

**Proposed Solar PV Development**

# Preliminary Environmental Information Report

## Appendix 7.2 National Policy and Guidance

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## APPENDIX 7.2: NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

1. This Appendix summarises national policy and guidance relevant to the LVIA for the Proposed Development.

### National Policy Statements (NPS)

#### Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1)

2. NPS EN-1 requires that decision makers “take into account environmental, social and economic benefits and adverse impacts, at national, regional and local levels.”
3. Section 5.9 discusses landscape and visual matters. It notes that LVIA will be required, considering both construction and operational stages and that “*Virtually all nationally significant energy infrastructure projects will have effects on the landscape. Projects need to be designed carefully, taking account of the potential impact on the landscape. Having regard to siting, operational and other relevant constraints the aim should be to minimise harm to the landscape, providing reasonable mitigation where possible and appropriate.*”
4. In relation to local landscape character studies and designations, it directs that these “*should be paid particular attention*” and that “*local landscape designations should not be used in themselves to refuse consent, as this may unduly restrict acceptable development*”.
5. Paragraphs 5.9.15-5.9.16 identify that the longevity and reversibility of effects require consideration and that the effects (which may include extensive visibility) must be considered in the context of whether they are offset by the benefits of and need for the project.
6. Paragraphs 5.9.21 to 5.9.23 discuss mitigation and include the caution that “*reducing the scale or otherwise amending the design of a proposed energy infrastructure project may result in a significant operational constraint and reduction in function – for example, the electricity generation output*” indicating that mitigation following this approach should only be under “*exceptional circumstances, where mitigation could have a very significant benefit and warrant a small reduction in function*”. These paragraphs also discuss the role of siting, materials and planting in mitigation.
7. The latest draft revisions to NPS EN-1 were published in March 2023.

#### Draft National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)

8. The designated NPS EN-3 does not include specific reference to solar technologies, however, the latest draft published in March 2023 for consultation includes a section on solar photovoltaic generation. In relation to landscape and visual matters, this section indicates that effects on residential visual amenity are likely to require consideration (para. 3.10.85) and that selecting sites close to their intended grid connection point can have benefits in reducing environmental effects but is likely to require consideration of cumulative effects with other energy infrastructure in the nearby area (para. 3.10.39).
9. Paragraphs 3.10.27 to 3.10.29 of draft NPS EN-3 includes the indication that “*Applicants are encouraged to design the layout and appearance of the site to ensure continued recreational use of public rights of way, where possible during construction, and in particular during operation of the site. Applicants are encouraged where possible to minimise the visual outlook from existing public rights of way, considering the impacts this may have on any other visual amenities in the surrounding*”

landscape. Applicants should consider and maximise opportunities to facilitate enhancements to the public rights of way and the adoption of new public rights of way through site layout and design of access.” It also notes in paragraph 3.10.60 that “there may be socio-economic benefits in retaining site infrastructure after the operational life, such as retaining pathways through the site or a site substation.”

10. The long-term retention of existing vegetation is highlighted as a design priority, and it is indicated in paragraph 3.10.89 that applications “will be expected to direct considerable effort towards minimising the landscape and visual impact of solar PV arrays especially within nationally designated landscapes”.
11. The statement notes that all elements of the proposed development should be considered in the assessment of effects – including fencing and CCTV.

## National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2021

12. Section 12 of the NPPF focuses on good design and includes the following at para 130:

*“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:*

*a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*

*b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*

*c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*

*d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place....”*

13. Section 15 of the NPPF is headed ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’ and includes paragraph 174 which requires that:

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

*a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, ... (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 ... trees and woodland;*

*c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;..”*

*A.1.3 Paragraphs 175 and 176 also note that: “Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites” and that “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.”, and that*

*“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.”*

## Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

### Planning Practice Guidance for Natural Environment, 21 July 2019

14. This document covers the key issues in implementing policy to protect biodiversity and landscape fabric (including green infrastructure, Ancient Woodland and veteran trees), and contains a section on landscape. This section notes that:

*“Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed.”*

15. In respect of designated landscapes it notes that *“the relevant management plan will contain further information on the area’s particular character and beauty”*. The status of management plans is also described, saying that these documents *“do not form part of the statutory development plan, but they help to set out the strategic context for development... They may contain information ... which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications.”*
16. The guidance further indicates that all development within nationally designated landscapes *“will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects their status as landscapes of the highest quality”*, and that *“land within the setting of these areas often makes an important contribution to maintaining their natural beauty, and where poorly located or designed development can do significant harm. This is especially the case where long views from or to the designated landscape are identified as important, or where the landscape character of land within and adjoining the designated area is complementary. Development within the settings of these areas will therefore need sensitive handling that takes these potential impacts into account.”*

### Planning Practice Guidance for Design: process and tools, October 2019

17. This document sets out how well-designed places can be achieved *“by taking a proactive and collaborative approach at all stages of the planning process”* and notes that it should be read alongside the National Design Guide. It reiterates NPPF guidance, noting that:

*“permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development”*

18. It further sets out ten characteristics that contribute to good design and that are expanded on in the National Design Guide.

## National Design Guide: January 2021

19. The National Design Guide sets out the ten key characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. It notes:

*“Well-designed places have individual characteristics which work together to create its physical Character. The ten characteristics help to nurture and sustain a sense of Community. They work to positively address environmental issues affecting Climate. They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.”*

20. In relation to the context of development it notes that:

*“38 Context is the location of the development and the attributes of its immediate, local and regional surroundings.*

*39 An understanding of the context, history and the cultural characteristics of a site, neighbourhood and region influences the location, siting and design of new developments. It means they are well grounded in their locality and more likely to be acceptable to existing communities. Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion.*

*40 Well-designed places are:*

- based on a sound understanding of the features of the site and the surrounding context, using baseline studies as a starting point for design;*
- integrated into their surroundings so they relate well to them;*
- influenced by and influence their context positively; and*
- responsive to local history, culture and heritage.”*

21. In relation to the identify or character of a place it notes:

*“50 The identity or character of a place comes from the way that buildings, streets and spaces, landscape and infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. It is not just about the buildings or how a place looks, but how it engages with all of the senses. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods.*

*51 Well-designed places, buildings and spaces:*

- have a positive and coherent identity that everyone can identify with, including residents and local communities, so contributing towards health and well-being, inclusion and cohesion;*
- have a character that suits the context, its history, how we live today and how we are likely to live in the future; and*
- are visually attractive, to delight their occupants and other users.”*

22. In relation to the importance of the natural environment it notes:

*“90 Nature contributes to the quality of a place, and to people’s quality of life, and it is a critical component of well designed places. Natural features are integrated into well designed development. They include natural and designed landscapes, high quality public open spaces, street trees, and other trees, grass, planting and water.*

*91 Well-designed places:*

- integrate existing, and incorporate new natural features into a multifunctional network that supports quality of place, biodiversity and water management, and addresses climate change mitigation and resilience;*
- prioritise nature so that diverse ecosystems can flourish to ensure a healthy natural environment that supports and enhances biodiversity;*

- *provide attractive open spaces in locations that are easy to access, with activities for all to enjoy, such as play, food production, recreation and sport, so as to encourage physical activity and promote health, well-being and social inclusion.*

## Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (June 2015)

23. In relation to the consideration of solar farms, this guidance notes that key considerations include the need for solar farms to be of adequate size and receive enough sun for efficient energy generation; and the need to consider the potential impacts on designated landscapes and local amenity. The guidance specifically notes that:  
  
*“The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.”*
24. and that  
  
*“solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use”.*
25. In terms of design, decision makers are guided to consider the colour and appearance of the panels, the potential for glint and glare (and the potential effect of that on neighbours); the potential need for security measures such as fencing and lighting and *“the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges”.*
26. The guidance notes the need for cumulative impacts to be considered, whilst also noting that *“in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero.”*