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LANDSCAPE STATEMENT

PAUL HARRIS CMLI:

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PROPOSED BESS, WHITES  
FARM, BASILDON

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Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – Section 78 Appeal

Planning reference: 22/01108/FULL

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 I am Paul Harris, a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute with over 30 years professional experience in landscape assessment and design. I am director of MHP Design Ltd, an established landscape consultancy registered with the Landscape Institute for over 28 years. I have a degree and Diploma in Landscape Architecture from GLOSCAT, now the University of Gloucestershire. I also attend and represent landscape and visual matters for the Gloucestershire Design Review Panel. I have provided evidence on landscape design and landscape and visual matters at a large number of planning appeals over the past 12 years.
- 1.2 I have been instructed by Anglo ES Whites Farm Ltd, to provide a statement on landscape and visual matters for an appeal of full planning application 22/01108/FULL for a proposed Battery Energy Storage Site (BESS), substation compound, with associated infrastructure, fencing, existing access off Barleylands Road, drainage and landscaping (the 'Site').
- 1.3 My statement considers the landscape and visual effects of the proposed BESS development and in particular the visual effects on the openness of the Green Belt in this location.
- 1.4 The statement that I have prepared and provide for this appeal is true and the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## 2 REASON FOR REFUSAL AND THE SCOPE OF MY STATEMENT

- 2.1 My statement addresses landscape and visual matters with particular focus on the effects of the development proposals on the spatial and visual openness of the landscape in response to Reason for Refusal 1. Reason for Refusal 1 is a single reason for refusal which states:

*'The proposal represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt which is by definition harmful and prejudicial to the openness of the Green Belt. The proposed development is in conflict with Green Belt purpose (c) of paragraph 138 of the NPPF. The very special circumstances that have been evidenced do not provide sufficient reason to justify a departure from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The proposed development would cause significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt by reason of the proposal's location and siting. For these reasons, the proposed development is contrary to paragraphs 147, 148 and 149 of the NPPF 2021.'*

- 2.3 My statement will draw on the outcomes of the professional landscape assessment that accompanied the application and from observations made during visits to the site and the wider contextual area.
- 2.4 Reason for Refusal 1 is specific to Green Belt. Green Belt is not a 'landscape' policy but there is a visual aspect as visual impact has been found to be implicitly relevant to considering openness (Turner V SSCLG [2016] EWCA CIV 466). I do not focus my statement on landscape and visual harm generally as no significant conflict has been identified by the Council with landscape specific policies at either national or local level. The reason for refusal alleges that the development would represent inappropriate development which by definition would be harmful and prejudicial to the openness of the Green Belt. My statement therefore considers this harm in landscape and visual terms as two distinctive threads. The first being spatial harm arising from the development proposals on the landscape and the second as visual harm arising from the development proposals on the openness of the landscape.

- 2.5 My statement does not address the full implications contained within Reason for Refusal 1 and should be read in conjunction with the planning statement provided by Mr Barton for the Appellant.

### 3. THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The application site consists of level land of approximately 1.61 ha, immediately adjoining Whites Farm located off Barleylands Road, Basildon.

- 3.2 As set out in the 'Report to Planning Committee' [CDxx] under Agenda Item 4:

*'The site forms part of Whites Farm which comprises a much wider complex of commercial and leisure uses, farm buildings, a large stable building for 60 stables, indoor arena, ancillary buildings, outdoor menage and associated parking and grazing and nine container units all used for E(g) and B8 Use. There is a pylon which is located close to the proposed site with overhead powerline, which is clearly visible from the public footpath to the north of the proposed site. The pylon infrastructure is the connection point for the battery facility.'*<sup>1</sup>

- 3.3 I consider this an accurate and useful summary of the location of the appeal site, illustrating how built form is already readily established at this location. The committee report goes on to say that the site is located approximately 280m north-west of the Grade II listed Daniels Farm and 300m north of the Grade II Laindon ponds. Furthermore, the report confirms that the site is located approximately 500m north-east of the Noak Bridge Conservation Area. Whilst this paints a picture of a rural idyll, the reality is that the proposed development is not located adjacent to these potentially sensitive locations but rather is located immediately adjacent the significant structures and their associated activities at Whites Farm.

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<sup>1</sup> CDxx 2.2 page 7

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- 3.4 The appeal site is also located adjoining the pylon and overhead cable infrastructure to which the connection point to the grid would be made. This keeps the entire proposed development compact and contained with very limited encroachment beyond the footprint of the BESS itself. The proposed BESS development footprint is not only compact, but it would form part of the overall established footprint of Whites Farm.
- 3.5 I accept that the introduction of the BESS infrastructure will establish built form on land which is presently open. However, it will form a part of an existing development that already has an influence on the openness of the Green Belt in this location. The appeal proposals, in my assessment, would therefore not be seen as an incongruous and isolated development in open countryside where a clear loss of openness would be perceived. I consider this an important point because the appeal site location has been chosen to limit the potential for perceived loss of visual openness due to existing structures and visual containment.
- 3.6 The proposed access track and route of the below ground connection route to the grid will not give rise to any sense of spatial or visual loss of openness. It is only the battery storage containers and ancillary equipment and fencing that have potential to impact on the openness of the landscape. The extent of this spatial impact is identified in the aerial photograph extract provided below:
- 3.7 Figure 1 Proposed BESS at Whites Farm



- 3.8 The proposed BESS immediately adjoins the cluster of existing commercial and agricultural structures at Whites Farm. The battery storage containers which make up most of the new structures that would be introduced to the site, do not exceed 2.85m in height. This is considerably lower than the existing adjoining agricultural structures.
- 3.9 In visual terms the appeal site is well screened from the west (Barleylands Road) by the structures of Whites Farm and by existing field hedges. The appeal site is visible from a single public right of way that is orientated east/ west and which passes immediately north of the main farm buildings. There are also sports pitches located to the east of the appeal site where players and spectators would have potential views of the appeal site. These potential visual receptors are illustrated in Figure 1<sup>2</sup> of the Appellant's LVIA [CDxx]. To mitigate potential visual effects, the development proposals incorporate a new mixed species native

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hedge around the perimeter of the proposed development to provide screening when established. This is illustrated in Figure 20<sup>3</sup> of the Appellant's LVIA.

- 3.10 It is accepted (and identified through the Appellant's LVIA) that there would be views of the appeal site and its proposed structures (which I consider in my summary of landscape and visual effects) but these views are limited and localised. They are experienced within an active landscape and predominately seen in the context of the existing farm structures which form the backdrop to views from the east and north east.
- 3.11 I therefore consider that the location of the appeal site provides robust, inherent mitigation that reduces both potential landscape and visual effects at the outset. This is reinforced by new native hedge planting that will provide screening of the appeal site, conserving the existing landscape character and visual amenity.
- 3.12 The location of the appeal site and the development proposals have been evolved to limit change in the landscape by conserving the existing landscape character and character of the views already experienced. Where landscape character is conserved, the overall balance of elements in that landscape such as built form, open field, urban and rural characteristics will not be perceived to have been changed by development. Although there will have been a minor change to the spatial openness of the land immediately adjoining the farm, this change will not be readily perceptible to those active within or passing through the landscape in this location. The assessment outcomes of the Appellant's LVIA can therefore be used as a measure of how successfully the development will assimilate into the landscape, reducing sense of change in that landscape, resulting from loss of openness from the introduction of new built form.

#### **4. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS**

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- 4.1 The application was both informed and tested by the Appellant's landscape and visual assessment (LVIA). This assessment was undertaken in two distinct stages. The first stage input into the siting and design of the proposed layout in order to ensure that potential detrimental landscape and visual effects could be limited by design. This included the consideration of additional mitigation measures in order to limit potential harm where siting and design of the layout could not eliminate all potential adverse landscape and visual effects.
- 4.2 The second stage of the LVIA assessed the likely landscape and visual effects and their significance, to inform decision makers of how the proposals impact on the character and appearance of the landscape.
- 4.3 The professional methodology used for the LVIA was found to be acceptable to the Council and confirmed in paragraph 5.65 of the report to committee [CDxx]. Paragraph 5.66 also confirms that the Council are generally in agreement with the judgements of value, susceptibility and sensitivity assigned within the LVIA.
- 4.4 There are differences in professional judgement identified in the report to committee where the report considers the impacts from '*new industrial/urban development*' to be underestimated in the Appellant's LVIA. From reading the report to committee I note that no reference is made to the substantial existing structures which already inform the local character and impact on the existing spatial openness. These structures would form the immediate backdrop seen in local views of the appeal site.
- 4.5 However, putting professional subjective judgements to one side, the report to committee confirms in paragraph 5.69 that the overall effect on landscape character '*is not judged as substantial and can be minimised with suitable mitigation and enhancement measures.*' I therefore consider that both the Council and the Appellant are not far apart in the assessment and interpretation of effects of the proposed development on landscape character.



- 4.6 The Appellant's visual assessment identifies potential visual effects to be limited other than on walkers using a short length of public right of way 310\_200 which passes the appeal site immediately to the north. Views of the appeal site will be seen when approaching from leaving the recreation ground to the east, and when immediately passing the northern boundary. Views are then quickly screened by the existing structures of Whites Farm. Walkers heading eastwards on the public right of way have all views screened by structures of Whites Farm until immediately adjoining the northern boundary of the appeal site. After passing this short boundary the focus of walkers is towards the east and away from the proposed development.
- 4.7 Walkers will experience views of the appeal site in the immediate context of the existing farm structures. As such the development features will appear as part of the mixed cluster of built form already seen.
- 4.8 Although the Appellant's LVIA assesses that there would be a substantial visual harm experienced by walkers until mitigation hedge planting had established. This harm will reduce as the hedging establishes. The report to committee acknowledges that officers were generally in agreement with the assigned value, susceptibility and sensitivity judgements made by the Appellant in the LVIA and agreed that:
- 'On review, the adverse visual impacts will be primarily limited to those within the immediate surroundings, given the topography of the landscape and the vegetation within the local area. Officers therefore support the majority of the visual effects judged. Where judgements may differ, these are not deemed significant or substantial.'*<sup>4</sup>
- 4.9 I therefore conclude that the Appellant's LVIA is accepted as a fair assessment of the landscape and visual effects resulting from the development proposals. As both landscape and visual effects have been assessed to be limited and localised, there would be no

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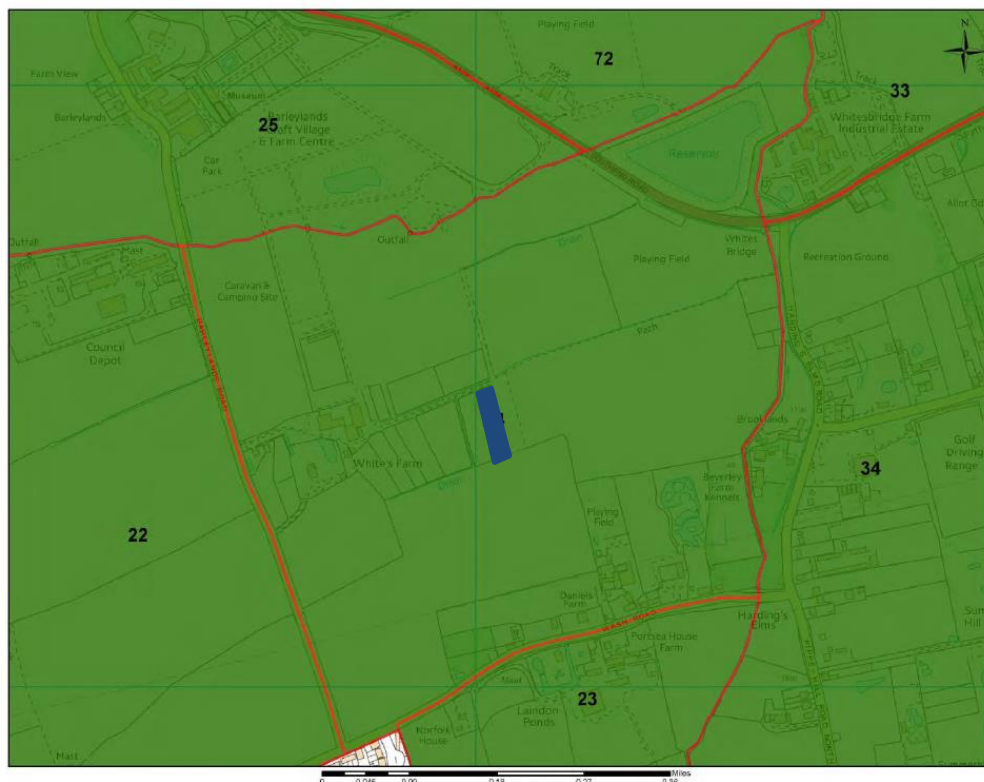
<sup>4</sup> CDxx para. 5.72

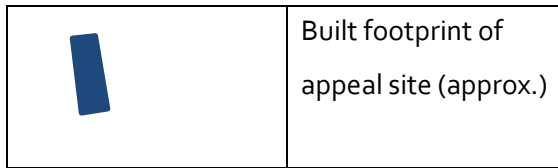
justification to support a separate landscape reason for refusal. I consider this to be important as where there is only limited and localised landscape and visual harm, the overall change to the landscape will be limited. I consider there to be a direct correlation between maintaining limited changes to a landscape and minimising changes to the perceived openness of that landscape with reference to Green Belt.

## 5. CONTRIBUTION TO THE PURPOSES OF GREEN BELT

5.1 The landscape in which the appeal site is located (Area 24) has been assessed in the Basildon Borough Green Belt Review 2017 [CDxx]. The extent of Area 24 is illustrated in paragraph 5.15 of the report to committee but for convenience I include it below in Figure 2

5.2 Figure 2 Area 24 of the Basildon Borough Green Belt Review 2017.





5.3 Area 24 measures approximately not less than 68 hectares in area. I note that the current large scale barns and sheds now present on the site are not illustrated in the plan extracted from the Basildon Borough Green Belt Review I show in my Figure 2. I indicate the approximate location of the proposed built form of the BESS on the extract to illustrate how the footprint of the appeal proposals form only a small area of the wider Area 24.

5.4 Area 24 was identified to make the following contribution to the purposes of Green Belt:

a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas; **[Partly contributes]**

b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; **[Partly contributes]**

c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; **[Partly contributes]**

d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and **[Does not contribute]**

e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. **[Not assessed, as per all areas in this Review – as this is the purpose of redevelopment]**<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CDxx para. 5.16

- 5.5 Overall, I assess that the Basildon Borough Green Belt Review identified that Area 24 does not make a significant contribution to the purposes of Green Belt, with only three purposes being partly contributed to.
- 5.6 This limited contribution to the purposes of Green Belt is accepted by the Council in their assessment in the report to committee made in paragraphs 5.17 to 5.22. The Council draw the conclusion that the appeal proposals conflict with only a single purpose of Green Belt, that of (c) encroachment of development into the countryside.
- 5.7 I accept that any introduction of new built form into an undeveloped green field site will result in encroachment into the countryside arising from the physical loss of open land and its replacement with built form. However, of the 5 purposes of Green Belt, the appeal site will only conflict with one purpose which has been identified in the Basildon Borough Green Belt Review for Area 24, to make only a '*partial contribution*' to that purpose of Green Belt in that location.
- 5.8 Whilst I accept that this remains a conflict with Green Belt policy, it is in my opinion a very limited conflict. Particularly because the appeal site is so closely associated with the existing structures of Whites Farm which themselves reduce the local perception of openness so limiting the magnitude of change that would be experienced in local views.

## 6. VISUAL OPENNESS AND GREEN BELT

- 6.1 The Appellant's LVIA identifies that open views into and across the appeal site are limited and localised. This is recognised by the Council who refer to adverse visual effects being limited to the '*immediate surroundings*'. Equestrian and sports participants at Whites Farm and the adjoining sports pitches may have local views but they are generally engaged in activities on which they focus. Walkers using the very immediate footpath are the predominant visual receptors who will perceive the greatest magnitude of change in their views.
- 6.2 These views are experienced for a very short length of the public right of way and generally walking westwards or immediately adjoining the appeal site when walking eastwards. These

views are therefore experienced in a very limited visual envelope or the 'immediate surroundings', as stated by the Council.

- 6.3 All views from the east or northeast of the appeal site will experience the existing farm structures of Whites Farm as a backdrop. The structures create a screen to longer distance views to the west (which would be further limited by hedgerow even if not obscured by existing built form). Whilst visual receptors will experience the open field between their location and the farm structures, the introduction of the appeal site development will make a very limited change to the extent of open landscape that will be seen. Views to the north and south will remain open as far as the adjoining hedgerows which again limit deep views into the wider landscape. The extent of the change likely to be seen is illustrated in the verifiable photomontages submitted as part of the application.
- 6.4 The mitigation hedge planting will predominately screen the general features of the appeal site development so conserving the landscape character and visual amenity. However, as the development proposals will be seen in the immediate context of the White Farm structures, the proposed new hedge will also be seen in this context. I consider this to have a neutral effect on the sense of openness perceived in potential local views as the depth of the views enjoyed will be barely seen to have changed. The introduction of a new native hedge which will, in due course, partly screen the existing agricultural barn in local views, will in my opinion be beneficial in that it will reduce views of the existing barn so reducing the visual prominence of existing built form.
- 6.5 It is therefore my professional opinion that the visual openness of the appeal site is not a key characteristic or of notable significance. It is a limited area of openness that is locally contained by features of local landcover. These features (such as hedgerows and buildings) prevent longer views into the wider landscape. As such there is no sense of a wider open landscape beyond the hedgerows and buildings seen in views immediate to the site. The introduction of the appeal proposals will make virtually no difference to the extent or distance of existing views already experienced so will have a negligible effect on the openness of the landscape and the sense of permanence of that openness.

- 6.6 The low visual prominence of the appeal site is a result of the embedded mitigation incorporated into the siting and layout design of the appeal proposals, to limit changes to views and change to landscape character including perceivable change to the openness of the landscape.
- 6.7 A recent appeal decision also considered openness of Green Belt and landscape harm in the immediate landscape to the east at Crays Hall Farm. Appeal APP/V1505/W/23/3318171 Land at Crays Hill Farm, Church Lane, Crays Hill CM11 2UN considered the effect of a new solar farm and associated infrastructure on the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt and the effect on landscape character and visual amenity. The planning application was refused on openness of Green Belt and had a separate reason for refusal for harm to landscape character and visual amenity.
- 6.8 The Inspector identified that *'The introduction of the proposed solar panels would detract from the openness of a significant part of the central part of the valley and would be seen alongside existing panels comprising the extended Outwood solar farm'*. The Inspector also identified that there would be a locally moderate adverse effect on landscape character. The area was identified to be popular with local residents, horse riders, walkers and cyclists and that a named public right of way the *'Ramsden Crays Circular Walk'* would be the most seriously affected by the development proposals. The Inspector did not disagree with the Council's opinion of landscape harm and the significance of that harm but accepted that the harm should be taken forward to consider in the final balance. The Inspector identified that the proposals would result in a moderate to major adverse visual harm reducing to moderate adverse over time. He noted that *'However, none of the PROWs would be affected for a significant distance except for the Circular Walk'*.
- 6.9 The Inspector drew the conclusion that *'The potential energy generation together with the limited degree of harm to landscape character and visual amenity along comprise the very special circumstances that outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness...'* and allowed the appeal. The proposed BESS is not the same as a solar farm development as it is of a much smaller scale and does not generate electricity itself. However, it's function to store and release electricity back into the grid when required, makes it a critical part of a stable

and reliable supply infrastructure. I therefore see considerable similarities between the two developments located in close proximity to each other.

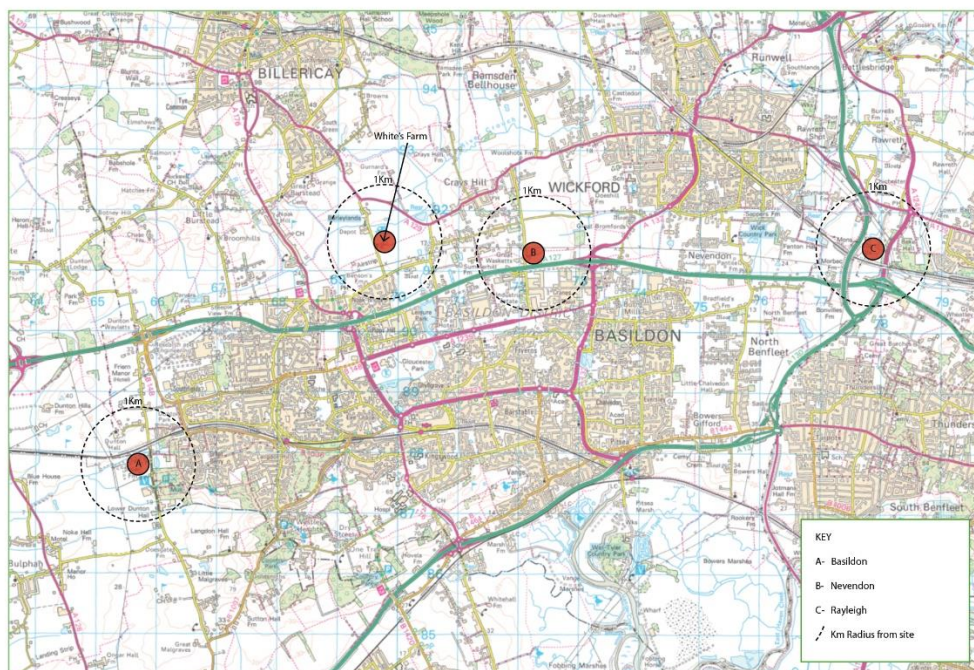
- 6.10 The application for the solar farm was different from that of a BESS but there are a number of commonalities which I consider relevant to this appeal. The solar farm consisted of components which the Inspector referred to as industrial, metallic, recognising the intrusiveness of associated structures such as CCTV poles, transformers and security fencing which would '*contrast starkly with the historic predominately agricultural landscape*'. This could be described of the BESS structures but these are robustly contained and visually associated with the existing structures (and storage containers) at Whites Farm.
- 6.11 Although landscape and visual harm has been identified by the Appellant in their LVIA for the proposed BESS, the Council are generally in agreement and accept that both landscape and visual harm would be limited and localised. The public right of way which passes the proposed BESS site is not a named trail like the Circular Walk identified at the solar farm. The proposed BESS has no landscape or visual reason for refusal unlike the solar farm. The Whites Farm BESS proposals, overall have a much lighter landscape and visual impact which I assess would also include impact on the openness of the landscape.

## **7 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND ALTERNATIVE SITES**

- 7.1 Although not considered as part of the Appellant's LVIA, an appraisal of the landscape sensitivity of a number of other potential sites which might provide the opportunity for grid connection and identified by the Local Planning Authority as alternative sites. The landscape within 1km of the following substations was considered during a site survey undertaken by Chartered Landscape Architect in September 2023:

- Basildon
- Nevendon
- Rayleigh

- 7.2 There were a number of common threads to general landscape characteristics arising from the land being agricultural but seen from the edge of the wider urban area. Power lines, pylons and built form are common throughout but hedgerows and trees bring localised visual containment. All of the areas appraised fall with the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 7.3 The location of these substations and the 1km radius of surrounding landscape is illustrated below.
- 7.4 Figure 2 Location of alternative connection points.



### Basildon Substation

- 7.5 The landscape in which Basildon substation is located lies just to the west of the urban area of Basildon on land that rises towards Dunton Hall. Of the three alternative locations the Basildon landscape had more of an elevated character due to its topography. This appeared to give greater potential visual sensitivity to the landscape generally. Pylons and overhead power lines were abundant in this visually more open landscape. Hedges and belts of trees



create local containment and introduced a sense of wilderness away from highways and energy installations (solar farm and substation). The Essex Wildlife Trust Langdon Nature Reserve Centre lies south east of the solar farm and substation. This is a well-used visitor centre which I consider sensitive to local development due to its strong association with local wildlife and as a district visitor attraction specifically associated with landscape and its habitats.

- 7.6 West of the substation and the urban edge generally is the wider agricultural landscape with an irregular field pattern comprising of well defined hedgerows which have capacity to visually contain the landscape at local level where not influenced by rising topography.
- 7.7 Overall, the landscape around the Basildon substation was appraised to have a greater sense of openness due to more pronounced local topography. The Langdon Centre Wildlife Reserve was also assessed to be sensitive to changes in landscape character which inform its setting although it is unlikely that significant views of any new development would be experienced from the centre. When compared with the Whites Farm appeal site, it is assessed that the Basildon site has slightly greater landscape and visual sensitivity.

#### Nevendon Substation

- 7.8 The Nevendon site lies within a local landscape which is quite contained by hedgerows and hedgerow trees and small woodlands. This green infrastructure creates a stronger sense of undisturbed agricultural landscape as built form and highway corridors are predominately screened. There is no sense of general wider openness due to the screening of green infrastructure further exacerbated by the strong vegetation containment found along local lanes and roads.
- 7.9 The strong containment of the landscape by local green infrastructure will limit visual sensitivity but the stronger sense of rural and unspoilt agricultural character has greater sensitivity to change than the Whites Farm site.

#### Rayleigh Substation

- 7.10 The Rayleigh substation site lies within a disturbed landscape where communication corridors cut through the landscape creating strong compartments. The wider landscape is considerably more developed although field hedgerows, tree planting along communication corridors and local woodland bring potential for strong visual containment. It is appraised that the landscape within the vicinity of the Rayleigh Sub Station has lower visual sensitivity and landscape sensitivity than Whites Farm due to the extent of local development and communication corridors. However, it is assessed that the contribution that the landscape makes to the purposes of Green Belt (preventing sprawl, encroach and coalescence of settlement) is more significant than the landscape at Whites Farm due to the extent of communication corridor infrastructure and built form within the wider landscape.
- 7.11 Overall, there are similarities of character of the wider landscape in which the three substations are located. All have a mix of rural and urban characteristics that make them slightly disturbed and active landscapes which benefit from local screening by established vegetation. This screening can limit long views so giving a sense of local containment to the landscape and reduced sense of openness. All of these landscapes fall with the Green Belt but each will make a slightly different contribution to the purposes of Green Belt.
- 7.12 Basildon substation is located adjoining Green Belt study area 65. The land in which the substation is located within is not included in the 2017 study. Area 65 was assessed to contribute as follows:
- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas; **[Contributes]**
  - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; **[Partly contributes]**
  - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; **[Contributes]**
  - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and **[Contributes]**
- 7.13 Nevendon substation is located within Green Belt study area 35. This area was assessed to contribute as follows:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas; [**Partly contributes**]
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; [**Contributes**]
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; [**Contributes**]
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and [**Does not contribute**]

7.14 Rayleigh substation is located just outside of Green Belt study Area 48. This area was assessed to contribute as follows:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; [**Parcel not relevant to this purpose**]
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; [**Does not contribute**]
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; [**Contributes**]
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and [**Does not contribute**]

7.15 Overall, the Basildon and Nevendon substation areas make a greater contribution to the purposes of Green Belt than Area 24 (Whites Farm). The Rayleigh substation was identified to make a greater contribution to the purposes of Green Belt than Area 24 (Whites Farm) in terms of preventing encroachment. The Rayleigh substation site was assessed not to contribute to parts a) sprawl, b) merging towns and d) setting of historic towns unlike the Whites Farm area 24 which was assessed to partly contribute to part a) sprawl and b) merging of towns. However, the Whites Farm proposal was refused planning permission due to conflict with part c) due to its partial contribution to preventing encroachment into the Green Belt. Paragraphs 5.17 to 5.20 of the Council's report to committee, sets out why the appeal site does not contribute to parts, a), b) or d) of the purposes of Green Belt. The Rayleigh substation site lies within a landscape assessed to make a 'contribution' to preventing encroachment into Green Belt. As such, with regard to conflict with part c) encroachment, the Rayleigh site would also conflict but to a greater extent.

7.16 I therefore conclude that with regard to harm to Green Belt, the development of the appeal site would result in the less harm to the purposes of Green Belt than the other alternative sites.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS**

8.1 The appeal proposals have been assessed to result in only limited landscape and visual harm.

8.2 The appeal site falls within study area 24 of the Basildon Borough Council Green Belt Review (2017) which identifies the land to make only a limited contribution to the purposes of Green Belt.

8.3 The appeal proposals will result in a spatial loss of openness through the implementation of the development proposals on undeveloped land. However, the extent to which this loss of openness will be perceived will be limited due to the close association of the appeal site with the existing farm structures and wider visual containment by field hedges.

8.4 Views of the appeal site are limited to the immediate area adjacent including a single public right of way that passes the northern boundary of the appeal site. New native hedge planting will provide mitigation to views as the hedge establishes. The appeal proposals will be seen in the context of the existing farm structures which are already experienced in these local views. This limits the extent to which the development proposals will be seen to reduce or change the sense of openness presently experienced in the immediate landscape to the appeal site.

8.5 Overall, the appeal proposals will have limited landscape and visual effects and as a result will not significantly change the perception of the openness of the landscape in which views of the site are obtained. The appeal proposals will conflict with part c of the purposes of Green Belt (encroachment) but this conflict will be limited in scale and perception due to the inherent mitigation of the appeal site and the potential to achieve further mitigation through the establishment of the native hedge planting.

- 8.6 My assessment of the alternative sites identified by the LPA at Basildon, Nevendon and Rayleigh, has confirmed that the landscape character is similar throughout. However, local differences in visual openness and potential landscape sensitivity are constraints to alternative areas that have been found not to be constraints of the current appeal site. All potential alternative areas assessed are located within the Metropolitan Green Belt and all make an equal or greater contribution to the purposes of Green Belt.
- 8.7 For the weight that should be given in the final planning balance to the benefit of the appeal proposals, landscape and visual harm and conflict with the purposes of Green Belt, I defer to Mr Barton and his planning statement. However, the identified limited harm to landscape character and appearance of the landscape underpins the capacity of the appeal site to accommodate the development proposals. Alternative areas around potential connection points to the grid do not appear to offer greater capacity in landscape and visual terms, to accommodate development. With regard to potential effects on the purposes of Green Belt, these alternative sites may increase potential for conflict.
- 8.8 I therefore consider the appeal proposals to have been reliably tested and found to be appropriate in terms of limited landscape and visual impacts including impacts on the visual openness of the Green Belt. Furthermore, other alternative locations do not appear to offer a better alternative in terms of Green Belt impact.