

From: BMSDC Planning Area Team Pink <PlanningPink@aberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk>

Sent: 07 Feb 2024 02:45:06

To:

Cc:

Subject: FW: National Landscape Team response - DC/23/05656 Land At Grove Farm And Land East Of The Railway Line, Bentley

Attachments:

From: Beverley McClean <Beverley.McClean@suffolkand'essex-nl.org.uk>

Sent: Wednesday, February 7, 2024 1:05 PM

To: Bron Curtis <Bron.Curtis@aberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk>

Subject: National Landscape Team response - DC/23/05656 Land At Grove Farm And Land East Of The Railway Line, Bentley

Proposal-Full Planning Application - Construction of a solar farm (up to 40MW export capacity) with ancillary infrastructure and cabling, DNO substation, customer substation and construction of new and altered vehicular accesses.

Dear Bron.

Thank you for consulting the National Landscape team on the above solar farm application to the north of Bentley village and to the east of the railway line.

In principle, the National Landscape team recognise that infrastructure and renewable energy schemes are vital to society and that renewable energy will play an increasingly important role in the transition to low carbon economies and societies. The team also acknowledge that such schemes also have the potential to result in negative landscape and visual impacts and these need to be balanced against all the wider benefits that such schemes can deliver.

The Proposed Development comprises the following elements:

40MW Photovoltaic Solar Panels and associated support frames, String inverters, Transformer Stations, Client Substation, Distribution Network Operator (DNO) Substation, Control Building, Spares Container, Internal access tracks, deer/stock fencing, Substation fencing; and new landscaping.

The site lies outside the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB. The AONB boundary lies approximately 1.0km south (Holly Wood) and approximately 2.5km northeast of the application site.

While not within the AONB itself, the site is located within the Additional Project Area to the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB. Bentley has been assessed as part of the Valued Landscape Assessment Report prepared by Alison Farmer Associates in 2019 and in the Bentley Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Appraisal also prepared by Alison Farmer Associates in 2019.

The application is proposed on two land parcels on either side of Church Road, Bentley. The southern boundary of the western part of the site follows Potash Lane and extends north-west towards Engry Wood which is an ancient woodland. The north-eastern boundary extends close to St Mary's Church while the eastern boundary runs along the western side of Church Road. The eastern part of the solar farm crosses Church Road and extends from the east side of the highway across the field to the north of Falstaff Manor where it wraps around a woodland block to the rear (east) of the manor house.

The application site is surrounded by mature well managed hedgerows with irregularly spaced mature trees. There are also number of listed buildings located to the north of the site including the parish church of St Mary, Falstaff Manor, Bentley Hall and associated buildings and buildings of local interest to the south including Red Cottages and Potash Cottages.

The Bentley Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Appraisal concluded that the land to the north of Bentley was considered to be a valued landscape and 'above normal countryside' in terms of its landscape and scenic quality, and its natural, cultural and historic interests.

Paragraph 4.7.2 of the above report stated the following:

'In the context of the Parish, the former Special Landscape Area (SLA) comprised areas of arable plateau to the north and west containing notable ancient woodlands and some parkland, as well as the distinctive incised river valleys. The former SLA, where it lies beyond the proposed extension to the SC&H AONB but within Bentley Parish, has been reviewed as part of this landscape assessment in the context of the criteria for assessing valued landscapes set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA 3rd Edition). This has revealed that the northern part of the Parish has a weight of evidence to support its recognition as a valued landscape due to its intact historic patterns of settlement, ancient woodland, remnant parkland and rural lanes. Although the topography over much of this landscape is relatively flat, scenic quality is derived from the balanced and cohesive composition of mature trees, wooded skylines, arable fields, historic vernacular buildings and lack of modern

development. The footpath network and winding rural lanes, coupled with gentle folds in landform, afford a range of sequential views across a rural backwater which impart strong perceptions of time depth. The ancient woodlands and hedgerows are valued habitats for significant populations of endangered Stag beetle and Dormouse. Many of the buildings are listed and form important groups. These qualities elevate the area above normal countryside.'

The National Landscape team acknowledge the changes made to the scheme design set out in the Design and Access Statement. The National Landscape team also welcome that an LVIA has been submitted with the application, and we accept many of the assessment findings. For example, we acknowledge that landscape and visual effects will mainly be localised due to the important screening function provided by the mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees and that the embedded landscape and ecological enhancements proposed as part of the scheme have the potential to reinforce some of the elements that contribute to the area being a valued landscape. Glimpsed views into the site are mainly only possible from field accesses but longer cross site views are possible from some of the public rights of way network e.g. bridle way 65 that runs along the west of the site, Potash Lane and Chruch Road.

Overall, the National Landscape team is concerned that the installation of a solar farm of this scale will have a number of negative impacts on the valued landscape.

During the construction phase, impacts on the tranquility of the area are likely to be substantial for those living and recreating in the area. This impact will arise from construction traffic and the installation of the large number of solar panels. The character of the valued landscape will also be negatively impacted over a medium time frame (40 years) as a result of the changes from an agricultural character to more industrialised character. Visually the solar panels and some of the supporting infrastructure will introduce an incongruous type of development within the valued landscape where the agricultural use has remained relatively unaltered over many centuries.

The National Landscape team consider that overall, even with the mitigations proposed, the proposal has the potential to cause harm to the valued landscape and as such is not compliant with paragraph 180a of the National Planning Policy Framework.

If, as the determining authority, Babergh Council is minded to approve the above planning application all the embedded mitigations and landscape mitigations set out in supporting documents and drawings should be secured via condition where needed to ensure that impacts on the valued landscape and residents in the area are minimised or effectively mitigated.

The National Landscape team concurs with the comments in the Place Services (Landscape) response, that the ancillary structures associated with the development (transformer station unit, control building, spares container, substations and other units) should be dark muted colours and black, dark grey or dark brown would be suitable. We also agree with the recommendations regarding the fencing.

I hope these comments are helpful

Yours sincerely
Beverley

Have you booked on our planning event on 14 March 2024?

[National Landscape Planning Event Tickets, Thu 14 Mar 2024 at 09:30 | Eventbrite](#)



**Suffolk & Essex
Coast & Heaths
National
Landscape**



**Dedham Vale
National
Landscape
& Stour Valley**

Beverley McClean
National Landscape Planning Officer

Email: beverley.mcclean@suffolkand'essex-NL.org.uk

Phone: 01394 445220

Mobile: 07849 079285

Pronouns: She/Her

National Landscape Office, Saxon House, 1 Whittle Road, Hadleigh Industrial Estate, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP2 0UH

www.coastandheaths-NL.org.uk

www.dedhamvale-NL.org.uk

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Please note that I work flexibly. I work my contracted hours on a 9 day fortnight basis and will usually be unavailable every other Friday