STEPHENSON HALLIDAY

Planning, Landscape & Environment
an RSK company

East Stour Solar Farm

Land South of the M20, Church Lane, Aldington, Kent

Summary Landscape and Visual Evidence of:
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Prepared for:
EDF Energy Renewables Limited (trading as EDF Renewables)

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SUMMARY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL PROOF OF EVIDENCE

1.1.1 My name is John Stephen Ingham. I hold an honours degree in Landscape Design with Town Planning and a postgraduate diploma in Landscape Architecture. I was elected as a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) in 2003. I am employed as the Director of Landscape Planning at Stephenson Halliday, a planning, environmental and landscape consultancy which is part of the RSK group of companies.

1.1.2 I am instructed to present evidence on behalf of EDF Energy Renewables Limited (the "Appellant") in respect of landscape and visual amenity matters relating to the East Stour Solar Farm Appeal.

1.1.3 The main purpose of my evidence is to address Reason for Refusal 1 in so far as it relates to landscape and visual matters but I also address the Council's Statement of Case (**CD 8.2**), the Main Statement of Common Ground (**CD 9.1**) and the Landscape Statement of Common Ground (**CD 9.2**) in so much as they all relate to landscape and visual matters.

1.1.4 Having reviewed the various LVIA submissions and having undertaken my own analysis, I acknowledge that the Proposed Development would give rise to some limited and locally significant adverse landscape and visual effects but I also recognise that this is to be expected for any utility scale solar farm development in the UK.

1.1.5 Through the application of good design principles the scheme has been designed such that there would be no adverse effect on any of the existing landscape fabric within the Appeal Site and in my opinion the landscape mitigation proposals would enhance the existing landscape fabric once established.

1.1.6 There are several landscape detractors in the immediate vicinity of the Appeal Site including the M20, HS1 railway line, Sellindge Converter Station, overhead power lines and pylons, all of which reduce the sensitivity of the site to the type of development proposed.

1.1.7 Mature blocks of woodland bound the Appeal Site on several sides and I consider that this helps to limit the extent of landscape and visual effects.

1.1.8 In my judgement significant effects on landscape character would be limited to the Appeal Site itself and the immediately adjoining fields to the west of the northern land parcel and south east of the western/eastern land parcels. Beyond approximately 0.5km to the south of the site, I consider that any longer distance glimpses of the solar farm would be framed by mature woodland blocks and not give rise to a significant effect on landscape character. Significant effects on landscape character would therefore be contained to parts of both LCA 29: Evegate Mixed Farmlands and LCA 10: East Stour Valley.

1.1.9 I have not identified any overriding landscape sensitivities which indicate that the Appeal Site is not capable of accommodating the change proposed.

1.1.10 In my opinion, significant effects on visual amenity would be limited to a section of Church Lane and certain sections of PRoWs AE432, AE437, AE457, AE459 and AE656 as well as the two proposed permissive footpaths (Footpath A and Footpath B). Whilst there would be some

view of the solar array from more distant PRoWs, I consider that the magnitude of change at these locations would be sufficiently low that the effects would not be significant.

1.1.11 I consider that the mitigation proposals are proportionate and appropriate for the Proposed Development and complement the strategy for landscape enhancement in the host landscape character areas.

1.1.12 I have acknowledged that there would be some significant adverse effects on the private visual amenity of Bested House and The Paddock but consider that appropriate mitigation measures have been incorporated into the design of the scheme to minimise these effects. The offset of the solar arrays from these properties, together with existing and proposed mitigation screening means that the Proposed Development would not have an overbearing effect on the visual amenity experienced by residents of these properties. In my opinion the dwellings would continue to be widely regarded as pleasant and attractive rural places to live.

1.1.13 I have also considered the cumulative effects of the proposed development with other known projects. In the scenario in which the Proposed Development is approved and constructed against a future baseline where the Sellindge BESS project, the Sellindge Grid Stability Facility and the Otterpool Park Garden Town are all constructed, the cumulative effect on landscape character and visual amenity would be no more significant than the *solus* effects of the Proposed Development.

1.1.14 The proposed Stonestreet Green solar farm NSIP is currently at examination with a decision unlikely much before the end of 2025.

1.1.15 In the scenario that both the Proposed Development and the Stonestreet Green project are constructed, I consider that there would be some cumulative effects on landscape character in LCA 10: East Stour Valley and LCA 25: Aldington Ridgeline and in parts of these two LCAs the combined effect would be significant. In LCA 25 the Stonestreet Green project would give rise to significant effects on this LCA in any case and the cumulative effects can be attributed largely to Stonestreet Green rather than the Proposed Development. In LCA 10 the reverse would be true and the cumulative effects could be attributed largely to the Proposed Development rather than the Stonestreet Green project. In my judgement therefore, in both of the LCAs mentioned above, one or other of the two projects would be locally significant but the additional effect of both projects would have a relatively small additional impact on any LCA.

1.1.16 I consider that there are relatively few locations in the landscape where both schemes might be seen simultaneously (ie at the same time from any given point in the landscape). Those locations where simultaneous views would be possible are generally distant from the Proposed Development.

1.1.17 I acknowledge however that along PRoWs AE475 and AE474, there would be some visibility of both the Proposed Development and the Stonestreet Green scheme either simultaneously or sequentially (as the receptor walks along the route). Along these two routes, the cumulative visual effect would be slightly greater than if either scheme was constructed in isolation and the overall effect on these routes would be cumulatively significant. However, a significant effect is likely along the western part of these routes in any case if the Stonestreet Green scheme was constructed in isolation. The additional cumulative effect which could be attributed to the Proposed Development would be minor.

1.1.18 I also acknowledge that there may be occasional, very distant views of both the Proposed Development and the Stonestreet Green scheme from more distant elevated locations in the North Downs (approximately 4.5km to the north east). At this distance, however, the combined cumulative visual effect would remain not significant and the overall panoramic experience from these locations would remain undiminished.

1.1.19 Whilst I have identified some significant effects on landscape character and visual amenity, in my opinion, these effects would be limited, localised and occur in a landscape which is not recognised by landscape designation.

1.1.20 I therefore acknowledge that a degree of landscape and visual harm would arise but that this would not be disproportionate for the type and scale of renewable energy development proposed.

1.1.21 The effects which I have identified as 'significant' are those which in my opinion are material to the planning decision but I would note that significant adverse effects as reported in LVIA terms are not necessarily unacceptable. Such effects need to be balanced alongside the other benefits and disbenefits of the scheme as well as relevant policy. Further guidance on this is provided within Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition (GLVIA3) (**CD 4.2**) published by the Landscape institute. It advises at page 8 that:

"It should be noted that judgements of significance are not judgements of acceptability considering the policy context, which is a matter for decision makers. For example, it may be the case that the LVIA concludes that a proposal would result in 'significant' adverse effects on receptors, but the proposal could still be considered acceptable when judged alongside other factors in the overall planning balance. Conversely, the LVIA could identify 'no significant effects' but the proposal could be found to be unacceptable when judged alongside other factors in the overall planning balance."

1.1.22 The overall planning balance is addressed by Mr Steven Longstaff in his proof of evidence (**CD 10.6**).

1.1.23 For the reasons stated above my view as an expert witness to this inquiry is that on landscape and visual grounds there is no reason to refuse planning permission for the Proposed Development.