

Ref: MR/P25-0480

21st November 2025

Kerr Brown

Planning Inspectorate

By email only KERR.BROWN@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Dear Kerr,

RE: Appeal Ref APP/D3505/W/25/3370515 at Land at Grove Farm and East of Railway Line, Bentley

At the Case Management Conference on Tuesday 4th November 2025 the Inspector advised that she would give further thought to this matter and advise. To assist the Inspector with this matter, we hereby submit:

- The 25 responses that were received to the appellant's consultation on the amendments together with a summary of the comments received.
- The appellant's comments on whether the proposed amendments alter the assessments made in respect of the original planning application.

Consultation Responses

Submitted alongside this letter is a folder containing the 25 comments received. These were submitted to Pegasus Group in response to the 227 letters that were issued to inform interested parties of the amendments. Comments were received both in support of and against the proposal. The comments received can be summarised as follows:

Support Comments

- Solar power is a vital component of energy policy.
- Landscape is uninspiring, and heritage structures not affected. Question the necessity of the size of the Conservation Area. Layout is well thought through and considerate.
- New plans considerably help to screen the solar farm from surrounding areas.
- Views will not be changed. Listed buildings not overlooked.
- No archaeological grounds for refusal.
- Encouraging that the changes will produce a far higher degree of mitigation from the first proposals. No heritage building will have a view into the site.

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Objection Comments

- Amendments do not address the major objections.
- Conservation Area has now been designated, no amount of additional screening can alter this fact.
- Loss of high quality agricultural land. Solar panels should not be on productive farmland.
- Inadequate justification for the hedgerow alterations.
- Visual and landscape impact. Residents want to keep the rural outlook that they enjoy.
- Impact on public amenity – screening from neighbouring properties still inadequate.
- Biodiversity and Wildlife concerns.
- Noise and glare.
- Development would conflict with local planning policy.
- Amendments will hide and disguise the desecration of the village.
- Set backs still wholly inadequate.

Appellant's Comments

Landscape

The appellant's landscaping witness has confirmed that the LVIA does not need to be updated to reflect the changes brought about by the amendments. Whilst there would be some material qualitative improvements, the narrative in the assessment remains an accurate portrayal of the nature of the described view of the development as experienced from the assessed viewpoints and there is no change in the level of effect from the specified receptors. There are some areas there are specific material improvements, but these are not addressed specifically in the LVIA so no update is necessary.

It is noted that some of the photomontages require updating to reflect the changes, however these are illustrative and do not alter the conclusions of the LVIA.

Heritage

The appellant's heritage witness has confirmed that the proposed amendments would not change the assessment undertaken to support the application; although this is caveated by the fact that this was prepared by a different consultant, and as such any assessment put forward at the Inquiry will be her own professional conclusions in any case.

Regardless, the proposed landscape changes are of a very modest nature. The increase in planting (Amendment B to reference the Amended Scheme Clarification Note) to the north of the non-

designated Falstaff Manor would further reduce visibility of the Scheme from this asset – insofar as there would be any presently given the current vegetation and the large agricultural shed immediately north of the building. The original assessment assessed a low level of harm arising from the change in character of the Site from agricultural to energy generation. This was assessed as harmful due to the former historic association between the Site and the asset rather than for any specific view of the Scheme. Although the planting ensures that there would be no views of the eastern parcel, even in winter, given the thickness of what would become the tree belt in this location, this would not reduce the assessment of a low level of harm arising from the change in character of the Site more generally.

The further planting along Church Lane as part of Amendment A will help to reduce potential visibility when moving along the lanes of the Conservation Area – however the Conservation Area was not assessed in the first place so any conclusions on this asset will be a new consideration for this appeal.

Biodiversity

The appeal submission included an updated Ecological Assessment Report and Biodiversity Metric to account for the amendments. Comments have since been received from the Council's Ecologist which we respond to as follows:

An outdated (pre-statutory) version of the metric was used

The application was submitted before Biodiversity Net Gain became statutory, and the ecologists updated the version that was originally submitted.

The solar array footprint has not been fully considered in the baseline assessment

This concern comes from the UKHab guidance published in 2023, which relies on a 'top down (i.e., aerial) view to classify habitats. It has not been the typical approach to assessing solar PV for many years and the precedent set across all scales of project has been to take c. 5% land take. Clearly the land under panels is available for biodiversity and has value. We have acknowledged the presence of panels in the assessment of condition as stated in assessors comments.

Even if the alternative approach was followed, we would achieve approximately 42% net gain overall, still well in excess of policy requirements.



The Ecological Assessment Report describes ditches, however no ditches are included within the Metric

The ditches were dry and therefore exempt from BNG.

The comments received from the Ecologist in respect of the appeal submission do not raise any concerns that relate to the amendments themselves.

Conclusions

The consultation responses and the comments from the appellant's team demonstrate, in the appellant's view, that the amendments do not fundamentally alter the consideration of the scheme in a way that would prejudice any party.

Yours sincerely,

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Associate Planner

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cc Jasmine Whyard (Babergh District Council)
Bentley Parish Council