

**Proposed Photovoltaic Solar Array on
Land at Priory Farm to the east of
Great Wymondley
Hertfordshire**

Review of Ammended Proposals

for

North Hertfordshire Distrct Council

Planning | 5th July 2022

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1 Introduction

1.1 Scope of the review

1.1.1 This review has been prepared by The Landscape Partnership (TLP) on behalf of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) in relation to full planning application 21/03380/FP.

1.1.2 TLP prepared a full review of the applicants Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and the solar park proposals in relation to landscape and visual matters in May 2022. This report is posted on the NHDC website under the above application number. This current review has also been carried out by Jonathan Billingsley (CMLI) who authored the initial TLP Review of May 2022. It was not considered necessary to revisit the site to assesses the updated materials.

1.1.3 The applicant has not provided a response to TLPs review of the LVIA in respect of matters raised about: methodology, baseline assessment or differences in judgement on the magnitude of change and level of effects. However, the applicant has amended the site and landscape proposals and submitted two updated drawings as follows:

- Drawing 3004-01-003 Revision D General Arrangement
- Drawing 3004-01-012 Revision D Landscape Proposals

1.1.4 The amended drawings are not supported by any further written documentation.

2 Comments on proposed amendments

2.1.1 The May 2022 TLP Report included a number of proposed amendments that were considered would help to reduce the levels of effect. These are provided at Section 5.5 of the TLP Review which included the following recommendations to mitigate the effects.

Therefore TLP recommend the following changes to the proposals:

- a. *Reduction of the extent of solar panels on the land closer to Great Wymondley.*
- b. *Localised removal of panels to provide for more planting at one location on Graveley Road where there would be direct views to the north-east into the northern part of the Site.*

The locations where modifications are recommended are shown on the attached mark up of Figure 1 at Appendix 1 to this review. Locations 1 and 2 are indicated with the reasons being:

Location 1 – omit panels on sloping land closer to Great Wymondley with views from the village edge and rights of way and in west facing views along Graveley Lane. Add hedgerow to north boundary of field to extend finger to plating to join existing hedge to the east.

Location 2 – Create space for small copse of medium scale trees and shrubs to screen views from Graveley Lane to looking east

- 2.1.2 The amended Proposals as shown on Revision D of both drawings listed above include the following changes:

Drawing 3004-01-012 Revision D Landscape Proposals

- 2.1.3 The solar arrays have been reduced to part (approximately a third) of the field closest to Great Wymondley. This reduction involves a wedge of land north of Graveley Road. The land is indicated to largely be replaced with species rich grassland and with an area of proposed woodland to the east, which would when established help screen views from Graveley Road traveling west towards Great Wymondley.
- 2.1.4 The applicant has also included lengths of new native hedging to the north east and west of this field and a length of proposed woodland to the south west boundary of the same field. These changes are a benefit and partly meets TLPs recommendations (as shown on Appendix 1 in their May 2022 report) in respect of areas of proposed solar panels to be removed. The changes also include all the areas of new planting recommended and a further woodland belt to the west.
- 2.1.5 TLPs recommendation (as shown on Appendix 1 in the May 2022 report) was that the whole of this field has the solar panels omitted and be replaced with species rich grassland. This is still TLPs recommended position. However, if this is not included by the applicant then a minimum further change would be to provide a new hedge to the south of the panels to screen views to the north from the new permissive footpath route located to the south of the field (and north/adjacent to Graveley Road).
- 2.1.6 The solar panels in the south-west corner of the central field north of Graveley Road have been omitted and replaced with a copse of woodland planting. This will screen views from Graveley Road when travelling east. This change is a benefit and meets TLPs recommendation (as shown on Appendix 1 in their May 2022 report).
- 2.1.7 The amended proposals also include new permissive paths to the north of Graveley Road inside the site boundary to the western boundary, north of Graveley Road and to the south-east corner. These routes would link with the existing rights of way to the north east and north of the site to form a circular route. These routes were not requested by TLP in the May 2022 report. However, they would provide enhanced connectivity around the site and a safer route for pedestrians following Graveley Road. The proposed solar panels would be screened from views from a few sections of the permissive paths by new hedges and woodland. However, for most of the route there would be open views into the solar park from the new paths.
- 2.1.8 TLP welcome the addition of the permissive route. TLP recommend that as a minimum the legal status of the permissive routes be tied to the life of the solar farm and that ideally, they be made definitive rights of way to form a long term benefit. TLP also recommended that native hedges are

provided to the outer edge of the solar arrays to screen views from the new permissive paths across the solar arrays.

- 2.1.9 The Landscape Proposals Drawing also includes locations of surface water attenuation basins and surface water detention basins, which were not indicated on the previous version of the drawings. The general locations seem to be reasonable. However, one of the detention basins to the western boundary is indicated to extend up to the permissive footpath route which may lead to seasonal access problems along the route. TLP recommend that the areas required for attenuation are adjusted to ensure such conflicts are avoided and that detailed drawings be submitted by way of a condition if the application is approved.

Drawing 3004-01-003 Revision D General Arrangement

- 2.1.10 The General Arrangement layout is compatible with the Landscape Proposals Drawing. However, it does not show areas of proposed species rich grassland, woodland and hedges, which are only shown on the Landscape Proposals. For this reason should the application be approved Drawing 3004-01-012 Revision D Landscape Proposals must be included as an approved Drawing.
- 2.1.11 The General Arrangement drawing also shows areas of, no dig, which relates to potential effects on areas of archaeological interest.

3 Other consequences of changes to proposals

- 3.1.1 The number of solar panels and MW output will reduce to a degree due to areas omitted in the filed closets to Great Wymondley.

4 Matters not addressed in recent submissions

- 4.1.1 The May 2022 TLP report requested several additional details that have not yet been addressed including:
- Typical cross sections to show: site boundaries, rights of way, planting etc (TLP Report 4.1.7).
 - Limited coverage on closest residential properties (TLP Report 3.2.2) or visual effects.
 - No consideration of effects on adjacent LCAs (TLP Report 5.2.10).
 - No consideration of landscape character effects at Local scale between District scale and Site scale level (TLP Report 5.2.12)
 - No inclusion of additional/substitute Viewpoint 8a (TLP Report paras 5.3.10- 5.3.11).

5 Residual Effects

5.1 Effects on landscape character post amendments

- 5.1.1 TLP still consider that despite the changes to the proposals set out above (and which are all beneficial) there would still be significant adverse effects at the Local scale and Site scale on landscape character as set out in the May 2022 Review (Table 1 page 14).

5.2 Effects on visual receptors post amendments

5.2.1 The Level of effect on visual receptors for users of Graveley Road would reduce particularly where there are views to the east and west into the areas of proposed panels north of Graveley Road. The proposed reduction in solar panels to the west and inclusion of two areas of tree planting would help reduce the effects for these receptors. There would also be a reduction in the effect for receptors at Viewpoint 4 and 5. The effects on receptors at other Viewpoints is considered unchanged and would include some significant visual effects at Viewpoints 1, 2, 3 and 7 at Year 1.

5.3 Effects on Green Belt post amendments

5.3.1 TLP consider that the proposed amendments to the site layout and landscape proposals would locally reduce in the perceived impact of encroachment into the countryside from the solar park. This would be most noticeable traveling along Graveley Road. However, this change would be minimal in relation to the scheme's overall effect and there would still be a material adverse effect both spatially and perceptually on the openness of the Green Belt by virtue of the encroachment of built development into the countryside both at Year 1 and Year 10.