

Project name:
Longfield Solar Farm**From:**
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31 August 2022

Technical Note

Subject: Technical note prepared in response to Longfield Solar Farm Draft position statement on Landscape and Visual Impact prepared by Wynne-Williams Associates for Essex County Council, Chelmsford City Council and Braintree District Council.

Context

Wynne-Williams Associates prepared a draft position statement for Essex County Council, Chelmsford City Council and Braintree District Councils setting out their position regarding landscape and visual impact resulting from Longfield Solar Farm (the Scheme).

The draft position statement sets out that the LVIA has been carried out according to current and commonly applied professional guidance; that it was agreed that residential amenity assessments were not required; that the extent of the Local Landscape Character Areas were agreed with the LPAs; and that the cumulative assessment follows current methodology. The draft position statement also sets out that although there is a proposed loss of 450.6m² hedgerow, and 469.1m² loss of woodland, the mitigation planting proposed would, in time, provide enhanced green infrastructure across the site.

The draft position statement goes on to set out a review of landscape and visual effects as completed by Wynne Williams Associates.

Outstanding comments

The draft position statement sets out that most comments raised by Wynne-Williams Associates have been satisfactorily addressed. Two areas of concern remain outstanding, namely:

- The impact of the Scheme on the Ter Valley North Local Landscape Character Area; and
- The vegetation removal proposed on Noakes Farm Lane; a protected lane.

The Scheme's approach to these two comments is set out below.

Impact on Ter Valley North and views from the Essex Way

The LVIA found that the Scheme would result in minor adverse effects at year 1 and negligible adverse effects at year 15, neither of which are considered significant. The draft position statement sets out that there would be moderate adverse (significant) effects at year 1, reducing to minor adverse (not significant) by year 15. The draft position statement notes that the moderate adverse effect identified at year 1 could be eliminated if field PDA 1 was removed from the developable area.

Related to the effect on the character of the Ter Valley North, the LVIA concluded that people walking on the Essex Way (which follows the northern side of the Ter Valley, before crossing the valley north to south and continuing east past Sandy Wood) would experience moderate adverse (significant) effects at year 1, reducing to minor adverse (not significant) at year 15. The draft position statement found that moderate adverse (significant) effect experienced would not reduce by year 15 but set out that this may be mitigated by additional mitigation planting.

Longfield's iterative design process has sought to embed good design throughout the development of the Scheme in order to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects (both significant and not significant). This has included extensive consideration of the siting and the design of the northern extent of the Scheme, relevant to the receptors in question. This has included particular consideration of the proposals in, and close to, PDA 1 to mitigate potential effects on the character of the Ter Valley North Local Landscape Character Area, views from within the valley and from the Essex Way. Mitigation measures proposed include:

- No built features are proposed below the 40m contour of the southern side of the valley in order to minimise physical change to the valley landscape.
- New scrub vegetation is proposed below the 40m contour instead of any PVs to augment the existing vegetation structure and improve visual screening.
- The planting of a hedgerow along the northern boundary of PDA 1 under the existing overhead lines to provide visual screening.
- Planting of a tree belt on the northern boundary of PDA 1 outside the existing overhead lines to continue the existing tree belt and provide visual screening.
- Planting of a new 25m wide woodland buffer on the western edge of PDA 1 to augment the existing structure of woodland 'Springs' (see Lyonshall Spring and Terling Spring) and provide visual screening to views from the north and west.
- Planting of a new tree belt on the most northerly edge of PDA 2.
- Planting of six new trees in between existing overhead lines to soften the appearance of the solar array.
- All planting set out above is proposed to be planted in advance of construction in order to maximise growth, therefore provide effective mitigation sooner into the operational stage.

The rationale for the conclusions are set out in the LVIA and the draft position statement respectively and therefore not repeated here. The difference in overall level of effect represents a difference in professional judgement which, as noted in best practice guidance¹, can occur even between qualified and experienced professionals.

Whilst there is a difference in opinion regarding the level of effect on the Local Landscape Character Area there is agreement that once the proposed mitigation planting has established there would not be significant effects on the Ter Valley North by year 15.

Protected Lanes

The Scheme proposes a visibility splay of c. 93m on Noakes Farm Lane. This requirement was raised through consultation with Essex County Council to facilitate a safe crossing of construction traffic and will require removal of c. 42m of hedgerow on the northern side of the lane.

Minimising and mitigating the Scheme's impact on the protected lane has formed part of the Scheme's iterative design development. Such measures include:

- Construction traffic is not proposed to travel along Noakes Lane since this was considered inappropriate, given its protected status. The construction route is therefore proposed to cross the lane instead.
- The extent of vegetation loss on the protected lane has been minimised wherever possible. For example, the first iteration of a visibility splay extended for 125m. Further design iterations allowed this to be reduced to 90m to minimise vegetation removal.
- The crossing's location uses two existing field accesses, preventing the need for further vegetation clearance.
- The proposal includes gated access and a banksman in order to minimise the need for further measures.

¹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition states that "*Even with qualified and experienced professionals there can be differences in the judgements made...*"

A targeted arboricultural survey has been completed since the preparation of the draft position statement. This survey found the hedgerow to be of low quality (category C) in arboricultural terms.

Acknowledging that any vegetation loss on the protected lane is regrettable, the proposed crossing will be raised at a forthcoming meeting with Essex County Council, scheduled for early September, to determine whether further reduction in the visibility splay would be acceptable.