



LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

BURSTEAD SOLAR FARM AND BATTERY STORAGE 'FREE GO'

LAND SOUTH AND EAST OF GREAT BURSTEAD, BILLERICAY, ESSEX

NOVEMBER 2023



Landscape and Visual Appraisal

BURSTEAD SOLAR FARM 'FREE GO'

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been prepared by Briarwood Landscape Architecture by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute, on behalf of Enso Green Holdings J Ltd in respect of a ‘Free Go’ application for the proposed installation of solar farm and battery storage facility with associated infrastructure on Land south and east of Great Burstead, Billericay (‘the site’).

1.2 This LVA is prepared following a previous refusal. The amendments to the detailed application have sought to overcome the reasons for refusal. The location of the proposed development is shown on the Site Location Plan at Appendix 1.

Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan

1.3 The LVA considers the potential effects of the proposed development on:

- Landscape elements and features such as vegetation, topography and water bodies etc.,
- Landscape character and,
- Visual amenity

1.4 The primary objectives of the LVA are as follows:

- To identify, describe and evaluate the current landscape character of the site and its surrounding area
- To identify, describe and evaluate any notable individual landscape elements and/or features within the site
- To determine the sensitivity of the landscape to the type of development proposed
- To identify potential visual receptors (i.e. people who would be able to view the proposed development) and to evaluate their sensitivity to the type of changes proposed
- To identify and describe any effects of the proposed development in so far as they affect the landscape and/or views and to evaluate the magnitude of change owing to those effects

1.5 The primary visual assessment was undertaken in autumn (October 2021) with leaf cover still largely on the existing deciduous vegetation and minimum visibility. A second visit was undertaken in October 2022 that was accompanied by Council Officers. While

a third site visit and review of the visual assessment was made in October 2023. Consideration has also been given to the effect on visibility with the vegetation having no leaf cover with maximum visibility.

Iterative Process

- 1.6** Following the refusal for a previous application for a solar farm on the site, an amended scheme is being proposed. The revised layout (see Appendix 16) maintains the redline of the refused application but confines development of the solar farm to the eastern part of the site only. The western part of the site would remain undeveloped.

Appendix 16 – Revised Layout

- 1.7** The Landscape and Visual Appraisal has been updated according in response to the revised scheme.

2. Methodology

Guidance

2.1 This LVA has been undertaken with regard to the following best practice guidance:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd Edition) – Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). Hereafter referred to as GLIVA3.
- Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02/21 – ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’.

2.2 As outlined in paragraph 1.11 of GLVIA3, though the processes used to undertake them are very similar, the term Landscape and Visual Appraisal has been used to distinguish this standalone report from a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which normally constitutes part of a larger, formal, EIA document.

2.3 A detailed methodology is given in Appendix 2. As recommended within the published guidance, landscape (elements and character) and visual effects are assessed separately.

Appendix 2 – Detailed Methodology

Nature of Effects

2.4 The nature of effects on landscape, character and visual amenity can be neutral, adverse or beneficial. Neutral effects are those that would maintain, on balance, the existing integrity, quality or key characteristics of a landscape or view.

2.5 For the purposes of this assessment, unless otherwise stated, any change to the landscape and visual amenity as a result of the proposed development is considered to be permanent and non-reversible and adverse in nature.

Assessment Period

2.6 Operational effects are assessed at years 1 and 10 so as to take into account any mitigation measures such as new planting etc. Unless expressly stated otherwise, the effect, and the nature of the effect, at year 10 is considered to be the same as year 1.

2.7 The operational phase of the proposed development is temporary for 40 years. It is recognised that such a timescale can reasonably be considered to be ‘long term’.

Photography and Photoviews

- 2.8** The majority of photographs used as part of the detailed visual assessment have been taken using a Canon E05 Mark III, full frame sensor, digital camera with a 50mm lens. The lens has a standard focal length and is considered to best represent the human eye. The camera was at a height of approximately 1.6 metres.
- 2.9** Photography took place in sunny weather, with good visibility, in April 2021 and on the 11th October 2021. The visual assessment was reviewed in October 2023. It was noted that there had been no significant changes to the site or its wider context since the initial visual assessment.
- 2.10** Those photographs used in the preparation of photomontages were taken on a separate visit and are verified. They are compliant with the requirements of the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 0/19 Visualisations of development.
- 2.11** The Photoviews used for the visual assessment are presented at A3 size as single shots or at A1 (printable size) for panoramic views in accordance with the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 0/19 Visualisations of development.

Photomontages

Where photomontages have been prepared to help support both the design evolution process for the scheme, and the LVA, the photomontages are verified in accordance with Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 0/19 Visualisations of development.

Caveat

- 2.12** It is acknowledged that by virtue of carrying out the ‘visual’ element of this assessment, the author has an inherent ‘bias’ against the proposals to which this report relates. When carrying out the site visit and taking photos from the chosen viewpoint locations (from publicly accessible areas and vantage points), the report’s author is actively and deliberately ‘looking’ for the ‘site’ within the local landscape. Nevertheless, as acknowledged in GLIVA3, professional judgement, based upon experience of similar developments and clear and transparent methods, is used to provide a qualitative assessment.
- 2.13** In reality, visual receptors such as users of the public rights of way network and motorists alike will not ‘actively’ be ‘looking’ for the site (or the development) whilst traversing the public rights of way and road network. Whilst each visual receptor will

have a varying degree of appreciation for their surroundings, depending on what they are doing (playing sport, walking, driving), their efforts will typically not be concerned with ‘actively’ and ‘deliberately’ looking for any given ‘site’ or ‘solar development’.

2.14

The photoviews were accurate at the time they were taken. Site conditions can be subject to change, for example garden and field boundary hedgerows can be cut/trimmed by landowners/farmers, trees can be felled by landowners or blown over by adverse weather, and new trees can be planted. Therefore, the extent of visibility can potentially increase or decrease since the photoviews were taken. Such eventualities are not within the control of the report’s author. The assessment of visibility within photoviews is accurate at the time of writing.

3. Baseline Context

Site Description

- 3.1** The site of the proposed development comprise two parcels of land, to the east and west of the A129 Southend Road respectively. Only the eastern parcel is proposed to be developed.
- 3.2** The parcels are situated to the south and east of the settlement of Great Burstead. Both parcels of land are irregular in shape and are separated from one another by arable fields and the Gurnards Farm industrial complex; a separation distance of approximately 900 metres at their closest points. A series of context views helps to illustrate the nature of the site (see Appendix 3).

Appendix 3 – Context views

- 3.3** The site’s western, parcel (hereafter referred to as parcel A for ease) consists of all or the substantial parts of four fields – referred to as fields 1 to 5 inclusive (see Appendix 4 - Landscape Features Plan) . The eastern, parcel (hereafter referred to a parcel B for ease) consists of all of one field (field 6) and part of a second (field 7).

Appendix 4 – Landscape Features Plan

- 3.4** The site is relatively well defined. With the exception of a short section of the northern boundary of the site in field 2 of parcel A and the south-eastern site boundary in field 7 of parcel B, which are both currently undefined on the ground, the fields containing the site are contained by generally well vegetated field boundaries.
- 3.5** Topographically, parcel A rises from a low point of approximately 21.5 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to a high point of approximately 55 metres AOD in its north-west corner. A localised high point of approximately 40 metres is found within field 2 close to the site’s northern edge. In the eastern part of the site, parcel B, the land rises from a low point of approximately 16 metres AOD to a high point of approximately 52.5 metres AOD along the parcel’s northern boundary. No development is being proposed above 33 metres AOD.
- 3.6** The site is private with no general public access. Nevertheless several public rights of way (PRoW) pass through the site. In parcel A, PRoW 306_62, 306_63 and 306_64 pass through the site and PRoW 306_60 and 306_61 pass close to the site boundary.

- 3.7** PRoW 306_36 and 306_38 pass through parcel B. PRoW 306_34 passes close to the site boundary. Part of the Ramsden Circular Walk passes parallel to part of parcel B's eastern boundary. The promoted route also runs parallel to parcel B's northern boundary.

NB source of public rights of way - <https://www.essexhighways.org/getting-around/public-rights-of-way/prow-interactive-map>

- 3.8** The site contains several water filled drainage channels. The main tributary of the River Crouch passes just to the south of parcel A while a second tributary passes through the centre of parcel B.

Designations

- 3.9** The site does not contain nor is it covered by any statutory or non-statutory landscape protection designation (see Appendix 5). The site and its surroundings are within the Metropolitan Green belt. Green Belt is a planning rather than landscape designation. There is no requirement for landscape in the Green Belt to be of a particular quality or condition.

Appendix 5 - Designations

Site context

- 3.10** The site is located within a belt of landscape, which is predominantly agricultural, between Great Burstead to the north and Basildon to the south. Immediately, to the north of parcel A is Great Burstead Cemetery and Grange Farm . The urban edge of Great Burstead is located between approximately 150 metres and 215 metres north of parcel A. Urban development extends northwards for approximately 1.3 km.
- 3.11** To the east, agricultural, predominantly arable, fields extend for approximately 900 metres to parcel B. To the south, agricultural fields extend from the site boundary for approximately 745 metres to reach the northern edge of Basildon. To the west of the site is the linear settlement of Noak Hill, which straddles the A176 Noak Hill Road.
- 3.12** To the north of parcel B the landscape is mostly agricultural with some woodland. The existing Outwood Solar Farm is situated to the north-east of the site.
- 3.13** The fields immediately adjacent to the east of parcel B form part of the site of the Crays Hall Farm Solar Farm. The latter has, at the time of preparing this report, has recently been granted planning permission at appeal. Though yet to be constructed, the solar farm has been consented and now forms part of the baseline to the proposed development.

- 3.14** To the south of parcel B, an agricultural field separates the site from the A129 and the settlement of Crays Hill. To the west, agricultural fields extend to parcel A.
- 3.15** Topographically the land surrounding the site undulates. To the north and west the land reaches approximately 65 metres AOD. To the south and east, the land reaches approximately 40 metres AOD.

Published Landscape Character Assessments

- 3.16** A hierarchy of national/regional, county and borough published landscape character assessments are available. These respective documents describe the host landscape of the site at an increasingly refined level. The published landscape assessments are intended to provide a foundation for understanding the key component elements and features that characterise the host landscape and potential the site itself.

Scale and Geographic Extent of the Proposed Development

- 3.17** In the context of its immediate surroundings and of the site as a whole, the proposed solar farm within parcel B is assessed as being of a ‘medium’ scale.
- 3.18** Attention is focused on the host landscape described by the National/Regional and District published assessment at a finer grain than the whole of the particular character area. At the scale of a particular character area, the geographical extent of the proposed solar farm would, it is considered, have only a limited effect on character.

National Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.19** England is divided into 159 National Character Areas (NCA). The site is located within NCA 111 Northern Thames Basin (Appendix 6).

Appendix 6 – Extract from NCA 111 Northern Thames Basin

NCA 111 Northern Thames Basin

- 3.20** The key characteristics of NCA 111 Northern Thames Basin are identified by Natural England as being the following:
- “The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys. The prominent hills and ridges of the ‘Bagshot Hills’ are notable to the northwest and extensive tracts of flat land are found in the south.
 - Characteristic of the area is a layer of thick clay producing heavy, acidic soils, resulting in retention of considerable areas of ancient woodland.

- Areas capped by glacial sands and gravels have resulted in nutrient-poor, free-draining soils which support remnant lowland heathlands, although these are now small. Areas that have alluvial deposits present are well drained and fertile.
- The water bearing underlying Chalk beds are a main source of recharge for the principal London Basin Chalk aquifer.
- A diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the major rivers Ver, Colne and Lea, and slightly steeper valleys of the rivers Stour, Colne and Roman. Numerous springs rise at the base of the Bagshot Beds and several reservoirs are dotted throughout the area
- The pattern of woodlands is varied across the area and includes considerable ancient semi-natural woodland. Hertfordshire is heavily wooded in some areas as are parts of Essex, while other areas within Essex are more open in character. Significant areas of wood pasture and pollarded veteran trees are also present.
- The field pattern is very varied across the basin reflecting historical activity. Informal patterns of 18th-century or earlier enclosure reflect medieval colonisation of the heaths. Regular planned enclosures dating from the Romano-British period are a subtle but nationally important feature on the flat land to the south-east of the area. In the Essex heathlands 18th- and 19th-century enclosure of heathlands and commons followed by extensive 20th-century field enlargement is dominant.
- Mixed farming, with arable land predominating in the Hertfordshire plateaux, parts of the London Clay lowlands and Essex heathlands. Grasslands are characteristic of the river valleys throughout. Horticulture and market gardening are found on the light, sandy soils of former heaths in Essex, particularly around Colchester, along with orchards, meadow pasture and leys following numerous narrow rivers and streams.
- The diverse range of semi-natural habitats include ancient woodland, lowland heath and floodplain grazing marsh and provide important habitats for a wide range of species including great crested newt, water vole, dormouse and otter.
- Rich archaeology including sites related to Roman occupation, with the Roman capital at Colchester and City of St Albans (Verulamium) and links to London. Landscape parklands surrounding 16th- and 17th-century rural estates and country houses built for London merchants are a particular feature in Hertfordshire.
- The medieval pattern of small villages and dispersed farming settlement remains central to the character of parts of Hertfordshire and Essex. Market towns have expanded over time as have the London suburbs and commuter settlements, with the

creation of new settlements such as the pioneering garden city at Welwyn and the planned town at Basildon.

- Brick-built dwellings are characteristic from the late 17th century onwards. Prior to this dwellings and farm buildings tended to be timber built with weatherboarding, now mainly painted white but traditionally black or tarred, and whitewashed plaster walls.”

3.21 It is considered, in reviewing the published assessment, that the site’s host landscape within approximately 2km of the site boundary presents few of the key characteristics. The principal elements presented locally are:

- Mixed arable and pastoral farming, predominantly arable
- Planned settlement of Basildon, dispersed and expanded settlements.

County Landscape Character Assessment

3.22 In the published Essex Landscape Character Assessment (2003), the site (excluding most of the proposed cable route) is located in the London Clay Landscapes landscape character type (LCT) and specifically within the South Essex Farmlands (E1) landscape character area (LCA) (see Appendix 7).

Appendix 7 – South Essex Farmlands (E1)

South Essex Farmlands (E1)

3.23 The key characteristics of the LCA are given as:

- “Gently undulating landform, locally strongly rolling.
- Rectilinear field pattern with tall thick hedgerow boundaries.
- Occasional small woods and copses. Sense of enclosure
- Striking large open water expanse of Hanningfield Reservoir surrounded by dense tree belts is a distinctive feature in the west.
- Pylons are a frequent presence.”

3.24 The landscape is identified within the published assessment as having a medium sensitivity to ‘large scale’ development.

Rochford District Council Landscape Character

3.25 The final part of the proposed cable route passes through Rochford District Council. The Council relies on the Essex Landscape Character Assessment. Within Rochford District Council area, the proposed cable route passes through the South Essex Coast Towns (G3) LCA and the Crouch and Roach Farmland (F2) LCA.

South Essex Coast Towns

3.26 The key characteristics of the LCA are given as:

- “Large areas of dense urban development.
- Strongly rolling hills with steep south and west facing escarpments covered by open grassland or a mix of small woods, pastures and commons.
- Extensive flat coastal grazing marshes in the south adjacent to the Thames Estuary.
- Large blocks of woodland in the centre of the area.
- Narrow bands and broader areas of gently undulating arable farmland, with a remnant hedgerow pattern, separating some of the towns.
- Particularly complex network of major transportation routes.
- Pylon routes visually dominate farmland in the A130 corridor.”

3.27 The landscape within the published assessment as having a medium sensitivity to ‘large scale open uses’.

Crouch and Roach Farmland (F2) LCA

3.28 The key characteristics of the LCA are given as:

- “Long narrow Crouch and Roach river estuaries with bands of flat low lying marshlands.
- Rolling or gently undulating arable farmland between the estuaries.
- Regular fields of variable size and thick or intermittent hedgerow boundaries.
- Frequent long views across the farmland to the estuaries from higher ground.
- Strongly right angled pattern of lanes.
- Small villages, a scattering of hamlets, farmsteads, and newer suburban properties are concentrated along the lanes on higher ground.”

3.29 The landscape within the published assessment as having a medium sensitivity to ‘large scale open uses’.

District Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.30** In the published Basildon Borough Landscape Character Assessment and Green Belt Landscape Capacity Study the eastern part of the site, parcel B is in the LCA9 Upper Crouch Valley Farms (see Appendix 8).

Appendix 8 – LCA9 Upper Crouch Valley Farm

- 3.31** The key characteristics for LCA are given as:

- “Gently sloping landform throughout most of area
- Local higher ground at Crays Hill to south east
- Large scale arable fields to east and west of area with limited hedges and trees particularly along the A129
- Intact historic pattern of medium scale fields with good hedges and mixed arable and pasture to centre of area running north south between Crays Hill and Barrenley Wood
- Absence of woodland
- Urban fringe uses including playing fields, recycling centre and Barleylands
- Farm/Craft Centre with seasonal exhibitions and markets
- Scattered intrusive commercial development in open locations
- Settlement limited to isolated properties and farm buildings
- Panoramic views to north towards Wooded Hills and ridge
- Sense of separation created between Billericay (including Great Burstead/South Green), Wickford and Basildon
- A129 runs through part of area, elsewhere minor roads and a number of rights of way running north south.”

- 3.32** As part of the Management Guidelines for the LCA the following is noted:

“...Promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries wherever possible.

Encourage new native hedgerow planting to historic field boundaries including roads and rights of way...”

- 3.33** The assessment identifies that the condition of the landscape is variable so moderate. Strength of character is also moderate. The long term management strategy for the LCA is ‘improve and conserve’.
- 3.34** The western part of the site, parcel A, is located in LCA12 Burstead Sloping Farmland (see Appendix 9).

Appendix 9 – LCA12 Burstead Sloping Farmland

- 3.35** The key characteristics of the LCA are given as:
- “Sloping landform with marked secondary undulations to edge of plateau
 - Large fields with remnant hedges and hedgerow trees apart from at settlement boundaries
 - Marked rural and arable character to most of area
 - Noak Hill and associated ribbon development along A176
 - Two Plotlands areas at Broomhills Chase and Green Lanes/The Chase
 - Discrete woodlands and linear green lane
 - Few isolated farms and farm buildings
 - Minor roads and networks of local rights of way
 - St Mary’s Little Burstead and St XX [sic] Great Burstead churches are notable landmark buildings.”
- 3.36** As part of the Management Guidelines for the LCA the following is noted:
- “...Promote hedgerow restoration and creation with native species throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links. Pattern to follow historic field boundaries and rights or way wherever possible...”
- 3.37** The long term management strategy for the LCA is ‘improve and conserve’.

Author’s Own Assessment of Character

- 3.38** An assessment of the existing local landscape character up to 1 km from the site has been undertaken by the report’s author. The author’s assessment considers the site and its immediate surroundings and reviews the sensitivity and the capacity of the local landscape to accommodate the type and scale of development being proposed. The following criteria will be used:
- Landscape scale

- Landform and enclosure
- Landscape pattern and complexity
- Settlement pattern and human influences
- Skylines
- Intervisibility
- Tranquillity

Landscape scale

- 3.39** The combination of a rolling and undulating topography and generally enclosed fields form a medium to large scale landscape.

Landscape and enclosure

- 3.40** Owing to the general absence of hedgerows, away from the urban edge of Great Burstead and along the tributaries of the River Crouch, there is little sense of enclosure and views are mainly open.

Landscape pattern and complexity

- 3.41** The landscape within 1 km of the site is relatively complex. Areas of settlement and urban land uses are dominant to the periphery of the area. Although superficially agricultural in appearance the landscape contains a wide variety of uses that influence its character. Industrial uses associated with Gurnards Farm. There is an extensive area of playing fields with associated facilities and parking to the south of parcel B. The retail/commercial activities and parking associated with Barleylands Farm together with camping and a Council Depot are notable features to the south-west of parcel B. The above existing development combine to create a more peri-urban environment rather than true countryside.

Settlement pattern and human influences

- 3.42** Noak Hill constitutes an area of ribbon development that contains the site to the west and which forms an effective divide in the landscape along the route of the A176. Basildon forms a visual presence on higher ground to the south and is an urbanising influence.
- 3.43** Crays Hill forms an extensive area of suburban development to the south-east that emphasises the more rural nature of the area to the north. Part of the southern edge to

Great Burstead is exposed and stark. The A129 is a busy and noisy road that removes the perception of tranquillity in the area.

- 3.44** Other human influences include scattered commercial/leisure and industrial developments. In close proximity to parcel B is Gurnards Farm.

Skylines

- 3.45** Skylines around the site are typically formed by higher ground and vary in their extent. To the north and east of parcel B the skyline comprises woodland and tree belts. In other directions, areas of settlement are part of the skyline, although Great Burstead is set within a well treed environment.

Intervisibility

- 3.46** There is general wide spread intervisibility across the landscape within 1km of the site. However, where hedgerows, woodlands or built form occur, the level of intervisibility at the local level reduces – often considerably.

Tranquillity

- 3.47** Tranquillity is defined as being the absence of noise and activity. In this context, the area of the site and its immediate vicinity are not tranquil. The relative level of tranquillity increases to the east and away from the site boundary.

Baseline Visual Receptors

- 3.48** A visual assessment of the proposed development has been undertaken to determine how the proposals would have a bearing on the visual amenity of the surrounding landscape. The original visual assessment was prepared for the previous refused application on the site and was undertaken in April and October 2021. Consideration has been given when leaf cover is absent and potential visibility is at its maximum and also to when there is full leaf cover and potential visibility is at a minimum. The visual assessment was reviewed during another site visit in October 2023
- 3.49** A revised screened zone of theoretical visibility (SZTV) has been produced to assist with the visual assessment of the current scheme (see Appendix 10). The SZTV indicates where the proposed development would potentially be visible in the landscape.

Appendix 10 – Revised Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility.

3.50 Having undertaken a visual assessment, it is evident that the visual envelope i.e. the area in which the proposed development would be visible, is more restricted than the SZTV would suggest. Localised changes in topography, existing built development and the layering effect of existing vegetation (where it occurs) in the intervening landscape between the person viewing (the visual receptor) the proposed development and the site boundary would restrict certain potential views from within the surrounding landscape.

3.51 A number of representative viewpoints have been identified on which to base a visual assessment (see Appendix 11 – Viewpoint Location Plan).

Appendix 11 – Viewpoint Location Plan

3.52 The detailed assessment of these representative viewpoints is given in section 8 (see also Appendix 12 - Representative Viewpoints).

Appendix 12 - Representative Viewpoints

Residential Properties

3.53 There are numerous residential properties in close proximity i.e. 500 metres or less, to the site boundary. The greater number of properties are in close proximity to parcel A, with the closest residential properties located along the eastern side of Noak Hill Road and along the southern edge of Great Burstead. In nearly all instances, the residential properties present their rear elevations to the site of the proposed development. Views into and of the site as a whole are generally restricted by the presence of rear garden vegetation and boundary treatments such as fences. Intervisibility with parcel B is further restricted through a combination of changes in topography, vegetated field hedgerow boundaries and tree belt vegetation in the intervening landscape between the particular residential property and the boundary of parcel B. Potential views of the proposed development would be similarly restricted.

3.54 There are fewer residential properties in close proximity to parcel B. The closest residential properties to parcel B are those that form an area of ribbon development along Coxes Farm Road to the north and north-west of the site boundary. The properties are typically detached dwellings set within relatively large plots. The orientation of the particular property and the typical presence of garden boundary vegetation and treatments such as walls and fences together with existing vegetation in the intervening landscape between the particular property and the site boundary, would act to restrict views of and into the site.

3.55 Any views of the proposals would typically be ones where the proposed solar farm would be viewed in part, rather than its entirety, and where the solar farm would represent

only a small component element of the view. From a greater distance than 500 metres, views of the proposals from residential properties would be limited further by a combination of the undulating topography and the layering effect of vegetation in the form of field boundary vegetation in the intervening landscape between the particular property and the site boundary.

Public Highways

- 3.56** The extent of the public highway network, outside settlement areas, in the locality of the site is limited. In most instances highways orientated so that the main direction of travel is tangential to the proposed development. There is some intervisibility between the highway network and the site and views are typically open ones but oblique and experienced at speed.

Public Rights of Way

- 3.57** There are a relatively large number of public rights of way (PROW) within the landscape surrounding and including several that pass through the site. There is the potential to view the proposed development from the PROW network.

Selection of representative viewpoints

- 3.58** A comprehensive visual assessment has been undertaken of the study area. In line with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd Edition), a number of representative viewpoints (10 in total) have been selected to form the basis of a detailed visual assessment.
- 3.59** The chosen viewpoints are regarded as being representative of the range of potential views and receptors e.g. users of the public highway and PROW networks, etc. from various distances and directions around the site. A desk top study and field surveys has refined the number and exact location of the representative viewpoints and their locations are ones from which there is anticipated to be an effect. The representative viewpoints are not intended to be exhaustive. A greater number of locations would have demonstrated no visual effect.
- 3.60** The following table summarises the overall sensitivity of the representative viewpoints.

Table 3.1 – Summary of viewpoint susceptibility, value and overall sensitivity

Viewpoint				
	Type of visual receptor	Susceptibility	Value	Overall sensitivity
Viewpoint 1 - View from Church Lane, north of Crays Hill/PROW 309_38 looking north-west	Users of the public right of way network	High	Medium	High
Viewpoint 2 - View from PROW (bridleway) 306_34 looking south-west	Users of the public right of way network	High	Medium	High
Viewpoint 3 - View from Southend Road looking west	Users of the public highway network	Medium	Medium	Medium
Viewpoint 4 – View from PROW 306_60 looking south-east	Users of the public right of way network	High	Low	Medium

Viewpoint				
	Type of visual receptor	Susceptibility	Value	Overall sensitivity
Viewpoint 5– View from recreation ground off A129 looking north	Users of the sports pitches	Medium	Medium	Medium
Viewpoint 6 – View from PROW 310_60, north of Wash Road looking north	Users of the public right of way network	High	Medium	High
Viewpoint 7 – View from PROW 306_62 south of Grange Farm looking west	Users of the public right of way network	High	Medium	High
Viewpoint 8 – View from PROW 306_36/306_37 looking east	Users of the public right of way network	High	Low	Medium
Viewpoint 9 – View from PROW 306_64/306_63/306_62 looking north- east	Users of the public right of way network	High	Medium	Medium

Viewpoint				
	Type of visual receptor	Susceptibility	Value	Overall sensitivity
Viewpoint 10 - View from PROW 306_36 within the centre of the site (east) looking south-east	Users of the public right of way network	High	Medium	High

4. Proposed Development and Mitigation Measures

Description of the Proposed Development

- 4.1** The proposed development is for the temporary installation of a solar farm and battery storage facility with associated infrastructure and cable route. Development is only proposed within the eastern parcel of the site – parcel B.
- 4.2** A layout has been produced upon which this landscape and visual appraisal has been made. The proposals allow for fixed mounted panels (to a maximum 3 metres in height) across the site; arranged east-west with the panels facing south. The gaps between panels rows will be grassed.
- 4.3** The site would be protected by a security fence (approximately 2.1 metres in height) around its perimeter with gates to allow for maintenance access. The style of security fence will be a rural, ‘deer fence’, one with a timber post and mesh construction. The fence and solar array are set back from the existing field boundaries into the site.
- 4.4** Post mounted CCTV cameras will be present at strategic points around the security perimeter of the site. Both the security fence and the solar array will be contained within the existing retained field boundaries.
- 4.5** Site access for the eastern parcel B would be from the existing access to Gurnard’s Farm (off the A129 from Granites Chase). A new access track would lead along field 7 and into the centre of field 6. Another access track would lead to the approximate centre of field 7 and to close to the eastern edge of field 7.
- 4.6** The proposed access tracks will be constructed of compacted permeable aggregate stone.
- 4.7** The proposed development also includes a battery storage area and substation on the western edge of field 7 within parcel B. The battery storage area will be enclosed by its own security fence constructed of welded mesh. The proposed development will be unlit during hours of darkness save for emergency lighting located at the entrances to the high voltage equipment within the substation compound which will be, rarely, used for unplanned or unexpected maintenance works at time of insufficient natural light.

Mitigation Measures

4.8 Mitigation measures to help minimise the potential impacts and effects have been incorporated into the development stages of the proposed development, including:

- During the site selection process - by containing the proposed development within a discrete and well-defined area and by avoiding sensitive areas;
- Through the design process - positioning the solar panels away from the edge of the site boundary to help minimise their visibility and to retain existing vegetation and other landscape features such as ponds etc, using existing access points where possible; and
- Incorporating additional mitigation measures - such as sensitive grassland seeding, management and planning for construction, operation and de-commissioning.

Mitigation through selection and siting of the proposed development

- The proposed development site was selected because of the comparative absence of major environmental constraints including landscape protection designations, whilst taking into account commercial and technical considerations.
- The proposed development is intended to cause the minimum of disruption to the surrounding and established landscape pattern.
- Any structures associated with the proposed development have been located so as to achieve a balance between operational requirements and restricting their wider visibility and will be painted in a dark recessive colour to minimise their influence.

Additional landscape mitigation measures incorporated into the proposed development design

4.9 Landscape relevant additional mitigation measures incorporated into the proposed development design are shown on the Landscape Proposals plan (revision E) (see Appendix 13) and include:

- Wildflower grassland/biodiversity area covering parts of the proposed development outside the solar farm boundaries will be managed for biodiversity;
- Seeding within the solar farm fenceline will be suitable for grazing;
- Creation of new hedgerows and areas of tree/structure (woodland) planting consistent with the aspirations expressed in the Management Guidelines for the respective published landscape character assessments covering the site. The new

hedgerow planting would reinforce the existing field boundaries, provide wildlife habitat and help provide further screening of the proposed solar farm including along public rights of way;

- Gapping up of existing hedgerows.

Appendix 13 – Landscape Proposals – Revision E

4.10 Mitigation measures, relevant to the LVA during the construction period, include:

- Minimal vegetation loss;
- Limited access points,
- The temporary construction compound to be located within or alongside the proposed development site minimising direct and indirect effects on landscape elements, landscape character and visual amenity receptors and their views and,
- All temporarily disturbed and excavated areas will be reinstated following completion of construction activities

4.11 Mitigation measures, relevant to the LVA during the operation period, will include:

- All on-site cabling will be underground; and
- Existing entrances and tracks will be used and new access points kept to a minimum so as to reduce direct effects on landscape elements;
- Management of retained and new landscape features.

4.12 NB it should be acknowledged that the operational effects of the proposed development will be long term but that all such effects will ultimately be temporary, given the 40-year operation period and the proposed development is reversible.

4.13 The proposed development will be operational for 40 years, at the end of which it will be dismantled and removed and the site reinstated to previous conditions.

5. Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

5.1 The latest iteration of the NPPF was published in September 2023 and superseded the previous version. The NPPF has a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10). Specifically, paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that:

“Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development...

...For decision-taking this means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”

5.2 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF defines the three dimensions to sustainable development. These dimensions are economic, social and environmental. In detail the environmental dimension is explained in the following terms:

“an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy...”

5.3 Section 14 of the NPPF, ‘Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change’ specifically refers to renewable energy sources such as solar photovoltaic energy schemes. Particularly, paragraph 158 states:

“When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:

- a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
- b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.”

5.4 Section 15 of the NPPF refers to ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’. Paragraph 174 states:

“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.”

5.5 Paragraph 175 of the NPPF states:

“Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.”

5.6 The first line of paragraph 176 expands on the requirements of paragraph 171 by saying:

“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.”

Local Plan Policy

Basildon District Council

5.7 The greater part of the proposed development is located within Basildon District Council. The Adopted Basildon District Local Plan forms the saved policies of the Local Plan (first adopted in March 1998). A new emerging Local Plan was removed from examination on 3rd March 2022. Of potential relevance to landscape and visual matters is:

- saved policy BAS C5 – Trees and Woodlands – protection of Ancient Woodlands

Rochford District Council

5.8 Part of the cable route for the proposed development passes through Rochford District Council. The new Local Plan for Rochford is still emerging. Within the adopted Core Strategy (December 2011) the following two policies are relevant to landscape and visual matters.

5.9 Policy ENV6 – Large Scale Renewable Energy Projects Planning states:

“permission for large-scale renewable energy projects will be granted if:

- the development is not within, or adjacent to, an area designated for its ecological or landscape value, such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Ramsar Sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), Ancient Woodlands, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) or Local Wildlife Sites (LoWSs); or if it can be shown that the integrity of the sites would not be adversely affected;
- there are no significant adverse visual impacts. “

5.10 Policy ENV7 – Small Scale Renewable Energy Projects states:

“The Council will favourably consider small-scale renewable energy development, particularly to residential properties, in both new and existing development, having regard to their location, scale, design and other measures, including ecological impact, are carefully considered.”

Response to Policy

5.11 The site of the proposed solar farm avoids any statutory or non-statutory protected landscape such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or World Heritage Site etc. which are recognised as national or international importance within the NPPF. Similarly, neither the site nor its immediate environs are identified as being a ‘valued landscape’ as outlined in the NPPF. Green Belt is not a landscape policy.

5.12 Consideration has been given to the published landscape character assessments covering the site. The proposals seek to avoid any adverse impacts on the character of the local landscape and to maintain the existing pattern of fields. The physical elements and features of the landscape outside the application site boundary will be physically unaffected with the proposed solar farm in place.

5.13 Consideration has been given to the careful design and layout of the proposed solar farm. The layout design has evolved as part of an iterative assessment process that has considered and responded to landscape and visual constraints. The proposals include a range of mitigation and enhancement measures, and seek to avoid, reduce and remediate any adverse effects on landscape elements and features (such as trees and hedgerows), character or residential and general visual amenity.

6. Effect on Landscape Elements and Features

Topography

- 6.1** The topography of the site outside of parcel B would be unaltered with the proposed development in place. In parcel B, the sloping and undulating topography across the site would remain substantially unchanged as a result of the proposed development. Any changes would be minor ones and restricted to temporary measures during the construction period. The changes would be related to the erection of the solar panels and associated structures including battery storage/substation and the construction of the proposed access tracks. Changes would be localised and most would be returned to the existing conditions immediately at the end of the construction works.
- 6.2** There would be no further changes to the topography during the operational phase. During the de-commissioning phase, above ground structures will be removed and the topography returned to its original state.
- 6.3** The susceptibility of the site (parcel B) topography to the proposed development is assessed as low. The topography of the site is typical of the host landscape and is not rare or unusual. Its value is assessed as low. With a low susceptibility and a low value, the overall sensitivity of the site topography to the proposed solar farm development is assessed as low.
- 6.4** At year 1 of the operational phase, the magnitude of change to the site topography is assessed as negligible. With a negligible magnitude of change and a low sensitivity, the effect on the site's topography as a result of the proposed development is assessed as negligible neutral at year 1 of the operational phase. At year 10 of the operational phase the scale of effect would remain as negligible neutral. Such a scale of effect is expected to continue in the long term for the operational life of the proposed development.

Arable land

- 6.5** The effect of the proposed solar farm and battery storage facility would unavoidably necessitate the loss of arable land in parcel B. The pattern of agricultural on the remainder of the site would be unaltered with the proposals in place. In parcel B, grassland will replace the arable crops beneath and around the temporary solar panels and arrays.

- 6.6** Arable land is assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development proposed. Though characteristic of the wider landscape, the arable land use on the site is not rare or unusual and its value is assessed as low. The overall sensitivity of the arable land use is assessed as medium.
- 6.7** The removal of the arable use as a result of the proposed development would bring about a high magnitude of change on the site. At both year 1 and year 10 of the operational phase the scale of effect on the arable nature of the site would be major adverse. Such a scale of effect is expected to continue in the long term for the operational life of the proposed development.
- 6.8** Notwithstanding the loss of arable land use in parcel B, replacement of the arable land with grassland would, it is considered, result in the proposals having a beneficial effect by ensuring ground cover is maintained on the site at all times of the year in a manner which could be of benefit to wildlife and biodiversity. Grazing as part of the long term management of the site would ensure that an element of farming practice continues on the site during its operational period.
- 6.9** At the end of the operational phase of the proposed solar farm and following decommissioning there would be the opportunity to return the site to its current land use if this was felt to be appropriate at the time.

Public Rights of Way

- 6.10** The public right of way network is assessed as having a high value and a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. Overall the sensitivity is assessed as high.
- 6.11** There are several public right of way that pass through the wider site. In respect of parcel B, a section of public right of way Great Burstead and South Green 36 passes through the parcel together with a very short section (approximately 50 metres) of Great Burstead and South Green 38. Similarly, a short section of Great Burstead and South Green 37, which runs along Granite's Chase, passes through site close to the junction of Granite's Close and the A129.
- 6.12** Physically, the public right of way network on and in the vicinity of the site would be unchanged during the operational phase of the proposed development. Those PROW that do pass through the site are to be kept to the definitive alignment and are outside the security fence which defines the extent of the proposed solar array.
- 6.13** Experientially, there would be some limited change. The primary change would be visual (see section 8). The public right of way would pass through green passageways in

the site. However, the proposed solar farm would not generate noise or movement so that the level of tranquillity experienced by the users of the footpaths would remain substantially unaltered. There would be no long term physical effects on public rights of way during the operational phase of the proposed development.

Water Features

- 6.14** There would be no physical effects on any water features within the site during the construction, operational or decommissioning phases of the proposed solar farm. Existing land drains passing along the site boundaries and the existing tributaries of the River Crouch would be protected by margins within the site from which the proposed solar panels would be excluded.
- 6.15** The existing water features on the site are assessed as having a medium value and medium susceptibility to the type of development proposed, giving an overall medium sensitivity. The magnitude of change to the existing water courses is assessed as negligible with the proposals in place.
- 6.16** With a medium sensitivity and a negligible magnitude of change, it is considered that there would be a negligible neutral effect on the existing water features on the site at both year 1 and year 10 of the operational phase. Such a scale of effect is expected to continue in the long term for the operational life of the proposed development.

Trees and Hedgerows

- 6.17** The site benefits from an existing tree and hedgerow resource associated with the site's field boundaries. The tree and hedgerow resource have been the subject of an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) – prepared by Barton Hyett Associates (2023). Native species such as hawthorn dominate the hedgerows and oaks are the predominant specimen and hedgerow trees.
- 6.18** The AIA indicates that most of the existing tree and hedgerow resource on the site is located on the perimeter of the respective parcels A and B. Internally, parcel A is largely devoid of trees and shrubs except for some disjointed stands of blackthorn and hawthorn along the eastern boundaries of Fields 1 and 4. Some trees and sections of hedgerow, mainly hawthorn and blackthorn) are identified in the AIA within parcel B following the tributary of the River Crouch that bisects the parcel.
- 6.19** As part of the iterative design process, the layout of the proposed solar farm has been adjusted to ensure the long term retention of existing tree and hedgerow resource – avoiding Root Protection Areas (RPA) for trees and providing the necessary growth and maintenance room for the existing hedgerows.

- 6.20** The existing tree and hedgerow resource is assessed as having a medium value. Without the protection afforded by removing the proposed solar panels from outside the RPA of the existing trees and hedgerows, it is considered that the susceptibility of the existing tree and hedgerow resource would be high.
- 6.21** Taking into consideration the proposed protection measures outlined in the AIA, the susceptibility of the existing tree and hedgerow resource associated with parcel B is assessed as low. Overall, the sensitivity of the tree and hedgerow resource is assessed as low.
- 6.22** The existing tree or hedgerow resource on the site outside parcel B would be unaltered with the proposed development in place.
- 6.23** As part of the proposed development, extensive lengths of new hedgerows would be created on the site within parcel B. As indicated on the Landscape Proposals plan approximately 1,200 linear metres of new hedgerow together with approximately 3,300 square metres of new woodland would be planted.
- 6.24** The new hedgerows and woodland/structure planting would strengthen and enhance the existing resource on the site, consistent with the aspiration of the published landscape character assessments. By connecting to the existing retained hedgerows, the newly created hedgerows and woodlands would allow for the movement of birds and animals into and through the site providing a benefit for wildlife/biodiversity as well as having a function of visual mitigation.
- 6.25** It is considered that the creation of new hedgerows and woodlands as part of the proposed development would be entirely consistent with the Management Guidelines given in the respective published landscape character assessments covering the site. It is anticipated that the new hedgerow/structure planting will be planted at approximately 40-60cm high and will achieve a growth of approximately 30 and 50 cm per annum. Specimen trees are proposed to be planted at a height of between 3 and 6 metres.
- 6.26** With a low sensitivity, the magnitude of change at year 1 of the operational phase is assessed as low (any new planting will be immature) and leading to a negligible beneficial effect.
- 6.27** At year 10, once the proposed planting has established and begun to fill out, it is assessed that the magnitude of change will have changed to high. With a low sensitivity and a high magnitude of change it is assessed that there will be a moderate beneficial effect to the existing tree and hedgerow resource at year 10 of the operational phase. It is considered that as the trees and hedgerows planted as part of the proposals continue to grow and mature, the beneficial effect on the existing tree and hedgerow resource

would continue to improve in the long term over the operational phase of the proposed development.

Summary

- 6.28** The scale and nature of the effects on the existing landscape elements and features associated with parcel B with the proposed development in place on the site are summaries in table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 – Summary of the scale and nature of the effects on the existing landscape elements and features associated with parcel B

Landscape Feature/element	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change at year 1	Scale of effect – year 1	Scale of effect – year 10	Residual effect/long term	Reversible or Permanent
Topography	Low	Negligible	Negligible neutral	Negligible neutral	Negligible neutral	Permanent
Arable land use	Medium	High	Major adverse	Major adverse	Major adverse	Reversible
Public rights of way 34, 36 and 37	High	No change	No change	No change	No change	Permanent
Water features	Medium	Negligible	Negligible neutral	Negligible neutral	Negligible neutral	Permanent
Tree and hedgerow resource	Low	Low	Negligible beneficial	Moderate beneficial	Major beneficial	Reversible

- 6.29** It is evident that the proposed development would not appreciably harm, physically, the distinctive existing landscape elements and features associated with parcel B or the wider site. The following conclusions can be reached.
- 6.30** The sloping/undulating topography of parcel B and the existing water features i.e. land drains and tributaries would remain substantially unchanged. The existing water features on and near the site would be retained and would be protected within an undeveloped margin free of any infrastructure.
- 6.31** The right of way network as it relates to parcel B would be unaltered physically with the proposed development in place on the site. The experiential change of being able to view the proposed development would be mitigated through the creation of new hedgerows and landscape features.

- 6.32** Provision of new trees and hedgerows on the site would be consistent with the Management Guidelines outlined in the published landscape character assessments covering parcel B. The proposed new hedgerows and woodland would reinforce and enhance the retained tree and hedgerow resource on the site and would help provide a landscape setting to the proposed development.
- 6.33** Grassland and herbaceous vegetation could be established beneath the rows of solar panels. The grassland would be managed to benefit biodiversity and wildlife.
- 6.34** All the new and existing landscape features within the site will benefit from an agreed programme of management which would help their long-term viability within the landscape.

7. Effect on Landscape Character

Value and Susceptibility of the Published Landscape Character Areas

National/regional level

- 7.1** At the national/regional level, following a review of the published assessment, where solar farms are mentioned as a driver for change, it is considered that the landscape character of the NCA 111 Northern Thames Basin as it relates to the site and its environs has a medium value and a low susceptibility to the type of solar development proposed. With a medium value and a low susceptibility, the overall sensitivity of the landscape is assessed low as per Table 7 of the Detailed Methodology (Appendix 2).

County Level

- 7.2** Although the Essex Character Assessment is now over 14 years old it is considered that the value of the landscape of the South Essex Farmlands LCA is medium and the susceptibility of the landscape character to the type of development is medium. Overall, the sensitivity of the South Essex Farmlands LCA is assessed as medium as per Table 7 of the Detailed Methodology (Appendix 2).
- 7.3** In reviewing the published document, the South Essex Coast Towns (G3) LCA is assessed as being of medium value but having a low susceptibility to the type of development represented by the proposed cable route – located below ground. The overall sensitivity of the South Essex Coast Towns (G3) LCA is assessed as low as per Table 7 of the Detailed Methodology (Appendix 2).
- 7.4** In reviewing the published document, the Crouch and Roach Farmland (F2) LCA is assessed as being of medium value but having a low susceptibility to the type of development represented by the proposed cable route – located below ground. The overall sensitivity of the Crouch and Roach Farmland (F2) LCA is assessed as low as per Table 7 of the Detailed Methodology (Appendix 2).

District Level

- 7.5** Upon reviewing the published character assessment, the landscape character of both the LCA9 Upper Crouch Valley Farms and LCA12 Burstead Sloping Farmland are both valued as of medium value. Both landscape character areas are assessed as having a

medium susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. Overall both LCA9 Upper Crouch Valley Farms and LCA12 Burstead Sloping Farmland are assessed as having a medium sensitivity as per Table 7 of the Detailed Methodology (Appendix 2).

Value and Susceptibility of the Local Landscape

7.6 The site is not within any statutory or non-statutory landscape protection designation. In order to determine its value, the local landscape is evaluated based on the assessment of various landscape factors¹ such as:

- Landscape quality (condition).
- Natural heritage.
- Scenic quality.
- Rarity.
- Representativeness.
- Conservation Interests.
- Recreational Value.
- Perceptual Aspects.
- Associations.

Both parcels A and B have been considered together as ‘the site’. However, any exceptions relevant to either parcel is noted.

Landscape quality (condition)

7.7 The landscape, broadly speaking, appears to be in a fair condition. It is noted that the published character assessment for the LCA9 Upper Crouch Valley Farms, in which parcel B is situated, assesses the condition of the landscape to be variable and overall ‘moderate’.

7.8 The landscape appears to be generally well managed as part of its generally intensively farmed regime. Nevertheless, certain sections of public rights of way are overgrown and impassable while desire lines and informal walking routes have developed elsewhere. This latter situation is particularly noticeable in respect of parcel A.

¹ Based upon Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21 ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’ and Box 5.1 page 84 of GLIVA3

- 7.9** There is currently a general absence of woody vegetation within parcel A. Those trees and shrubs present are suggestive of being remnant hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- 7.10** Within parcel B, existing trees and shrubs are confined to the banks of the tributary of the River Crouch. This riparian vegetation is gappy.

Natural Heritage

- 7.11** The site as a whole, and parcel B specifically, is not within nor does it contain any ecological or wildlife designations.

Scenic quality

- 7.12** The landscape around the site has some scenic quality but the presence of settlement along much of the high ground and the occasional presence of more urban land uses reduce the visual appeal of the area. Gurnards Farm, on the western edge of parcel B, has an industrial aspect to it rather than a rural quality.

Rarity

- 7.13** The open countryside around the site is an example of a well settled mixed -use agricultural landscape. However, the landscape is not recognised as being particular rare or unique as evidenced through the absence of any national or local landscape designations. No rare or unusual landscape features are identified for either of the two parcels forming the site or their immediate environs.

Representativeness (distinctiveness)

- 7.14** The analysis presented in the previous paragraphs suggests that the landscape associated with the site is an example of a typical settled landscape. The combination of mixed pastoral and arable land, undulating landform, dispersed and linear settlement pattern together with elements of infrastructure can be found elsewhere in the district.

Conservation Interests

- 7.15** The landscape contains several churches. St Mary Magdelene in Great Burstead is recognised as being a landmark within the landscape whose tower can be seen from much of the area. The site and the surrounding landscape are remote from any registered parks and gardens etc. The Great Burstead Conservation Area adjoins parcel A of the site to the north. Neither parcel A or B is identified as having any specific conservation interest.

Recreational Value

- 7.16** Public Rights of Way are quite frequent in the wider local landscape. The site has some public access. Four public rights of way pass through parcel A.
- 7.17** Two public rights of way pass through parcel B. The Ramsden Crays Circular Walk passes parallel to a section of parcels B's eastern boundary and parallel to the parcel's northern boundary. The landscape surrounding the site is considered to have some value for recreation as does the site itself.

Perceptual Aspects (tranquillity and wildness)

- 7.18** The site is not wild. The level of audible noise and movement is comparatively high on the site which causes a reduction in the perceived level of tranquillity.
- 7.19** Movement and noise within Gurnards farm is evident from the western edge of parcel B. Noise and movement is also apparent when a football match and/or training is taken place on the playing field associated with Essex Royals FC and Basildon Boys and Girls Club to the south of parcel B.

Associations

- 7.20** There are no known cultural or historic associations with the site.

Sensitivity of the Local Landscape

- 7.21** It is considered that taken into account the above factors, the local landscape is of medium value. It is considered that the local landscape has a medium susceptibility to the type of development proposed. Overall, it is assessed that the local landscape has a medium sensitivity to the type of development proposed.

Construction and Decommissioning Effects

- 7.22** Construction activities which have the potential to temporarily affect the landscape character and include:
- Deliveries to site and vehicle movements on and off site;
 - Installation of solar panels, battery storage facilities and associated infrastructure; and
 - Reinstatement works to areas disturbed by construction activities.
- 7.23** Decommissioning activities which have the potential to affect the landscape character include:

- Dismantling and removal of all installed infrastructure; and
- Reinstatement works to areas disturbed by de-commissioning activities.

7.24 From the description of the construction and de-commissioning activities as outlined above, any effects on landscape character during the construction and de-commissioning phases will be only temporary in duration.

7.25 The short-term, reversible and temporary nature of the construction and decommissioning activities on landscape character will ensure that the overall effects will be, at worst, minor adverse.

Operational Phase

7.26 The key characteristics of the site are well represented in the surrounding area. Therefore, any changes at the site level will be relatively small in scale and will not impact to any great extent upon those characteristics identified for the local landscape.

7.27 The proposed solar farm development will be contained within the existing field boundaries of parcel B. Outside of parcel B, the existing field pattern of the site would be unaltered.

7.28 The set back of the solar panels from the field boundaries of parcel B will help reduce the physical extent of the proposed solar panels and their visibility. Panels have been excluded from the areas near to the parcel B's northern and eastern boundaries so as to provide appropriate mitigation of visual effects.

7.29 The proposed development would bring about no physical changes to the pattern of the landscape beyond the site boundary. The landscape elements and features in the surrounding landscape would be physically unaltered with the proposals in place.

7.30 The perception of the landform across the local landscape would be largely retained. Although new hedgerows and woodlands would be introduced onto the site, the existing field boundaries would also be retained and integrated into the proposed layout. The proposals would respect the more geometric nature of the wider landscape. The proposals would have no physical or perceived influence on the settlement pattern in the local landscape.

7.31 The combination of new and existing retained hedgerow and tree planting would create a more enclosed landscape than currently exists. However, a review of historic

mapping² indicates that a particular moment in time, the respective land parcels on the site were both further subdivided into smaller fields (see Appendix 14).

Appendix 14 - Historic Map Extracts

- 7.32** It is acknowledged that the location of the proposed hedgerows would not follow the alignment of a previous historic hedgerow. Nevertheless, the new hedgerows would give rise to a pattern of smaller fields on the site and it is considered the scale of these field would still be consistent with the character of the wider area which also contains smaller scale fields and with the smaller field pattern as it previously existed on the site in the past.
- 7.33** Hedgerows are a feature in the existing local landscape. The proposed new hedgerows within the site would be complementary to the character of the local landscape. New hedgerow planting in the landscape is positively advocated in the Management Guidelines in the published landscape character assessments covering parcel B, especially where they follow public rights of way, as would be the case here.
- 7.34** Consistent with the Management Guidelines in the published landscape character assessments covering parcel B, the new hedgerows and tree planting would create links to the existing retained hedgerows and woodlands helping to provide a visual buffer and opportunities for biodiversity. The network of hedgerows would allow for the movement of plants and animals into and through the site and would strengthen the overall green infrastructure across the presently intensively managed arable land.
- 7.35** The introduction of the proposed development onto the site would create some additional complexity to the site and would result in some perceived changes in the character and appearance of the local landscape. The removal of the arable land use on the site would reduce the amount of seasonal change on the site. However, the use of grazing as part of any management regime on the site, would ensure that a farming operation would continue to prevail with the proposals in place.
- 7.36** The visual appearance of the proposed development would be restricted from outside the site boundary wherever changes in level occur and/or where vegetation/built form is present as a screen or filter. With the proposed mitigation measures in place on the site, it is considered that the proposed development would not be overtly prominent in the landscape and would not become the dominant feature.
- 7.37** The proposed solar farm would not move and would be substantially silent. The level of tranquillity in the local landscape and on the site would not change noticeably with the

² Copyright National Library of Scotland - <https://maps.nls.uk/view/104194479> and <https://maps.nls.uk/view/101457209>

proposals in place. The solar farm's appearance in the landscape would not be incongruous or alien as the surrounding landscape is already accommodating of other similar solar photovoltaic development.

- 7.38** It is evident that the majority of the analysed landscape elements and features that currently characterise the site and have an influence on the wider area around the site would not, as is discussed in the previous section 6, and in relation to the susceptibility of the local landscape, be affected at all or only to a limited degree. In terms of views of characteristic features and landmarks, their perception by users of the landscape would not be notably compromised or materially harmed from most locations.
- 7.39** Overall, the magnitude of change to the local landscape is considered to be medium with the proposed development having limited influence over certain aspects of the local landscape.
- 7.40** With a low sensitivity and a medium magnitude of change this would translate to a minor adverse effect on the host landscapes identified in the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area at year 1 and year 10 of the operational phase and during the long term operational phase of the proposals.
- 7.41** At the County level, for the Crouch and Roach Farmland and South Essex Coast Towns LCAs, the effect of the proposed development on landscape character area would be minor adverse at year 1 and year 10 of the operational phase and during the long term operational phase of the proposals.
- 7.42** For the South Essex Farmland LCA, with a medium sensitivity and a medium magnitude of change, the scale of effect of the proposals would be moderate adverse at year 1 of the operational phase. It is considered that with the growth of the proposed mitigation tree and hedgerow planting, from the medium term of the operational phase, there would be a notable reinforcement and enhancement on the site of a key characteristic of the LCA. This would lead to a reduction in the scale of effect to minor adverse at year 10 of the operational phase and in the long term.
- 7.43** At the District level, for the LCA9 Upper Crouch Valley Farms with a medium sensitivity and a medium magnitude of change, the scale of effect of the proposals would be moderate adverse at year 1 of the operational phase. It is considered that with the growth of the proposed new tree and hedgerow planting, as advocated in the District's published landscape character assessment, from the medium term, year 10, of the operational phase, there would be a notable reinforcement and enhancement on the site of a key characteristic of the LCA. This would bring about a reduction in the scale of effect to minor adverse leading in to the long term.

- 7.44** The proposed development would have some effect on the character of the local landscape. Nevertheless the local landscape's character comprising a relatively complex pattern of more rural character of agricultural fields and urban edge land uses would prevail and would not be materially changed.

Summary

- 7.45** The proposed solar farm would include strings of solar panels, with inverters, and other associated infrastructure.
- 7.46** The proposed solar farm development will be contained within the existing field boundaries. The proposed development would maintain the geometric pattern of the existing landscape expressed in the field shapes together with the more sinuous roads and watercourses.
- 7.47** The proposed development would bring about no physical changes to the pattern of the landscape beyond the site boundary. In terms of views, features, and landmarks, their perception would not be substantially compromised or materially harmed with the proposals in place. The landscape elements and features in the surrounding landscape would be physically unaltered with the proposals in place.
- 7.48** The siting, scale and form of the solar panels and rows, transformers, batteries, inverters and security fencing would in the course of the first 10 years of the operational phase generally appear screened behind the proposed hedgerows from most locations. The proposed solar farm would further add some limited complexity to the character of the local landscape but the local landscape is already accommodating of other human influences and similar solar photovoltaic development.
- 7.49** The proposed hedgerows and woodland would, once established and mature, enhance an existing characteristic of the host landscape. The new hedgerows and woodlands would create some subdivision on the site. However, such an internal division of the parcel B was an historic feature of the site, as evidenced by historic mapping. The creation of new hedgerows and woodland areas, as proposed, is also considered to be consistent with the Management Guidelines for the published landscape character assessments covering the two respective land parcels on the site.
- 7.50** The proposed solar farm would not completely redefine the character of the local landscape; the prevailing character of a working agricultural and predominantly rural landscape would remain. The key characteristics of the local landscape, which differentiate the local landscape from other areas, would not be changed and would prevail.

7.51 On balance, it is considered that the proposed solar farm would result in acceptable effects on the character of the local landscape with the proposed mitigation measures in place. The character of the local landscape and its underlying more rural but settled character would prevail and would not be materially changed.

8. Visual Assessment

Detailed visual assessment

- 8.1** Based upon the projected SZTV, a visual assessment has been undertaken from the representative viewpoints to determine how the proposed development might influence the visual amenity of the surrounding landscape. The assessment was undertaken as part of the site survey, with the photographic assessment recording the nature of the view and the existing visibility of the site.
- 8.2** The site survey and photographic assessment were undertaken during two site visits in April and October 2021. The visual assessment was reviewed in October 2023.
- 8.3** Leaf cover on existing vegetation was at partial but consideration has also been given to when the vegetation is bare without leaf cover and when leaf cover is complete. The detailed assessment of the effects of the proposed development on the various representative viewpoints is given below. Reference should be made to Appendices 11 and 12.
- 8.4** The respective viewpoints have been assessed at year 1 of the operational phase of the proposed development (short-term) and at year 10 of the operational phase (mid-term). The choice of year 10 is to take into account the development of mitigation measures such as the establishment and growth of new tree and hedgerow planting.

Construction and De-commissioning Effects

- 8.5** Construction activities which have the potential to temporarily affect views and visual amenity receptors include:
- Deliveries to site and vehicle movements on and off site;
 - Installation of solar panels, battery storage facility and other associated development; and
 - Reinstatement works to areas disturbed by construction activities.
- 8.6** Decommissioning activities which have the potential to affect views and visual amenity receptors include:
- Dismantling and removal of all installed infrastructure; and
 - Reinstatement works to areas disturbed by de-commissioning activities.

- 8.7** From the description of the construction and decommissioning activities, each lasting approximately 7 months, as outlined above, any effects on visual amenity receptors and their views during the construction and de-commissioning phases will be short term and temporary in duration.
- 8.8** Therefore, the short-term, reversible and temporary nature of the construction and decommissioning activities on visual amenity receptors and their views will ensure that the overall effects will be, at worst, minor adverse.

Operational Phase Effects

- 8.9** The detailed visual assessment focuses on the operational phase of the proposed solar farm.

Viewpoint 1 – View from Church Lane, north of Crays Hill PROW 309_38 looking north-west

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.10** This view is an expansive one taken from higher ground at the point where PROW 309_38 joins with Church Lane, Crays Hill. The view looks north-eastward across several interim fields in the primary direction of the eastern part of the site – parcel B. Parcel B can be seen in the middle distance. The built form of Great Burstead and South Green can be seen as part of the skyline on high ground. The view is representative of users of the public right of way network.
- 8.11** Users of the public right of way network are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as having a high value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the public right of way, is re-assessed as high.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.12** The view would experience some change with the proposed development in place. The foreground field would be unaltered, as would the horizon and skyline. Solar panels would be seen in the middle distance, on parcel B, in the centre of the view. However, only discrete elements of the proposal would be seen.
- 8.13** A portion of the proposed development would be screened by the layering effect of vegetation (field boundaries) in the intervening landscape between the observer and the

site boundary. Part of parcel B would also remain undeveloped as areas of meadow grassland.

- 8.14** At year 1 the proposed development the magnitude of change to the view is assessed as medium. The proposals would be clearly visible in part but would not overtly prominent. It is considered that owing to their low profile, on lower ground, the proposed solar panels would not be a dominant feature in the view. The view would remain a panoramic one, with views beyond the proposed development to Great Burstead and South Green.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.15** For users of the public right of way network, with a high sensitivity and a medium magnitude of change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as major adverse in the short term.
- 8.16** At year 10 of the operational phase (mid-term), it is assessed that the effect would reduce to moderate adverse. New hedgerow, woodland and tree planting, implemented as part of the proposals, would have become established and would be beginning to fill out. The vegetation would have grown to a height that would provide additional screening to the proposed development.
- 8.17** New planting but especially tree and woodland planting would continue to grow in the long term (the remaining period of the operational phase) so that ultimately the scale of effect would diminish further to minor adverse.

Viewpoint 2 – View from PROW (bridleway 306_34) looking south-west

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.18** This view is taken from a field entrance, with an ornate metal security gate, on the bridleway EX1306_36. The bridleway forms part of the Ramsden Crays Circular Walk.
- 8.19** The view looks south-westwards across an arable field towards parcel (B) of the site which can be seen in part in the middle distance. The tower of St Mary Magdelene can be seen amongst trees on higher ground that forms the skyline to the view.
- 8.20** However, the foreground field is part of the approved Crays Hill Farm Solar Farm. The field is to be filled with solar panels and a native hedgerow planted behind the existing gate. As a consented scheme, the Crays Hill Farm Solar Farm is deemed to exist.

- 8.21** The view is representative of users of the public right of way network. Users of the public right of way network are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. As shown in the viewpoint, the view would have been assessed as medium value. However, the view is to be one of solar panels and will ultimately be screened entirely by the hedgerow to be implemented as part of the Crays Hill Farm Solar Farm. The view is assessed as low. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the public right of way, is assessed as Medium.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.22** With the proposed development in place, there would be no change to the view. The view is to be screened entirely by the consented Crays Hill Farm Solar Farm.
- 8.23** At year 1 the proposed development the magnitude of change to the view is assessed as no change.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.24** For users of the public right of way network, with a high sensitivity and no change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as negligible neutral.
- 8.25** At year 10 of the operational phase, it is assessed that the effect would remain as negligible neutral. Such an effect would continue into the long term.

Viewpoint 3 – View from Southend Road looking west

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.26** This view is taken from a bus stop on the eastern side of Southend Road, opposite the proposed site entrance, and looks west towards the western parcel (A). The site is located in the middle distance across an arable field. Trees and woodland enclose the view. The containers belonging to the local archery club can be seen to the right (south) of the view. The view is representative of users of the public highway.
- 8.27** Users of the public highway are assessed as having a medium susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as medium value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the highway, is assessed as medium.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.28** The view would remain unaltered with the proposed development in place. The view looks across parcel A of the site, which would remain undeveloped. Parcel B is not in the field of view.

- 8.29** At year 1 the proposed development the magnitude of change to the view is assessed as no change.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.30** For users of the public highway network, with a medium sensitivity and medium no change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as negligible neutral.

- 8.31** At year 10 of the operational phase, it is assessed that the effect would remain as negligible neutral. Such an effect would continue into the long term.

Viewpoint 4 – View from PROW 306_60 looking south-east

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.32** This view is taken from PROW 306_60 at Noak Hill as passes close to the western site boundary of parcel A. The view looks south-east across the vale landscape . The view is an expansive one, with well vegetated field boundaries the dominant feature. Most of the site is hidden from view – screened through a combination of topography and the layering effect of existing vegetation in the landscape between the observer and the site boundary. The central part of parcel A is visible in the middle distance.

- 8.33** Users of the right of way are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as medium value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the right of way, is assessed as high.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.34** The view would remain unaltered with the proposed development in place. The view looks across parcel A of the site, which would remain undeveloped. Parcel B is not in the field of view.

- 8.35** At year 1 the proposed development the magnitude of change to the view is assessed as no change.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.36** For users of the public highway network, with a medium sensitivity and medium no change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as negligible neutral.

- 8.37** At year 10 of the operational phase, it is assessed that the effect would remain as negligible neutral. Such an effect would continue into the long term.

Viewpoint 5 – View from recreation ground looking north-

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.38** This view is taken from within the playing field recreation ground off the A129 to the south of Gurnard’s Farm. The view looks northwards in the direction of the eastern parcel (B) – parcel A is not visible in the field of view. The access track to Gurnards Farm which would form part of the access to the proposed development is seen in the foreground. The southern part of parcel B is visible in the middle distance but its boundary is not defined on the ground. The northern field of parcel B is partially visible in the distance.
- 8.39** Users of the recreation ground are assessed as having a medium susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as medium value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the recreation ground, is assessed as medium.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.40** Some solar panels and a security fence would be evident in the middle to far distance. Nevertheless, only discrete parts of the proposed development in parcel B would be seen. The treed skyline would be unaltered. It is assessed that there would be a medium magnitude of change at year 1.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.41** For users of the recreation ground, with a medium sensitivity and medium magnitude of change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as moderate adverse. Planting in the proposed development would be relatively immature.
- 8.42** The proposals allow for the implementation of new tree and hedgerow planting within the site. By year 10 of the operational phase, the proposed trees and hedgerows would be established and beginning to fill out.
- 8.43** At year 10 the nature of the effect of the proposed development would change from minor adverse.

Viewpoint 6 – View from public right of way 310_60, north of Wash Road looking north

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.44** This view is taken from PROW 310_60 to the north of Wash Road, Basildon and looks north across several arable fields towards the site. Most of the site is screened from view by a combination of the rolling/undulating topography and by the layering effect of vegetation in the intervening landscape between the observer and the site boundary. Overhead electricity transmission pylons are a visual detractor.
- 8.45** Users of the right of way are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as medium value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the right of way, is assessed as high.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.46** The view would be substantially unaltered with the proposed development in place. Parcel A is to be kept free of development. That part of parcel B that can just be seen would remain as a meadow grassland area. It is assessed that there would be a negligible magnitude of change at year 1.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.47** For users of the public right of way network, with a high sensitivity and negligible magnitude of change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as minor adverse.
- 8.48** At year 10 of the operational phase, the effect of the proposals would remain minor adverse.

Viewpoint 7 – View from public right of way 306_62 looking west

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.49** This view is taken from the field to the south of Grange Farm close to the footbridge across the drainage ditch watercourse. The footbridge is no longer useable and informal footpath as developed that passes westward along the field boundary, which at this point runs just to the north of the site. The arable field in the foreground is part of the site but much of the site is not visible.
- 8.50** Users of the public right of way network are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as medium value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the public right of way network, is assessed as high.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.51** There would no change with the proposed development in place. Parcel A would not be developed and parcel B is not in the field of view. The magnitude of change at year 1 would be no change.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.52** For users of the public right of way network, with a high sensitivity and no change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as negligible neutral.
- 8.53** At year 10 of the operational phase, the effect of the proposals would remain as negligible neutral. This scale of effect would continue throughout the long term operational phase of the proposed development.

Viewpoint 8 – View from public right of ways 306_36 and 306_37 looking east

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.54** This view is taken from the junction of PROW 306_36 and 306_37 and looks east towards the eastern part of the site – parcel B . The view includes a storage/rubbish area, which is a detractor, associated with Gurnard’s Farm in the middle distance; the surrounding earth mounds act to screen much of the site from view.
- 8.55** Users of the right of way network are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as low value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the right of way, is assessed as medium.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.56** The existing earth mounding would act to screen most of the proposed development. New woodland planting is proposed in the area of field visible at the end of the track in the centre of the view. It is assessed that there would be a low magnitude of change at year 1.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.57** For users of the public right of way network with a medium sensitivity and a low magnitude of change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as minor adverse.
- 8.58** The proposals allow for the implementation of new tree and shrub planting . At year 1, the planting would be immature but by year 10 of the operational phase, the tree and shrub planting would be established and beginning to fill out.

- 8.59** The scale of effect would diminish to negligible adverse at year 10 of the operational phase .

Viewpoint 9 – View from public right of way within the centre of the site (west) looking north-east

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.60** This view is taken from the junctions of three PROW at the centre of parcel A (parcel B cannot be seen). The view looks north-east across the site, which in this locality is a fairly featureless arable field. The only visual interest is the rise in the topography which also acts to screen much of the remaining parcel from view.
- 8.61** Users of the right of way network are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as medium value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the right of way, is assessed as high.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

- 8.62** At year 1 the proposed development the view would be unaltered. The magnitude of change is assessed as no change.

Scale of visual effect

- 8.63** For users of the public right of way network with a high sensitivity and no change the scale of effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as negligible neutral.
- 8.64** At year 10 of the operational phase, the scale of effect would remain as negligible neutral.

Viewpoint 10 – View from public right of way within the centre of the site (east) looking south-east

Description of the baseline view and sensitivity of receptor

- 8.65** This view is taken from PROW 306_36 as it passes through parcel B along the line of one of the River Crouch tributaries. The view looks across arable fields towards the eastern boundary of parcel B.
- 8.66** Users of the right of way network are assessed as having a high susceptibility to the type of development being proposed. The view is assessed as medium value. Overall, the sensitivity of the visual receptor i.e. those using the right of way, is assessed as high.

Predicted view at year 1 and magnitude of change

8.67 At year 1 the proposed development would be clearly be seen and would occupy most of the view. A newly implemented and immature hedgerow would be seen at the base of the proposed security fence. The magnitude of change is assessed as high.

Scale of visual effect

8.68 For users of the public right of way network with a high sensitivity and a high magnitude of change the effect on the view at year 1 is assessed as major adverse.

8.69 At year 10 of the operational phase, the newly created hedgerow would have established and would have begun to fill out. With an anticipated growth rate of between 0.3 metres and 0.5 metres, the hedgerow would have attained a manged height of approximately 3 metres and sufficient to screen the adjacent solar panels and fence. At year 10 it is assessed that the visual effect would have diminished to moderate adverse.

Summary of detailed visual assessment

8.70 A summary of the effects on visual amenity of the 10 representative viewpoints is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Summary of the effects on representative viewpoints

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Scale of Effect at years 1 and 10
Viewpoint 1 - View from Church Lane, north of Crays Hill/PROW 309_38 looking north-west	High	Medium	Year 1 – Major adverse Year 10 – Moderate adverse
Viewpoint 2 - View from PROW (bridleway) 306_34 looking south-west	High	No change	Year 1 – Negligible neutral Year 10 – Negligible neutral

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Scale of Effect at years 1 and 10
Viewpoint 3 - View from Southend Road looking west	Medium	No change	Year 1 – Negligible neutral Year 10 – Negligible neutral
Viewpoint 4 – View from PROW 306_60 looking south-east	Medium	No change	Year 1 – Negligible neutral Year 10 – Negligible neutral
Viewpoint 5– View from recreation ground off A129 looking north	Medium	Medium	Year 1 – Moderate adverse Year 10 – Minor adverse
Viewpoint 6 – View from PROW 310_60, north of Wash Road looking north	High	Negligible	Year 1 – Minor adverse Year 10 – Minor adverse
Viewpoint 7 – View from PROW 306_62 south of Grange Farm looking west	High	No change	Year 1 – Negligible neutral Year 10 – Negligible neutral
Viewpoint 8 – View from PROW 306_36/306_37 looking east	Medium	Low	Year 1 – Minor adverse Year 10 – Negligible adverse
Viewpoint 9 – View from PROW	Medium	No change	Year 1 – Negligible neutral Year 10 – Negligible neutral

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Scale of Effect at years 1 and 10
306_64/306_63/306_62 looking north- east			
Viewpoint 10 - View from PROW 306_36 within the centre of the site (east) looking south-east	High	Year 1 – Major adverse	Year 10 – Major adverse

Green Belt effects

- 8.71** The site lies within the Green Belt. Green Belt is a planning policy rather than a landscape designation per se. However, case law accepts that there is visual component to the openness of the Green Belt and that visual impacts may need to be considered as part of the assessment of the proposed development in relation to any particular Green Belt policy.
- 8.72** In relation to land designated as Green Belt, openness can relate to the facility for open and long-distance views as well as to a lack of built development. Much of the site within the redline boundary would be undeveloped. Solar infrastructure is only proposed within the eastern part of the site – parcel B.
- 8.73** The viewpoint photographs included in this LVA illustrate representative viewpoints from areas around the site. They illustrate that the proposed development is unlikely to be visible from most locations within the surrounding area and where visible would not typically be seen in its entirety but as discrete parts. This is a function of topography of the area and of the area’s existing tree and vegetated field boundary resource in combination with the relatively low height of the panel structures (approximately 3 m above ground) lower than most other types of built development) that help to provide screening to parcel B.
- 8.74** Viewpoints from the surrounding area demonstrate that the proposed development would not screen or otherwise appreciably affect views of landscape around and beyond the site. The ability of people to perceive the extent of the Green Belt would not be

substantially affected by the proposed development, as the proposed development would not prevent or unduly obstruct views in any direction.

- 8.75** Nor would the solar panels meaningfully affect the ability to understand the underlying landscape surrounding the site or within the wider study area. The proposed development would not result in the visual or physical coalescence of settlements. Adverse visual effects on the residents of settlements within the study area, where these have the potential to occur, would be limited in extent, due to both distance and screening by intervening buildings and vegetation. The proposed development, with the exception of the northern edge of Crays Hill, would be largely imperceptible in views from settlements such as Great Burstead and Basildon, and the perception of the openness of the Green Belt would be maintained.

Summary

- 8.76** A detailed visual assessment of a selection of representative viewpoints indicate that higher level of visual effects would be generally be experienced from close to the site boundary or within from within the site itself. Two major adverse effects are identified in year 1 of the operational phase. However, with the establishment and growth of the proposed mitigation planting the scale of effect would diminish to moderate adverse by year 10 of the operational phase.
- 8.77** In the long term, the continued growth of proposed trees and woodland would have the potential to reduce these and other visual effects further. It is assessed that no visual major adverse effects would persist into the long term operational phase of the proposed development.
- 8.78** The proposed development where visible would typically be seen only as discrete elements rather than in its entirety. It is considered that from publicly accessible vantage points, in the undulating and expansive host landscape, the proposals would not be perceived as overtly prominent and that they would not be a dominant visual feature. Overall it is considered that the proposed development would have a limited effect and harm on the visual amenity of the wider landscape beyond the site boundary.

9. Cumulative Assessment

9.1 Two other solar farm developments are identified as being in proximity to the site of the proposed development. The first development is Outwood Solar Farm. Outwood Solar Farm is operational. The Outwood Solar Farm is included in the baseline for this LVA.

9.2 The second development, as application 22/00296/FULL, relates to the,

‘Installation of renewable energy generating station comprising ground mounted photovoltaic solar arrays together with substation, transformer stations, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements’

at Crays Hall Farm Church Lane Ramsden Crays Billericay Essex CM11 2UN. The application has now gained planning permission at appeal (decision date – 30th August 2023).

9.3 This Cumulative Landscape and Visual Appraisal (CLVA) has been undertaken with reference to best practice outlined within GLVIA3. There are no no-renewable energy cumulative schemes.

9.4 Definition of Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

9.5 Cumulative landscape and visual effects are described within paragraph 7.2 of GLVIA3 as those that,

“result from the additional changes to the landscape or visual amenity caused by the proposed development in conjunction with other developments (associated or separate to it), or actions that occurred in the past, present or are likely to occur in the foreseeable future.”

Definition of Cumulative Landscape Effects

9.6 Cumulative landscape effects are described in GLVIA3 paragraph 7.3 as effects that,

“can impact on either the physical fabric or character of the landscape, or any special values attached to it” (SNH, 2012).

Definition of Cumulative Visual Effects

9.7 Cumulative visual effects are described in GLVIA3 paragraph 7.3 as,

“effects that can be caused by combined visibility which occurs where the observer is able to see two or more developments from one viewpoint and/or sequential effects which occur when the observer has to move to another viewpoint to see different developments” (SNH, 2012).

Sensitivity of Receptors

- 9.8** In the assessment of cumulative effects the sensitivity of particular landscape and visual receptors remains the same as identified within the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) for the proposed Burstead Solar Farm in isolation from other solar developments.

Cumulative Magnitude of Change

- 9.9** The cumulative magnitude of change is an expression of the degree to which landscape or visual receptors will be changed by a solar farm in addition to other solar developments that are already operational, under construction, consented or in planning. This is dependent on a number of factors:

- **The location of the solar farm in relation to other solar developments.** If the development is visible with another solar farm, this will generally increase the cumulative magnitude of change as it will extend the solar farm’s visual influence in the surrounding landscape.
- **The extent of the developed skyline.** If the solar farm will add notably to the developed skyline in a view, the cumulative magnitude of change will tend to be higher, as the nature of the skyline has a particular influence on both views across a study area.
- **The number and scale of solar farms seen within simultaneous, successive or sequential views.** Generally, the higher the number of visible solar farms, the higher the cumulative magnitude of change. Likewise, the addition of the solar farm to a view where a greater number of smaller solar farms are apparent will usually generate a higher cumulative magnitude of change than a view of one or two large solar farms, as this can lead to the impression of a less co-ordinated or strategic approach to solar development within the landscape.
- **The distance of the solar farms from a particular viewpoint.** In general, the greater the distance from surrounding solar farms, then typically the lower the cumulative magnitude of change will be.
- **The magnitude of change of the solar farm as assessed in the LVA.** If a low magnitude of change has been identified within the LVA for the development in isolation, the cumulative magnitude of change is also likely to be low. The

development is unlikely to contribute to cumulative situation, if the magnitude of change is considered to be low for the solar farm in isolation. The converse of the above is also likely to be the case.

10.1 Table 10-1 below provides a definition for the cumulative magnitude of change for landscape and visual receptors. The scale of effect threshold remains as per Table 12 of the detailed methodology for the LVA as a whole.

Table 10-1 - Definition of Cumulative Magnitude of Change for Landscape and Visual Effects	
Magnitude of change	Definition
Negligible	The addition of the proposed development will make only a slight contribution to the cumulative situation that is just greater than a 'no change' situation and not readily apparent
Low	The addition of the proposed development will make a minor contribution to the overall cumulative situation, and its cumulative addition is only slightly apparent.
Medium	The addition of the proposed development makes a notable contribution to the cumulative situation, and the cumulative addition is readily apparent.
High	The addition of the proposed development will make an immediately apparent contribution to the cumulative situation in a landscape receptor or view.

Preparation of Cumulative Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility

9.10 A series of cumulative screened zone of theoretical visibility (SZTVs) diagrams have been prepared. The series of three SZTVs (see Appendix 15) show:

- The cumulative effect of the proposed development (parcel B) and the Outward Farm development

- The cumulative effect of the proposed development and the Crays hall Farm development
- The cumulative effect of all the schemes.

Appendix 15 – Cumulative SZTVs

9.11 The series of three cumulative SZTV help demonstrate that theoretical extent of all cumulative visual effects would be confined primarily to an area of landscape no greater than 2km from the site boundary of the proposed development. The greatest theoretical potential to see all three solar sites i.e. the proposed development, Outward Farm and Crays Hall Farm would be from higher ground to the south and south-west and in the of parcel B.

Effect on the National Character Area

- 9.12** The addition of the proposed development in parcel B would together with the consented Crays Hall Farm development and the operational Outward Farm development create a perceived cluster of solar farm development within the NCA 111 Northern Thames Basin. However, the key characteristics of the NCA would continue to prevail with the respective solar developments in place.
- 9.13** It is assessed that the addition of the proposed scheme together with the Crays Hall Farm and Outward Farm developments would it is assessed bring about a low magnitude of change.
- 9.14** With a low sensitivity and low magnitude of change the addition of the proposed development would have a minor adverse cumulative effect on National Character Area 111 Northern Thames Basin at year 1 and year 10 of the operational phase. It is considered that such a minor adverse effect would be long term during the operational phase of the proposed development.

Effect on County Landscape Character Areas

- 9.15** At the County level, both the Crays Hall Farm development and the proposed development are located in the South Essex Farmlands LCA. The addition of the proposed development above the baseline and including the proposed Clay Hall Farm development would represent an intensification of solar/photovoltaic infrastructure in the landscape of the South Essex Farmlands LCA with a primary removal of arable land use and its replacement with grassland and solar panels.
- 9.16** With a medium sensitivity, it is assessed that there would be a medium cumulative magnitude of change with the addition of the proposed development. The cumulative

effect on the landscape character of the South Essex Farmlands LCA would be moderate adverse at year 1 and year 10 of the operational phase.

Effect on District Landscape Character Areas

- 9.17** At a District level, the eastern parcel, parcel B, of the proposed development and the proposed Crays Hall Farm development are both within the Upper Crouch Valley Farm LCA. Parcel A of the proposed development is located within the Burstead Sloping Farmland LCA.
- 9.18** At this District LCA level, the proposed development as an addition to the Crays Hall Farm development will inevitably incur a localised contribution to the overall cumulative situation within the Upper Crouch Valley Farm LCA.
- 9.19** The magnitude of change on the Crays Hall Farm development LCA with the addition of the proposed development above that of the Crays Hall Farm development is assessed as medium.
- 9.20** With a medium sensitivity and a medium cumulative magnitude of change, a moderate adverse cumulative effect at year 1 of the operational phase on landscape character would be anticipated at the local scale on the Upper Crouch Valley Farm LCA.
- 9.21** Such a scale effect would diminish to minor adverse at year 10 of the operational phase and over the long term operational phase of the proposed development with the growth and development of the proposed new tree and hedgerow planting to be implemented by both schemes. Such planting in conjunction with retained vegetation would create a physical barrier and visual screen as well as reinforcing and enhancing a key characteristic of the local landscape.
- 9.22** The proposed Crays Hall Farm development would have no physical effect on the adjoining Burstead Sloping Farmland LCA. The only effect would be a visual one and the appearance of the Crays Hall Farm development in respect of the Burstead Sloping Farmland LCA would be restricted. The cumulative magnitude of change to the Burstead Sloping Farmland LCA with the addition of the proposed development would be the same as for the proposed development in isolation.

Summary of cumulative effect on landscape character

- 9.23** If the proposed development were to be consented there would be incremental, cumulative effects on landscape character and within the Upper Crouch Valley Farm LCA in particular. The close proximity of the proposed development and the Crays Hall Farm development would result in cumulative effects on landscape character at a localised level through the introduction of further solar farm/photovoltaic infrastructure

within the existing farmland beyond the baseline established by the presence of the existing Outwood Solar Farm.

- 9.24** Though the cumulative effects on landscape character would be adverse in nature, the addition of the proposed development for a period of 40 years would be finite. Ultimately the proposed development together with the Crays Hall Farm development both constitute as being a temporary, though long term, feature in the landscape.

Cumulative Effects on Visual Amenity

- 9.25** The cumulative SZTVs show that there would be considerable theoretic intervisibility between the Outward Farm and Crays Hall Farm development – extending over a large area of landscape to the north and east. The area of cumulative visibility with the addition of the proposed development would be largely constrained to an area of landscape immediately around parcel B and to an area either side of Church Lane Crays Hill.
- 9.26** In reality the visual envelope in which the proposed development would be seen in conjunction with the Outward Farm and/or Crays Hall Farm developments would be much less extensive than the theoretical potential. Factors such as the screening presence of field boundary hedgerows and tree lines together with the availability of potential publicly accessible viewpoints act to limit cumulative visual effects.

Cumulative Effects - Public Highways

- 9.27** The public highway network in the landscape containing the proposed development and the existing solar farm development is relatively limited. Only one continuous route, the A129 Southend Road has the potential to afford views of both the proposed development and Crays Hall Farm development in succession. However, owing to gently undulating and sloping topography of the vale landscape together with the layering effect on field boundary/roadside vegetation and the presence of built form in the intervening landscape between the observer and the solar farms, the opportunity to see any of the proposed Crays Hall Farm development is limited. Any views would be typically be oblique ones and transitory, experienced at speed relative to the road.
- 9.28** It is considered that the cumulative visual effect of the addition of the proposed development on the A129 would be the same as for that of the proposed development in isolation.

Cumulative Effects - Public Right of Way Network

9.29 The greatest potential for cumulative effects from the public right of way network with the addition of the proposed development would be sequential views when travelling along public rights of way 306_36 and 309_38 respectively. The former passes through both the eastern part, parcel B, of the proposed development and then through the southern fields of the Crays Hall Farm development.

9.30 Consideration has also been given to the potential cumulative effect on users of the promoted Ramsden Crays Circular Walk.

Effect on public right of way - Great Burstead and South Green, 306_36

9.31 When travelling west along public right of way 306_36 from its junction with 306_35, views of the southern part of the Crays Hall Farm development would be afforded to either side of the footpath. The addition of the proposed development would bring about only a limited extension of sequential views of photovoltaic infrastructure when travelling west along the footpath.

9.32 Public right of way 306_36 would pass through a grassland margin on the site of the proposed development. The proposed layout removes all solar panels from the area between public right of way 306_36 and the tributary of the River Crouch to the west. In addition, new woodland planting is proposed to the north of public right of way 306_36 replacing an area of solar panels.

9.33 Only part of parcel B would be visible. Part of the site would be screened or partially screened by existing vegetation at year 1 of the operational phase. It is assessed that there would be a low cumulative magnitude of change giving rise to a moderate adverse cumulative effect.

9.34 By year 10 of the operational, new tree and hedgerow planting implemented as part of the proposed development would have become established and would have filled out so that the cumulative effect of the addition of the proposed development on the footpath would diminish to minor adverse as much of parcel B would be restricted from view.

Effect on public right of way - Great Burstead and South Green, 306_368

9.35 Public right of way 309_38 passes along the western edge of the southern fields of the Crays Hall Farm development. The addition of the proposed development would put the right of way on the eastern edge of parcel B. The right of way would pass along a grassed margin within the proposed development. The proposed layout removes solar

panels from the area between the public right of way and the tributary of the River Crouch to the west.

- 9.36** Photovoltaic infrastructure associated with the proposed development would be located to the west of the right of way and largely screened from view by existing retained vegetation along the course of the River Crouch tributary. New tree and shrub planting implemented as part of the proposed development would, once established and beginning to fill out, reinforce and enhance the retained existing vegetation.
- 9.37** Some cumulative views between the proposed development and the Cray Hall Farm development would remain from the higher ground to the south close to Cray s Hill (as evidenced in Viewpoint 1). The removal of solar panels from the northern part of Field 6 within parcel B would, it is considered help to reduce such visual effects.
- 9.38** The cumulative effect on public right of way 309_38 with the proposed development in place is assessed as being that same for the proposed development in isolation. At year 1 it is assessed that there would be a major adverse effect. At year 10 the effect of mitigation planting would reduce the scale of the cumulative effect to moderate adverse. During the long term operational phase of the proposed development further growth of trees and woodland in the mitigation planting would have the potential to reduce the scale of effect further.

Effect on the Ramsden Crays Circular Walk

- 9.39** The Ramsden Crays Circular Walk is an approximately 4.8km local walk promoted by Basildon Council. The walk comprises four public rights of way plus a section of highway (Coxes Farm Road). The latter forms the western section of the walk. Public rights of way Great Burstead and South Green 164 and Billericay 164 from the northern section, Ramsden Crays 33 forms the eastern section, and Great Burstead and South Green 34 forms the southern section.
- 9.40** For much of its length, the Ramsden Crays Circular Walk passes through woodland and between vegetation. Along these stretches of the walk there is relatively little intervisibility with the wider landscape. However, there would be sequential views between the existing Outward Farm and the consented Cray Hall Farm development as the public right of way passes between the two sites. The right of way passes immediately to the east and north of the consented Cray Hall Farm development through a largely open section of the walk and there are clear views across the site of the consented solar far. There are also direct views of the existing Outwood Farm, which in certain places comes within only a few metres of the walk.

- 9.41** Some views of the additional proposed development would be visible from Great Burstead and South Green 34 as it passes by the northern and part of the eastern edge of the site. Views of the proposals would typically be filtered ones, with hedgerow shrubs and trees forming some restriction. Where there are gaps in the vegetation, there is the potential to see the whole of the proposed development that would result in a major adverse effect at year 1 of the operational phase. The scale of effect would diminish to minor adverse at year 10 once mitigation planting had begun to fill out. Gaps in the existing vegetation alongside the walk are extremely limited.
- 9.42** Taken as a whole, the cumulative effect of the addition of the proposed on the Ramsden Crays Circular Walk is assessed as moderate adverse at year 1 of the operational phase.
- 9.43** The growth of the proposed hedgerow and woodland along the northern edge of the revised solar array would, once fully established, and filling out at year 10 of the operational phase would further reduce the cumulative effect brought about by the addition of the proposed development.
- 9.44** The cumulative effect on Ramsden Crays Circular Walk as whole with the proposed development in place is assessed as minor adverse at year 10 and during the long term operational phase of the proposed development.

Effect on the remaining public right of way network

- 9.45** From elsewhere on the public right of way network, it is considered that the factors such as the orientation of particular routes, the presence of existing vegetation in the intervening landscape between the observer and the proposed solar farm developments, and the gently undulating/rolling topography would restrict the potential for most cumulative visual effects. Overall it is considered that the cumulative visual effect on the local public right of way brought about by the addition of the proposed development over that of the proposed Cray Hall Farm development would be minor adverse during the operational phase of the proposed development.

Cumulative Effects - Residential Properties

- 9.46** As static elements in the landscape, there would be no sequential effects as a result of the addition of the proposed development on residential properties. Views of the proposed development, when seen in isolation, from residential properties such as from the edge of Great Burstead to the north and Basildon to the south are largely restricted through a combination of topography and the layering of field boundary vegetation.
- 9.47** The additionality of the proposed development to create views in which one or more solar farm would be seen in combination or succession would also be limited. The

cumulative magnitude of change is assessed as negligible. With a high sensitivity and a negligible magnitude of change, the cumulative effect of the proposed development on residential visual amenity is assessed as minor adverse at year 1 and year 10 of the operational phase and that such a level would continue for the remaining period of the operational phase .

Summary of Cumulative Visual Effects

- 9.48** There is the potential for some limited cumulative visual effects, arising from the addition of the proposed development over and above the recently consented Crays Hall Farm development. Parcel B would adjoin the southern fields of the Crays Hall Farm development. Nevertheless, despite the proximity of the two proposed solar farms, it is considered that cumulative visual effects would be limited in extent and scale.
- 9.49** Sequential views from the limited public highway network in the landscape surrounding the proposed and existing solar farms are generally restricted. Such a restriction is typically owing to gently undulating and rolling topography of the vale landscape together with the layering effect on field boundary/roadside vegetation and the presence of built form in the intervening landscape between the observer and the solar farms. Similarly, views of the proposed development, when seen in isolation, from residential properties such as from the edge of Great Burstead or Crays Hill are restricted through a combination of topography and the layering of field boundary vegetation. The additionality of the proposed development to create views in which one or more solar farm would be seen in combination or succession would also be limited.
- 9.50** There would be some increase in the sequential viewing of solar farm infrastructure from the public right of way network with the addition of the proposed development. The public right of network in the landscape surrounding the site and the proposed solar farms is quite extensive. However, the greatest potential for cumulative visual effects would be from the two public rights of way that pass through the development and the proposed Crays Hall Farm development.
- 9.51** Nevertheless, mitigation measures included as part of the proposed development and arising from the revised layout, including new tree and hedgerow planting will, by year 10 of the operational phase, help to remove or reduce the cumulative effects on the visual amenity of users of these public rights of way and from the public right of network in general.
- 9.52** There are no identified may adverse cumulative effects associated with the addition of the proposed development in the context of the operational Outward Farm or the recently consented Crays Hill Farm developments.

10. Summary and conclusions

- 10.2** The proposed development is for the installation of a solar farm and battery storage facility with associated infrastructure. The revised scheme follows the refusal of a planning application on the site for a larger and more extensive scheme. The proposals would confine development to the eastern parcel of the site – parcel B. The remainder of the site within the redline boundary would be undeveloped.
- 10.3** The site of the proposed solar farm avoids any statutory or non-statutory protected landscape such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which are recognised as national importance within the NPPF. Similarly, neither the site nor its immediate environs are identified as being a ‘valued landscape’ as outlined in the NPPF. Green Belt is not a landscape designation.
- 10.4** It is evident that the proposed development would not appreciably harm or physically alter the distinctive existing landscape elements and features associated in the site and that the following conclusions can be reached.
- 10.5** The undulating topography of the site and the existing water features i.e. land drains and tributaries would remain unchanged. The existing water features on or near the site would be retained and would be protected within an undeveloped margin free of any infrastructure.
- 10.6** The public right of way network would be unaltered physically with the proposed solar farm in place on the site. The public rights of way would be retained on their definitive routes. Changes to the public right of way network brought about the proposals would be experiential ones and primarily visual. The proposed solar farm is inert and largely silent so that the perceived level of tranquillity would be little altered for users of the rights of way. Adverse experiential change of being able to view the proposed development would be mitigated, reduced, through the creation of new hedgerows and woodlands.
- 10.7** Grassland and herbaceous vegetation would be established beneath the rows of solar panels to benefit biodiversity and wildlife. This grassland would have the potential opportunity to be managed through a grazing regime that would allow for an agricultural function to be maintained on the site during the operational phase.
- 10.8** All the new and existing landscape features within the site will benefit from an agreed programme of management which would help their long-term viability within the landscape.

- 10.9** The proposed development would maintain the broadly geometric but irregular pattern of the existing landscape expressed in the field shapes and slightly sinuous roads and watercourses. The straight rows of panels would be consistent in their more geometric arrangement but where the edges of the array would be shaped to avoid affecting features on the site.
- 10.10** The proposed development would bring about no physical changes to the pattern of the landscape beyond the site boundary. In terms of views, features, and landmarks, their perception would not be unacceptably harmed with the proposals in place. Except for a few locations within the site itself, landmarks such as St Mary Magdelene church tower would still act as a landmark as would other similar features in the wider landscape.
- 10.11** The landscape elements and features in the surrounding landscape would be physically unaltered with the proposals in place. Any perceived changes in the character and appearance of the local landscape would be limited to the site itself.
- 10.12** The siting, scale and form of the solar strings, transformers, batteries, inverters and security fencing would in the course of the first 10 years of the operational phase generally appear screened behind the proposed new hedgerows and retained vegetated field boundaries. The proposed solar farm would add some complexity to the character of the local landscape and provide an increased sense of enclosure.
- 10.13** The proposed new hedgerows and woodland planting would alter the pattern of the landscape within the site by creating new smaller scale fields, which would be perceptible in the wider local landscape. Such new hedgerow planting is advocated within the published landscape character assessments covering the site.
- 10.14** The proposed hedgerows and trees would, once established and mature, have the potential to enhance an existing key characteristic of the host landscape. Such new tree and hedgerow planting would also provide a further element of green infrastructure by facilitating the creation of habitat, increasing biodiversity and allowing for the movement of plants and animals into and through the site.
- 10.15** The proposed solar farm would not completely redefine the character of the local landscape; the prevailing character of a working agricultural and predominantly rural landscape would remain. The key characteristics of the local landscape, which differentiate the local landscape from other areas, would not be so changed as to be unrecognisable and would prevail.
- 10.16** Having undertaken a detailed visual assessment of a selection of representative viewpoints indicate that higher level of visual effects would be generally be experienced from closer proximity to the site boundary or within the site itself.

- 10.17** The proposed development where visible would typically be seen only as discrete elements rather than in its entirety. It is considered that from publicly accessible vantage points, in the flat and expansive host landscape, the proposals would not be perceived as overtly prominent and that they would not be a dominant feature. Overall it is considered that the effect of the proposed development would not bring about an unacceptable harm to the visual amenity of the wider landscape.
- 10.18** On balance, it is considered that the proposed development would result in acceptable effects on the character of the local landscape and visual amenity with the proposed mitigation measures in place. The character of the local landscape and its underlying intensive agricultural, rural and settled character would prevail and would not be intrinsically changed so as to lose its fundamental identity with the proposed solar farm development in place.