

Landscape Architect's response to Planning Application

From: Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd (Isla Denton-Thompson)

On behalf of: West Sussex County Council (Environment & Heritage Team)

Date: 17/07/2014

Application ref: BE/63/14/PL

Description: Installation of Solar Farm comprising erection of solar arrays, inverters, transformers, equipment housing, security fencing, internal tracks & ancillary equipment. Departure from the Development Plan.

Location: Manor Farm Shripney Lane Shripney

Determining Authority: Arun DC

Summary response: No objection with proviso conditions

Comments:

Relevant baseline information

- WSCC Landscape Character Assessment (2005)
 - County Character Area County Character Area SC9 Chichester and Yapton Coastal Plain
- WSCC Landscape Strategy
- Historic Landscape Characterisation
 - Late 20th Century Informal landscapes

Relevant landscape designations

4.5km from South Downs National Park

Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land

LBs in Shripney 500km to east

WSCC Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

The WSCC LCA is presented as Land Management Guidance sheets. The relevant sheet for this area is SC9 Chichester and Yapton Coastal Plain. The following points from SC9 are considered particularly relevant to the consideration of this proposal.

In the section entitled **Key Issues for Change** the following relevant issues are identified:

- *Loss of tree and hedgerow cover from agricultural intensification since World War II*

In the section entitled **Key Landscape Sensitivities** the following relevant issues are identified:

- *Fragmentation and loss of hedgerows and connections between hedgerow and woodland*
- *Replacement of mature treescape*
- *Changes in transport infrastructure due to urban development pressures*

In the section entitled **Key Land Management** objectives the following relevant issues are identified:

- *Create a new, large scale tree and hedgerow framework which complements the open intensively farmed landscape, whilst maintaining significant views of Chichester Cathedral, the South Downs and local features*
- *Maintain and strengthen field boundaries such as hedgerows and shelterbelts*
- *Link up existing remnant hedgerows and tree lines to re-establish coherent field boundaries and wildlife corridors*
- *Encourage and promote land management schemes to increase species rich grassland areas*
- *Promote management and establishment of grassland regimes of grazing, hay cutting and silage*

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The terra firma Consultancy Ltd.

Response

The site is in a rural location which is moderately influenced by a large area of poly tunnels (to the west) and a number of overhead powerlines. The site consists of large scale agricultural fields defined by fragmented hedgerow boundaries. The site is reasonably well screened from views from the wider landscape by the existing onsite vegetation and other intervening vegetation and the low lying flat character of the landscape. However there are number of localised views of the site from a number of PRoWs, roads and private residences surrounding the site as is identified in the LVIA submitted as part of the application.

I agree with the findings of the applicants LVIA and the landscape mitigation measures it proposes. The combination of the proposed and existing vegetation will aid in integrating the proposed solar panels into the landscape and in largely screening potential views. However more information is required as to the exact location of proposed planting along the western site boundary.

I cannot find a plan which shows the route of the proposed underground cable connection to the substation. Confirmation should be provided that the route of the cable will not have an adverse impact on the existing trees. I also cannot find a plan showing the proposed location of the CCTV cameras. It is important that these are sympathetically integrated into the landscape, for example using existing/proposed trees as screening.

The proposals include a wildlife protection zone seeded with a wildflower mixture which will provide positive biodiversity enhancements. I would also advise that the natural fertility of the soil within the development area is safeguarded and enhanced for its future restoration back to agricultural land, particularly given that the land is classified as Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land.

Full details and method statements for the planting and establishment of the proposed planting backed up with a management/maintenance plan should be conditioned including grazing/grassland management regimes.

Provided that the landscape mitigation proposals outlined in the LVIA are implemented and the following points are addressed by way of condition, I do not object to this application:

- More information is required as to the exact location of proposed planting along the western site boundary.
- The proposed location of the CCTV cameras should be confirmed. It is important that these are sympathetically integrated into the landscape, for example using existing/proposed trees as screening.
- I would advise that the natural fertility of the soil within the development area is safeguarded and enhanced for its future restoration back to agricultural land, particularly given that the land is classified as Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land.
- Full details and method statements for the planting and establishment of the proposed planting backed up with a management/maintenance plan should be conditioned including grazing/grassland management regimes.