

Planning Application for the Installation and Operation of a Solar Farm and Associated Infrastructure New Rides Solar Farm, Landscape & Visual Assessment

PREPARED BY PEGASUS GROUP ON BEHALF OF ENGERIEKONTOR UK LTD | JUNE 2021 | P20-3549.001C



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Assessment has been prepared on behalf of Energiekontor UK LTD by Pegasus Group. It relates to an area of agricultural land on the Isle of Sheppey to the south of Eastchurch as shown on Figure 1. This Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) considers the site and its surrounding context in both landscape and visual terms, to assess the potential effects of the proposed solar installation upon:
- Landscape features;
 - Landscape character; and
 - Visual amenity.
- 1.2 The assessment responds to Swale Borough Council’s EIA Screening Opinion which confirmed that the proposed development was not EIA development, however, noted that the planning application should be supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and detailed landscape scheme.
- 1.3 This assessment has been guided by the assessment criteria set out in Appendix 1. It should be noted that all of the landscape and visual effects stated within assessments such as this are considered adverse unless stated otherwise. It should also be noted that all effects are considered direct, long-term but non-permanent unless otherwise stated.
- 1.4 The assessment has been prepared through a desk study analysis of the site and its policy context to gain an appreciation of the landscape and visual context of the site.
- 1.5 This LVA has been prepared during the period where UK Government advice has been not to undertake any unnecessary activity outside of the home and travel only when essential. It was therefore determined appropriate to not carry out site work to aid the production of the assessment. Instead, the LVA has been informed by analysis using OS mapping, aerial mapping, and ‘street-view’ imagery, as well as knowledge of the landscape in and around the site held by the landscape architect from previous projects. It has also been deemed appropriate to use ‘street-view’ imagery to provide the photographic record in the document. Once Government restrictions have been lifted, updates to the LVA with on-site photography could be undertaken, if required.
- 1.6 A landscape masterplan is illustrated by Figure 7 and conveys the landscape strategy for the site.



Figure 1: Site Location and Surroundings

2. METHODOLOGY

Published LVA Guidance

- 2.1
- The LVA has been undertaken in accordance with the principles of best practice, as outlined in published guidance documents listed in the reference section of this report, notably the third edition of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3), (Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).
- 2.2
- The methodology and assessment criteria for the assessment have been developed in accordance with the principles established in this best practice document. It should be acknowledged that GLVIA3 establishes guidelines, not a specific methodology. The preface to GLVIA3 states:

‘This edition concentrates on principles and processes. It does not provide a detailed or formulaic ‘recipe’ that can be followed in every situation – it remains the responsibility of the professional to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the task in hand.’
- 2.3
- The approach set out below and in detail in Appendix 1 has therefore been developed specifically for this assessment to ensure that the methodology is fit for purpose.

Distinction between Landscape and Visual Effects

- 2.4
- In accordance with the published guidance, landscape and visual effects were assessed separately, although the procedure for assessing each of these is closely linked. A clear distinction has been drawn between landscape and visual effects as described below:
 - Landscape effects relate to the effects of the indicative proposals on the physical and perceptual characteristics of the landscape and its resulting character and quality; and
 - Visual effects relate to the effects on specific views experienced by visual receptors and on visual amenity more generally.

Types of Landscape and Visual Impacts Considered and Duration

- 2.5
- The LVA assesses both the permanent effects of the development and the temporary effects associated with its construction.
- 2.6
- Consideration has been given to seasonal variations in the visibility of the development and these are described where necessary.

- 2.7
- Both beneficial and adverse effects are identified in the assessment and reported as appropriate. Where effects are described as ‘neutral’ this is where beneficial effects are deemed to balance the adverse effects. The adverse and beneficial effects are communicated in each case so that the judgement is clear.
- 2.8
- As part of the proposed development, new planting would be introduced. Newly planted vegetation takes a number of years to mature and average growth rates have been taken into consideration in this assessment. The effectiveness of vegetation would improve over time (both in terms of integrating the development into the surrounding landscape and in providing visual screening) and this needs to be considered appropriately.
- 2.9
- Therefore, permanent landscape and visual impacts of the project are assessed both in the winter of year 1 (the year in which the development is completed) and also in the summer of year 5 (5 years after completion of the development). In this second scenario it is assumed that vegetation planted as part of the development will have established and exhibit a degree of maturity.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Assessment

Assessed Proposal

- 2.10
- The project proposals have been developed iteratively in conjunction with the production of the LVA with the intention of incorporating mitigation into the project from the outset. The effects identified and described as part of this LVA are based on the landscape masterplan as shown in Figure 7.

Baseline Information

- 2.11
- The baseline landscape resource and visual receptors were identified in part through a desk based study of Ordnance Survey mapping, published landscape character studies, relevant planning policies, interrogation of aerial photography.

3. SITE CONTEXT

- 3.1
- The site is located on the Isle of Sheppey, an area of land in north Kent which is separated from the main land by The Swale, a relatively short stretch of river between the River Medway and the North Sea. Most development on the Isle of Sheppey is concentrated to the north-west at the towns of Sheernees,Minster, Halfway House and Queensborough and to the north-east at Leysdown-on-Sea, Warden and Eastchurch. Central and southern parts of the Isle of Sheppey are dominated by marshes and include Elmley National Nature Reserve and The Swale National Nature Reserve.
- 3.2
- The site is located approximately centrally on the Isle of Sheppey on gently sloping agricultural land, approximately 1km to the south of the village of Eastchurch and in proximity to the Sheppey Prison Cluster to the west of the site, made up of HMP Swaleside, HMP Elmley and HMP Stanford Hill, including clusters of residential properties to the north of the prison cluster. Land to the north, east and south of the site is predominantly agricultural with scattered farmsteads.
- 3.3
- A number of wind turbines lie either in between fields within the site as well as to the south of the site. These turbines, known as New Rides Wind Farm, were constructed in 2019 and are 125m high to blade tip. Their locations are shown on Figure 8. These turbines appear as prominent vertical features within the landscape.
- 3.4
- A recently constructed solar farm, namely the Old Rides Solar Farm, lies adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site, its location illustrated by Figure 8. An additional solar farm called South Lees Solar Farm lies approximately 3.5km to the north-west of the site
- 3.5
- A photographic record of views toward the site and its local context is provided in Appendix 2, with the photographic locations illustrated in Figure 12.

4. DESIGNATION AND POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 This section provides an overview of the policies and designations of particular relevance to landscape and visual issues. Figures 2 to 6 illustrate relevant designations within the locality of the site. The site is located within the administrative boundaries of Swale Borough Council.

Landscape Designations

4.2 The site is not covered by any national or local landscape designations. The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approximately 10km to the south of the site, as illustrated by Figure 2. An Area of High Landscape Value (Kent Level) as defined by Swale Borough Council is located approximately 0.5km to the south of the site with its location shown on Figure 3.

4.3 There are no listed buildings or scheduled monuments on the site. The locations of listed buildings and scheduled monuments in proximity to the site are shown on Figure 4, and summarised below and are dealt with in relevant archaeological reports:

- Four Hangers at HM Prison Stanford Hill (Grade II listed) located approximately 0.9km west of the site(LB-EAC-0015);
- Parsonage Farmhouse and Garden Walls (Grade II listed) approximately 0.8km to the north-west of the site (LB-EAC-0002 and 0003);
- A cluster of listed buildings close to the junction of High Street and Church Road in Eastchurch, most notably All Saints Church (Grade I listed), located approximately 1.2km north-west of the site (LB-EAB-0004);
- 22 High Street in East Church (Grade II listed) located approximately 1.15km north of the site (LB-EAB-0005); and
- Shurland House scheduled monument and Shurland Farm (Grade II listed, LB-EAC-007) located approximately 1.25km north of the site.

4.4 A public right of way (ZS46) crosses the site in a north-south orientation , passing close to or through parts of the site boundary, including southern and central parts. This footpath along with other surrounding public rights of way are shown on Figure 5.

4.5 National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 174 is located approximately 4.9km to the north-west of the site at its closest point, providing a link between NCN route 1 at Sittingbourne to Sheerness and Minster on the Isle of Sheppey.

4.6 A number of ecological designations lie close to the site including The Swale SSSI, SPA and Ramsar designations, Elmley National Nature Reserve, The Swale National Nature Reserve, as well as other local designations. These are dealt with in relevant ecological reports.

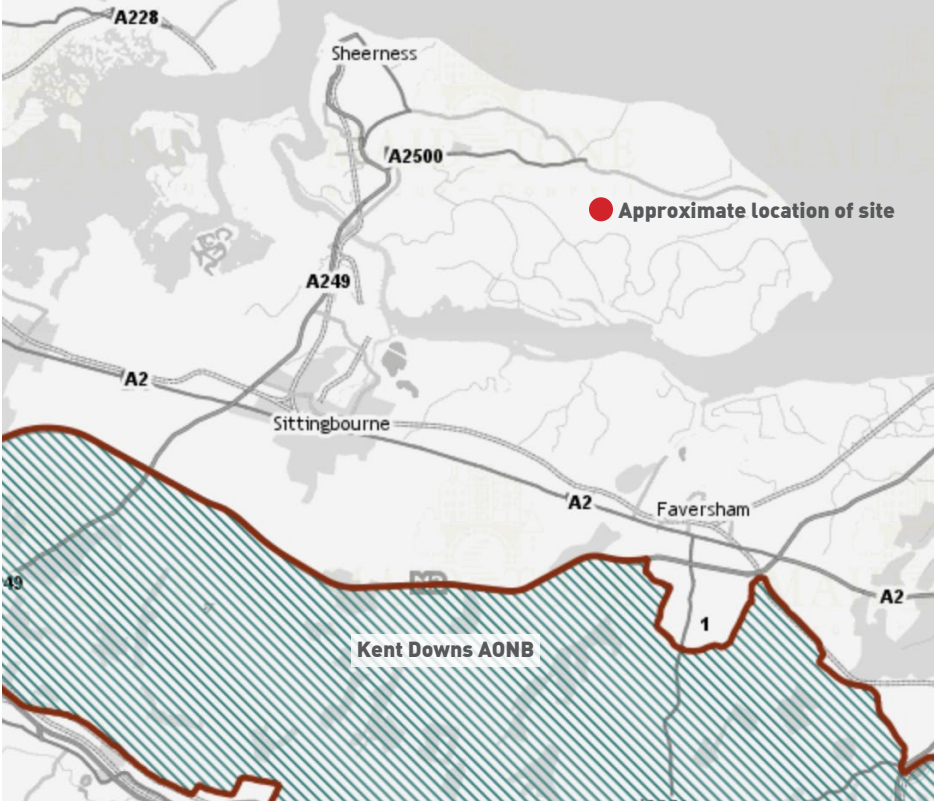


Figure 2: Extract of Swale Borough Councils interactive map of adopted Local Plan (Bearing Fruits 2031) - AONB

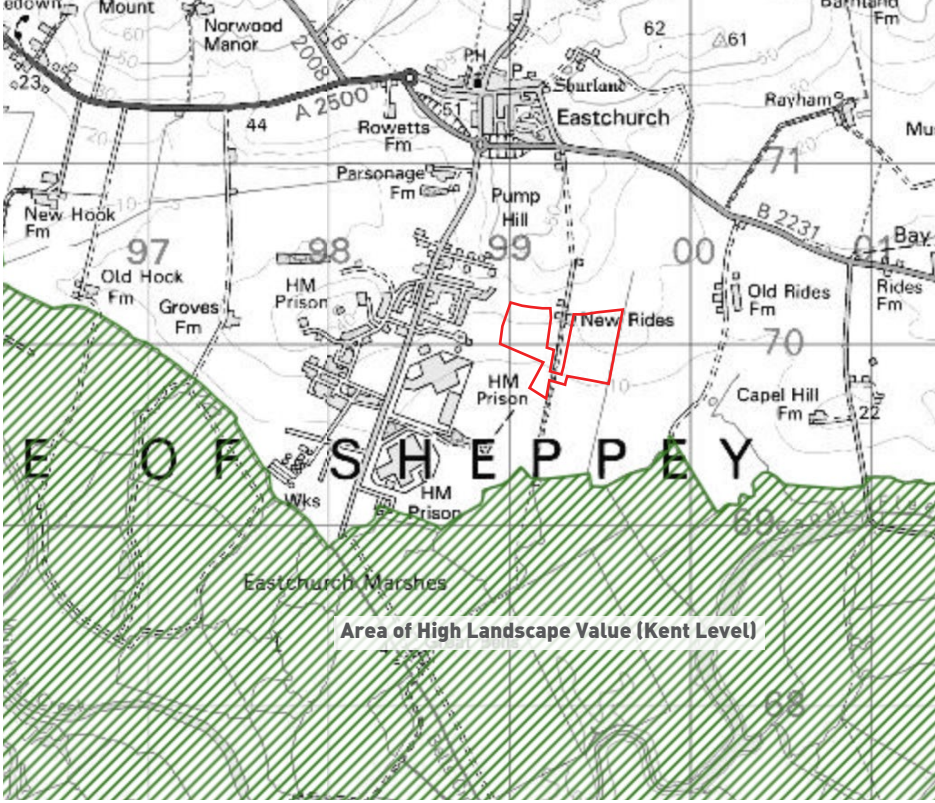


Figure 3: Extract of Swale Borough Councils interactive map of adopted Local Plan (Bearing Fruits 2031) - AHLV

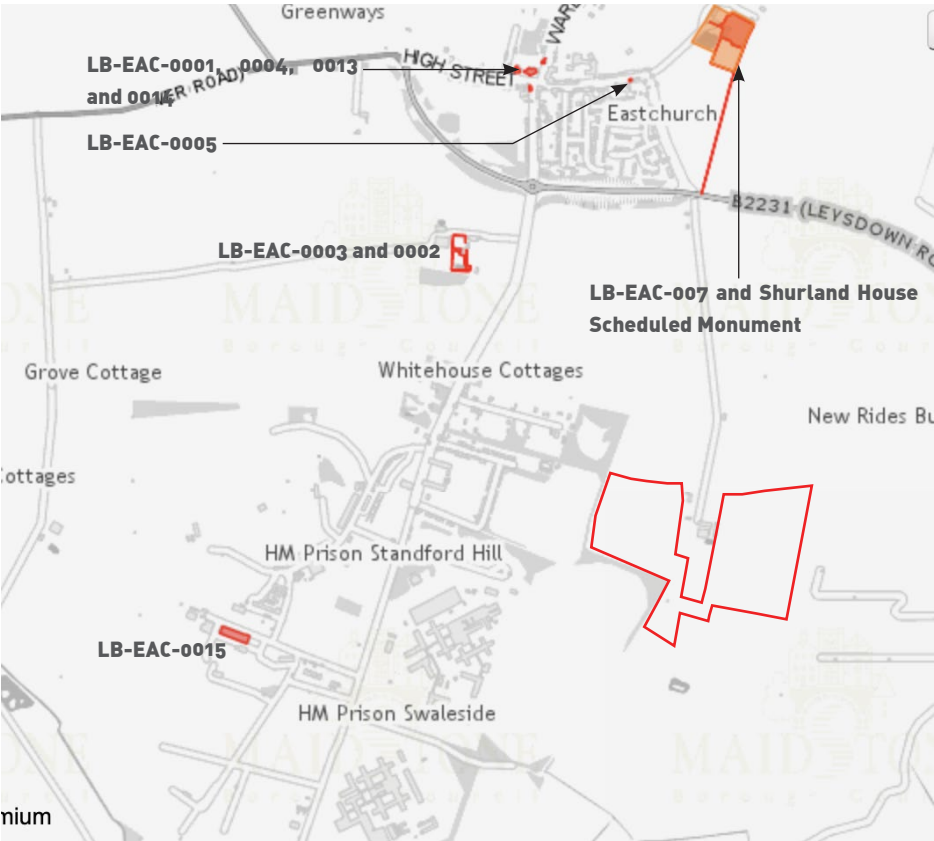


Figure 4: Extract from Swale Borough Councils Heritage and Environment interactive map

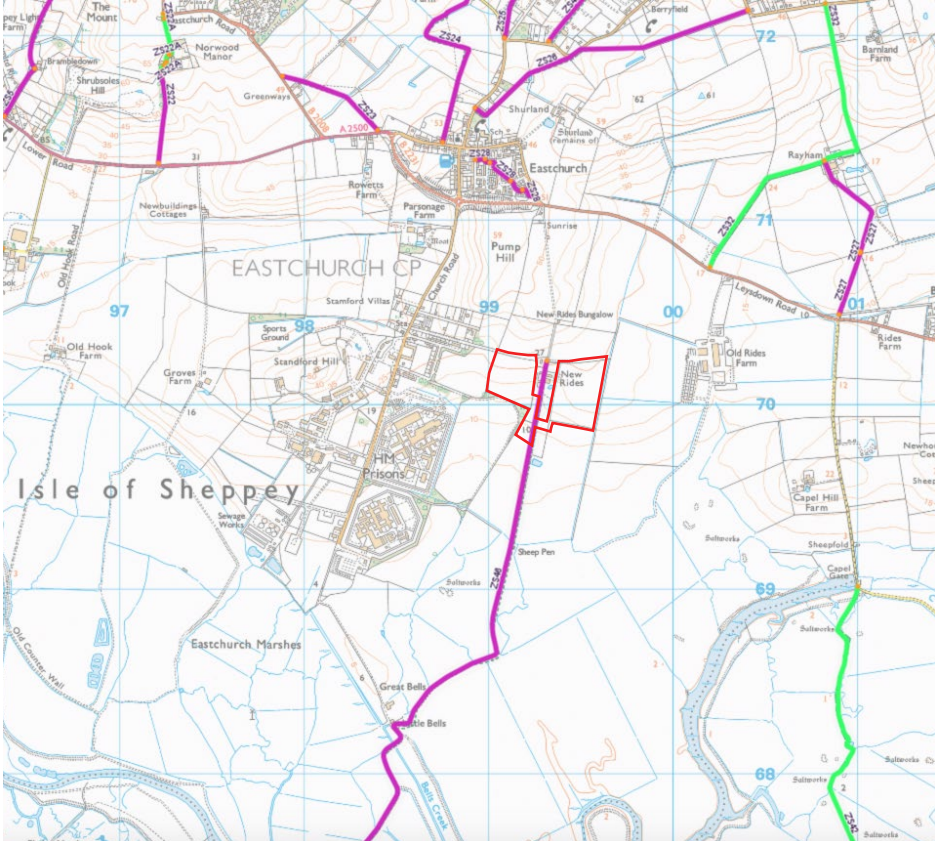


Figure 5: Extract from Swale Borough Councils Public Right of Way interactive map

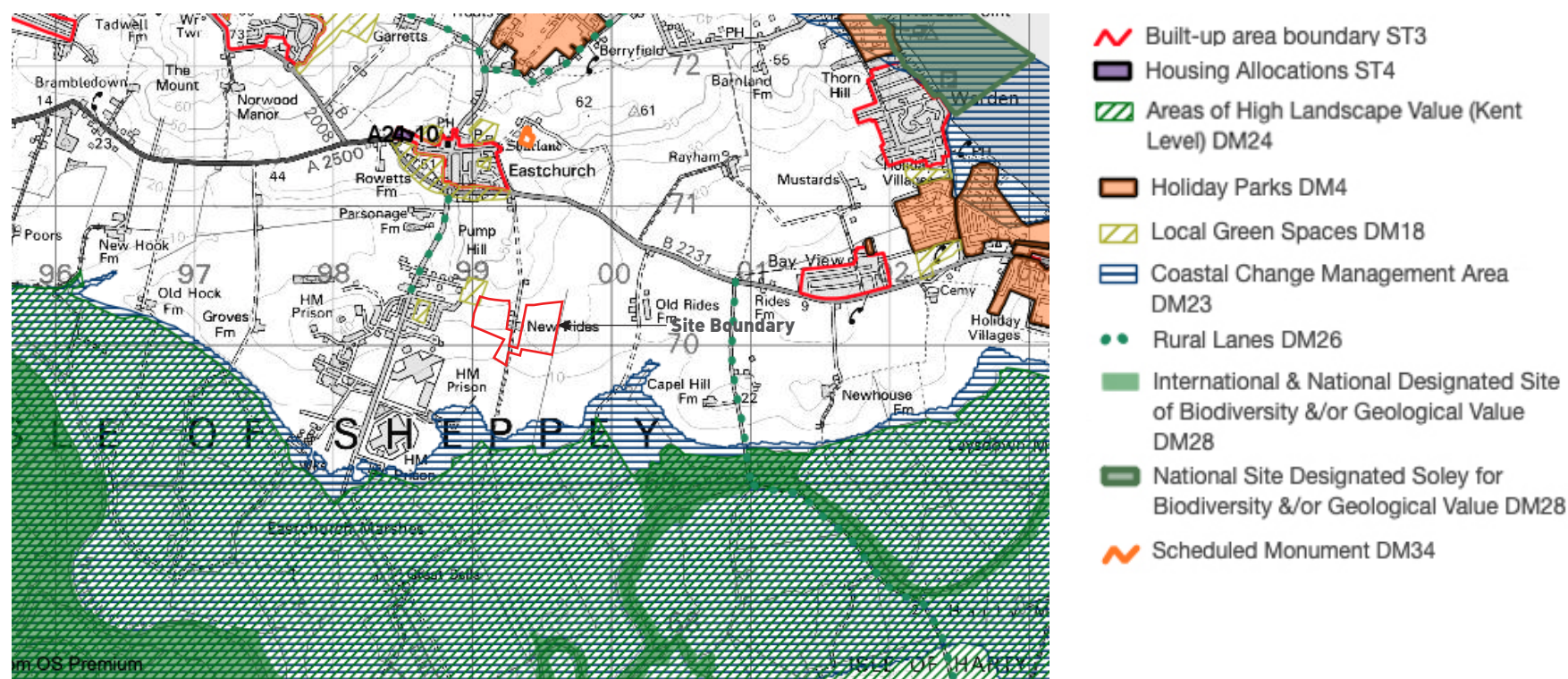


Figure 6: Extract of Swale Borough Councils interactive map of adopted Local Plan (Bearing Fruits 2031)

Relevant Landscape Planning Policy

National Planning Guidance

- 4.7 Government revised the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in February 2019. This document sets out a general presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11) and guides the Local Planning Authorities in the production of Local Plans and in decision making.
- 4.8 In paragraph 148, the NPPF sets out its support for renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure, with subsequent paragraphs in section 14 setting out how this can be achieved.
- 4.9 Paragraph 170 of the NPPF in relation to valued landscapes, states:

'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland...'

- 4.10 Although the site is in proximity to an area designated as an Area of High Landscape Value (Kent Level), it does not cover any part of the site, and therefore, the site is considered not to be a valued landscape in accordance with the NPPF.

Local Planning Policy

- 4.11 The site is situated in the Swale Borough Council (SBC) local authority area. SBC has adopted The Swale Borough Local Plan - Bearing Fruits 2031 as of July 2017. Those policies of relevance to the site are considered below and an extract from SBCs interactive map is illustrated in Figure 6.
- 4.12 An Area of Higher Landscape Value (AHLV) (Kent Level), is located approximately 0.5km to the south of the site at its closest point, its location in relation to the site illustrated by Figure 3. Policy DM24 of the local plan in relation to conserving and enhancing valued landscapes states:

'Part A. For designated landscape areas...

2. Areas of High Landscape Value (Kent and Swale Level) are designated as being of significance to Kent or Swale respectively, where planning permission will be granted subject to the:

- 1. conservation and enhancement of the landscape being demonstrated;*
- 2. avoidance, minimisation and mitigation of adverse landscape impacts as appropriate and, when significant adverse impacts remain, that the social and or economic benefits of the proposal significantly and demonstrably outweigh harm to the Kent or Swale level landscape value of the designation concerned...*

...Part B. For non-designated landscapes:

1. Non-designated landscapes will be protected and enhanced and planning permission will be granted subject to:

- 1. the minimisation and mitigation of adverse landscape impacts; and*
- 2. when significant adverse impacts remain, that the social and or economic benefits of the proposal significantly and demonstrably outweigh the harm to the landscape character and value of the area.*

Part C. For all landscapes:

1. The scale, layout, build and landscape design of development will be informed by landscape and visual impact assessment having regard to the Council's Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study and Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal SPD, including, as appropriate, their guidelines, and the key characteristics, sensitivity, condition and capacity of character area(s)/landscapes, taking opportunities to enhance the landscape where possible, including the removal of visually intrusive features.'

- 4.13 Policy DM20 of the local plan in relation to renewable and low carbon energy states:

'Planning permission will be granted for the development of renewable and low carbon energy sources where:

6. Landscape, visual...including cumulative impacts, are minimised and mitigated to acceptable levels;'

- 4.14 In relation to general development criteria, Policy DM14 of the local plan states:

'All development proposals will, as appropriate...

...5. Reflect the positive characteristics and features of the site and locality...

9. Provide for an integrated landscape strategy that will achieve a high standard landscaping scheme that informs the earliest stages of a development proposal;'

4.15 Policy CP4 of the local plan in relation to requiring good design, states:

‘All development proposals will be of a high quality design that is appropriate to its surroundings. Development proposals will, as appropriate...

...2. Enrich the qualities of the existing environment by promoting and reinforcing local distinctiveness and strengthening sense of place...

...6. Conserve and enhance landscape, biodiversity and local environments by:

a. assessing and responding to landscape character, condition, sensitivity and any limitations arising from its overall capacity for change, together with the guidelines set out within the Landscape Character and Biodiversity Assessment and Guidelines and Urban Extension Landscape Capacity Study;

b. retaining trees where possible (including old orchards and fruit trees, hedgerows, shelter belts, woodland and scrub) particularly those that make an important contribution either to the amenity, historic, landscape character or biodiversity value of the site or the surrounding area;

c. providing a high standard of locally native plant species and trees (of local provenance and supportive of biodiversity) for soft (including green walls) landscaping in a pattern which respects the landscape character;

d. providing hard landscaping, surface and boundary treatments that are locally distinct and that respond positively to the character of the locality; and

e. provide features and management intended to encourage biodiversity.’

4.16 Policy DM29 of the local plan in relation to woodland, trees and hedges states *‘The Borough Council will seek to ensure the protection, enhancement and sustainable management of woodlands, orchards trees and hedges...’* and sets out relevant guidance as to how this should be achieved.

4.17 Church Road to the north-west of the site and Harty Ferry Road to the east of the site are designated as rural lanes. Policy DM26 of the local plan in relation to rural lanes, states:

‘Planning permission will not be granted for development that would either physically, or as a result of traffic levels, significantly harm the character of rural lanes. For those rural lanes shown on the Proposals Map, development proposals should have particular regard to their landscape, amenity, biodiversity, and historic or archaeological importance.’

Supplementary and Local Planning Guidance

Renewable Energy Planning Guidance Note 2

4.18 Swale Borough Council have produced local planning guidance in relation to renewable energy named *‘Renewable Energy Planning Guidance Note 2 - The Development of Large Scale (→50kW) Solar Arrays, May 2014’*. The document provides landscape and visual impact guidance for solar PV installations setting out the importance of siting and mitigation measures for solar farm proposals, using the site named Old Rides Farm as a case study, which is located adjacent to the eastern site boundary. The guidance also sets out relevant documentation to consider and references cumulative impacts.

4.19 In relation to public footpaths, the guidance states:

‘The existence of Public Rights of Way (PROW), including public footpaths, bridleways and highways, should be carefully considered at the site selection and design stage. Solar PV facilities should not, by virtue of its size, scale or setting, have an unacceptable impact, either during its construction or operation, on users of such a PROW. Where a PROW may be affected by such development careful mitigation, including appropriate landscape planting, should be considered and detailed within any planning application. Additional measures, such as the erection of an interpretation board explaining the role of the facility, may allow the development to become an accepted feature along the PROW.’

4.20 In addition, Appendix A sets out guidance on the information to be provided within a landscape and visual impact assessment. This LVA provides all the requirements as set out in the appendix, however, in accordance with GLVIA3 and because the proposed development is not subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment, no judgements regarding whether any of the identified landscape and visual effects are ‘significant’ have been made.

Planting on New Developments - A guide for Developers

4.21 Swale Borough Council have produced supplementary planning guidance in relation to planting, named: *‘Planting on New Developments - A guide for Developers’*.

5. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Proposed Development

- 5.1 The proposed development comprises a ground mounted solar farm together with associated equipment and infrastructure. It is anticipated the delivered capacity of the solar farm would be up to 10MWp. The proposed development would consist of the following:
- Photovoltaic (PV) arrays based on a simple metal framework, pile driven into the ground, avoiding the need for substantive foundations, up to a maximum height of 3m;
 - A number of transformer and inverter substations at various locations around the arrays within a 6m x 2.5m x 3m high cabinet on a concrete plinth;
 - Boundary fencing (e.g. deer fencing) around the edge of the site, with access gates into the site; and
 - A CCTV system, either pole or fence-mounted, located at strategic points around the site..
- 5.2 The proposed development would utilise the existing New Rides Wind Farm substation, to allow for the connection of the solar farm to the National Grid.
- 5.3 Access to the site would be via the existing access for New Rides Farm and New Rides Wind Farm off the B2231.
- 5.4 The solar panel rows would be set back from the existing and the proposed planting along the boundaries in order to minimise over shadowing of the solar panels, provide opportunities for biodiversity enhancements along the site boundaries and ensure conflicts with tree root protection areas are avoided.

Mitigation Proposals

- 5.5 In order to mitigate against landscape and visual impacts, the landscape masterplan as illustrated at Figure 7, takes account of the identified areas of sensitivity by providing additional planting where required and maintenance notes for existing planting.
- 5.6 Care has been taken to retain existing trees and hedgerows where possible, to retain the character of the local area, to maintain existing visual buffers and to maintain biodiversity value. There will, however, be the requirement to remove a short section of hedgerow, to allow access between the fields.
- 5.7 The landscape mitigation proposals include the following:
- retention, protection and enhancement of existing trees and hedgerows, with new native tree and hedgerow species;

- provision of new native infill planting where gaps are present in the existing field boundary hedgerow to the north-east, to define site boundaries and provide additional visual enclosure;
- provision of new sections of native hedgerow to surround parts of the existing New Rides Farm property between north-eastern and north-western fields;
- enhancement of site boundary margins and areas underneath solar panels, through proposed species rich grassland in line with ecological requirements;
- existing and proposed native hedgerows managed to a height of up to 3m; and
- ongoing landscape management of planting during the lifetime of the solar farm.



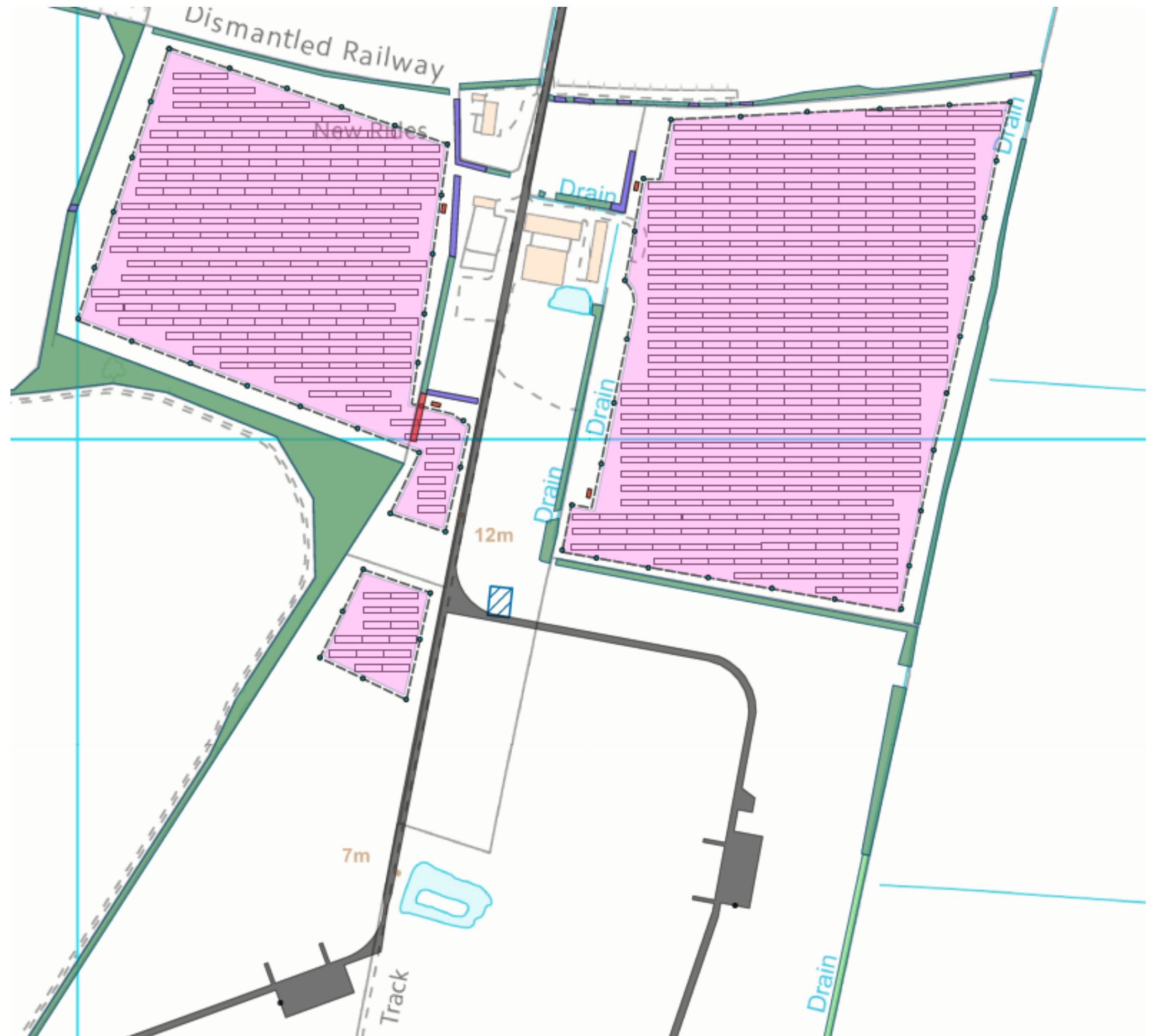


Figure 7: Landscape Masterplan (Energiekontor Plan)

6. LANDSCAPE BASELINE AND EFFECTS

- 6.1 The assessment of Landscape Effects deals with the changes to the landscape as a resource. Different combinations of the physical, natural and cultural components (including aesthetic, perceptual and experiential aspects) of the landscape and their spatial distribution create the distinctive character of landscapes in different places.
- 6.2 Effects are considered in relation to both landscape features and landscape character during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 5 and beyond. A summary of landscape effects are included in Table 1.

Landscape Features

Landform and Topography

- 6.3 The landform of the site is generally gently sloping with the highest areas located to the north at approximately 28m AOD, falling away to the south to approximately 8m AOD at its lowest.
- 6.4 To the north of the site, land continues to rise towards a locally high point named Pump Hill (59m AOD) to the south of Eastchurch, before falling towards the settlement, where the B2231 sits in cutting to the south of Eastchurch. To the west of the site, where land is occupied by the Sheppey Prison Cluster, the pattern of gently sloping land continues, with land rising beyond built form to Stanford Hill, a locally high point at approximately 50m AOD. To the south, land continues to fall toward Fleet Capel and eventually to The Swale, forming an area of flat marshland, with occasional locally elevated land on the Isle of Harty to the south-east. To the east, land gently undulates, with farmsteads often located on locally higher ground.
- 6.5 The landform is not unusual in the locality, being typical of the local area, therefore, the sensitivity is judged to be no greater than medium. There would be limited changes to the landform of the site to accommodate foundations of solar panels, transformer foundations and other structures. The magnitude of change is considered to be low, which would result in Minor adverse levels of effects during all periods, which would be non-permanent.

Water Features and Drainage

- 6.6 There are no watercourses or features within the boundaries of the site, however, a number of field boundary drains are located adjacent to the eastern boundary and surrounding New Rides Farm, along with two small ponds adjacent to the farm and surrounded by the site further to the south. A number of ditches, creeks and watercourses lie to the south and south-east of the site associated with the adjacent marsh area, including Capel Fleet and The Swale approximately 3km to the south.

- 6.7 There would be no direct or indirect effects upon above ground water features in proximity to the site, therefore, the LVA does not consider these features further.

Land Use, Buildings and Infrastructure

- 6.8 The site is comprised of two pastoral fields either side of New Rides Farm complex and parts of another field further south of the farm, which is also in pastoral use. The fields are dissected by the tracks and concrete pads associated with the wind turbines, which provides a vehicle connection to Leysdown Road to the north. Four wind turbines with associated pads lie close to the southern site boundary.

- 6.9 The Old Rides Solar farm lies adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site with Old Rides Farm and its large scale complex beyond. The large scale Sheppey Prison Cluster is located to the south-west of the site, along with other residential development, a prominent development in the local area, situated close to the western boundary of the site.

- 6.10 It is considered that although mostly a greenfield site, it is typical of the surrounding agricultural landscape and influenced by the wind turbines, solar farm and nearby development including New Rides Farm complex, therefore is deemed to have a low sensitivity.



Figure 8: Aerial Photograph of site and surroundings

6.11 The proposals would represent a change to the current land use from predominantly agricultural fields to an operational solar farm with additional infrastructure, albeit in context of infrastructure associated with the New Rides wind farm and nearby solar farm, as well as the surrounding prison complex and sprawling farm complexes. As such, the magnitude of change is assessed as medium to high, resulting in a Moderate to Minor adverse level of effect during all periods.

Vegetation

- 6.12 There are a number of well established native hedgerows defining site boundaries particularly to the north of the site and part of the western boundary is defined by a maturing area of trees and scrub surrounding adjacent fields. To the south, the site boundary does not follow any field boundary with a lack of vegetation surrounding this areas, however, the south-eastern boundary is defined by a hedgerow, which becomes progressively gappy further to the south. The vegetation pattern of the site and surrounding areas is shown by Figure 8.
- 6.13 Surrounding the site, vegetation is mainly limited to field boundary hedgerows or scattered areas of scrub, the exception to this is the network of mature vegetation surrounding the Sheppey Prison Cluster.
- 6.14 The pattern of vegetation within the site is typical of that featured in the surrounding landscape, and therefore, is deemed to have a medium sensitivity
- 6.15 During construction, all trees and woodland within and surrounding the site would be protected, with only a limited section of hedgerow needing be removed to accommodate the proposed development, with the wind turbine tracks utilised for circulation purposes wherever possible. Proposed infill hedgerow planting would be provided along field boundaries to better integrate the proposals with the surrounding areas, as well as to reinforce the existing landscape framework and character. Additional lengths of hedgerows would be incorporated surrounding areas of the proposed solar farm in proximity to buildings.
- 6.16 A low magnitude of change is predicted during construction and at Year 1 (as planting would not have matured), giving rise to a minor adverse landscape effect in the short to medium term. In the longer term, the proposed vegetation would integrate the development with its surroundings and bring about some limited localised benefits, resulting in a Negligible beneficial landscape effect.

Landscape Character

6.17 This section provides an overview of the landscape character of the site and its locality. It provides an indication of the sensitivity of the landscape character to the proposed development and the resulting effects which would arise from the development proposals.

National Level Landscape Character

6.18 The site is located within National Character Area (NCA) 81, Greater Thames Estuary, with the site location identified in Figure 9. The key characteristics of NCA 81 are as follows:

- *Predominantly flat, low-lying coastal landscape where extensive open spaces are dominated by the sky, and the pervasive presence of water and numerous coastal estuaries extend the maritime influence far inland.*
- *Geological contrast and variety along the coastline provided by Sheppey, a long, low island rising from a stretch of very flat marsh along the Swale Estuary in Kent with low, steep clay cliffs facing towards Essex, and Mersea Island in the Blackwater Estuary in Essex.*
- *Open grazing pastures patterned by a network of ancient and modern reed-fringed drainage ditches and dykes, numerous creeks and few hedges or fences, with tree cover a rarity.*
- *Traditional unimproved wet pasture grazed with sheep and cattle combined with extensive drained and ploughed arable land protected from floods by sea walls, with some areas of more mixed agriculture on higher ground.*
- *Strong feelings of remoteness and wilderness persist on extensive salt marshes, mudflats and reclaimed farmed marshland, which support internationally important plants, invertebrates and populations of breeding and overwintering birds, notably overwintering Brent geese.*
- *Open mosaic habitats on brownfield sites support nationally important invertebrate assemblages and key populations of rare invertebrate species.*
- *Distinctive landmarks of coastal military heritage including Napoleonic military defences, forts and 20th-century pillboxes.*
- *Some of the least settled parts of the English coast with numerous small villages and hamlets on higher ground and marsh edges reflecting medieval patterns and the coastal economy.*

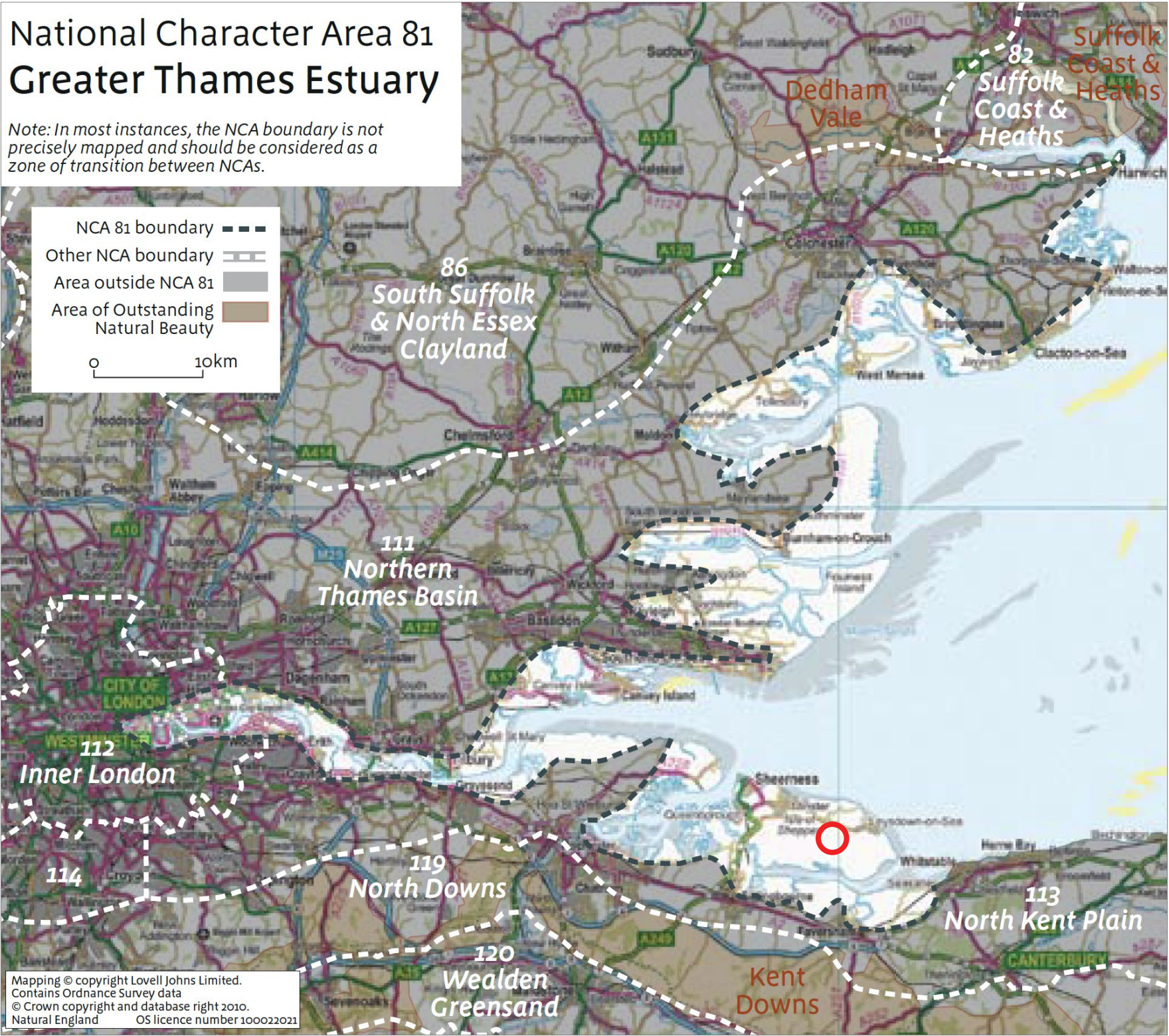


Figure 9: Extract of Natural England NCA 81 with approximate site location circled.

- *Highly urbanised areas within London and on marsh edges subject to chaotic activity of various major developments including ports, waste disposal, marine dredging, housing regeneration, mineral extraction and*
- *prominent power stations plus numerous other industry-related activities.*
- *Increasing development pressures around major settlements and especially towards London, with urban, industrial and recreational sites often highly visible within the low-lying marshes.*

6.19 The national level assessment gives a broad brush impression of a region and provides a useful contextual overview of the character of the wider landscape. However, the proposed development is not considered to have the potential to result in any perceptible effects on landscape character at this national scale and to remain proportionate to the small scale of the site in relation to the NCA, focus is placed upon the local landscape character.

Regional Landscape Character

6.20 The Landscape Assessment of Kent, October 2004, identifies that the site is located within the North Sheppey Landscape Character Area (LCA) and in proximity to the Swale Marshes LCA. The location of the site in relation to the LCAs is illustrated by Figure 10.

6.21 The key characteristics of North Sheppey LCA are set out below:

- Island situation, exposed, prominent hills and cliffs above alluvial marshes;
- Geologically significant.
- Scrub on hills. Open, intensively farmed land on lower slopes;
- Denuded landscape. Remanent marshland-creeks and ditches;
- Prominent development and industry; and
- Caravans and chalets.

6.22 The assessment determines that the landscape condition of North Sheppey LCA is very poor and its sensitivity is moderate, resulting in 'Restore and Create' based landscape actions, which are set out below:

- Restore woodland to ridge tops;
- Restore mature standards and hedgerow to the highway;
- Encourage urban planting within built development;
- Create urban edges;
- Restore the prominence of heritage features in the view;

- Restore and simplify selected open views on the marshland; and
- Restore ecological networks within the remnant marshland. Delineate edges between marshes and higher land by enhancing inherent characteristics.

- 6.23 The key characteristics of Swale Marshes LCA are set out below.
- Coastal marsh with isolated low hilly outcrops;
 - Remote, wild and isolated. Fleet creeks and marshland vegetation. Grazing animals and birds;
 - Extensive areas of cultivated marsh, few features; and
 - Intrusive buildings and industry, infilling of creeks and ditches.
- 6.24 The assessment determines that the landscape condition is very good and the sensitivity is very high, resulting in 'Conserve' based landscape actions, which are set out below:
- Conserve the existing sparse settlement patterns;
 - Conserve the existing open areas intact and retain long views;
 - Conserve natural and cultivated grassland habitats; and
 - Conserve saltmarsh.

6.25 Although the LCAs at a regional level are of a similar size and scale to those at the local level, it has been deemed more appropriate not to assess the LCAs within the Landscape Assessment of Kent, instead focussing upon the local landscape character, as set out in the characterisation provided in the Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal, discussed below.

Local Landscape Character

6.26 The Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal, Swale Borough Council, Supplementary Planning Document Revision A, November 2011, identifies that the site is located within Landscape Character Area 13 – Central Sheppey Farmlands and in proximity to Landscape Character Area 7 – Leysdown and East Church Marshes as illustrates by Figure 11.

- 2. Elmley Marshes
- 7. Leysdown and Eastchurch Marshes
- 8. Luddenham and Conyer Marshes
- 9. Minster Marshes
- 10. Sheppey Court and Diggs Marshes
- 11. South Sheppey Saltmarshes and Mudflats
- 12. Spitend Marshes
- 13. Central Sheppey Farmlands
- 14. Elmley Island
- 15. Isle of Harty
- 16. Minster and Warden Farmlands

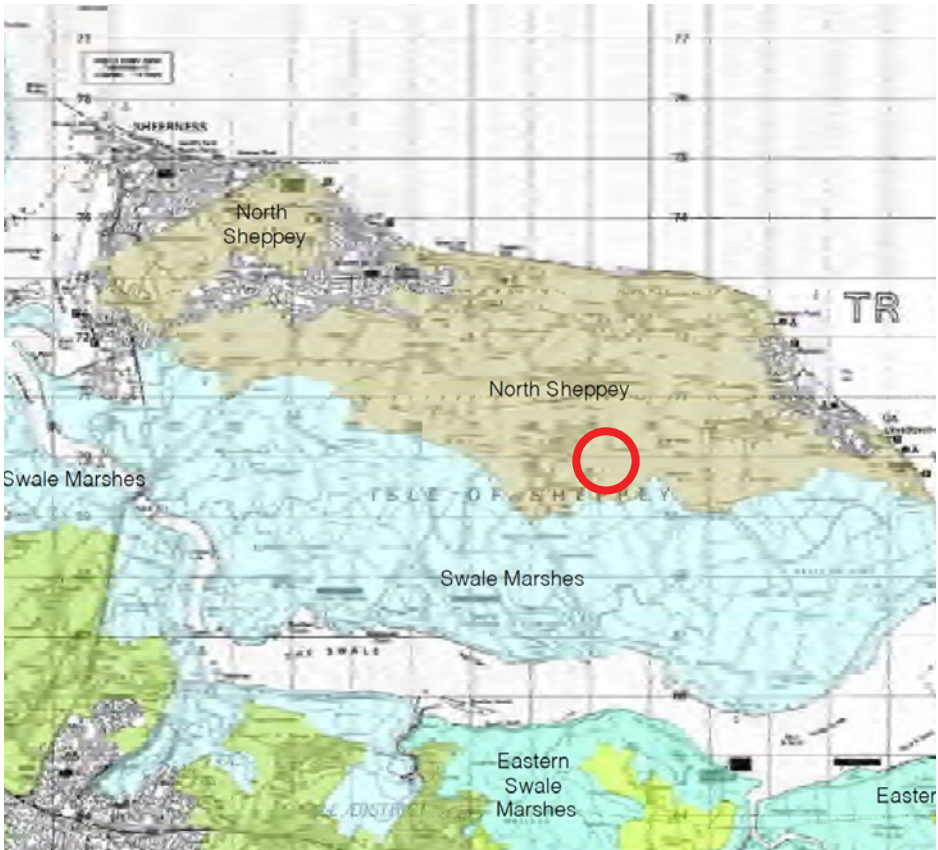


Figure 10: Extract from The Landscape Assessment of Kent, October 2004

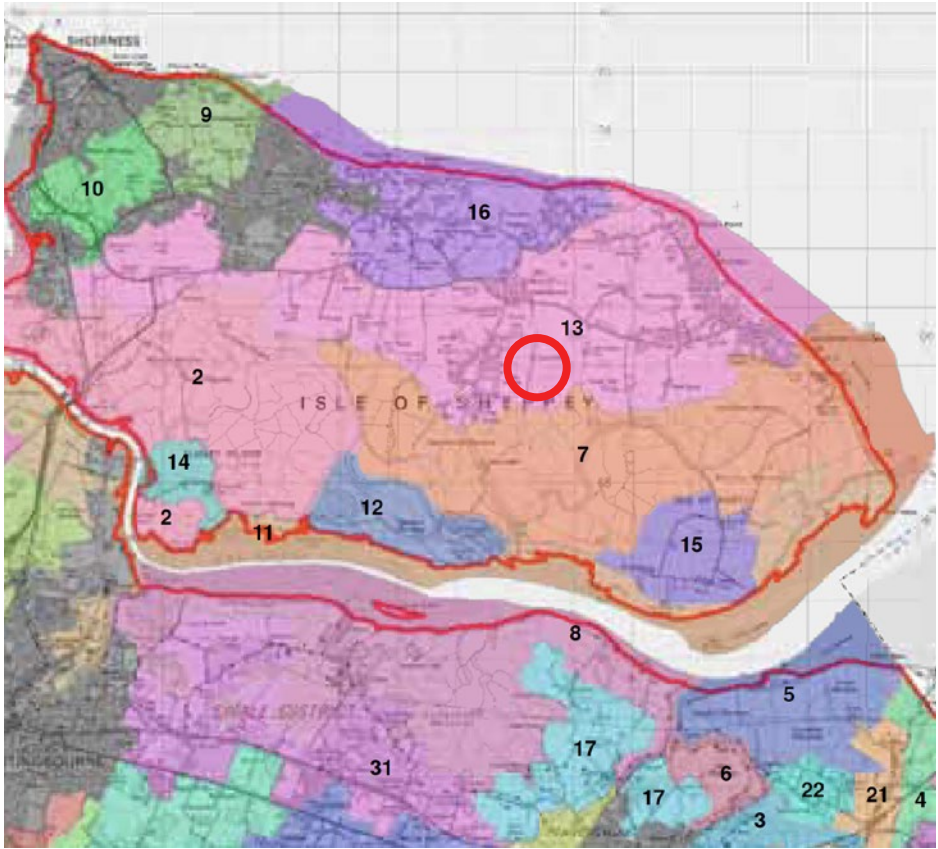


Figure 11: Extract from The Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal

6.27 The key characteristics of LCA 13 – Central Sheppey Farmlands of relevance to the site, are as follows:

- *Ridge of London clay rising steeply to the north;*
- *Eroded clay cliffs of geological significance;*
- *Coastal views of estuary and windfarm;*
- *Large – scale open predominantly arable landscape, with infrequent isolated orchards;*
- *Remnant shelterbelts and fragments of over-mature hedgerows;*
- *Poor quality urban fringe developments including holiday parks;*
- *Distinctive outcrop of Bunnybank East Church; and*
- *Prison complex raised on Stanford Hill provides a dominant feature.*

6.28 The landscape condition of LCA 13 – Central Sheppey Farmlands is considered to be poor and the sensitivity of the landscape to be moderate, with the action to ‘Restore and Create’ within the LCA. The report defines restore and create as ‘*actions that restore distinctive features and the removal or mitigation of detracting features, whilst creating new features or areas where they have been lost or are in poor condition.*’. The guidelines for the LCA of relevance to the site are as follows:

- *Consider the generic guidelines for clay farmland landscapes;*
- *Maintain remaining landscape features and look for opportunities to restore or create a stronger landscape structure (trees, shelterbelts, hedgerows, drains, ponds, traditional orchards and woodlands) within denuded areas;*
- *Look for opportunities to integrate development, including harsh edges and road corridors, through planting;*
- *Avoid proposals that would be unduly prominent in highly visible location, such as undeveloped south, east and west facing slopes and limit ribbon development; and*
- *Avoid proposals that would be unduly prominent on the undeveloped coast and those that would obstruct or erode views of the Swale or Thames Estuary.*
- *Use local and vernacular materials appropriate to the location: for boundaries – mostly hedgerows in rural locations...For new hedges and hedgerow trees – hawthorn, pedunculate oak, ash and field maple and for planting in mixed woodland or for within developments – pedunculate oak, ash, wild cherry, field maple, hazel, hawthorn. Shelterbelts – poplar (on higher ground).*

6.29 The key characteristics of LCA 7 – Leysdown and East Church Marshes, located to the south of the site, are as follows:

- *Large open area of alluvial marshland;*
- *Large-scale fields divided by long straight drainage ditches and post and wire fencing;*
- *Typical features include creeks, ditches, counter and sea walls;*
- *Capel Fleet;*
- *Mixed agricultural land use;*
- *Limited settlement alongside coastline and scattered farmsteads;*
- *Atmospheric and tranquil landscape with large open and often dramatic skies;*
- *Remote hamlet of Shellness overlooking a shell and shingle beach.*

6.30 The landscape condition of LCA 7 – Leysdown and East Church Marshes is considered to be good and the sensitivity of the landscape is high with the action to ‘Conserve’ within the LCA. The report defines conserve as ‘*actions that encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition.*’.

Effects upon LCA 13 – Central Sheppey Farmlands

- 6.31 The site lies close to the southern edge of this large LCA as illustrated by Figure 11. The site is typical of the LCA, being part of the large-scale open arable landscape, but adjacent to the dominant prison complex. To accord with the LCA sensitivity set out in the The Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal, the sensitivity of LCA 13 is assessed as medium.
- 6.32 Within the wider character area, the proposals would constitute a development within agricultural land, in between the Sheppey Prison Cluster and the existing Old Rides Solar Farm, as well as being located in proximity to the New Rides Wind Farm. Due to the location of the proposed development on rising land, the development would have some influence upon the surrounding landscape, however, due to the network of field boundary hedgerows within and surrounding the site, the proposals would only affect a small part of a wider character area.
- 6.33 It is therefore predicted that the proposed development would give rise to a low magnitude of change upon the wider character area, resulting in a Minor adverse level of effect.

Effects upon LCA 7 – Leysdown and East Church Marshes

- 6.34 Although not physically within the LCA, the site is located close to the northern boundary of this large LCA. To accord with the LCA sensitivity set out in the The Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal, the sensitivity of LCA 13 is assessed as high.
- 6.35 Although the theoretical visibility of the proposed development within this LCA appears extensive, particularly to the north-east of the LCA, in reality, the field boundary hedgerows surrounding the proposals, in combination with the context of the Old Rides Solar Farm, would reduce the influence upon this LCA. It is therefore predicted that the proposed development would give rise to a magnitude of change of no greater than low upon the wider character area, resulting in a worst case Moderate/ Minor adverse level of effect.

Effects on Local Landscape Character

Sensitivity of the site and immediate surroundings

6.36 As stated previously, the site is typical of the local landscape character, being part of the large-scale open arable landscape, but adjacent to the dominant prison complex. Although additionally influenced by the adjacent Old Rides Solar Farm and New Rides Wind Farm, to accord with the LCA sensitivity set out in the The Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal, the sensitivity of the site and immediate surroundings is assessed as medium.

Effects on the site and immediate surroundings

6.37 The landscape character of the site and surroundings has the potential to be influenced to some degree by the proposed development. The proposed development would introduce a new man-made feature into the landscape, which although of only limited height, it would incorporate most of the site area and therefore adversely alter the physical and perceptual attributes of the site. It is acknowledged however, that the layout would allow retention of all valuable features within and surrounding the site and that the proposed built components would typically take up less than 25% of the physical site. The influence upon the surroundings would be limited by the network of mature field boundary hedgerows, as well as influenced by the context of nearby developments including solar, wind, agricultural and the Sheppey Prison Cluster.

6.38 The magnitude of change to the site and surrounding area is assessed as medium to high, which when combined with its medium sensitivity would result in a Moderate level of effect upon the landscape character of the site during all phases of the development.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Development Phase	Magnitude of change	Level of Effect
Landscape Features				
Landform and topography	Medium	Construction	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Minor Adverse
Land use and buildings	Low	Construction	Medium/High	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/High	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/High	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Vegetation	Medium	Construction	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Very Low	Negligible Beneficial
Landscape Character				
LCA 13 – Central Sheppey Farmlands	Medium	Construction	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Minor Adverse
LCA 7 – Leysdown and East Church Marshes	High	Construction	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
The site and immediate surroundings	Medium	Construction	Medium/High	Moderate Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/High	Moderate Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/High	Moderate Adverse

Table 1: Summary of Landscape Effects

Sensitivity		
7.6	Residential receptors and users of PROWs are of high visual sensitivity. Users of the local minor road network, including B-roads, where the view is not the focus of activity are of medium sensitivity, with those defined as rural roads by the SBC Local Plan, namely Church Road and Harty Ferry Road are of high sensitivity (refer to Appendix 1). Views from upper floors of the Sheppey Prison Cluster are of low sensitivity.	
Residential Receptors		
7.7	For the purpose of this assessment, it is assumed as a worst-case, that all nearby dwellings are permanent residences.	
7.8	Of the properties located within the area immediately surrounding the site, there are a number of residential properties from which potential visibility of the development could exist and whereby the change to views could be considered as being more than incidental.	
7.9	Due to the financial involvement of New Rides Farm, they are fully aware of the proposed development, and as such, have not been considered as a residential receptor.	
New Rides Bungalow		
7.10	This property is located adjacent to the access track to New Rides Farm, approximately 0.2km north of the site. The bungalow has dense vegetation surrounding the property and surrounding its garden area. The nearby New Rides wind farm is visible form the property.	
7.11	Glimpsed views of the proposed development may be possible from the property, limited by intervening vegetation along the northern boundary of the site and by garden vegetation. A worst case medium to low magnitude of change would arise, resulting in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect during all time periods.	
Sunrise, New Rides Farm		
7.12	The property is located adjacent to Leysdown Road (B2231) adjacent to the entrance track to New Rides Farm. Despite the proximity of the property, much of the proposed development would not be visible due to a combination of gently falling land and boundary vegetation to the north of the site in particular. Vegetation surrounding the property would also limit views towards the proposed development.	
7.13	A medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.	as seen below wind turbines on the skyline and limited by vegetation along the eastern site boundary. At worst, a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.
Residential Properties north of Sheppey Prison Cluster		
7.14	A number of residential properties are located off Church Road and Brabazon Road to the north of the Sheppey Prison Cluster. Despite their relative proximity to the site, vegetation surrounding the properties, as well as vegetation surrounding the site, limits any intervisibility towards the site.	
7.15	At worst, a low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect. However, this is likely to only be limited to those properties closest to the site.	
Eastchurch		
7.16	Although only 1km north of the site, the intervening landform at Pump Hill and vegetation surrounding the B2231 prevent any intervisibility from properties within the settlement towards the site, therefore, resulting in no visual effect.	
Old Rides Farm		
7.17	Old Rides Farm and its associated sprawling complex of agricultural buildings and storage areas lies to the east of the site in open countryside.	
7.18	Any views towards the proposed development would be seen in context of the associated intervening foreground agricultural complex, in context of the existing Old Rides Solar Farm, as well as seen below wind turbines on the skyline. In addition, the existing mature vegetation along the eastern site boundary would serve to limit views towards the proposals.	
7.19	At worst, a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.	
Caper Hill Farm and Newhouse Farm Cottages		
7.20	These farmsteads are located on locally high ground to the south-east of the site, located in open countryside off Harty Ferry Road. Both have various areas of vegetation and agricultural buildings surrounding the properties limiting outward views towards the site.	
7.21	Any views towards the proposed development would be seen over the existing Old Rides Solar Farm and Old Rides Farm complex, as well	
Great Bells Farm		
7.22	This isolated farmstead is located adjacent to Bell Creek in open countryside, located close to the marshes and approximately 1.3km to the south-west of the site.	
7.23	The proposed development would be visible on rising land, limited in part by the network of field boundary hedgerows in proximity to the site. Any views towards the proposed development would be seen in context of the Sheppey Prison Cluster and the existing Old Rides Solar Farm, as well as seen below wind turbines on the skyline.	
7.24	At worst, a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.	
Rayham Farm		
7.25	Rayham Farm is located on gently rising land to the north of Leysdown Road (B2231), approximately 1.6km to the north-east of the site.	
7.26	Due to the nature of the intervening landform and the network of field boundary hedgerows, views towards the proposed development would be limited. A low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.	
Bayview		
7.27	Although theoretical visibility is possible to the south-west of the settlement, most properties in the settlement are bungalows, with the tree lined hedgerow south of Leysdown Road (B2231) limiting any intervisibility between the site and the properties, therefore resulting in no visual effect.	
Mocketts, Isle of Harty		
7.28	Although the farmstead lies beyond 3km from the site, it is situated at a prominent situation on locally high ground on the Isle of Harty.	
7.29	Although the proposed development would be visible on rising land, due to the distance from the site, it would be barely discernible and seen	

below the New Rides Wind Farm. A very low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Minor adverse level of effect.

Sheppey Prison Cluster - Upper Floors

7.30 Although views from the ground floor of the prison would be screened by the prison walls, some views towards the site may be possible from upper floors, limited in part by vegetation along field boundaries and seen in context of views towards the New Rides wind farm and the Old Rides solar farm beyond.

7.31 It is predicted that a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.

Recreational Receptors

Public Right of Way - ZS46

7.32 This rural public right of way provides a connection between New Rides Farm adjacent to the site, to Elmley National Nature Reserve to the south-west of the site, and although utilising the wind farm infrastructure and farm access tracks in proximity to the site, the route crosses areas of marshland prior to linking with more formal routes within the nature reserve.

Section within the site and within 0.65km

7.33 To the north, the path passes through an agricultural complex of buildings and working yards, which limit views towards the proposed development. Once past the New Rides farm, the footpath passes close to the New Rides wind farm and its associated infrastructure including substation, with panels visible adjacent and close to the nearby turbines, with views to panels further north limited by field boundary vegetation. Views towards the nearby Old Rides Solar Farm would also be glimpsed from parts of the footpath.

7.34 Further south, the path would pass through an area with panels on only one side of the route for a limited extent, seen in context of the adjacent wind turbine. Beyond the footpath, limited views of the panels and associated fencing and infrastructure would be visible, with no proposed planting to prevent these views, however, most of the panels would be located behind field boundary vegetation.

7.35 Due to the context of New Rides Wind Farm and adjacent solar farm, a medium to high magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a Moderate adverse level of effect. With the benefit of proposed hedgerows surrounding the agricultural complex, some views towards the proposed panels would become filtered when passing close to New Rides farm.

Section beyond 0.65km to the south and west

7.36 Beyond 0.65km to the south, although the footpath crosses open marsh and agricultural land, due to the low lying nature of the proposals and the network of intervening field boundary hedgerows, views towards the proposed development would become limited in nature, with the more prominent wind turbines and the nearby prison cluster becoming the focus of built development in the local area.

7.37 At worst, a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods, resulting in a Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect. As the footpath travels further to the south-west towards the marshes, the potential effects would continue to reduce.

Local Green Space to north-west of site

7.38 An area of rectangular open space, as defined in SBC local plan as a Local Green Space, is located to the west of Kent View Drive and is adjacent to the north-western corner of the site.

7.39 Due to the network of vegetation within the open space, it is predicted that a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.

Public Rights of Way north of B2231

7.40 A footpath and bridleway cross agricultural land between Leysdown Road (B2231) and Warden Road further to the north.

7.41 Due to the nature of the intervening landform and the network of field boundary hedgerows, views towards the proposed development along the routes would be limited. A low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.

Public Rights of Way south-east of site

7.42 A footpath and bridleway cross agricultural land either side of Harty Ferry Road. Views towards the proposed development would be seen in context of the existing Old Rides Solar Farm and Old Rides Farm complex, as well as seen below wind turbines on the skyline and limited by vegetation along field boundary hedgerows and surrounding farmsteads.

7.43 At worst, a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods and result in a worst case Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect. However, along select parts of the paths, it is predicted that visibility of the proposed development would be reduced or would be not visible.

Elmley National Nature Reserve

7.44 Elmley National Nature Reserve is located adjacent to The Swale and features numerous tracks and nature trails crossing areas of marshland, which connect to bird hides. There are also a cafe, accommodation and a wedding venue facility on the reserve.

7.45 Most of the reserve lies well beyond 3km of the site with views obscured by the intervening Sheppey Prison Cluster. However, eastern parts of the reserve lie approximately 2.25km to the south-west. Due to the distance from the reserve, views of the proposed development would be limited. At worst, a low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods, resulting in a Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect.

Road Users

Leysdown Road (B2231)

7.46 This national speed limit road provides a vehicular link between the A2500 west of Eastchurch, to Leysdown-on-Sea on the north-eastern coastline of the Isle of Sheppey. Most of the road is defined by mature field boundary hedgerows on both sides as it crosses agricultural land to the north and north-east of the site.

7.47 Glimpses of the proposed development may be possible from the road at an oblique angle to the direction of travel. Any view of the proposals would be fleeting and incidental and limited by the network of intervening field boundary hedgerows, including adjacent to the site and by the roadside.

7.48 The proposed development would give rise to a low magnitude of change, resulting in a Minor level of effect during all time periods.

Harty Ferry Road

7.49 This national speed limit minor road provides a connection for properties on the Isle of Harty to the main road infrastructure of the Isle of Sheppey and crosses areas of open agricultural land.

7.50 Due to the length of the road and the intermittent nature of field boundary hedgerows adjacent to the road, there are a number of locations where the proposed development may be visible from, mostly seen at an oblique angle from the direction of travel. To the north of the road, most views towards the site would be partly obscured by the Old Rides Farm complex and seen in context of the Old Rides Solar Farm. Further southwards, beyond Capel Hill Farm, open views towards the proposed development would be possible, seen below the Sheppey Prison Cluster. Glimpses towards the site are also possible as the road crosses Isle of Harty, particularly as the road is elevated, however, due to the distance from the site, visibility of the proposed development are limited in nature. All views towards the proposed development from the road are seen in context of the New Rides Wind Farm on the skyline.

7.51 At worst, a medium to low magnitude of change would arise as a result of the proposed development, which would remain during all time periods, resulting in a Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect. As the road travels further to the south-east further away from the site, the potential effects would continue to reduce.

Church Road

7.52 Church Road provides a vehicular connection between the B2231 and the Sheppey Prison Cluster. Due to intervening landform at Pump Hill, there is no intervisibility from the road towards the site, therefore, resulting in no visual effect.

Brabazon Road

7.53 This road provides vehicular connections between the various prison buildings which collectively form the Sheppey Prison Cluster. Although some theoretical visibility is shown on Figure 12, the network of vegetation surrounding the prison cluster limits any view from the road towards the site, therefore, resulting in no visual effect.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Development Phase	Magnitude of change*	Level of Effect*
Residential receptors				
New Rides Bungalow	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Sunrise, New Rides Farm	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Residential properties north of Sheppey Prison Cluster	High	Construction	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Eastchurch	High	Construction	No view	No Effect
		Year 1	No view	No Effect
		Year 5	No view	No Effect
Old Rides Farm	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Caper Hill Farm and Newhouse Farm Cottages	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Great Bells Farm	High	Construction	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Rayham Farm	High	Construction	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Bayview	High	Construction	No view	No Effect
		Year 1	No view	No Effect
		Year 5	No view	No Effect
Mocketts, Isle of Harty	High	Construction	Very Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Very Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Very Low	Minor Adverse
Sheppey Prison Cluster – Upper Floors	Low	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse

Receptor	Sensitivity	Development Phase	Magnitude of change*	Level of Effect*
Recreational receptors				
Public Right of Way – ZS46 – Section within the site and within 0.65km	High	Construction	Medium	Moderate Adverse
		Year 1	Medium	Moderate Adverse
		Year 5	Medium	Moderate Adverse
Public Right of Way – ZS46 – Section beyond 0.65km to the south and west	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Local Green Space to north-west of site	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Public Rights of Way north of B2231	High	Construction	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Public Rights of Way south-east of site	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Elmley National Nature Reserve	High	Construction	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Road users				
Leysdown Road (B2231)	Medium	Construction	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Low	Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Low	Minor Adverse
Harty Ferry Road	High	Construction	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 1	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
		Year 5	Medium/Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse
Church Road	High	Construction	No view	No Effect
		Year 1	No view	No Effect
		Year 5	No view	No Effect
Brabazon Road	Medium	Construction	No view	No Effect
		Year 1	No view	No Effect
		Year 5	No view	No Effect

Table 2: Summary of Visual Effects

8. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

8.1 There are a number of solar farm or energy developments within the study area, all of which have been constructed. The sites are listed below, including a description of the proposals:

- New Rides Wind Farm (SW/13/1571) - erection of four wind turbines with maximum blade tip height of up to 126.5m with associated infrastructure;
- HMP Stanford Hill Wind Turbines (SW/10/1567) - erection of two wind turbines with maximum blade tip height of up to 121m with associated infrastructure;
- Old Rides Solar Farm (SW/12/1448) - 8MW solar farm with associated transformer inverter units, substation and security fencing; and
- South Lees Solar Farm (SW/13/1202) - 10.5MW solar farm with associated inverter housing, access tracks, security fencing and cameras.

8.2 The methodology used to assess cumulative effects is in accordance with the principles set out in Chapter 7 of The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) (Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013). It is important to note in particular that at GLVIA para 7.5, states that such an assessment is to be kept 'reasonable and in proportion to the nature of the project under consideration'.

Consideration of Cumulative Effects with other existing schemes

New Rides Wind Farm

8.3 The operational New Rides Wind Farm is located adjacent to the site. Due to the size and scale of the wind farm in comparison to the proposed development, there would be no locations in the surrounding landscape where the proposed development would be visible from which the turbines would not already be seen. On that basis, it is acknowledged that all of the landscape and visual effects identified in relation to the proposed development would in effect comprise combined effects alongside the effects of the turbines. However, given the existing effects of the turbines are much greater than those which would arise for the proposed development, and have served to already establish the presence of energy generation infrastructure in this part of the landscape, it is not considered that the effects of the proposed development would be increased due to the presence of the wind farm. Rather, the proposed development provides a sensible consolidation of development in a part of the landscape where impacts from multiple energy schemes already



Figure 13: Combined Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility with Old Rides Solar Farm

occur, rather than extending effects to a new part of the landscape where turbines are not already visible.

HMP Stanford Hill Wind Turbines

8.4 Similarly to the New Rides Wind Farm, due to their height and their proximity to the site at just over 1km, there would be no location in the surrounding landscape where the proposed development would be visible from which the operational Stanford Hill turbines would not already be seen. Again, this would therefore serve to consolidate the effects of the proposed development to an area in which energy development was already visible, with the turbines again bringing about the biggest part of the effect, rather than the solar farm.

Old Rides Solar Farm

8.5 The solar farm lies adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site, located to the south-west of the Old Rides Farm complex, as illustrated on Figure 13.

8.6 Figure 13 illustrates the combined visibility of the proposed development and the existing adjacent Old Rides Solar Farm. The results show that areas where the proposed development would be theoretically visible, would already have views of the existing Old Rides Solar Farm. There are very few exceptions to this, however, most notably the proposed development has some limited additional visibility north of Bayview. The Old Rides Farm has some limited areas of visibility also, including

close to Old Rides Farm, additional parts of Leysdown Road and nearby agricultural land.

- 8.7 Due to the similarity in visibility of the two solar farms, the proposed development would serve to reinforce existing visibility of solar energy development, rather than introduce the effects of solar energy to new parts of the landscape. It is not therefore considered that there would be notable additional cumulative effects, above those already reported in the main assessment, when the Old Rides Solar Farm is considered alongside the proposed development. Instead, the proposed development would read as a logical extension to the existing solar farm in the landscape, largely consolidating effects to the same area from which the existing scheme can already be seen.

South Lees Solar Farm

- 8.8 This solar farm lies approximately 3.4km to the west of the site, adjacent to South Lees Farm. As demonstrated by the Screened ZTV at Figure 12, there is no intervisibility with this solar farm, therefore, no additional combined cumulative effects would arise as a result.

9. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Landscape Character

- 9.1 As an inevitable consequence of the change from undeveloped pastoral fields to a solar farm, the proposed development would give rise to Moderate long-term adverse effects upon the landscape character of the site and immediate surroundings, seen in context of the New Rides Wind Farm and adjacent Old Rides Solar Farm.
- 9.2 The site lies within LCA 13 - Central Sheppey Farmlands and close to LCA 7 - Leysdown and East Church Marshes. Within the wider character area, the proposals would constitute a development within agricultural land, in between the Sheppey Prison Cluster and the existing Old Rides Solar Farm, as well as being located close to the New Rides Wind Farm. Due to the location of the proposed development on rising land, the development would have some influence upon the surrounding landscape, however, due to the network of field boundary hedgerows within and surrounding the site, the proposals would only influence limited parts of both LCAs.

Landscape Features

- 9.3 The site is comprised of two pastoral fields either side of New Rides Farm complex and parts of another field further south of the farm, which is also in pastoral use. The fields are dissected by the tracks and concrete pads associated with the nearby wind turbines. The site is already influenced by surrounding energy and prison developments, which results in a Moderate/Minor adverse level of effect upon the change in land use as a result of the proposed development.
- 9.4 The proposed development actively seeks to respect, retain and augment landscape boundaries within and surrounding the site. In the long-term, infilled hedgerows and management of the landscape structure would enhance site boundaries and would give rise to some landscape and wildlife benefits, albeit limited.
- 9.5 There would also be limited changes to the landform of the site to accommodate the proposed development.

Visual Receptors

- 9.6 The proposed layout has sought to retain and augment existing field boundary vegetation and therefore has aimed to minimise harmful visual effects. It is likely that there will be only a single sensitive recreational receptor that could experience Moderate adverse effects as a result of the proposed development, which would be users of public rights of way ZS46 where it crosses the site, however, it should be noted that the proposed development would be seen in context of other wind and solar developments in the vicinity.
- 9.7 In general, other receptors are mostly considered to give rise to Moderate/Minor or Minor adverse effects due to intervening landform and vegetation surrounding the site obscure the visibility of the proposed development and due to the context of the proposed development in relation to nearby or adjacent energy or prison development.

Cumulative Effects

- 9.8 In terms of cumulative effects, the existing wind farms at New Rides and Stanford Hill are of relevance, as is the adjacent existing Old Rides Solar Farm. However, when the additional cumulative sites in proximity to the proposed development are considered, it is understood that the proposed development provides a sensible consolidation of development in a part of the landscape where impacts from multiple energy schemes already occur, rather than extending effects to a new part of the landscape where the existing turbines and solar farm are not already visible.

Conclusion

- 9.9 From a landscape and visual perspective, any notable effects on landscape character or visual receptors as a result of the proposed development would be confined to surrounding local areas with visual effects reduced by the retention of the existing vegetation and the context of surrounding developments.
- 9.10 Overall the total extent of the landscape and visual effects would be localised and limited in nature.

10. REFERENCES

- 10.1 The following documents have been consulted during the preparation of this statement:
- National Planning Policy Framework, February 2019;
 - The Swale Borough Local Plan - Bearing Fruits 2031, July 2017;
 - Swale Borough Council, Renewable Energy Planning Guidance Note 2 - The Development of Large Scale (→50kW) Solar Arrays, May 2014;
 - Swale Borough Council, Planting on New Developments - A guide for Developers;
 - Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition) - Landscape Institute/ Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013;
 - Landscape Institute GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13, June 2013;
 - Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19, September 2019;
 - Natural England (2014) National Character Area (NCA) 81;
 - The Landscape Assessment of Kent, October 2004; and
 - Swale Borough Council, The Swale Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal, Supplementary Planning Document Revision A, November 2011.

APPENDIX 1: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

INTRODUCTION

This appendix presents the assessment criteria adopted for the appraisal of landscape and visual effects arising from the proposed development.

The primary source of best practice for LVA in the UK is The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) (Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013). The assessment criteria adopted to inform the appraisal of effects has been developed in accordance with the principles established in this best practice document. It should however be acknowledged that GLVIA3 establishes guidelines not a specific methodology. The preface to GLVIA3 states:

“This edition concentrates on principles and processes. It does not provide a detailed or formulaic ‘recipe’ that can be followed in every situation – it remains the responsibility of the professional to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the task in hand.”

The criteria set out below have therefore been specifically tailored for this appraisal to ensure that the methodology is appropriate and fit for purpose.

The purpose of an LVA when undertaken outside the context of an EIA is to identify and describe the relative level of any landscape and visual effects arising as a result of the proposals. As confirmed in GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13 (Landscape institute, 10th June 2013) an LVA for development which has been screened as not requiring EIA should avoid concluding whether the effects are significant or not and this is the approach adopted in this LVA.

An LVA must consider both:

- effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right (the landscape effects); and
- effects on specific views and visual amenity more generally (the visual effects).

Therefore, separate criteria are set out below for the assessment of landscape and visual effects.

NATURE (SENSITIVITY) OF LANDSCAPE FEATURES

The nature or sensitivity of an individual landscape feature or element reflects its susceptibility to change and any values associated with it. It is therefore a function of factors such as its quality, rarity, contribution to landscape character, degree to which the particular element can be replaced and cultural associations or designations that apply. A particular feature may be more ‘sensitive’ in one location than in another often as a result of local values associated with the feature or in relation to its function as a key or distinctive characteristic of that local landscape. Therefore it is not possible to simply place different types of landscape features into sensitivity bands. Where individual landscape features are affected, professional judgement is used as far as possible to give an objective evaluation of its sensitivity. Justification is given for this evaluation where necessary.

The nature or sensitivity of individual landscape features has been described as very high, high, medium, low or very low.

NATURE (SENSITIVITY) OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The nature or sensitivity of landscape character reflects its susceptibility to change and any values associated with it. It is essentially an expression of a landscape’s ability to accommodate a particular type of change, in this case a housing development. It varies depending on the physical and perceptual attributes of the landscape including but not necessarily limited to: scale; degree of openness; landform; existing land cover; landscape pattern and complexity; the extent of human influence in the landscape; the degree of remoteness/wildness; perception of change in the landscape; the importance of landmarks or skylines in the landscape; inter-visibility with and influence on surrounding areas; condition; rarity and scenic quality of the landscape, and any values placed on the landscape including any designations that may apply.

In this appraisal, the nature or sensitivity of landscape character is considered with reference to published landscape character areas/types and where relevant local landscape units as defined in this LVA for the purposes of this study. Information regarding the key characteristics of these local character areas/units has been extrapolated from relevant published studies where possible. Together with on-site appraisal, an assessment of landscape sensitivity to housing development has been undertaken employing professional judgement for relevant local landscape character areas/types/units.

The nature or sensitivity of landscape character has been described as very high, high, medium, low or very low.

NATURE (SENSITIVITY) OF VISUAL RECEPTORS

The nature or sensitivity of a visual receptor group reflects their susceptibility to change and any values associated with the specific view in question. It varies depending on a number of factors such as the occupation of the viewer, their viewing expectations, duration of view and the angle or direction in which they would see the site. Whilst most views are valued by someone, certain viewpoints are particularly highly valued for either their cultural or historical associations and this can increase the sensitivity of the view. The following criteria are provided for guidance only and are not exclusive:

- Very Low Sensitivity – People engaged in industrial and commercial activities or military activities.
- Low Sensitivity - People at their place of work (e.g. offices); short - medium stay patients at hospital, shoppers; users of trunk/major roads and passengers on commercial railway lines (except where these form part of a recognised and promoted scenic route).
- Medium Sensitivity - Users of public rights of way and minor roads which do not appear to be used primarily for recreational activities or the specific enjoyment of the landscape; recreational activities not specifically focused on the landscape (e.g. football); motel users.
- High Sensitivity – Residents at home; users of long distance or recreational trails and other sign posted walks; users of public rights of way and minor roads which appear to be used for recreational activities or the specific enjoyment of the landscape; users of caravan parks, campsites and ‘destination’ hotels; tourist attractions with opportunities for views of the landscape (but not specifically focused on a particular vista); slow paced recreational activities which derive part of their pleasure from an appreciation of setting (e.g. bowling, golf); allotments.
- Very High Sensitivity - People at recognised vantage points (often with interpretation boards), people at tourist attractions with a focus on a specific view, visitors to historic features/estates where the setting is important to an appreciation and understanding of cultural value.

It is important to appreciate that it is the visual receptor (i.e. the person) that has a sensitivity and not a property, public right of way or road. Therefore, a large number of people may use a motorway for example but this does not increase the sensitivity of the receptors using it. Conversely, a residential property may only have one person living in it but this does not reduce the sensitivity of that one receptor. The number of receptors affected at any given location may be a planning consideration, but it does not alter the sensitivity of the receptor group.

Where judgements are made about the sensitivity of assessment viewpoints, the sensitivity rating provided is an evaluation of the sensitivity of the receptor group represented by the viewpoint and not a reflection of the number of people who may experience the view.

NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS – GENERAL NOTE

The following discussion sets out the approach adopted in this LVA in relation to a specific issue arising in GLVIA3 which requires a brief explanation.

Prior to the publication of GLVIA3, LVA practice had evolved over time in tandem with most other environmental disciplines to consider significance principally as a function of two factors, namely: sensitivity of the receptor and magnitude of the effect (the term ‘magnitude’ being a word most commonly used in LVA and most other environmental disciplines to describe the size or scale of an effect).

Box 3.1 on page 37 of GLVIA3 references a 2011 publication by IEMA entitled ‘The State of EIA Practice in the UK’ which reiterates the importance of considering not just the scale or size of effect but other factors which combine to define the ‘nature of the effect’ including factors such as the probability of an effect occurring and the duration, reversibility and spatial extent of the effect.

The flow diagram on page 39 of GLVIA3 now suggests that the magnitude of effect is a function of three factors (the size/scale of the effect, the duration of the effect and the reversibility of the effect).

For clarification, the approach taken in this LVA has been to consider magnitude of effect solely as the scale or size of the effect in the traditional sense of the term ‘magnitude’. Having identified the magnitude of effect as defined above the LVA also describes the duration and reversibility of the identified effect before drawing a conclusion on the overall level of effect taking all of these factors into account.

In the context of the above discussion the following criteria have been adopted to describe the magnitude of effects.

NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS ON LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Professional judgement has been used as appropriate to determine the magnitude of direct physical effects on individual existing landscape features using the following criteria as guidance only:

- Very Low Magnitude of Change - No loss or alteration to existing landscape features;
- Low Magnitude of Change - Minor loss or alteration to part of an existing landscape feature;
- Medium Magnitude of Change - Some loss or alteration to part of an existing landscape feature;
- High Magnitude of Change - Major loss or major alteration to an existing landscape feature;
- Very High Magnitude of Change - Total loss or alteration to an existing landscape feature.

NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS ON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The magnitude of effect on landscape character is influenced by a number of factors including: the extent to which existing landscape features are lost or altered, the introduction of new features and the resulting alteration to the physical and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. Professional judgement has been used as appropriate to determine the magnitude using the following criteria as guidance only. In doing so, it is recognised that usually the landscape components in the immediate surroundings have a much stronger influence on the sense of landscape character than distant features whilst acknowledging the fact that more distant features can have an influence on landscape character as well.

- Very Low Magnitude of Change - No notable loss or alteration to existing landscape features; no notable introduction of new features into the landscape; and negligible change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.
- Low Magnitude of Change - Minor loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of minor new features into the landscape; or minor alteration to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.
- Medium Magnitude of Change - Some notable loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of some notable new features into the landscape; or some notable change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

- High Magnitude of Change - A major loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of major new features into the landscape; or a major change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.
- Very High Magnitude of Change - Total loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of dominant new features into the landscape; a very major change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS ON VIEWS AND VISUAL AMENITY

Visual effects are caused by the introduction of new elements into the views of a landscape or the removal of elements from the existing view.

Professional judgement has been used to determine the magnitude of impacts using the following criteria as guidance only:

- Very Low Magnitude of Change - No change or negligible change in views;
- Low Magnitude of Change - Some change in the view that is not prominent but visible to some visual receptors;
- Medium Magnitude of Change - Some change in the view that is clearly notable in the view and forms an easily identifiable component in the view;
- High Magnitude of Change - A major change in the view that is highly prominent and has a strong influence on the overall view.
- Very High Magnitude of Change - A change in the view that has a dominating or overbearing influence on the overall view.

Using this set of criteria, determining levels of magnitude is primarily dependant on how prominent the development would be in the landscape, and what may be judged to flow from that prominence or otherwise.

For clarification, the use of the term ‘prominent’ relates to how noticeable the features of the development would be. This is affected by how close the viewpoint is to the development but not entirely dependent on this factor. Other modifying factors include: the focus of the view, visual screening and the nature and scale of other landscape features within the view. Rather than specifying crude bands of distance at which the proposed development would be dominant, prominent or incidental to the view etc, the prominence of the proposed development in each view is described in detail for each viewpoint taking all the relevant variables into consideration.

TYPE OF EFFECT

The assessment identifies effects which may be ‘beneficial’, ‘adverse’ or ‘neutral’. Where effects are described as ‘neutral’ this is where the beneficial effects are deemed to balance the adverse effects.

DURATION OF EFFECT

For the purposes of this appraisal, the temporal nature of each effect is described as follows:

- Long Term – over 5 years
- Medium Term – between 1 and 5 years
- Short Term – under 1 year

REVERSIBILITY OF EFFECT

The LVA also describes the reversibility of each identified effect using the following terms:

- Permanent – effect is non reversible
- Non-permanent – effect is reversible

LEVEL OF EFFECT

The purpose of an LVA when produced outside the context of an EIA is to identify the relative level of effects on landscape and visual amenity arising from the proposed development. The judgements provided within the LVA may then inform the planning balance to be carried out by the determining authority.

In this LVA, the relative level of the identified landscape and visual effects has been determined by combining judgements regarding the sensitivity of the landscape or view, magnitude of change, duration of effect and the reversibility of the effect. The level of effect is described as Major, Major/Moderate, Moderate, Moderate/Minor or Minor. No Effect may also be recorded as appropriate where the effect is so negligible it is not even noteworthy. In determining the level of residual effects, all mitigation measures are taken into account.

APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Note that photography has been taken from Google ‘Street View’ imagery, due to current government lockdown restrictions as set out in more detail in the report



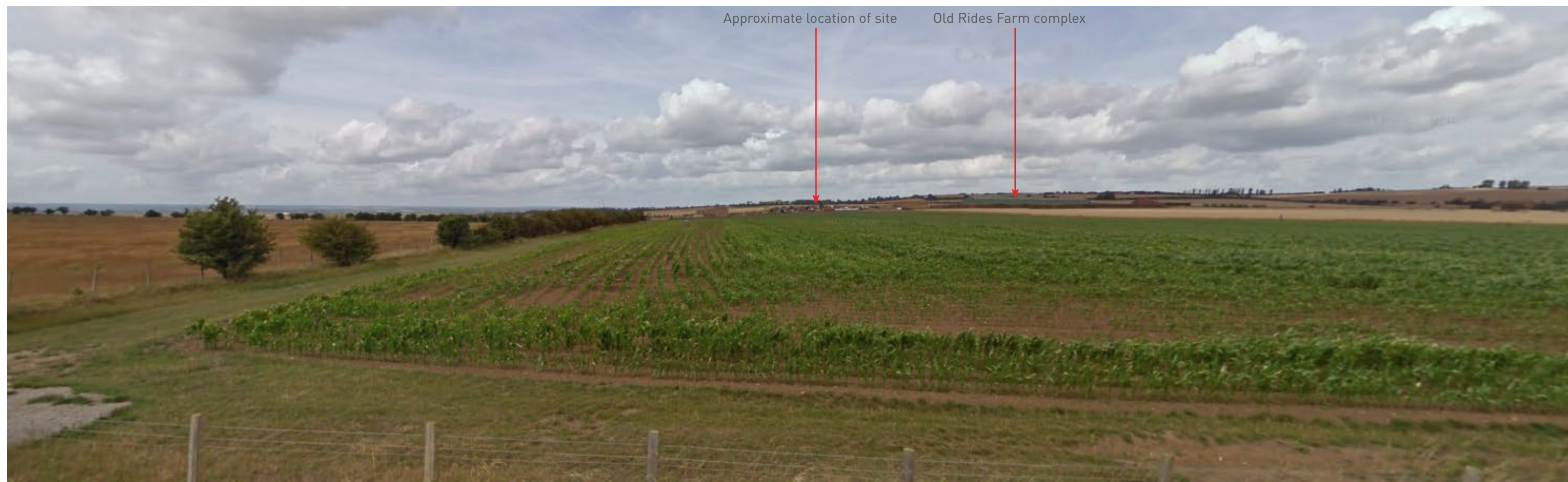
VIEWPOINT 1: View from Leysdown Road (B2231) adjacent to New Rides Farm entrance, looking south towards the site



VIEWPOINT 2: View from Leysdown Road (B2231) adjacent to Old Rides Farm entrance, looking south-west towards the site



VIEWPOINT 3: View from Leysdown Road (B2231) adjacent to Bayview, looking south-west towards the site



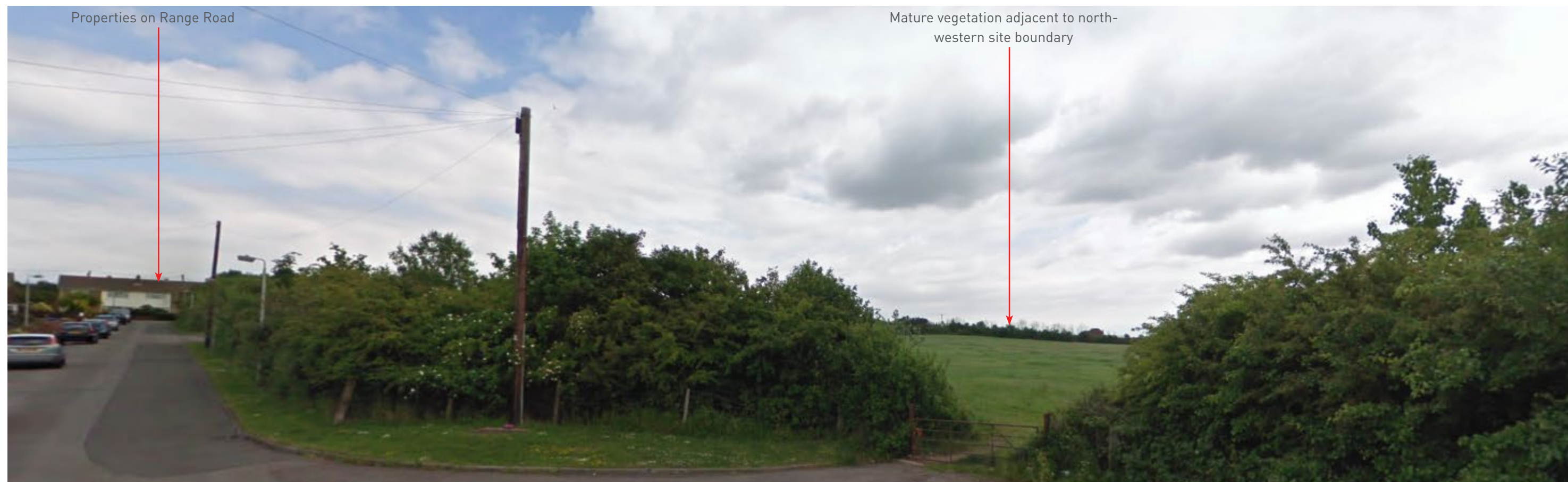
VIEWPOINT 4: View from Harty Ferry Road, north-east of Capel Hill Farm, looking south-west towards the site



VIEWPOINT 5: View from Harty Ferry Road adjacent to Capel Fleet, looking north-west towards the site



VIEWPOINT 6: View from Harty Ferry Road on the Isle of Harty, looking north-west towards the site



VIEWPOINT 7: View from Ridge Road north of Sheppey Prison Cluster, looking east towards the site



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