

Longfield Solar Farm
Braintree District Council
UNR: LOSF-0003

BDC (LANDSCAPE SERVICES) Response to ExQ2 Question 2.2.3 (Veteran Oak Tree)

After reviewing the documentation submitted, namely the 'Arboricultural Impact Assessment (Part 1 of 2 & part 2 of 2)', the 'Illustrative Concept Design' (ARCUS), the Planning Inspectorate response, the 'Outline Landscape Masterplan – Advanced planting and Day 1 Solar Farm Construction' (AECOM), the 'Vegetation Removal Plan' (ARCUS) and the 'Biodiversity Net Gain Report' (tracked changes); BDC Landscape Services provide the following comments:

Documents requested in previous comments have now been submitted and accepted, with the inclusion of an Arboricultural Impact Assessment as well as the completed LEMP.

The inspectorate's comments highlight an issue with regards to a veteran tree (T9 as identified within the AIA).

The inspectorate comments: *"The Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) [REP3-033 & REP3-034] indicates that there is potential for a veteran tree (T9) to be impacted by a proposed access route and fencing. It states that this can be avoided by micro-siting the track to avoid the amended RPA of this tree which will not be impacted. Furthermore, it indicates that this will be illustrated on a revised version of the illustrative concept design and updated vegetation removal plan (to be submitted during the Examination (See para 5.2.2). Please indicate where in the Examination documents these can be found and explain how they have taken the findings of the AIA into account."*

BDC Landscape Services echo these comments. The AIA suggests that the siting of the access track can be diverted around the veteran tree T9, to avoid conflict. However, there is no supporting documentation to be found to show any alteration to the track to avoid this significant tree. The vegetation removal plan shows the vegetation at the location of T9 as being removed for access, with no indication that the tree exists. The same is true of the Illustrative Concept Design, and no mention of the veteran tree can be found within the LEMP or the BNG report. Disparity is apparent and the veteran tree is being ignored.

As the veteran trees (there are three identified within the AIA), are missing from consideration within further documentation, amendments are recommended. Veteran trees are an invaluable habitat, and whilst there is no official government protection for veteran trees, there is a large push from the Woodland Trust and other associated bodies to create official recognition and protection for trees of veteran status.

The AIA offers suggestions for mitigation of the impact to T9, and it is felt this should be adhered to and adopted within further updated submitted vegetation removal plans and the illustrative design concept.

For such a large-scale site, which appears to have taken great efforts to improve the location with connectivity planting, screening, and future planting once the solar farm has been decommissioned; to not re-site the access track outside the RPA of a highlighted and valuable veteran tree would be a shame.