Comment on the Report on the Possible Date and Potential Significance of Co-axial Field System Boundaries at Eye and Yaxley, Suffolk, prepared by Dr A Chadwick, submitted to this deadline by Progress Power.

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1. Summary

1.1. Cartographic and field survey evidence is indicative of a late prehistoric date for the framework of trackways around the development site for the ECC and the limited local dating evidence currently available reinforces the case for a late prehistoric date for this field system.

1.2. The National Heritage Protection Plan identifies early field systems as important for local and regional distinctiveness and National Policy Statement EN-1 contains a presumption in favour of the preservation of heritage assets.

1.3. An AIS-variant substation would result in substantial harm to this heritage asset, contrary to national objectives.

2. The significance of the Eye-Yaxley Field System

2.1. In the 1980s, Professor Tom Williamson identified patterns of fields and lanes sharing a common orientation across an extensive area of the boulder-clay plateau of High Suffolk. Williamson suggested these were the remains of ancient planned landscapes, dating to the prehistoric and Roman periods, and surviving on a large scale within the modern landscape (The Eye-Yaxley Field System).

2.2. Williamson noticed that the Roman military road, the Pye Road (now the A140), appears to slice through the field pattern in a way analogous to a railway line or bypass, in such a way as to suggest the fields were earlier, and therefore of prehistoric date (landscape stratigraphy). Although Williamson’s assertions that the field systems in North Suffolk are pre-Roman have not been without challenge (e.g. Hinton 1997; Martin and Satchell 2008), the suggestion that they are of considerable antiquity, dating from at least the medieval period, if not earlier, is unquestioned.

2.3. The importance of the field boundaries in this area lies in the renewal, and thereby, survival and continuity of the boundaries, and the framework of land division, from later prehistory in this area – both within and extending well beyond – the development site.

2.4. They survived the extensive and profound reorganisation of lowland England that took place in the early medieval period (and consequently the field systems are not present across large parts of the county, replaced by medieval open field systems). Although, potentially late prehistoric field systems also survive as functional elements of the landscape in other parts of the region, the overwhelming majority are below-ground archaeological (defined as cropmarks).
2.5. More recent post-medieval boundaries respect, and use, the long-lived boundaries in this area. The predominant north to south axis of the field system is still relatively well intact in the area of the proposed compound - a block of historic landscape to the west of Leys Lane and east of Judas Lane. These lanes are major articulating features of the historic landscape, probably dating to the Iron Age period and over 2,000 years old. Williamson states, ‘Centuries of piecemeal alteration have preserved the essential orientation of field layout’ (1987, 425).

2.6. Clearly, there have been modifications to, and renewals of, the landscape, during later periods. These can be ‘read’ in the modern landscape. This is to be expected in a worked and long-lived agricultural landscape. The fact that there are (potentially) later subdivisions suggests that there was continuity of the boundaries, and long-lived continuity of function.

2.7. The essential early framework survived and, in some ways, the later changes and alterations add to the significance, resulting in palimpsest with a lengthy and complex history. Different generations have altered the landscape of their ancestors, yet the earliest landscape still survives in the boundaries that continue in use today, forming an important part of the sense of identity.

3. Comment on Chadwick’s Study

3.1. Adrian Chadwick reviews the current evidence in his study, usefully placing the early field systems in a broader context, both nationally and regionally. He makes clear, no new fieldwork or research has been undertaken for his study.

3.2. Chadwick argues that the specific examples of fields and boundaries highlighted by Williamson as being of pre-Roman origin are outside the development area (paragraph 5.4.2). Chadwick acknowledges, however, that Leys Lane and Judas Lane are on the same alignment as fields south of Yaxley identified by Williamson as being of a pre-Roman date (paragraph 5.4.2). Furthermore, he goes on to state that ‘fields laid out between trackways such as this is characteristic of field systems elsewhere in northern Suffolk and southern Norfolk with possible late prehistoric origins’.

3.3. Consequently, in terms of dating, the findings should be considered in conjunction with the results of the major archaeological excavations of an early trackway and early field boundaries to the south-east of the proposed development14. These were preserved as below-ground archaeological features, rather than extant boundaries, but they are very probably part of the same Eye-Yaxley field system which is affected by the current application. They have been given a provisional age of at least c.1,400 years (Caruth and Goffin 2012; Caruth Forthcoming). This is a key piece of archaeological dating evidence for the Eye-Yaxley field system, lending weight to Williamson’s early date for the field system.

3.4. Throughout his assessment, Chadwick compartmentalises the elements of the field system, and seeks variability in significance at that scale, as individual boundaries or hedgerows. In doing so, it is arguably somewhat

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14 HER nos. EYE 083 in 2007 and EYE 094
3.5. His evaluation of significance is heavily influenced by the issue of whether individual field boundaries – and, in particular, current hedgerows - within the development area are likely to have prehistoric origins. He asserts that there are no field boundaries of high significance within the development area, because the current hedges are a relatively recent component of the field system (paragraph 7.2.1). We would acknowledge that individual field boundaries within that framework may be of a later origin - it should not be anticipated that individual hedgerows would be prehistoric. The focus should be rather on interpretations of boundary, rather than hedgerow, continuity. That a hedgerow is of a certain age does not confirm the boundary to be of equivalent age, thus we do not consider it robust to draw a conclusion on the age, or value, of the boundary from the apparent age of the hedgerow.

3.6. Nevertheless, on the basis of the field evaluation undertaken by Oxford Archaeology East, Chadwick assigns a possible “pre medieval” date to Leys Lane (para. 5.4.5) and “medieval or earlier origin” to FB 6-7, 9, 10 and 12 (para. 5.4.6). Furthermore Chadwick goes on to state that cartographic evidence also indicates that FB 1 to 11 and FB18, “could be of medieval or earlier origin” (paragraph 5.4.7). The proposed development will remove large sections of FB 7, 9, and 12.

3.7. Those boundaries of potential medieval origin seem to be assigned a lesser value by Chadwick, presumably because they are not prehistoric. This approach does not seem consistent with the DMRB guidance on value referred to, which makes no reference to age in its criteria.

3.8. It is important to recognise that the survival of medieval boundaries is also significant in its own right, and their survival should not be de-valued because they are not prehistoric (all the extant ditches are marked on the 1839 Tithe Map for Yaxley).

4. Conclusion

4.1. Notwithstanding some of our concerns with Dr Chadwick’s report, it reaffirms the belief that the ECC would be located within an ancient field system. Unusually, the co-axial field system survives here as upstanding and functional elements in the modern landscape – namely in the form of trackways (Leys Lane and Judas Lane), banks, ditches and hedgerows (alongside below-ground remains).

4.2. The proposed AIS-variant substation will result in the direct loss of a large section of extant field boundaries within the heart of this historic landscape, resulting in a significant adverse effect on this heritage asset.

4.3. Furthermore, the compound is proposed to be positioned diagonally (parallel to the 400kV overhead line, which is aligned northeast-southwest) across the predominantly north-south alignment of the historic field system, which exacerbates the indirect landscape effects of the development on the historic landscape character of this area.
4.4. The National Heritage Protection Plan\textsuperscript{15} identifies early field systems as important for local and regional distinctiveness. Specifically it recognises that field systems “are the most extensive form of heritage asset in the country. They contribute significantly to local and regional distinctiveness. Studies have demonstrated the rate of loss of historic field systems still present in the landscape, their antiquity and value in character terms, and their ability to preserve earlier and nationally significant landscapes and assets. Action should focus on engaging communities in helping to preserve the distinctive character of our agrarian heritage”.

4.5. As set out in our Written Representation (paragraphs 12-14 therein) there is a clear steer from the National Policy Statements that assets such as this should be preserved; EN-1 states “once lost heritage assets cannot be replaced and their loss has a cultural, environmental, economic and social impact” (paragraph 5.8.14).

4.6. We agree with Dr Chadwick (paragraph 8.3) that mitigation through avoidance is the preferred option in this situation, and consequently, therefore, while it is acknowledged that a GIS-variant substation would still have an adverse impact on the wider landscape and on the heritage asset, that impact would be significantly moderated.

5. References


Hinton, D.A. 1997 The ‘Scole-Dickleburgh field system’ examined. Landscape History 19, 5-12.


