



Lime Down

Solar Park

Technical Note on Landscape Fabric and Landscape Character

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Technical Note

1.1.1 Within the relevant representations received from Wiltshire Council [RR4934], the Applicant agreed to prepare a Technical Note (TN) to set out the approach undertaken to the assessment of Landscape Fabric and Landscape Character used in the LVIA as presented in **ES Volume 1 Chapter 8 [APP-060]**.

1.1.2 Paragraph 8.13 of Wiltshire Council's Relevant Representations [RR4934] states:

“The definition of the term Landscape fabric needs to encompass all the physical and spatial components that combine and interact with each other. These include natural, cultural and historic features, land-use and current management practices, built elements such as infrastructure and roads, settlement pattern, including perceptual and aesthetic aspects such as relative tranquillity and sense of openness / enclosure and ruralness, all of which collectively define the baseline landscape fabric and combine and interact to form the characteristics of the site and the receiving landscape context. At present, the limited nature of landscape fabric components that the Applicant has considered within their assessment (both existing and introduced), is contributing to assessment scores which are not considered to give a true reflection of change to the baseline landscape fabric components, which in turn, collectively comprise to give overall baseline landscape character.”

1.1.3 Although the Methodology of the assessment is agreed, the application of the Methodology is not and there appears to be a degree of misunderstanding of the findings of the LVIA especially relating to Landscape Fabric and land use change.

1.1.4 This TN provides further explanation on the Methodology used in the LVIA to assess the effects of the Scheme on Landscape Fabric and Landscape Character. As explained further below, the assessment on Landscape Fabric is an independent and separate assessment to that undertaken on the effects of the Scheme on Landscape Character.

2 Methodology

2.1 LVIA Methodology

2.1.1 The Methodology for the LVIA is set out in **ES Volume 3, Appendix 8-1 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology [APP-187]**.

2.1.2 In section 1.6- Assessment of Landscape Effects of Appendix 8-1, the methodology sets out the identified Landscape Receptors which are assessed at construction, operation Year 1 and 15 and decommissioning phases of the Scheme.

2.1.3 It notes that “*Landscape receptors are those parts of the receiving landscape that may be affected by the change. In LVIA identification of landscape receptors includes both:*

- *the constituent elements of the landscape (the Landscape Fabric) being the individual tangible elements or features of the landscape, such as landform, woodland, hedges, tree cover, vegetation within the development area or site, for example which can usually be described and quantified,*
- *the specific aesthetic or perceptual qualities and the character of the landscape as a whole in different areas.”*

2.1.4 As such, the Landscape Fabric of the Site is considered as a landscape receptor which is assessed separately to impacts on Landscape Character and identified Landscape Character Areas.

2.1.5 Definitions

2.1.6 Landscape Fabric is described in the LVIA Methodology Glossary and at paragraph 8.7.16 of the LVIA **[APP-060]** as:

2.1.7 “*Landscape fabric is the individual tangible elements or features such as landform, woodland, hedges, tree cover, vegetation that make up a landscape or site. These can usually be described and quantified.*”. These are the natural elements within the Site, for example the lengths of hedgerow or areas of woodland and grassland within each individual site.

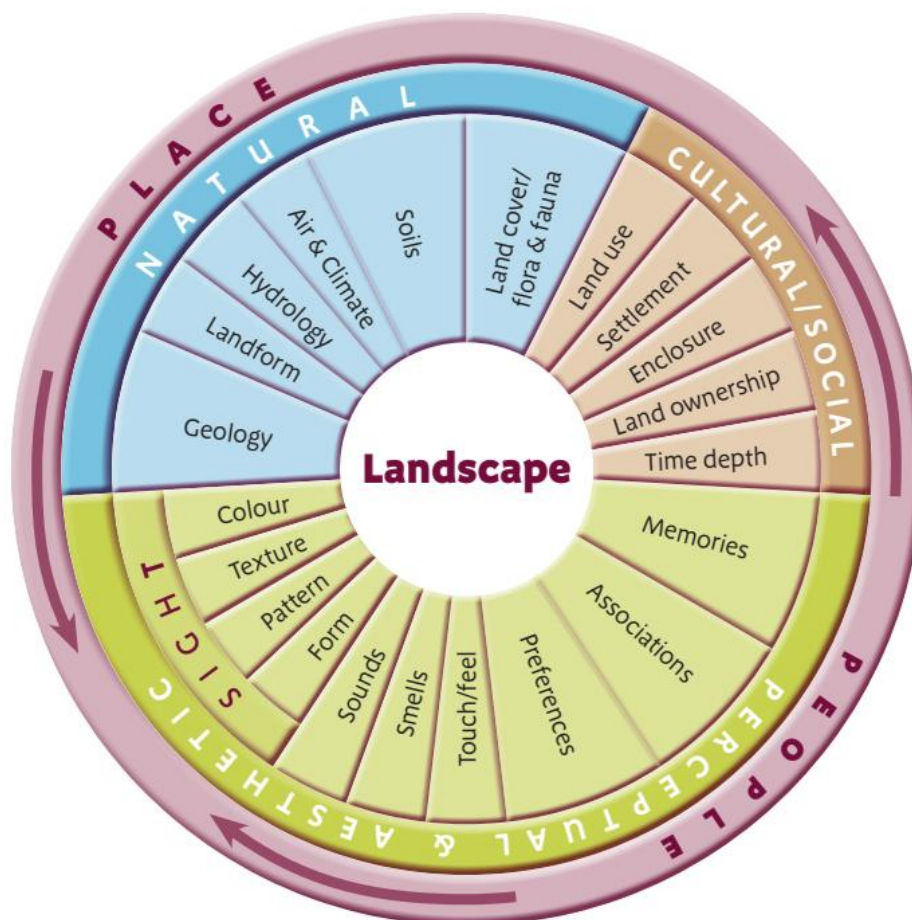
2.1.8 Landscape Character is described in the LVIA Methodology Glossary as follows:

“A distinct, recognisable, and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.”

2.1.9 Key aspects that shape landscape character include:

- Natural factors – hills, rivers, climate, vegetation.
- Human elements – buildings, roads, farming patterns.
- Cultural/historical influences – traditions, land management over time.
- Visual appearance – colours, textures, scale, and openness.

2.1.10 These aspects are illustrated on the wheel below as shown in Natural England guidance on Landscape Character - An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment October 2014 Christine Tudor.



2.1.11 Landscape results from the interplay of the physical, natural and cultural components of our surroundings. Different combinations of these elements and their spatial distribution create the distinctive character of landscapes in different places, allowing different landscapes to be mapped, analysed and described. Character is not just about the physical elements and features that make up a landscape, but also embraces the aesthetic, perceptual and experiential aspects of the landscape that make different places distinctive.

2.1.12 Within LVIA, Landscape Character Assessments are used to determine the baseline character of the Site and its receiving landscape. GLVIA3 discusses the identification of the receptors that will be affected by a development and notes at Paragraph 3.21:

“In LVIA there must be identification of both:

- *landscape receptors, including the constituent elements of the landscape, its specific aesthetic or perceptual qualities and the character of the landscape in different areas; and*
- *visual receptors, that is, the people who will be affected by changes in views or visual amenity at different places.”*

3 Landscape Fabric/ Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.1.1 Within the LVIA **ES Volume 1, Chapter 8 Landscape and Visual [APP-060]** Landscape Fabric and Landscape Character are assessed independently as two separate receptors.
- 3.1.2 Landscape Fabric relates only to land within the Red Line Boundary of the Scheme and refers only to the physical elements and features within each of the five Lime Down Solar Sites and the physical changes they undergo. Through the iterative approach to the design of the Scheme, these physical features are predominantly retained with vegetation removal limited to the very low levels of hedgerow removal associated with the construction of access tracks where existing gaps cannot be utilised.
- 3.1.3 The physical change in land use as a result of the development to the Landscape Fabric is from arable farmland to grassland (albeit below solar infrastructure). This is distinct from the change in landscape character, where the land use change is from arable farmland to solar infrastructure. A solar scheme is essentially 'overlaid' across a landscape and is considered reversible: For example, developments for mineral extraction fundamentally change the nature of the landscape in which they operate, whereas solar projects, with the exception of the footprint of the buildings, are 'overlaid' on the landscape. This allows the important landscape features such as hedgerows, trees and watercourses to remain and continue to contribute to the landscape character of the receiving area and for the land below the panels to be used for the establishment of a grassland meadow.
- The introduction of ground mounted solar infrastructure therefore does not change the physical fabric of the land within the Site. However, it is recognised and accepted that it fundamentally changes the character of the land within the Scheme, and ultimately therefore of the receiving landscape.
- 3.1.4 It is recognised that the change in character associated with the development of a solar scheme, as with any greenfield development, is of course Adverse. However, given the overlaying of the proposed infrastructure, these adverse effects are on the landscape character of the receiving area. Landscape Character includes the natural, cultural and historic features, land-use and current management practices, built elements such as infrastructure and roads, settlement pattern, including perceptual and aesthetic aspects such as relative tranquillity and sense of openness / enclosure and ruralness, as described in Paragraph 8.13 of Wiltshire's Written Representations **[RR4934]**.

- 3.1.5 The above factors collectively define the landscape character baseline of the receiving landscape context.
- 3.1.6 The Landscape Character change associated with the addition of the array and associated infrastructure is considered within the assessment of effects on Landscape Character which are assessed within the following Study Areas:
- the 1km Local Study Area;
 - the 2km Wider Study Area;
 - the 5km Outer Study Area, and
 - The 10km Cumulative Study Area.
- 3.1.7 The four Study Areas include the five Lime Down Sites, the cable route corridor and associated infrastructure which make up the Scheme.
- 3.1.8 The methodology used in the LVIA has been developed in response to the increasing number of large-scale solar farms where there is potential for large scale landscape change resulting in both Adverse and Beneficial effects.
- 3.1.9 The LVIA has fully assessed the Scheme effects on Landscape Character which includes consideration of: new built elements / components such as substations, internal access tracks, solar PV arrays, alongside changes to current land use and management, alterations to the rural road network, new planting and changes to vegetation management which are all components that together influence the baseline landscape character, including its perceptual and aesthetic qualities within the four Study Areas.
- 3.1.10 By treating Landscape Fabric as a separate Landscape Receptor, the approach allows the physical landscape benefits of the Scheme (such as new hedgerows and meadows) at the Site level, to be quantified without affecting the separate assessment on Landscape Character. This is how the LVIA concludes that Landscape Fabric can be Moderate/Minor Neutral at the construction phase, and become Moderate Beneficial at Year 15 once planting becomes established.
- 3.1.11 At no point in the assessment of effects on Landscape Character, does the LVIA conclude that there are Beneficial Effects on Landscape Character. The assessment of landscape effects within the 1km Study Area recognises that there are Moderate Adverse (Significant) effects to Landscape Character as a result of the Lime Down Scheme.

4 Summary and Conclusion

- 4.1.1 The LVIA in **ES Volume 1 Chapter 8 [APP-060]** has assessed Landscape Fabric and Landscape Character independently as two separate receptors. Landscape Fabric relates only to land within the Order Limits of the Scheme and refers only to the physical elements and features within each of the five Lime Down Solar Sites and the physical changes they undergo.
- 4.1.2 The methodology used in the LVIA has been developed in response to the increasing number of large-scale solar farms where there is potential for large scale landscape change resulting in both Adverse and Beneficial effects. By treating Landscape Fabric as a separate Landscape Receptor, the approach allows the physical landscape benefits of the Scheme (such as new hedgerows and meadows) at the Site level to be quantified without affecting the separate assessment on Landscape Character.
- 4.1.3 The physical change in land use as a result of the development to the fabric of the landscape is from arable farmland to grassland (albeit below solar infrastructure). A solar scheme is essentially 'overlaid' across a landscape and is considered reversable (the infrastructure would be required to be removed at the end of the lifetime of the consent): This allows the important landscape features such as hedgerows, trees and watercourses to remain and continue to contribute to the landscape character of the receiving area.
- 4.1.4 The introduction of ground mounted solar infrastructure does not change the physical fabric of the land within the Site to the same extent as a quarry scheme or a residential development for example. However, it is recognised that developments of this nature directly change the character of the landscape within the boundaries of the Site itself, with the individual fields proposed for infrastructure presenting as a solar array. This change from a 'greenfield' open agricultural farmland to renewables is considered to represent an adverse effect of the highest level, (likely to be referred to as Major Adverse and Significant). This change is what then ultimately indirectly impacts the character of the wider receiving landscape. It should be noted that this change is not limited to renewable projects, and that any development of a greenfield site would result in the same level of adverse impact at the site level.
- 4.1.5 It is recognised that the change in character associated with the development of a solar scheme is of course Adverse. However, these adverse effects are on landscape character which include natural, cultural and historic features, land-use and current management practices, built elements such as infrastructure and roads, settlement pattern, including perceptual and aesthetic aspects such as relative tranquillity and sense of

openness / enclosure and ruralness, as described in Paragraph 8.13 of Wiltshire's Written Representations **[RR4934]**.

- 4.1.6 The Landscape Character change associated with the addition of the array and associated infrastructure is considered within the assessment of effects on Landscape Character.
- 4.1.7 The LVIA has fully assessed the Scheme effects on Landscape Character which includes: new built elements / components such as substations, internal access tracks, solar PV arrays, alongside changes to current land use and management, alterations to the rural road network, new planting and changes to vegetation management which are all components that together influence the baseline landscape character, including its perceptual and aesthetic qualities within the four Study Areas.
- 4.1.8 At no point in the assessment of effects on Landscape Character, is it concluded that there are Beneficial Effects on Landscape Character. The assessment of landscape effects within the 1km Study Area recognises that there are Moderate Adverse (Significant) effects as a result of the Lime Down Scheme.