgerow trees and the grain of the landscape would all remain in place. The Appeal Site would still be in agricultural use just not so obvious given the solar panels and associated infrastructure. There would be no net loss of any features other than the current arable land use, the only difference is that the solar panels would be introduced along with the other infrastructure within the framework of the fields. In character terms, beyond the Appeal Site and its immediate environs, there would be no material change to the physical and experiential characteristics of the landscape.

4.7. In summary, the author notes that the overall key characteristics of the NCA reveal a settled and managed landscape with specific references to built infrastructure. It acknowledges (page 6 of the NCA 97 document) that the Arden landscape ***"…is a true mix of urban and rural with the heavily urbanised centres of Birmingham, Coventry, Redditch, Nuneaton and Tamworth set within and around a landscape of farmland, parkland and former wood pasture."*** This Natural England document is inevitably a high-level character assessment, but it provides a useful overview to understand the character of the local and wider landscape and its surroundings.

4.8. The author notes also that the description of the NCA 97 Arden states:

> ***"There are many mature hedgerow oaks, numerous patches of ancient woodland and parks containing remnants of wood-pasture. The association with former common and heathland also imparts a strong unity, reflected by the widespread occurrence of heathland vegetation and roadside bracken. The larger commons have been enclosed within a rectilinear pattern of larger fields, straight roads and hedges, but there are still smaller commons as well as extensive areas of farmland, characterised by small, irregular fields, dense, thick hedges, winding lanes and trackways. (…) Common oaks are still the dominant tree species and can be found both within towns and villages and as part of the hedgerow systems. The woods themselves range from 20th century plantations to species-rich ancient woodlands. Some of the woodlands contain important populations of lichens and fungi. Oak and ash wood with bracken, bramble and dog's mercury are also particularly distinctive."***

4.9. In comparison, the Appeal Site is best described as arable land with poor semi-improved grassland field margins typical of intensively managed arable margins, areas of scrub vegetation, semi-improved grassland areas, contained by generally well-maintained field hedgerows with hedgerow trees, and standard trees some of which were semi-mature or mature. The Appeal Site is not common land, there are no examples of heath habitat within the site, and no Ancient Woodlands within or abutting the site. The Ancient Woodlands located in close proximity would not be physically affected. The fields are medium to large scale and have been enlarged in the past.

4.10. At this higher level, it is considered that the Proposed Development would not have any discernible effect with regard to the key defining characteristics of this NCA as identified above. It is more informative to examine the local character assessments.

County Level - Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines (1993)

4.11. Warwickshire County Council produced 'Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines' in 1993 which maps and describes the special characteristics of each of the county's seven landscape character areas. The guidelines also provide strategies for managing and enhancing these landscapes.

4.12. The Appeal Site is located within Arden Regional Character Area, a large area extending between Tamworth in the north, to Warwick and Redditch in the south. The Arden Regional Character Area is further broken down into distinct types of landscape, with the site being located within the Ancient Arden Landscape Type.

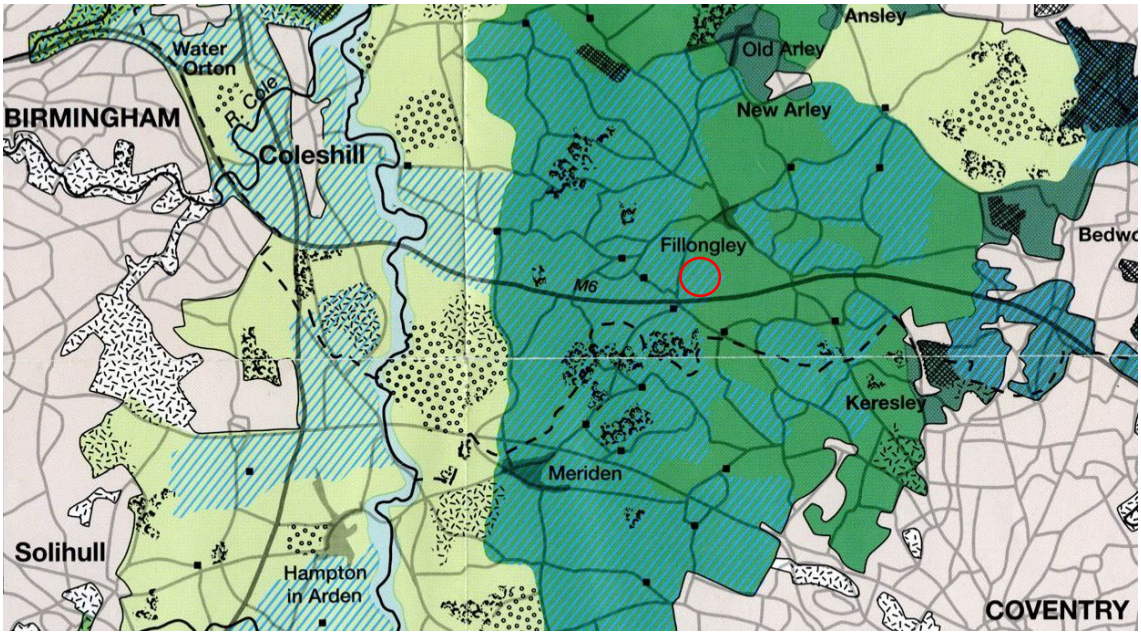

Figure 6: Plan showing the location of the Appeal Site (red circle) within the Ancient Arden Landscape Type

4.13. The overall character and qualities of the *'Ancient Arden'* landscape type are ***"A small scale farmed landscape with a varied, undulating topography, characterised by an irregular pattern of _fields and narrow, winding lanes"***.

4.14. The Ancient Arden is described as follows:

> ***"This is the most extensive Arden landscape and forms the core of ancient countryside in Warwickshire. It is located in two main areas: the northern section covers the eastern half of the North Warwickshire plateau, while the southern section forms the undulating countryside between Hatton and Redditch. It is a small scale, intricate landscape with many low rounded hills, steep scarps and small incised valleys. Landform is rarely dominant but in places it is emphasised by hilltop woodlands and wooded scarps. Within the area landform relates intimately with tree cover and field pattern to form a strong sense of enclosure. Views are restricted by thick roadside hedgerows and are often short, overlooking two or three fields to a wooded skyline. Occasional distant views are afforded from hilltops and ridgelines revealing a varied, wooded topography.***
>
> ***The farmed landscape is characterised by a well-defined small to medium sized irregular field pattern, complemented by an irregular pattern of narrow lanes. Most lanes and trackways are tightly defined by thick hedgerows often on hedgebanks. Pockets of permanent pasture are closely associated with small scale field patterns around hamlets and lanes. These form the treasured, undisturbed Arden landscapes where a combination of ancient hedgerows, unimproved pasture and grazing animals creates a strong sense of place and a peaceful reminder of times past. The intimacy of the landscape is often reinforced by the presence of sunken trackways and old field ponds which provide the finishing touches to tranquil, typically English rural scenes.***
>
> ***Throughout much of the area the landscape has a well wooded character formed by a mixture of woodlands, hedgerow trees, small parks and strongly wooded***

streamlines. Woodlands are particularly prominent on higher ground on the North Warwickshire plateau between Meriden and New Arley. The majority of woodlands are less than 5 hectares in size, although several such as Close Wood and Birchley Hays Wood just north east of Meriden are considerably larger. Most are oak dominated, but a substantial proportion particularly of larger woods have been replanted with mixed broadleaved and coniferous species. The irregular shape of most woodlands reflects the large number that have ancient origins. Hedgerow trees are mainly associated with pastoral landscapes, such as those found around Tanworth-in-Arden. Free standing field trees and groups of trees around field ponds are also locally important. Elsewhere trees are more scattered, but in combination with thick hedgerows they often maintain a semblance of wooded character.

An integral element of the landscape is the dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads. Many historic brick and timber farmhouses and parish churches are particularly prominent. Modern houses are found on the edges of most hamlets and along roadsides, but in north and south Arden these do not markedly detract from traditional settlement character. In central Arden however, in the parishes of Allesley, Berkswell, Corley and Meriden, urban influences give a suburban feel to the landscape." (underlining authors emphasis)

4.15. The characteristic features of Arden Parklands are set out as follows:

- ***"A varied undulating topography.***
- ***A network of winding lanes and trackways often confined by tall hedgebanks.***
- ***An ancient irregular pattern of small to medium sized fields.***
- ***Hedgerow and roadside oaks.***
- ***Field ponds associated with permanent pasture.***
- ***Many place names ending in Green or End."*** (underlining authors emphasis)

4.16. All of these key characteristics associated with the landscape beyond the site would remain and prevail with the proposed solar farm in place. Landscape effects would be negligible beyond the environs of the site.

4.17. The specific landscape guidelines associated with Arden Parklands landscape type are as follows:

- ***"Conserve and restore the ancient irregular landscape pattern.***
- ***Conserve and restore the irregular pattern of ancient hedgerows.***
- ***New hedge planting should reflect the irregular field pattern and include only mixed native species.***
- ***Conserve pastoral character and identify opportunities for conversion of arable land back to permanent pasture.***
- ***Retain and manage field ponds in areas of permanent pasture.***

- ***Encourage the natural regeneration of hedgerow oaks.***
- ***Enhance tree cover through small scale woodland planting.***
- ***Conserve rural character by restricting changes in the use of rural land."*** (underlining authors emphasis)

4.18. The landscape proposals for the scheme would be in accordance with the majority of these landscape guidelines for the host Ancient Arden by reflecting some historic field boundaries across the Appeal Site which have been lost, reintroducing a smaller scale and irregular landscape pattern and restoring ancient hedgerows. As part of the Proposed Development sheep grazing could be introduced, which as a result would change the current arable use of the Appeal Site to pastoral grazing. Attenuation basins could be introduced as part of the Proposed Development, set within grassland and new areas of shrub and tree planting would be introduced, with native species such as English Oak within the tree mix (see Appendix 8, Landscape Strategy Plan).

The North Warwickshire Landscape Character Assessment (2010)

4.19. The assessment was commissioned in November 2009 to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment of North Warwickshire Borough and a Landscape Capacity Study for the land adjacent to the main settlements and local service centres within the Borough.

4.20. The assessment identifies 13 Landscape Character Areas (LCA) across the whole of the North Warwickshire Borough landscape. The Appeal Site is located within LCA 7: Church End to Corley Hills & Valleys which covers ***"…an extensive area extending from just south of Birchley Heath in the north to Corley Moor in the south…"*** noting that areas of settlement are excluded from the study as a series of insets.

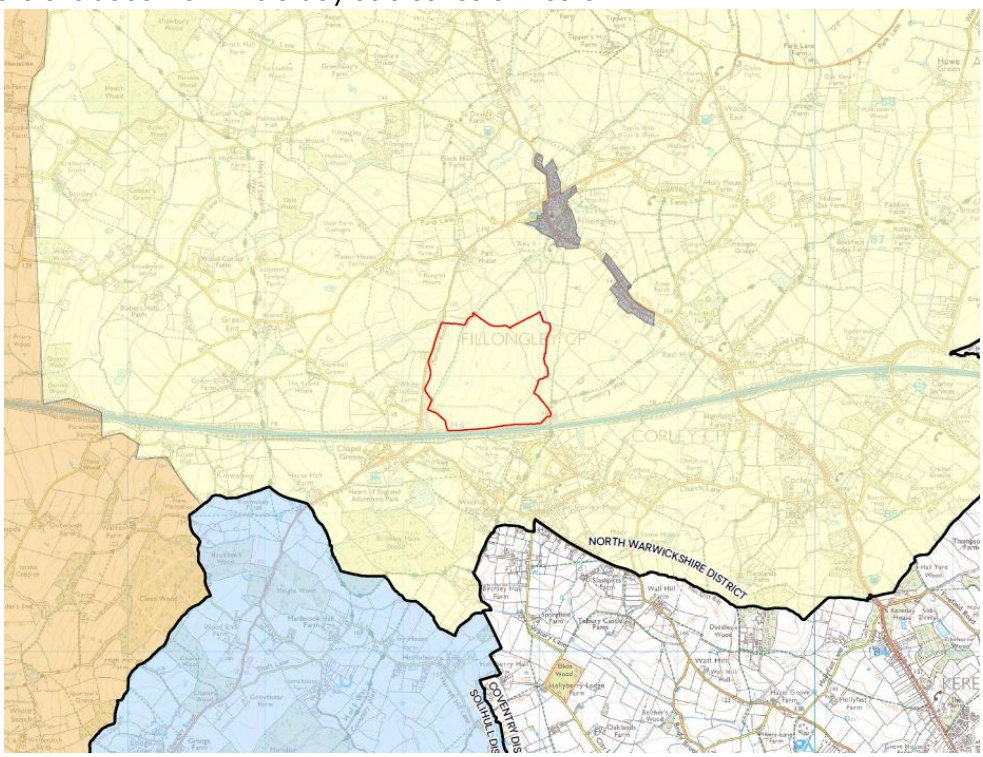

Figure 7: Plan showing the Appeal Site within LCA 7 Church End to Corley Hills & Valleys

4.21. Key characteristics of LCA 7 are listed as:

- ***"A broad elevated basin with numerous rolling hills and valleys;***
- ***Mixed agricultural landscape with an ancient pattern of small fields, winding lanes and dispersed, isolated hamlets and farmsteads, particularly notable to the west of Fillongley Hall;***
- ***Heavily wooded character due to presence of large woodland blocks on hilltops and associated with these numerous areas of former woodpasture with large, old oak trees and field ponds, often associated with heathland remnants;***
- ***Wooded escarpments at the northern, eastern and southern boundaries;***
- ***In places a more open network of large arable fields;***
- ***To the east and south, towards Coventry, the area is permeated by a number of larger settlements with modern expansion with increasingly busy roads;***
- ***The M6 motorway rows of pylons cut through the south and are highly visible locally from elevated slopes;***
- ***Long views from western slopes across the Blythe Valley to Birmingham."*** (underlining authors emphasis)

4.22. The landscape character, key description for LCA 7 is as follows:

> ***"An elevated farmed landscape of low, rounded hills, steep scarps and small incised valleys. This landform combined with extensive hilltop woodlands and tree cover creates an intricate and small scale character, punctuated by numerous scattered farms, and hamlets.***
>
> ***Streams within the valley bottoms generally converge to the west and outfall towards the Shustoke Reservoir. A rail line winds discretely through the base of the central valley. Daw Mill Colliery is nestled within this valley adjacent to the rail line and has little influence on the wider landscape. This settled landscape includes a dense network of older hamlets and farmsteads, ancient moated sites such as at Astley Castle as well as a number of settlements that have been subject to modern expansion, including Old and New Arley, Ansley, Fillongley, Corley and Corley Moor. The majority of these settlements are located to the south and east where they are connected by a network of busier lanes which link to the nearby urban areas of Nuneaton, Bedworth and Coventry. Collectively, and combined with the M6 motorway and lines of pylons within the south, this area has many suburban elements.***
>
> ***The majority of the character area is deeply rural and the tranquil. Ancient Arden landscape is apparent in the complex pattern of woodland, former wood pasture and heath, winding, frequently sunken hedged lanes and scattered farms and hamlets, built of wood or timber. This is most notable in close proximity to the hilltop woodland blocks and particularly to the west of Fillongley, where a complex and irregular network of small well-hedged pastoral fields with field ponds and numerous field trees is apparent in the vicinity of Fillongley Hall. There are similar areas around Fillongley Lodge and towards Over Whitacre. Elsewhere fields have been enlarged for***

arable production, although many still retain an irregular outline. To the south of Ansley and New Arley, numerous hedgerow trees around larger semi-regular arable fields combine to provide a sense of Parkland character towards Arbury Park located just to the east within the Nuneaton and Bedworth District.

Throughout much of the area the landscape has a well wooded character formed by a mixture of woodlands, spreading hedgerow and field oaks, small parks and strongly wooded streamlines. Some areas retain a heathy character, and this is noted at Shaw Lane, where there is oak/birch mix woodland with an understory of bracken. Large mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland blocks are located upon the peripheral escarpment to the north, east and south, framing the LCA.

Within the area landform relates intimately with tree cover and field pattern to provide enclosure. In the more intimate pastoral areas views tend to be restricted by thick roadside hedgerows and are often short, overlooking two or three fields to a wooded skyline. Elsewhere there are local views across small valleys, often to wooded skylines. Occasional distant views are afforded from hilltops and ridgelines revealing a varied, wooded topography. From elevated western parts of the area and from the steep scarp at the western edge of the LCA there are occasional panoramic views across the Blythe Valley to Birmingham." (underlining authors emphasis)

4.23. The assessment then goes on to set out the landscape related designations which fall within the LCA, none which are listed are of relevance to the Appeal Site.

4.24. Pressures for change/ key issues for LCA 7 include:

"This area retains much of the classic 'Arden' landscape characteristics, the main pressure for change comprises agricultural intensification and conversion of broad land swathes to arable. Associated changes in land management practices lead to gradual loss or deterioration of hedgerows, field ponds, wetland and heathland habitats and hedgerow trees. Around the south and eastern peripheries settlement expansion and associated increase in peripheral road traffic along with the presence of the M6 motorway and pylons have an urbanising influence and bring associated ongoing development pressures." (underlining authors emphasis)

4.25. Landscape /management strategies for LCA 7 which are relevant to the Appeal Site include;

"Conserve and restore the typical rural 'Arden' landscape character of this area;

- ***Conserve and enhance tree cover within and around settlements, any new development should be integrated within the landscape through implementation of landscape framework planting appropriate to the local landscape character;***
- ***Conserve rural character by restricting changes in the use of rural land;***
- ***Maintain the quiet, peaceful character of the area and only encourage informal recreation;***
- ***Conserve areas of pastoral character and identify opportunities for conversion of arable back to permanent pasture;***

- ***Conserve and manage any remaining old permanent pastures and grassland areas;***
- ***Retain and manage field ponds in areas of permanent pasture;***
- ***Encourage development of wide and diverse field margins;***
- ***New hedge planting should reflect the irregular field pattern and include only mixed native species;***
- ***Conserve and enhance tree cover through natural regeneration of hedgerow oaks;***
- ***Encourage new woodland planting; plant native, locally occurring species and predominantly oak. The design of new woodland planting should complement the shape and scale of the surrounding landscape pattern, large woodland blocks predominate on higher land;***
- ***Enhance the continuity and wooded character of stream corridors."***

4.26. The positive character-defining features of the LCA would be physically unaffected and would remain and continue to prevail beyond the Appeal Site itself with the Proposed Development in place. The current arable field would be converted to pasture as advocated in the LCA assessment. Species-rich meadow grassland would be sown across the Appeal Site, inside the security fencing and in the areas beyond to create wide botanically diverse field margins.

4.27. The Proposed Development would strengthen existing and establish new hedgerows within the Appeal Site in line with the land management guidelines which include reintroducing historic field boundaries and a more intimate field pattern. Species proposed within new hedgerows, areas of shrubs and individual trees would be native and reflect the local provenance of the area, including English Oak.

4.28. All of the key characteristics associated with the landscape beyond the Appeal Site would remain and prevail with the Proposed Development in place, with the Landscape Strategy Plan illustrating the additional landscape enhancements which would be introduced as part of the proposals such as the historic field boundaries, would remain after the Proposed Development is decommissioned as a legacy of landscape character enhancement.

4.29. There would be a negligible effect on the LCA 7 Church End to Corley Hills & Valleys beyond the Appeal Site itself.

Analysis Concerning Effect on Landscape Character

4.30. At the national, regional and local landscape character area level the Proposed Development would not change existing topography, vegetation, or drainage pattern, and would not change the local distinctive nature of these features and would be imperceptible at this scale.

4.31. The Appeal Site, and indeed the majority of the surrounding wider landscape in the vicinity, is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. The Appeal Site represents a typical example of a managed agricultural landscape. The landscape is therefore not of high value in the context of the NPPF. The value of the landscape within the Appeal Site and its environs is considered medium. With regard to its susceptibility to solar farms, the

analysis confirmed that the local landscape is of medium susceptibility. Overall, the Appeal Site and its environs are of medium sensitivity to solar farms.

4.32. The Proposed Development would represent a change from arable agriculture to a landscape containing solar panels. Existing hedgerows would be retained with opportunities for enhancement to maintain and develop the key characteristics, as well as reflecting historic field patterns.

4.33. During construction and on completion, the Proposed Development would bring about a medium magnitude of change to the Appeal Site itself the Appeal Site would change from an arable landscape to one which contains solar panels with sheep grazing, resulting in a moderate adverse effect. However, as the proposed planting across the Appeal Site matures, this adverse effect would reduce.

4.34. Following decommissioning at the end of the operational life of the panels, the Appeal Site would be returned to at least its current condition. However, the landscape enhancements such as reinstated field boundaries would remain. There would be some long-term beneficial effects on the local landscape character arising from the mitigation measures brought forward as part of the Proposed Development which include enhancements to the characteristic landscape elements and biodiversity within the Appeal Site.

4.35. Whilst any construction or decommissioning works would involve machinery operating within the Appeal Site boundary which would disturb the tranquillity of the area to some degree, the CPRE tranquillity mapping identifies the appeal site as being in an area assessed as being towards the 'least tranquil' end of the assessment spectrum, and construction or decommissioning effects would also be temporary.

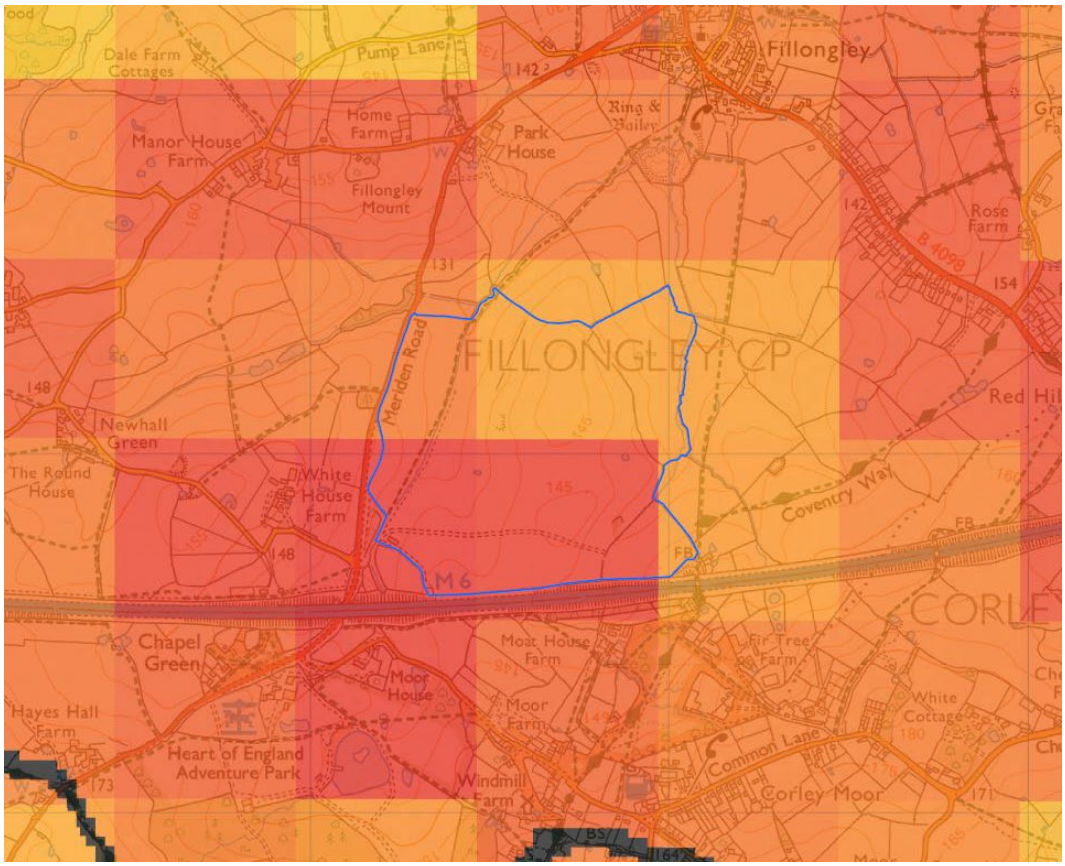

Figure 8: CPRE Traquillity Mapping

Summary

4.36. In overall terms, it is considered that there would be a moderate adverse effect upon the landscape character of the Appeal Site itself. The physical character of the surrounding landscape would remain and prevail unchanged with the Proposed Development in place.

4.37. In terms of landscape character associated with the Appeal Site, this is defined by the combination of various landscape elements, principally topography and land cover, hedgerows, tree cover and the configuration of the fields themselves. The field pattern is sometimes referred to as the "grain" of the landscape. With the exception of some small areas of development such as inverters which would require the temporary loss of some agricultural land, all of the landscape elements would be retained and remain as part of the landscape whilst the scheme is in place. It is accepted that where the panels would be located, the Appeal Site would continue to be used as grazing, accommodating sheep.

4.38. The hedgerows would be reinforced with further hedgerow planting and the tree cover resource associated with the Appeal Site would also be reinforced with additional tree planting.

4.39. All the hedgerows would be maintained at 2.5m in height, which is higher than the solar panels which are approximately 2.3m (2266cm) on their highest edge.

4.40. The trees over the project lifetime, both those existing and those introduced as part of the landscape proposals, would all continue to grow developing larger canopies apart from those trees that are already fully mature. This growth over a 40-year period, which is a significant period of time for both hedgerow and tree growth, would result in reinforcing the defining positive characteristics of the Appeal Site with regard to these features. Furthermore, the increased vegetation growth would create a stronger sense of physical and visual containment associated with the Appeal Site. This change would reduce the visual effects that would come about over the project timescale.

4.41. Upon completion of the decommissioning phase, all built infrastructure would be removed across the entirety of the Appeal Site. The management and growth of the hedgerows and trees across the Appeal Site would continue to remain as part of the landscape post-decommissioning phase and would leave a positive legacy in terms of landscape character given that trees and hedgerows contribute to the landscape character locally.

4.42. Beyond the environs of the Appeal Site, the landscape character of the area would remain materially unchanged. With the Proposed Development in place, the character of the fields within the Appeal Site would change as they would now accommodate solar arrays, however the underlying character of the fields would still be there, the fields would continue to be used for pasture farming, and they would return to solely agricultural use with the decommissioning of the solar farm in the longer term. However, it is proposed that as an integral part of the scheme, new hedgerows and tree planting would be introduced, and meadows created. All of these elements could and would remain after decommissioning as a positive legacy of the scheme and bring about enhancement to the landscape character in the long term.

4.43. The Proposed Development involves solar arrays and some associated infrastructure located across several fields that are managed as arable farmland. It is intended that whilst the solar arrays are operational, the fields would continue to be used for agricultural purposes in the

form of sheep grazing for the whole lifetime of the project. The Appeal Site would therefore continue to have an agricultural use.

4.44. Most of the existing landscape elements, vegetation, trees, and hedgerows would continue to remain and be reinforced. Therefore, the general agricultural character of the fields would remain accepting that they would also accommodate a solar farm and as such would change the current existing character of those fields. Parcels of land within the Appeal Site boundary would remain materially unchanged in terms of their character as farmland. Beyond the confines of the Appeal Site boundary, there would be no material change to the physical fabric of the landscape character.

5. Effect on General Visual Amenity

Introduction

5.1. To reiterate, character and appearance are two different aspects. The physical character of the surrounding landscape would remain unaltered with the Proposed Development in place.

5.2. In order to gain a better understanding of the extent and nature of the change brought about by the Proposed Development on the appearance of the local landscape, the visual effects of the Proposed Development on the general visual amenity of the landscape and the perception of those visual receptors (people) using the landscape are examined.

5.3. The assessment relates to the representative LVA viewpoints.

5.4. Visual amenity is defined on page 158 in the Glossary of GLVIA3 as:

> ***"The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area."***

5.5. The LVA analysis demonstrated that much of the landscape within the locality would be visually unaffected by the Proposed Development. In reality, the actual visual envelope from where the Proposed Development would be seen would be severely constrained owing to the layering effect of vegetation including the field boundaries and hedge trees in the intervening landscape between the visual receptor (person) and the Appeal Site boundary. This statement relies upon the detailed analysis set out in the LVA and visualisations which are not repeated in this statement. Further analysis is described to provide context to this detailed analysis.

5.6. The appreciation of views from the countryside is mainly gained from locations accessible to the public. The two main ways in which members of the public can gain an appreciation of views when in the countryside are primarily from public highways and by using the various PRoW that pass through the landscape.

5.7. Within the local area, the network of public highways is limited (as illustrated in Appendix 1). The typical character of these roads is that they are lined with hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Consequently, within the local landscape, the presence of such roadside vegetation means that a road user using these highways often has only a restricted opportunity to gain views of the countryside. The view of the user is most often channelled along the road itself in the direction of travel. The user's appreciation of the wider countryside can be limited to the direction of travel and to a narrow landscape corridor associated with the highway in front of the vehicle. Thus, the opportunity to gain a panoramic appreciation of the landscape and of the Proposed Development within the Appeal Site would generally be very restricted regarding roads in the locality. This would be the case here. This section provides further clarification with regard to highways locally as set out in the proceeding paragraphs.

5.8. In the proceeding paragraphs, further context is provided with regard to PRoW in the vicinity of the Appeal Site.

Views of the Solar Farm from the Countryside to the North

5.9. As PRoW users continue along PRoW M294/1 beyond the Appeal Site to the north, this route gradually descends, and as such only parts of the solar farm would be visible from locations in close proximity to the north boundary.

5.10. To the north of the Appeal Site is located the settlement of Fillongley which sits within a shallow valley. A combination of topography and well-established vegetation, including areas of woodland prevent views towards the Appeal Site (see Viewpoint 3), as PRoW users approach the Appeal Site from Fillongley along footpath M294a/1, dense, robust vegetation, which includes a high percentage of trees, would obscure views of the Proposed Development.

5.11. For road users travelling along Meriden Road (B4102) to the north of the Appeal Site, whilst much of the route is lined by roadside vegetation, views in a southerly direction are possible at agricultural field accesses near Park House, as illustrated by Viewpoint 9. Whilst the Appeal Site would be partially visible in the middle ground, the glimpsed and transient nature of the view, which would be only experienced by road users travelling away from Fillongley, must be emphasised.

5.12. During the site visit it was established that as road users travel along the B4098, opportunities to experience views towards the Appeal Site are prevented, primarily due to topography, with the orientation of the road following a broad ridgeline, meaning the 'shoulder' of the ridge occupies the foreground of any views looking westward towards the Appeal Site. Users of this highway would be visually unaffected by the proposal. Furthermore, whilst the bare earth ZTV indicated that it would be theoretically possible for receptors to experience views from highways and PRoWs to the north of Fillongley, the site visit confirmed that these routes would also be visually unaffected by the Proposed Development due to intervening built form and layers of vegetation (noting the ZTV does not take account of either of these elements as screening features).

5.13. There is a network of PRoW associated with the parkland grounds of Fillongley Park and its parkland. The boundaries of the park are generally defined by tree belts to physically and visually frame the parkland. As a result of this perimeter tree belt planting coupled with scattered individual parkland trees within the grounds, views from the PRoW and indeed, anywhere within the parkland would be visually unaffected by the Proposed Development.

5.14. Fillongley Village Hall and the adjacent allotments were also visited during the site visit and the existing well-established vegetation including trees around their periphery would prevent longer-ranging views south-west towards the Appeal Site.

Figure 9: View from Fillongely Village Hall west side car park, looking west southwest

Views of the Solar Farm from the Countryside to the South

5.15. The southern boundary of the Appeal Site runs adjacent to the M6 motorway, which is lined along much of its length by well-established trees and shrubbery. Sections of the route as it passes close to the Appeal Site are also on a slight embankment and also lined with 2m high acoustic fencing (near Fillongley Livery Yard, to the west of the Appeal Site). This existing vegetation combined with limited variations in topography and built form, heavily restricts views towards the Appeal Site.

5.16. Roads to the south of the M6 and the Appeal Site are often flanked by vegetation, with views contained to the foreground by well-established areas of woodland and isolated trees which exhibit a parkland character, particularly around the settlements of Chapel Green, Corely Moor and Corely.

5.17. Currently, users of the Coventry Way Long Distance Footpath can experience partial views of the Appeal Site from short sections of the route; noting this route is a 40-mile circular long-distance walk which extends around Coventry and passes close to many elements of built infrastructure.

5.18. As the Coventry Way continues south, it passes over a bridge on the M6. From this bridge users of the route can experience an elevated view looking over part of the Appeal Site. Whilst parts of the solar farm would be visible, users of the long-distance route at this location are already acutely aware of the adverse effects of the M6 and its six lanes of fast-moving vehicles, both audibly and visually on their experience.

5.19. Continuing south, users of the Coventry Way descend from the southern side of the footbridge and down steps into the Open Access Common Land at Corley Moor. During the site visit this area of open access land was walked, and it was established that trees and woodland within the common land itself, combined with the well-established trees along the M6 screen views northward towards the Appeal Site (see Viewpoint 14).

5.20. Whilst the bare earth ZTV indicated theoretical visibility across the areas west of Corley Moor, Chapel Green, Birchley Hays Wood and Meighs Wood, is was confirmed during the site visit that views from PRoW routes and roads in these areas would be visually unaffected by the Proposed Development due to intervening vegetation.

5.21. Views from Corley are illustrated by Viewpoint 16, as illustrated whilst views towards the Appeal Site are theoretically possible from the elevated land on the edge of the settlement, in reality, the layers of intervening vegetation which includes tree belts and areas of woodland, prevent views of the Appeal Site.

Views of the Solar Farm from the Countryside to the East

5.22. As noted above, during the site visit it was established that as road users travel along the B4098, opportunities to experience views towards the Appeal Site are prevented, primarily due to topography, with the orientation of the road following a broad ridgeline. For the residents of the properties along the B4098 it was noted during the site visit that vegetation within the gardens of the properties, or in the intervening fields, would largely obscure clear views towards the Appeal Site from their gardens or lower floor windows. From upper-floor windows, views could be possible from a limited number of properties located along the western side of the B4098, however, due to distance and the portion of the panoramic views

currently experienced which already contain infrastructure and vehicles associated with the M6 motorway, any adverse effects are expected to be limited.

5.23. Users of the Coventry Way Long Distance footpath descending from the B4098 have the opportunity from sections of the route as it descends down the valley side to meet PRoW M294a/5, to experience wide, panoramic views of the vale landscape to the south of Fillongley within which the Appeal Site is located. As illustrated by the photography at Viewpoint 13 the Appeal Site which is partially visible, is located in the mid-view. Once the proposed solar panels are in situ, due to their low-lying form which would follow the underlying topographic profile, they would not break the skyline of the view, which would remain as well-wooded, a key characteristic of the local LCA. Furthermore, once the proposed planting across the Appeal Site is implemented it will contribute to the well-wooded appearance of the valley, the reintroduced field boundaries will also aid in breaking up the appearance of the panels.

5.24. As users of the Coventry Way Long Distance footpath continue descending down the valley side towards the Appeal Site intervening vegetation along field boundaries intermittently aid in filtering views of the Proposed Development. There are no publically assessable locations where the entirety of the Proposed Development could be seen in one field of view. The Coventry Way joins PRoW footpath 294a/5 near the eastern boundary of the Appeal Site. The route of the Coventry Way passes through the southeastern corner of the Appeal Site, where currently users can experience views across part of the Appeal Site. As the proposed shrub planting matures, replicating other belts of linear vegetation in the locality, clear views of the proposed built form would diminish.

Figure 10: View from the Coventry Way to the southwest of LVA viewpoint 13

5.25. Views across this valley from the Coventry Way would reveal part of the Proposed Development, but it would form a small element within these wide views. With the

introduction of the Proposed Development and the mitigation planting, the general composition of the view would remain with small areas of the proposed solar farm visible.

5.26. As users travel along PRoW footpath 294a/1 oblique views west into parts of the Appeal Site are possible from sections of the route. However, these views are filtered by existing boundary vegetation which includes trees, views which encompass the whole Appeal Site would also not be possible due to the topography of the Appeal Site. As the proposed shrub planting along parts of the Appeal Site's eastern boundary matures, the opportunities for users to experience views of the built form would reduce.

5.27. In terms of PRoWs, there are a number at a distance to the east of the Appeal Site, beyond Fillongley, all of which would be visually unaffected as the Proposed Development would be screened by vegetation, built form and topography.

Views of the Solar Farm from the Countryside to the West

5.28. Running along the eastern boundary of the Appeal Site is a section of Meriden Road (B4102), much of which would be visually unaffected though some short sections would afford some visibility of the solar farm, however, these would be fleeting and oblique views and only experienced during the early life of the proposals, prior to the shrub planting along the Appeal Sites western boundary maturing. Other highways to the east of the Appeal Site such as Newhall Green and Green End would be visually unaffected by the proposal, including the minor road which passes near White House Farm which is heavily wooded.

Figure 11: View from near the entrance of White House Farm looking east

5.29. The proposed access point from Meriden Road (B4102) would utilise an existing agricultural point which is currently used by large-scale agricultural machinery and as such, no

vegetation would need to be removed to facilitate its use for the Proposed Development. As illustrated by Viewpoint 8, vegetation, including trees flank Meriden Road near the location of the proposed access, allowing only fleeting and oblique views towards the Appeal Site.

5.30. Users of PRoWs to the west of the Appeal Site on PRoW footpath M289a/1 are represented at Viewpoints 11 and 15. In Viewpoint 11 the Proposed Development would be visible when PRoW users are using this short section of the PRoW (approximately 112m in length, which runs on a east-west orientation, before crossing into another field). Once the vegetation has begun to mature, views of the Proposed Development would be restricted. Viewpoint 15 is from the west of White House Farm and demonstrates the level of vegetation around the farm, the Appeal Site is not visible from this section of the PRoW, the high ground visible on the horizon of the view is located beyond the Appeal Site, near Fillongley.

5.31. For users on PRoW footpath M289/1 near Manor House Farm (Viewpoint 10) due to the elevated location of the route, the Appeal Site which is partially visible, is located in the mid-view. Once the proposed solar panels are in situ, due to their low-lying form which would follow the underlying topographic profile, they would not break the skyline of the view, which would remain as well-wooded, a key characteristic of the local LCA. Furthermore, once the proposed planting across the Appeal Site is implemented it will contribute to the well-wooded appearance of the valley, the field boundaries which will be reintroduced will also aid in breaking up the appearance of the panels.

5.32. Beyond those routes noted above, there is a network of PRoWs to the west of the Appeal Site, however, the topography, tree cover and hedgerows in the intervening landscape would substantially reduce or entirely prevent views of the Proposed Development from these routes.

5.33. Views across this valley would reveal the Proposed Development, but it would form a small element within these wide views. With the introduction of the Proposed Development and the mitigation planting, the general composition of the view would remain materially unchanged, though the view itself would change with the proposed solar farm visible.

Views within the Appeal Site

5.34. There is one PRoW reference M294/1 which crosses north to south through the Appeal Site (Appendix 2) the Coventry Way Long Distance Footpath also grazes the southeast corner of the Appeal Site.

5.35. Both PRoWs would be retained on their current alignments, with PRoW M294/1 set within a generous 'green lane', with hedgerows along either side of the route with species-diverse meadow grassland proposed between the new hedgerows. With existing and new hedgerows maintained at 2.5m in height, there would be little opportunity to observe the Proposed Development from these routes. The scheme would be visible from some locations where field gates and access track routes punctuate these hedgerows, however, such views would be fleeting in nature and limited in a kinetic viewing experience.

5.36. It is worth noting that as users of PRoW M294/1 currently walk along the route, views along much of its length are contained to the fore or middle ground, by tall sweetcorn crops (in Fields 1 and 10) and when looking east, the rising landform within the Appeal Site. This results in the views not being as open or expansive as one may expect when viewing the PRoW route on mapping. Whilst the proposed hedgerows alongside M294/1 would enclose views from the PRoW, the alignment of the planting would reflect some of the historic field boundaries which

were present across the Appeal Site in 1887 (Appendix 7), in line with the guidelines for the Church End to Corley Hills & Valleys LCA.

5.37. Shrub planting is proposed along the southeast boundary of Field 6, which over time will prevent views of the Proposed Development from Coventry Way Long Distance Footpath.

Summary of Visual Effects

5.38. It is evident from the LVA and the visual analysis undertaken for this statement that the Proposed Development would be visually well-contained due to the low visual profile of the scheme, with the panels at a maximum height of 2.3m (226cm). The Proposed Development would be set within existing fields and within a wider field pattern landscape where field boundaries are demarcated by established hedges and tree cover. Based on the viewpoint assessment (Appendices 11 and 13) and Appeal Site visits, it is evident that the Proposed Development would be well contained as a result of topographical variations in the local landscape, vegetation screening including mature hedgerows, tree belts, woodlands, and roadside vegetation across the landscape. The majority of the visual receptors would be generally close to the Appeal Site near its perimeter, or located within it. More distant views across the valley would see the Proposed Development in a wider valley context. The majority of the identified and assessed viewpoints and receptors would not be subject to a major degree of visual effect.

6. Effect on Residential Visual Amenity

Public Interest Test

6.1. It is right to make a distinction between residential and general visual amenity. The latter term from a planning policy perspective usually relates to the public realm and the wider landscape whilst the former is concerned with the private visual amenity of an individual residential property.

6.2. The separation between what is a private interest and what should be considered in the public interest is clear and has no status in terms of being part of statutory documentation, planning policy or guidance. Furthermore, it is noted that no individual has the right to a particular view but there does come a point where, by virtue of the proximity, size and scale of a given development, residential property or properties would be rendered so unattractive as a place in which to live that planning permission should justifiably be refused. The test relates to the position which would pertain with the Proposed Development in situ, irrespective of the position beforehand. In other words, the test is not whether, in relative terms, a property would become a substantially less attractive place to live, the test is whether viewed objectively and in the public interest, a property would become an unattractive place in which to live. Such a situation if left unchecked would lead clearly to undesirable consequences. In this regard, Inspector Lavender within the Carland Cross Appeal Decision (APP/D0840/A/0921030260) summarised within paragraph 23:

> ***"The planning system is designed to protect public rather than private interests, but both interests coincide here where, for example, a visual intrusion is of such a magnitude as to render a property an unattractive place to live. This is because it is not in the public interest to create such living conditions where they did not exist before. This I do not consider that simply being able to see a turbine or turbines from a particular window or part of a garden of a house is sufficient reason to find the visual impact unacceptable (even though a particular occupier might find it objectionable). However, when turbines are present in such number, size and proximity that they represent an unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidable presence in main views from a house or garden, there is every likelihood that the property concerned would come to be widely regarded as unattractive (rather than simply less attractive, but not necessarily unhabitable) place in which to live."***[1]

6.3. The test of what would be unacceptably unattractive should be an objective test, albeit professional judgement is required in its application to the circumstances of each particular case. There needs to be a degree of harm over and above an identified substantial adverse effect on a private interest to take a case into the category of refusal in the public interest. Change in the outlook from a property is not sufficient; indeed, even a fundamental change in outlook is not necessarily unacceptable.

6.4. It is worthy of note that the visual component of residential amenity should be addressed "in the round" taking into account factors such as distance, the direction of the view, size of the solar farm and its layout, the layout of particular dwellings in terms of their floor plans, their garden environment, and the lines of sight towards the scheme.

[1] Paragraph 23, Carland Cross Appeal Decision (APP/D0840/A/0921030260)

6.5. The author has visited the Appeal Site and noted that there are some residential properties relatively close to the Appeal Site which can be shown on the Road Names Plan (Appendix 4).

6.6. Given the position of the solar panels and the distances between these and the existing residential properties, mindful that there are substantial existing mature trees and hedgerows along the boundary between the properties and the solar farm, and mindful of the proposed additional planting, any effect on the outlook for the elevations of these properties and their garden spaces, the author is of the view that the Proposed Development would not breach the public interest test here. The rear elevation and back gardens of properties on the western side of the B4098 between Fillongley and Corley Ash are generally framed by mature tree cover and hedgerows such that these properties would be little affected by the proposal.

6.7. This view is echoed by the Case Officer in the OR dated 4th March 2024 which concluded that ***"Taken together, and when considered against the original submission, any adverse visual impacts from existing residential property would have been considered to be generally minor. The amended plans address these harms and overall, they would be reduced to having a limited impact".***

7. Effect on the Openness of Green Belt

Introduction

7.1. The government attaches great Importance to Green Belts with the fundamental aim of the policy to prevent urban sprawl by keeping the land permanently open and therefore, the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their 'openness.' This is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2023) internal paragraph 142).

7.2. The aspect of openness relates to landscape having an absence of built form.

7.3. The author proceeds to consider how the proposed solar farm would have a bearing upon the openness with regard to the Green Belt in this locality. In so doing, the author considers the scheme in its entirety with regard to its various elements including the substation, and solar arrays.

7.4. Assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgement based on the circumstances of the case (see NPPG Reference ID 64-001-20190722). To elaborate, the Courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in undertaking any such assessment. These include but are not limited to; openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects, in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume in spatial dimension terms. A further consideration is the duration of the development and its remediability taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness. A further factor relates to the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation for instance.

Spatial Aspect

7.5. In terms of the solar farm proposals, there is minimal ancillary infrastructure such as invertors and the substation, with the majority of the development characterised by the configuration of solar arrays. These would be orientated east-west and on a fixed axis. The length of the solar arrays is determined by the panel configurations such that some of these in plan form look irregular in terms of their boundary edges. Between the arrays, the land would be managed as pasture. The arrays would sit within the existing field boundaries, whilst also allowing suitable buffers to new sections of hedgerows which will replicate historic field boundaries.

7.6. The arrays would be set back from the boundaries of the fields with wide field margin planting to create wildflower grass corridors between the field boundaries and the solar arrays such that the solar panels would be set into the fields and not up to their boundaries. The panels have also been set back where there are existing trees and tree groups to account for their canopies and associated shadows so as to avoid any pressure to reduce or remove canopies. The solar panels would be 2.3m (226cm) in height and would be arranged on fabricated steel frame legs such that the arrays would have a very limited physical footprint on the ground itself.

7.7. Given all of these design parameters, the proposed solar farm would have a light footprint. A significant proportion of the area would remain free of built infrastructure, equating to over half the site area. Furthermore, the solar farm would not generally extend above 2.3m (226cm) in height which is not dissimilar to tall crops like sweetcorn, maize, and miscanthus; noting that sweetcorn is currently being grown on part of the Appeal Site, adjacent to the PRoW.

The perimeter hedgerows are currently variable in height in terms of immediate landscape context. The solar farm equipment will appear as solar arrays accommodated within retained pastoral fields and the openness of these fields would continue to prevail above 2.3m (226cm) in height as would be the case with a tall farm crop. So whilst the proposal would introduce built form, this would be limited in spatial terms there would remain a sense of openness as associated with the fields that form the site.

7.8. The introduction of the proposed solar farm would inevitably introduce various elements of built form and reduce the spatial aspect associated with the site to some degree, though this would be limited given the low profile nature of the development combined with its light footprint. Given the hedgerows around the perimeter of the Appeal Site being of a comparable height, the perceived loss of any spatial aspect associated with the fields would be limited resulting in a limited and minor degree of harm in this regard. The solar farm with its various elements would inevitably reduce the sense of openness of the Green Belt from a spatial point of view.

Visual Aspect

7.9. In terms of the visual aspect (perception) of openness, there is already a relatively strong sense of enclosure associated with the Appeal Site. This is due to the substantial presence of mature hedgerows and tree cover which frame the Appeal Site, along with the undulating landform. This aspect of strong enclosure would continue to remain and prevail with the proposed solar farm in place such that wider area of countryside within the Green Belt beyond the Appeal Site, there would be generally very little visibility of the proposed scheme and as such, there would be little change to the perceived sense of openness within the locality and this particular part of the Green Belt as a result of the proposed solar farm.

7.10. The author also notes that the field pattern across the Appeal Site used to be considerably smaller, and that significant historic hedgerow removal has taken place internally across the Appeal Site; and had that not been the case, the sense of enclosure would be even more noticeable, especially as hedgerows used to exist on either side of the route of the PRoW, which would be reintroduced as part of the Landscape Strategy for the Appeal Site.

7.11. The visual aspect of openness as it relates to the Appeal Site can be most readily appreciated from locations where members of the public have access to the countryside passing through the environment and therefore, the author primarily focuses on both public highways and PRoW as well as other public locations and facilities. Mindful of this, the author continues to proceed and consider how the sense of openness is appreciated from both public highways and PRoW in the locality to provide further understanding as to how the scheme would affect the visual aspect of openness.

Visual Aspect as perceived from the Countryside to the North

7.12. As PRoW users continue along PRoW M294/1 beyond the Appeal Site to the north, this route gradually descends, and as such some views of parts of the solar farm though only some elements of the solar farm would be visible from locations in close proximity to the north boundary. The effect upon the sense of openness in this locality would not materially change for much of this route, it is only where this route travels closer to the Appeal Sites northern boundary that the solar farm would be visually apparent and there would be a minor effect upon the sense of openness in this immediate area.

7.13. To the north of the Appeal Site is located the settlement of Fillongley which sits within a shallow valley. A combination of topography and well-established vegetation, including areas of woodland prevent views towards the Appeal Site (see Viewpoint 3), as PRoW users approach the Appeal Site from Fillongley along footpath M294a/1, dense, robust vegetation, which includes a high percentage of trees, would obscure views of the Proposed Development, receptors along this section of the route would be visually unaffected as would the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness,

7.14. At Viewpoint 4, during the early years of the proposed planting, partial views of the panels within the eastern part of the Appeal Site would be visible. Once the proposed planting matures, opportunities to view the Proposed Development will be limited. Mindful of the proposal's very limited visual envelope and degree of effect, there would be a minor degree of harm with regard to the visual aspect of openness in the immediate locality.

7.15. For road users travelling along Meriden Road (B4102) to the north of the Appeal Site, whilst much of the route is lined by roadside vegetation, views in a southerly direction are possible at agricultural field accesses near Park House, as illustrated by Viewpoint 9. Whilst the Appeal Site would be partially visible in the middle ground, the glimpsed and transient nature of the view, which would only be experienced by road users travelling away from Fillongley, must be emphasised. For the much of the route, road users would be unaffected by the proposal and as such, there would be no change to the perception of openness. At Viewpoint 9, which can only readily be appreciated if the road user were to stop at the gateway, the affect upon the perception of openness would be minimal and minor in degree.

7.16. During the site visit it was established that as road users travel along the B4098, opportunities to experience views towards the Appeal Site are prevented, primarily due to topography, with the orientation of the road following a broad ridgeline, meaning the 'shoulder' of the ridge occupies the foreground of any views looking westward towards the Appeal Site. Users of this highway would be visually unaffected by the proposal. For receptors to on the highways and PRoWs to the north of Fillongley, the site visit confirmed that these routes would also be visually unaffected by the Proposed Development due to intervening built form and layers of vegetation would be visually unaffected as would the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness.

7.17. There is a network of PRoW associated with the parkland grounds of Fillongley Park and its parkland. The boundaries of the park are generally defined by tree belts to physically and visually frame the parkland. As a result of this perimeter tree belt planting coupled with scattered individual parkland trees within the grounds, views from the PRoW and indeed, anywhere within the parkland would be visually unaffected by the Proposed Development. As a result receptors at Fillongley Park would be visually unaffected as would the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness

7.18. Fillongley Village Hall and the adjacent allotments were also visited during the site visit and the existing well-established vegetation including trees around their periphery would prevent longer-ranging views south-southwest towards the Appeal Site as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the Proposed Development in place.

Visual Aspect as perceived from the Countryside to the South

7.19. The southern boundary of the Appeal Site runs adjacent to the M6 motorway, which is lined along much of its length by well-established trees and shrubbery. Sections of the route as it passes close to the Appeal Site are also on a slight embankment and also lined with 2m high

acoustic fencing (near Fillongley Livery Yard, to the west of the Appeal Site). This existing vegetation combined with limited variations in topography and built form, heavily restricts views towards the Appeal Site as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the scheme in place.

7.20. As the Coventry Way passes over a bridge on the M6. From this bridge users of the route can experience an elevated view looking over part of the Appeal Site. Whilst parts of the solar farm would be visible, users of the long-distance route at this location are already acutely aware of the adverse effects of the M6 and its six lanes of fast-moving vehicles, both audibly and visually on their experience. Therefore, the effect upon the perception of openness would be minimal and minor in degree.

7.21. Continuing south, users of the Coventry Way descend from the southern side of the footbridge and down steps into the Open Access Common Land at Corley Moor. During the site visit this area of open access land was walked, and it was established that trees and woodland within the common land itself, combined with the well-established trees along the M6 screen views northward towards the Appeal Site (see Viewpoint 14) as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the scheme in place.

7.22. Whilst the bare earth ZTV indicated theoretical visibility across the areas west of Corley Moor, Chapel Green, Birchley Hays Wood and Meighs Wood, is was confirmed during the site visit that views from PRoW routes and roads in these areas would be visually unaffected by the Proposed Development due to intervening vegetation as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the scheme in place.

7.23. Views from Corely are illustrated by Viewpoint 16, as illustrated whilst views towards the Appeal Site are theoretically possible from the elevated land on the edge of the settlement, in reality, the layers of intervening vegetation which includes tree belts and areas of woodland, prevent views of the Appeal Site resulting in receptors being visually unaffected as would the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness.

Visual Aspect as perceived from the Countryside to the East

7.24. As noted above, during the site visit it was established that as road users travel along the B4098, opportunities to experience views towards the Appeal Site are prevented, primarily due to topography, with the orientation of the road following a broad ridgeline as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the scheme in place.

7.25. For the residents of the properties along the B4098 it was noted during the site visit that vegetation within the gardens of the properties, or in the intervening fields, would largely obscure clear views towards the Appeal Site from their gardens or lower floor windows. From upper-floor windows, views could be possible from a limited number of properties located along the western side of the B4098, however, due to distance and the portion of the panoramic views currently experienced which already contain infrastructure and vehicles associated with the M6 motorway, the affect upon the perception of openness would be minimal and minor in degree.

7.26. Users of the Coventry Way Long Distance footpath descending from the B4098 have the opportunity from sections of the route as is descends down the valley side to meet PRoW M294a/5, to experience wide, panoramic views of the vale landscape to the south of Fillongley within which the Appeal Site is located. As illustrated by the photography at Viewpoint 13 the Appeal Site which is partially visible, is located in the mid-view. Once the

proposed solar panels are in situ, due to their low-lying form which would follow the underlying topographic profile, they would not break the skyline of the view, which would remain well-wooded; a key characteristic of the local LCA. Furthermore, once the proposed planting across the Appeal Site is implemented it will contribute to the well-wooded appearance of the valley, the historic field boundaries which will be reintroduced will also aid in breaking up the appearance of the panels. Mindful of the proposal's very limited visual envelope and degree of effect, there would be a minor degree of harm in the longer term with regard to the visual aspect of openness in the immediate locality.

7.27. In terms of PRoWs, there are a number at a distance to the east of the Appeal Site, beyond Fillongley, all of which would be visually unaffected as the Proposed Development would be screened by vegetation, built form and topography as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the scheme in place.

Visual Aspect as perceived from the Countryside to the West

7.28. Running along the eastern boundary of the Appeal Site is a section of Meriden Road (B4102), much of which would be visually unaffected though some short sections would afford some visibility of the solar farm, however, these would be fleeting and oblique views and only experienced during the early life of the proposals, before the shrub planting along the Appeal Sites western boundary maturing. It is only where this route passes in close proximity to the Site, adjacent to its western boundary that the solar farm would be visually apparent and there would be a minor effect upon the sense of openness in this immediate locality.

7.29. Other highways to the east of the Appeal Site such as Newhall Green and Green End would be visually unaffected by the proposal, including the minor road which passes near White House Farm which is heavily wooded as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the scheme in place.

7.30. As illustrated by Viewpoint 8, vegetation, including trees flank Meriden Road near the location of the proposed access, allowing only fleeting and oblique views towards the Appeal Site. Users of the route at this location would be visually unaffected as would the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness.

7.31. Users of PRoWs to the west of the Appeal Site on PRoW footpath M289a/1 are represented at Viewpoints 11 and 15. In Viewpoint 11 the Proposed Development would be visible when PRoW users are using this short section of the PRoW (approximately 112m in length, which runs on a east-west orientation, before crossing into another field). Once the vegetation has begun to mature, views of the Proposed Development would be restricted. Mindful of the proposal's very limited visual envelope and degree of effect, there would be a minor degree of harm in the longer term with regard to the visual aspect of openness in the immediate locality

7.32. Viewpoint 15 is from the west of White House Farm and demonstrates the level of vegetation around the farm, the Appeal Site is not visible from this section of the PRoW, the high ground visible on the horizon of the view is located beyond the Appeal Site, near Fillongley, users at this location would be visually unaffected as would the opportunity to appreciate the sense of openness.

7.33. For users on PRoW footpath M289/1 near Manor House Farm due to the elevated location of the route, the Appeal Site which is partially visible, is located in the mid-view. Once the proposed planting across the Appeal Site is implemented it will contribute to the well-

wooded appearance of the valley, the historic field boundaries which will be reintroduced will also aid in breaking up the appearance of the panels. The perception of openness would not materially change with the proposed scheme in place

7.34. Beyond those routes noted above, there is a network of PRoWs to the west of the Appeal Site, however, the topography, tree cover and hedgerows in the intervening landscape would substantially reduce or entirely prevent views of the Proposed Development from these routes as such, the perceived sense of openness would not change with the scheme in place.

Summary Regarding Visual Aspect of Openness

7.35. The opportunity to observe the proposed solar farm from public locations, i.e. public highways and rights of way in the locality would be very limited and as such, the perception of change to the sense of openness would be equally very limited. There would be two PRoW located within the Appeal Site where in the short term, until the proposed new hedgerows and shrub planting reach 2m in height, there would be a minor effect upon the sense of openness within the Appeal site itself. With establishment of the hedgerows and their management at 2.5m in the medium and long term, there would be a negligible effect upon the perception of openness for these routes to cross the fields as the solar farm would not generally be visible. Noting that if the Appeal Site had not been subject to historic hedgerow removal, that the proposals would not be as visible. Furthermore, there would be very few opportunities to observe the proposed solar farm from public highways of PRoW routes in all directions. Therefore, the effect upon the perception of openness would be minimal and minor in degree.

7.36. For the PRoWs which cut across the Appeal Site, the effect upon the sense of openness would be minor initially, reducing to a negligible level of harm in terms of perception of openness in the medium and longer term. Mindful of the proposal's very limited visual envelope and degree of effect, there would be a minor degree of harm in the longer term with regard to the visual aspect of openness in the immediate locality.

Duration of the Development and Remediability

7.37. The proposed solar scheme is planned to be temporary for 40 years and is therefore time limited development. The plan is to remove all built infrastructure of the solar farm, returning to its original state in terms of openness. With regard to this matter, the author considers that the solar scheme would only cause limited harm to the Green Belt whilst operational. The Appeal Site would continue to have a countryside character with the solar farm in place, i.e. anyone would recognise that it is located in a series of fields. With full demounting at the decommissioning stage, the site would fully reverse to a series of farm fields together with a sense of openness that is currently experienced today without development present. The duration of harm to the visual and spatial aspect would therefore be time limited and fully removed post-decommissioning stage with no residual harmful effects on openness. Whilst the existing and new trees and hedges would have continued to grow, creating a stronger sense of visual containment, this in the author's view has no bearing upon the perceived sense of openness, i.e. an environment free of built form.

Degree of Activity

7.38. The proposed scheme would generate little activity in the form of traffic, both with regard to management and maintenance. Any activity associated with traffic movement would not have a material bearing upon the openness of the Green Belt.

7.39. The proposed solar farm would generate some limited traffic movement as a result of routine maintenance. However, the opportunity to appreciate these traffic movements would be limited, restricted by the screening effect of the surrounding landscape framework. Furthermore, the activity associated with the solar farm would generally be limited and similar of agricultural traffic movement associated with the management of the land and therefore not cause material harm to the appreciation of openness.

Summary

7.40. It is accepted that the introduction of the solar farm would detract to some degree from the openness of the landscape with the introduction of various infrastructure elements. However, the existing field pattern together with hedgerows and significant tree cover, the effect on openness would be mitigated by the frequent hedges and mature trees which would provide a good level of vegetation cover. The overall rural character of the Appeal Site would prevail as the solar farm would still be seen located within fields and due to the degree of physical and visual containment, the landscape would have a high capacity to assimilate the solar farm with the character of the landscape beyond largely unaffected. The spatial and visual aspects of openness would be affected and in overall terms, there would be a local minor adverse effect on openness as a result.

8. Effect on the Purposes of the Green Belt

Introduction

8.1. The NPPF at internal paragraph 143 identifies five purposes for Green Belt. These are namely:

a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

d) To preserve the setting and special character of the historic towns

e) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

8.2. The author addresses each of these purposes in turn in this section.

Coventry & Warwickshire Joint Green Belt Study

8.3. The study was undertaken in two parts and published in 2015 and 2016 and assessed the Green Belt against the five purposes of Green Belts, as set out in the NPPF. The study portioned the Green Belt into a series of large Broad Areas and, in some locations, at a finer level of study, Land Parcels.

8.4. The Appeal Site was located within Broad Area 10.

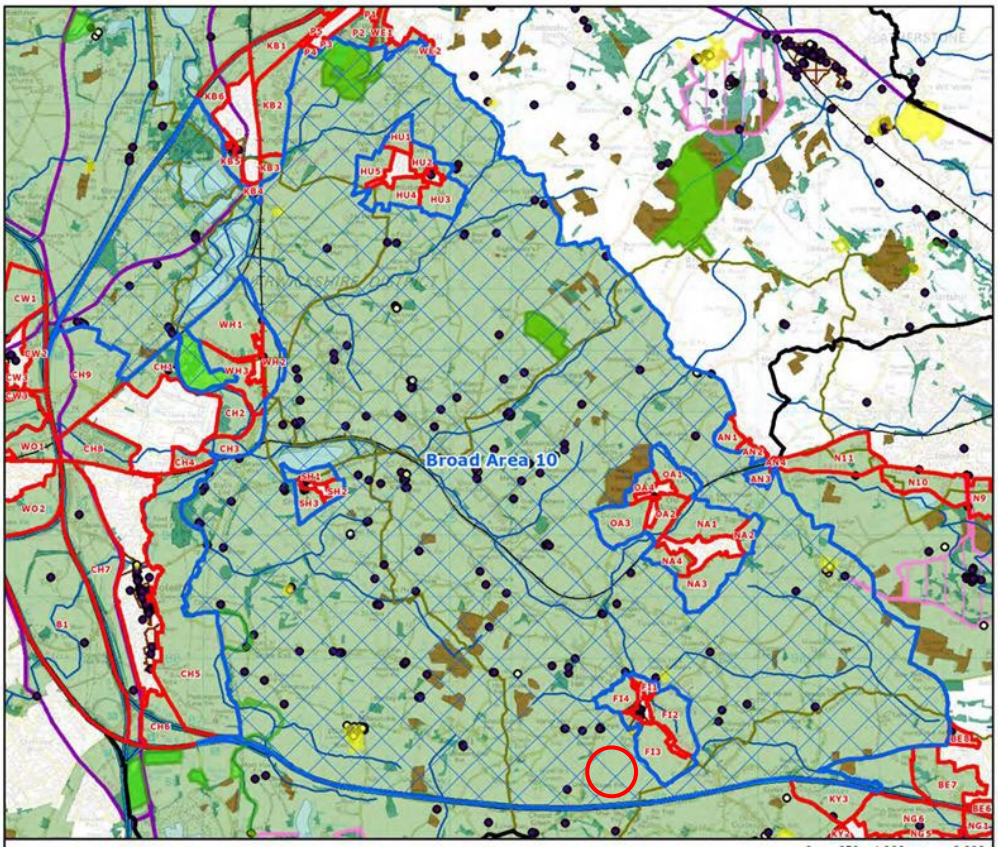

Figure 12: Plan showing the extent of Broad Area 10, and the location of the Appeal Site (red circle)

8.5. The summary text within the study states the following:

> ***"Broad area 10 lies between Nuneaton and Bedworth to the east, Kingsbury and Piccadilly to the north, Coventry to the south east and Coleshill in the west. In between these larger settlements are a number of villages – Fillongley, Old Arley, New Arley, Hurley and Shustoke. The broad area contains several Scheduled Monuments and pockets of ancient woodland, two of which are designated as SSSIs: Hoar Park Wood and Kingsbury Wood. There are two other SSSIs within the broad area, Whitacre Heath and the River Blythe.***
>
> ***Overall, the broad area makes a considerable contribution to all of the Green belt purposes:***
>
> ***Checking the sprawl of Nuneaton and Bedworth, Kingsbury and Piccadilly, Coventry, Coleshill, Fillongley, Old Arley, New Arley, Hurley and Shustoke.***
>
> ***Preventing the merging of Nuneaton and Bedworth, Kingsbury and Piccadilly, Coventry, Coleshill, Fillongley, Old Arley, New Arley, Hurley and Shustoke.***
>
> ***Safeguarding the countryside which contains several ancient woodlands, SSSIs, historic villages and Scheduled Monuments.***
>
> ***Preserving the setting and special character of the historic town of Coleshill, the historic core of which contains the prominent Grade I listed Church of St Peter and St Paul, which is visible across the western half of the broad area.***
>
> ***Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land across the West Midlands."***

8.6. Whilst the author acknowledges the findings for the Broad Area set out in the study, it is noted that the Appeal Site comprises a very small part, or which the study defines as a considerably large area. It is therefore more appropriate to look at the Appeal Site in a finer level of detail, as set out in the following paragraphs.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

8.7. Unrestricted sprawl is directly related to the sprawl of large built-up areas. The author notes that the Appeal Site does not lie adjacent to any large built-up areas and there are no large settlements in close proximity to the site. The nearest large scale settlements include Coventry to the east and Nuneaton in the northwest, these lie at some distance from the Appeal Site. As such, there would be no perception of unrestricted sprawl associated with large built-up areas with the scheme in place.

8.8. The Proposed Development would not conflict with this Green Belt purpose concerning checking unrestricted sprawl and therefore, the strategic function of this purpose would remain and prevail with the scheme in place.

To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

8.9. This purpose specifically focuses on towns and avoiding such settlements merging into one another. The nearest town to the site is Nuneaton to the northeast lying over 6km from the Appeal Site, Tamworth over 14km to the north, and Kenilworth over 12km to the south. In

summary, the Appeal Site lies in the centre of the Green Belt well away from these towns. The Green Belt in its wider context, extends over countryside to maintain spatial separation between each of these towns. With the proposed scheme in place, the physical and visual separation that currently exists defined by Green Belt between these settlements would remain unchanged with the scheme in place. As such, the proposed scheme would have no bearing upon this purpose and would therefore not conflict with it in Green Belt terms. The proposal would not harm this purpose.

To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

8.10. In terms of encroachment, the Proposed Development would introduce solar arrays across ten fields. Their operation would be supported by other associated infrastructure. However, the solar arrays would be arranged with grass corridors between the arrays and would inevitably alter the appearance of the fields from a sequence of open green spaces to accommodating a solar farm within pasture land. Such an effect would result in encroachment and conflict with this particular purpose of the Green Belt.

8.11. Introducing built infrastructure into what is currently an open field would represent encroachment of development into the countryside.

To preserve the setting and special character of the historic towns

8.12. The author notes that paragraph 138 of the NPPF relates to the preservation of '*setting and special character of historic towns*', not individual heritage assets such as listed buildings and scheduled monuments. The Heritage Statement confirms that the site does not fall within the setting of a historic town. The strategic function of the remaining Green Belt for this purpose would remain intact.

To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

8.13. A further purpose of the Green Belt is to deflect new development towards previously developed land (PDL) to assist urban regeneration. The author notes that the nature of solar farms is highly constrained in terms of location due to accessibility, connectivity and capacity with regard to the local electricity grid. Accordingly, the proposal would not be in conflict with this purpose of the Green Belt so far as it is relevant here.

Green Belt Purposes Conclusion

8.14. The Proposed Development would conflict with one purpose concerning encroachment in the countryside.

8.15. The surrounding landscape would retain its agricultural characteristics, whilst the strategic function of the remaining Green Belt for this purpose would remain intact. Notwithstanding the operational duration of the Proposed Development, it would be entirely reversible and would be decommissioned after 40 years.

8.16. In addition, as a farm diversification scheme, a proposed solar farm is not a form of development that is unusual or cannot be accommodated within a rural context, indeed, in

England there is very limited opportunity for the roll out of ground mounted solar development, without it necessarily being located in rural areas.

8.17. It is acknowledged that substantial weight is to be applied to the openness of the Green Belt, however, the reversibility of the Proposed Development and limited impact at the lower end of the scale concerning the purposes of the Green Belt are key considerations in the planning balance.

8.18. It is noted in the consultation concerning the, 'Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system.' Chapter 5 is concerning brownfield, grey belt and Green Belt. The publication defines the grey belt as follows:

> ***"For the purposes of Plan-making and decision-making, grey belt is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising Previously Developed Land and any other parcels and/or areas of Green Belt land that make a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes (as defined in para 140 of this Framework) but excluding those areas or assets of particular importance listed in footnote 7 of this Framework (other than land designated as Green Belt)."***

8.19. The areas of assets listed at footnote 7 of the Draft NPPF (July 2024) habitats sites, and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

8.20. None of these areas or assets are applicable to the Appeal Site, and as summarised above the reversibility of the Proposed Development and limited impact at the lower end of the scale (lower performing site) concerning the purposes of the Green Belt the Appeal Site would fit the definition of 'Grey Belt' which the draft NPPF (July 2024) is discussing.

9. Summary Statement

Introduction

9.1. The author is instructed to present evidence relating to landscape and visual issues in respect of the scheme for which planning permission is sought for the construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure. This statement should be read in conjunction with the Statement of Case prepared by Enviromena. The Proposed Development was a full application to North Warwickshire Borough Council (reference PAP/2023/0071). Having visited the Appeal Site and surrounding area and having reviewed all the relevant documentation pertaining to this scheme, the author has drawn the following conclusions which are set out in the proceeding paragraphs. .

Scale, Location, Layout and Appearance

9.2. With regard to scale, the proposal seeks to deliver a 40MW solar farm that by virtue of its scale would contribute significantly towards the renewable energy targets in light of the climate emergency. The quantum of development that is anticipated would extend over several fields, however there would be no opportunity to appreciate the total scale of this scheme from any one location. The topography together with mature tree cover, woodlands, tree belts, and hedges in the intervening landscape would mean that there would be very limited opportunity to appreciate the scale of the scheme.

Effect on Landscape Elements

9.3. The proposed solar farm would have a negligible adverse effect on topography. In terms of trees with the additional planting there would be a major beneficial effect, and with regard to hedges moderate beneficial effect. There would be a moderate adverse effect with regard to land cover with the introduction of the solar farm superimposed over pastureland. The author considers that there would be some beneficial effects with regard to landscape elements that would form the green infrastructure of the Appeal Site as part of the solar farm.

Effect on Land Cover

9.4. Land cover is a specific term which refers to the way in which the land is managed. The site is currently managed for arable use. Alternating between pasture and arable is not a matter subject to planning. The scheme would require the host fields to be managed as pasture for the duration of a project but would be grazed and would benefit the fields from a soil/agronomy perspective.

9.5. Furthermore, the introduction of meadows would bring about material ecological enhancements. The local published Landscape Character Assessment advocates the management of pasture which is precisely what this scheme would seek to achieve. It is accepted that solar panels would be suspended above the grass swards. The introduction of the solar farm would have a moderate adverse degree of effect with regard to land cover associated with the site, given the arable land is converted to pasture with panels.

9.6. The character of the field parcels within the site would inevitably change in terms of their landscape character with the solar farm in place, but the character of the landscape beyond the immediate environs of the site would remain unchanged with the scheme in place and that would apply to the vast majority of the Landscape Character Area. Whilst this is an

inevitable consequence of delivering renewable energy infrastructure, only a fraction of this area would physically change in terms of its character.

Effect on the Visual Amenity of the Area

9.7. With regard to visual amenity, of particular note from the authors perspective is that this is an extensive solar scheme across a number of fields yet given the level and gently undulating nature of the local topography, combined with the field and hedgerow network and patchwork quilt of woodlands, the actual visual envelope and the degree to which this scheme would be seen from the surrounding area would be very limited.

9.8. Energy infrastructure (pylons) is an integral part of the local landscape. The scheme's effect upon visual amenity of the area would be very limited in degree and very localised in extent.

9.9. The visual effects would be very limited given the scale of the proposal. Policies require careful integration through existing landscape features and new planting to mitigate adverse effects to minimal levels. The author understands that no policy in the Development Plan specifies absolutely no visibility whatsoever. The author considers that were it so, it would set such a high bar it would be impossible to achieve.

9.10. In overall terms, the visual effects of the proposed solar farm would be very limited due to its substantial visual containment as a result of a combination of topography and surrounding vegetation. Where seen, only small elements of the scheme would be observed and it would not be possible to appreciate the totality of the scheme from any one viewpoint location.

Effect on Landscape Character

9.11. In terms of landscape character associated with the site, this is defined by the combination of various landscape elements principally topography, land cover, hedgerows, tree cover and the configuration of the fields themselves, the field pattern is sometimes referred to as the "grain" of the landscape. With the exception of some small areas of development such as the substation and inverters which would require some small loss of agricultural land, these landscape elements would be retained and remain as part of the landscape whilst the scheme is in place. It is accepted that where the panels would be located the continued agricultural use would be in the form of grazing rather than arable use.

9.12. The hedgerows would be reinforced with further hedgerow planting and the tree cover resource associated with the site would also be reinforced with some additional tree planting. Some of the hedgerows would be managed such that they would be maintained at a slightly higher level than is currently the case.

9.13. The trees over the project lifetime, both those existing and those introduced as part of the landscape proposals would all continue to grow developing larger canopies apart from those trees that are already fully mature. This growth over a 40-year period which is a significant period of time for both hedgerow and tree growth would result in reinforcing the defining positive characteristics of the site, with regard to these features. Furthermore, the increased vegetation growth would create a stronger sense of physical and visual containment associated with the Appeal Site. This change would reduce visual effects that would come about over the project timescale.

9.14. Upon completion of the decommissioning phase, all built infrastructure would be removed both above and below ground across the entirety of the site. The management and growth

of the hedgerows and trees across the site would continue to remain as part of the landscape post-decommissioning phase and would leave a positive legacy in terms of landscape character given that trees and hedgerows contribute to the landscape character locally.

9.15. Beyond the environs of the Appeal the landscape character of the area would remain unchanged. With the proposed scheme in place, the character of the fields within the site would change as they would now accommodate solar arrays, but the underlying character of the fields would still be there and would fully return with decommissioning of the solar farm in the longer term. However, it is proposed that as an integral part of the scheme, new hedgerow and tree planting would be introduced, and wildflower meadows created with arable land converted to pasture as advocated in the landscape character documents. All of these elements could and would remain after decommissioning as a positive legacy of the scheme and bring about enhancement to the landscape character in the long-term.

9.16. The proposed scheme involves solar arrays and some associated infrastructure located in several fields which are managed for arable use. However, depending on farm management and maintenance and crop rotation, these fields could revert to pasture for a fallow period without any recourse to planning and similarly, grazed as pasture, again without any recourse to planning, such is the minor consequence to such a change of use in farming circumstances terms. It is intended that whilst the solar arrays would be installed and operational, that the fields would continue to function as fields and accommodate grazing stock, sheep for farming for the whole duration of the lifetime of the project. The site would continue to have an agricultural use.

9.17. Most of the existing landscape elements, vegetation, trees, hedges would continue to remain and be reinforced. Therefore, the character of the fields would remain accepting that they would also accommodate a solar farm, a renewable energy generating installation and as such, would change the current existing character of those developed fields. Beyond the confines of the red line site boundary, there would be no change to the physical fabric of the landscape character of the area.

9.18. In overall terms the author considers that there would be a moderate adverse effect upon the landscape character of the Appeal Site itself and its immediate environs. No off-site works requiring planning permission are required to enable this scheme to be implemented. The physical character of the surrounding landscape would remain and prevail unchanged with the proposed solar farm in place.

Effect on the Openness of the Green Belt

9.19. As far as the solar farm is concerned, this benefits from a high degree of visual containment evidenced by the fact that there are only limited locations from where receptors can appreciate the proposal in terms of views from the countryside to the north, south, east and west and as such, any associated perception of openness related to this land is very limited. The perception of openness is most readily appreciated from the adjacent and nearby roads and PRoW around the Appeal Site, but even from these locations, the perception of openness would not materially change with the presence of the solar farm associated with the site and its countryside surroundings as a backdrop and context to the Appeal Site as it still would feel very much part of the countryside and little difference in perception as local views would continue to over sail the Appeal Site as if there was a high crop, like miscanthus or sweetcorn.

9.20. The introduction of the proposed solar farm would undoubtedly introduce built form where there is none currently. The aspect of openness is derived in part with regard to two aspects,

the visual component and a spatial component. With regard to the visual aspect, it is evident that the perception of openness as it relates to the site is only readily appreciated from the nearby roads and PRoW.

9.21. The proposed solar farm would be relatively modest in mass and footprint with regular spaces between the solar arrays that would reduce the overall scale of the development. Furthermore, the proposed scheme would be in place for a period of up to 40 years, before being fully demounted and the land returned to its former condition at the end of its use. As such, whilst 40 years is a long period of time, it is still not permanent. Therefore, the impact on the openness of the Green Belt would be reduced and the site completely reinstated to its current open character. Consequently, both visually and spatially, the proposed development would result in some limited and localised harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

9.22. In terms of the visual aspect of openness, the author considers the harm would be minor (adverse) and in terms of the spatial aspect of openness, the harm would be minor. And in overall terms, the author considers that there would be minor (adverse) harm to the openness of the Green Belt though this would be limited and highly localised within the context of this wide designation.

Effects on the Purposes of the Green Belt

9.23. The proposed scheme would not have any bearing upon the first purpose of Green Belt, namely, to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. Whilst there are towns in every direction of the site, these are located several kilometres in distance and with the introduction of the proposed scheme, the solar farm would not cause any neighbouring towns to merge into one another. Indeed, the geographical disposition of neighbouring towns would remain unchanged with the proposed scheme in place and as such, the proposal would not conflict with this purpose. The proposal would inevitably introduce built infrastructure into ten fields where the character of the site would experience a minor adverse effect with the introduction of the solar farm. Beyond the site and its immediate environs, the character would remain unchanged. The proposal would cause encroachment in the countryside and as such, conflict with this particular purpose. The proposal would not affect the setting and special character of historic towns. The proposal would not have a bearing upon the recycling of derelict and urban land and as such, would not conflict with this purpose so far as it is relevant. In conclusion, the proposed solar farm would only conflict with one purpose in Green Belt terms.

9.24. In terms of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, the proposed solar scheme would be physically limited to the site itself. There would continue to be a strong disconnection between the distant urban areas beyond the Green Belt with the scheme in place. The encroachment, as a consequence of the solar farm, would be solely limited to the Appeal Site itself, with the land beyond the remaining countryside. As such, the proposed solar farm would conflict with one purpose of Green Belt, that of encroachment in the countryside. However, the level of harm would be limited to a minor degree.

9.25. The proposed solar farm, does not in my view contribute or fulfil any role with regard to the other four purposes of Green Belt and therefore would be a suitable site to be considered as Grey Belt.

Conclusions

9.26. For the reasons articulated in the preceding paragraphs, it is the authors professional judgement that whilst there would be some limited adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity, these would be localised. There would be localised minor adverse harm to the openness of the Green Belt and the proposal would conflict with one purpose of Green Belt in terms of encroachment in the countryside. The other four remaining purposes would not be affected by the proposed solar farm. The author considers that there are no substantive landscape character, visual amenity or Green Belt reasons from a landscape planning perspective for refusing planning permission for the proposed solar farm on 'land 800 Metres South Of Park House Farm, Meriden Road, Fillongley'.

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