

APPENDIX IV

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LVIA WITHIN THE MENDIP DISTRICT LANDSCAPES

View towards Meare and the Mendips from Sharpham Park near Street

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GENERALLY

As part of the landscape assessment project MDC are seeking to improve the consistency and standard of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA) submitted to the Authority alongside planning applications. The District view LVIA as an important tool in the design and planning process.

Assessments can assist with the design development process in that issues are recognised and addressed early

Accurate and comprehensive assessments help to clarify issues and allow pre-app and application processes to be progressed more efficiently

Clear well-presented assessments help the public and other agencies engage with application process as part of a positive consultation process.

LVIA may form a part of a wider Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as part of an Environmental Statement (ES) (these would be referred to as LVI Assessments. Alternatively, the authority may require a stand-alone assessment in which case this would probably be expected as a LVI Appraisal. The subtle distinction being in the legal requirement for EIA to identify 'significant' effects (reference GLVIA3).[1] Stand alone assessments may be appropriate where there may be local landscape sensitivities or concerns that need to be properly considered even though a full EIA is not required.

Consideration of landscape and visual effects will be important on many applications in the rural landscapes of the district and on the edges of the built up areas. They may still apply even in situations where existing development on or adjoining proposed development sites has an impact; LVIA may help recognise how schemes can be improved or existing impacts lessened as part of good site planning and design.

The authority expect that all LVIA studies would be undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect (member of the Landscape Institute) or other suitably qualified and experienced professional with an understanding of the best practice guidance. The current guidance being the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact, edition 3 (GLVIA3 – produced by the Landscape Institute in conjunction with IEMA – April 2013).

The majority of assessments received by the Authority will be reviewed by Planning Officers as opposed to Landscape professionals. The Authority may well seek external landscape consultant reviews of submitted assessments. To assist the both the Authority and members of the public it is expected assessments will be drafted with clear non-technical language with clearly explained methodologies and justified conclusions.

Useful guidance is also provided by the Landscape Institute on the topic of reviewing landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIA's) and landscape and visual appraisals (LVAs) [2].



SIGNIFICANCE

It is recommended that standard proformas and fixed standard assumptions are avoided in the preparation of assessments within the Mendip area. Particular care should be taken to consider the determination of 'Sensitivity' and 'Significance' in EIA LVIA's; the simple presence or absence of designations such as AONB or SLF do not confirm a landscape may not be valued or sensitive to change. Consideration should include reference to the Eight Landscape Qualities of the MDC collection of landscapes.

BASELINE ASSESSMENTS

This study provides information on a range of landscape aspects. Landscape Character areas are defined as broad areas, within which the degree that the identified character may be seen will vary. The assessments provided are a guide to the characteristic features and perceived character of each area; more local / site specific considerations of project areas



Turbines at Shooters Bottom / Chewton Mendip

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will still be important elements of an LVIA. Other aspects of the baseline landscape conditions provided in this study include the layers of natural, heritage, cultural and social interest, tranquility and dark sky mapping and recreational access.

The visual amenity of the district is generally high and the assessment includes reference to various views, viewpoints and landmarks. Among the Eight Landscape Qualities of the district the continuity of good generally unspoilt landscapes along all the main strategic routes is noted. This means that the main road corridors, although often heavily trafficked, should be considered sensitive viewpoints. Average daily traffic data for the main strategic routes is provided in graphic form here to assist with this aspect of baseline assessment.

The district has a good network of rights of way and minor lanes; these vary from some which are heavily used and others which offer more remote and isolated experiences; both types would be considered relatively sensitive (as the number of users diminish the sensitivity of individuals to small intrusions may well increase). Very few overgrown barely used paths within the district were noted in this study.

In respect of recreational access views it should be noted the district benefits from having a good selection of long distance paths, cycle trails and open access land which attract local and tourism users. In addition, the remaining former railway lines are identified as future sustainable transport links in the Local Plan. In relation to even general paths in more average areas of rural landscape, the proximity of Mendip to the urban populations of Bristol, Bath and North Somerset means there is in the order of 1m people in the local area with potential interest in this landscape.

Within the outputs from this study as much information as possible has been collated into GIS format and clear mapping to assist with the production of comprehensive baseline

assessments. These files and the graphic output from this study is intended to be freely available for this use. While this information has been compiled in good faith the Authority will have no responsibility to third party users of this data.

For a comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment the following topics are recommended as a check list to ensure all aspects of potential interest or value in the landscape are covered:-

Context – is there a wider context in which the development site or proposals sit – proximity to built up areas / strategic roads, position within the collection of Mendip landscapes

Physical Landscape Features – are there any topographical, geological/morphology, drainage, tree or vegetation cover, built or designed landscape elements that may be of value (intrinsic value irrespective of character or by public perception).

Landscape Character – how does the site/setting relate to the NCA and LCA's listed in this study, physical characteristics and perceptual aspects (including tranquility, remoteness, isolation, or semi natural character).

Tangible interests such as wildlife or flora, heritage, cultural interest, events, social space that may add to users experience or local sense of value.

Recreational function with reference to the districts network of PROW, Accessible woodlands, reserves, open access land, shared cycle / pedestrian routes and national cycleway links, back roads and minor lanes, rivers and lakes and occasional areas of private land that are used for recreational pursuits.

Under the same heading access for pedestrian and cycle users to make connections for other types of use such as the daily walk to school or commute can be included.

Designated status – formal designations or wider expressions of value that would confirm the location as a Valued Landscape

Visual Amenity - Views, Viewpoint's, Viewers and Landmarks



Pylons near Upper Godney

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CAPACITY AND SUSCEPTIBILITY TO CHANGE

As part of a baseline study consideration should be given to the capacity of the landscape to accept proposed forms of development and/or the susceptibility to impacts that may be particularly related to the type of development envisaged.

ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS

All assessments will be expected to show consideration of both landscape and visual impacts, as separate albeit related issues. Landscape effects should be considered in terms of irrespective of any public perception and those which may be perceived from public places or by sensitive parts of the population (e.g. this could include private residential areas). This consideration is of particular relevance to the renewable energy sectors.

Wind turbine developments may be perceived to have predominantly visual impacts; but as evidenced by the existing installations in the area they may still impact on aspects such as landscape character. This may be on the sense of tranquility (both noise and visual), remoteness or isolation and the District's semi natural settings. Several of these attributes relate to blocks of land between main roads, so if a development is encountered mid walk through a block or character area that effect could diminish the experience of a whole walk.

Large solar developments may be seen as having predominantly landscape effects as they are often not so visible, but similar concerns over tranquil (visually unspoilt), remote, isolated semi natural settings occur. In addition there are often localised visual intrusions often at gateways where close quarter views directly into installations open up to minor lanes or footpaths. While sometimes only a short view the lack of attention to this issue or effort to address creates the sense of an unnecessary or easily avoided impact which may be perceived as more

intrusive. The visual impact of additional overhead powerlines and plant should also be factored in.

Even hydro electric developments which often have a very small footprint and by definition are sited low in any topography; can have both landscape and visual impacts.

There are examples of unsightly engineering structures appearing in very natural riverscapes and appearing totally out of place. Considering potential impacts irrespective of public views should encourage more elegant engineering, developers of such structures should not assume they will never be seen. Access to rivers for angling and kayaking is subject to change over time; the River Frome has been used for regular kayaking for more than 30 years. Changes to water levels or flow may also impact on such recreational use; the availability of semi natural landscapes for adventure activities is again noted within one of the Eight Landscape Qualities of the District.

COMBINED AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Some developments may only present a range of minor effects. None of which on their own would be considered as significant. Despite this in the more sensitive locations assessments should acknowledge the potential for combined effects on several different aspects to result in a diminished landscape resource overall.

The cumulative impact of many small or moderate developments can degrade both landscape and visual amenity. Again this is of particular relevance to the renewable sector. The existing distribution of both solar and wind development across the Mendip district is already frequent. Most long views particularly in the east Mendip area include more than one of the larger turbines, along with the Pen Hill Mast and occasionally the various telecom towers. In two locations there are pairs of similar turbines which mean that while individually they are not always in view the is a constant presence of the structures in the local views. This frequency of recurrence in views means that while some are so distant that individually



Solar Farm Installation Sleight Lane near Dinder Wood

they would be insignificant, the repetition of intrusions starts to become an issue.

The larger turbines and PV sites have been mapped for this study on a GIS layer. This is available to download for assessment work (MDC offer no guarantee of accuracy on locational info and note that this resource may not be constantly up to date).

Landscape Strategies and Mitigation

Given the generally good condition of landscapes across the MDC area it is recognised that some developments will generate some aspects of harm to the landscape resource. As sites in more sensitive locations come forward it should be expected that the landscape design response will need to be more ambitious to address such effects.

Good understanding of potential adverse impacts can lead to positive ideas on how to avoid or reduce or the level of harm. On larger developments it would be expected that as part of the design process and/or development of a Design and Access Statement (DAS) a Landscape Strategy would be included. These would link with the expectation for Open Space and Green Infrastructure as would be covered by Local Plan Policy DP16. These would normally include explanation of the open space provision and allowances of strategic landscape and public realm, and design approaches for play, parking, streetscapes, biodiversity, Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS), Cycle and pedestrian access/circulation, biodiversity enhancement, hard and soft landscape (and even edible landscape).

Such Landscape Strategies or DAS documents would normally directly connect to any mitigation measures arising from LVIA assessments. Imaginative and multifunctional design

approaches and mitigation ought to be seamless. Sometimes a substantial adverse impact may be seen to become far more tolerable if obvious attempts are made to either offset or to mitigate the situation.

Landscape Strategies and Mitigation proposals should be developed with an understanding of the wider issues that the District's landscapes face (refer to section 8). The Council are seeking measures to address the dual issues of the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency. The spread of Ash Die Back is also identified as an immediate major issue for the area. In this situation there is potential for more ambitious mitigation measures to also assist with the wider objectives that seek to rebalance these wider environmental concerns.

Net gains in tree cover is an ambition that will be set back by Ash Die Back. Mitigation for the loss of diseased trees is sometimes suggested as a 3:2:1 approach. Replace one mature tree with a least 3 saplings, a semi mature tree with 2 and any younger trees on a like for like basis [Devon County Council Action Plan].

Could be set out as alternative ratios if a net gain in tree cover is considered appropriate.

As part of the management of CO2 emissions the role of soils needs to be recognised (soils are thought to represent the largest store of terrestrial carbon). Measures to protect site soils within landscape or mitigation strategies for larger development projects is therefore appropriate.

Opportunities to improve the network of Public Rights of Way (PROW) and cycle routes may offer aspects of enhancement that could be seen to offset other aspects of harm. (Note if there are few existing routes identified in a simple baseline assessment any impact may be assessed as neutral, without highlighting the potential for positive net gain).

It is envisaged that with the urgency needed to deliver real reductions in carbon dioxide emissions more renewable projects may need to be accommodated. Given the existing coverage identified and the potential for cumulative impacts there will be some aspects of landscape and visual impact will not be possible to directly mitigate. As part of a more ambitious approach to mitigation other means of offsetting may have to be considered as a last resort response. Given the point that such installations occur on rural land holdings there may be scope for wider public access, tree/woodland planting or other forms of significant habitat creation / management to be delivered by condition as an alternative.



Warren Farm Turbine from Maesbury Castle Scheduled Monument

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PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Comprehensive LVIA and ambitious imaginative mitigation are key to gaining support and raising public confidence. Assessments that down-play potential effects do not convince. In circumstances where necessary development will have adverse effects clearer presentation of the expected benefits (social, economic or environmental) may also help to convey the rational for such harm being acceptable.

As part of positive public engagement, particularly in the climate and energy debate; clearer information on expected output and post construction monitoring is one way of helping people appreciate the need for change and how potential impacts can and will be managed.

By way of an example of how a positive engagement can add to landscape interest; the small-scale hydroelectric project on the river Frome at Tellisford, includes a public display board charting the output for visitors on the footpath past the former mill building. This creates interest and a direct explanation of how the natural changes in water level influence the output from the site.

(Public data from other renewable sites and what that means in terms of energy produced and CO2 emissions saved is scarce. Within Section 5 of the main report overall comparisons of the existing renewable generation within the district is estimated from peak output figures to help the general understanding of how the landscape impact of these sites relates to the number of dwellings supplied)

REFERENCES FOR APPENDIX 4.0

- [1] *GLVIA3 (Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment - Third Edition)*
- [2] *Reviewing Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA) and Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs) Technical Guidance Note 1/20 (10 Jan 2020)*

