

Statement of Case by Appellant.

Section 78 Appeal.

In Respect of Grove Solar Farm, and at Grove Farm and land east of the Railway Line, Bentley, Suffolk. On behalf of Green Switch Capital Ltd.

Date: August | Pegasus Ref: P25-O480

Appeal Ref: TBC | LPA Ref: DC/23/056656





Document Management.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Statement of Case has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of the Appellant, Green Switch Capital Limited ("the Appellant"). It relates to a Planning Appeal made pursuant to Section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, in respect of land at Grove Farm and land east of the railway line, Bentley, Suffolk ("the Appeal Site").
- 1.2. The Appeal has been lodged following refusal by Babergh District Council (the relevant Local Planning Authority, "the LPA") of an application for full planning permission ("the Application", LPA ref: DC/23/05656) for a proposed development comprising:-

"Construction of a solar farm (up to 40MW export capacity) with ancillary infrastructure and cabling, DNO substation, customer substation and construction of new and altered accesses."

- 1.3. The Application was validated by the LPA on 7th December 2023.
- 1.4. The Application was refused at Planning Committee and a Decision Notice was duly issued 6th February 2025 by the LPA. two reasons for refusal were cited, the first concerning Heritage and the second concerning Landscape:

"1. HERITAGE

The proposal would conflict with policies SPO9, LP19, LP25 and consequently SPO3 of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (2023), policies BEN 11 and BEN 12 of the Bentley Neighbourhood Plan (2022) and paragraphs 212, 213, 215 and 216 of the NPPF (2024). The proposal would result in a low to medium level of less than substantial harm to a number of designated and non-designated heritage assets; the most notable and highly graded of which include the Grade I listed Bentley Hall Barn and Grade II* listed Bentley Hall, Bentley Hall Stables and Church of St Mary. Whilst significant weight is afforded to the public benefits of renewable clean energy, this benefit is not considered sufficient to outweigh the harm to a range of heritage assets, which are matters of considerable importance and great weight. The setting of these assets and thus their significance would be eroded and undermined by the proposed development as it would introduce an industrial incongruous character to the current traditional agricultural character and historical landscape of the area.

2. LANDSCAPE

The proposal would conflict with policies SPO9, LP17, LP18, LP25 and consequently SPO3 of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (2023), policies BEN 3 and BEN 7 of the Bentley Neighbourhood Plan (2022) and paragraphs 187 and 189 of the NPPF (2024). The development would introduce an incongruous, industrialised character into a valued landscape, being within the setting and Additional Project Area of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscape. The development would erode a well preserved and largely unaltered agricultural area and would infill a tranquil transitional gap between settlement and a valuable historical landscape with an abrupt, alien and jarring form of development. "



2. Appeal Procedure

- 2.1. The Appellant considers that a <u>Public Inquiry</u> would be the most appropriate appeal procedure in this case.
- 2.2. A number of complex issues will likely remain unresolved, between the Appellant and the LPA.
- 2.3. The extent of harm to the setting of the designated heritage assets cited in the first reason for refusal It is unclear from the Reason for Refusal what specific assets are being identified as experiencing harm and nor is it clear as to the level of harm for each identified asset. It is a further matter of disagreement between the parties whether the to-be-identified level of harm is outweighed by the range of public benefits to be derived from the Proposed Development. Determining this matter is likely to give rise to complex legal and planning policy considerations for the decision maker. These issues can only be properly tested through formal questioning of Expert Witnesses by an Advocate, which would not be permissible under the Informal Hearing procedure. It is also anticipated that there will be a need to make legal submissions with regard to heritage matters which again are best dealt with through the Inquiry procedure.
- 2.4. Of particular note, and directly relevant to the Appellants argument that a Public Inquiry is the most appropriate procedure for this application is the designation of a new Conservation Area at Bentley, within which the Site now lies in its entirety.
- 2.5. The designation of the Conservation Area was made subsequent to the decision to refuse planning permission, and both parties should be afforded the opportunity to present evidence on this matter in the context the proposed development. This issue can only be properly tested through formal questioning of Expert Witnesses by an Advocate, which would not be permissible under the Informal Hearing procedure.
- 2.6. With regard to the second reason for refusal on landscape, it is asserted that the landscape is a 'valued landscape', being within the setting and Additional Project Area of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscape. Determining the weight to be afforded to this consideration will involve an examination of the background, reasoning behind and status of this 'Additional Project Area' and assessing the extent of any harm that may be caused by the Proposed Development. Again, this is a complex issue which can only be properly tested through formal questioning of Expert Witnesses by an Advocate, which would not be permissible under the Informal Hearing procedure.
- 2.7. Further, given the very high level of public interest in this Application relative to the scale of the settlement (approximately 200 representations were received by the LPA at the time of reporting to Planning Committee), and the likelihood that residents will be legally represented as a 'Rule 6' party it is highly likely that this appeal will take more than 2 days to be heard (which exceeds normal practice for an informal Hearing).
- 2.8. At this stage, and without knowledge of the extent of involvement and the degree of legal representation of Third Parties, the Appellant considers that up to **5 days** would be required, depending upon the case advanced by the LPA and the extent of participation by Rule 6 Parties and other interested persons.
- 2.9. However, should it be determined by the Planning Inspectorate that this Appeal is to be determined by way of a different procedure to a Public Inquiry, the Appellant reserves their



right to add to this Statement of Case as, while a full Statement of Case, it does not include all the evidence that would be included in Proof(s) of Evidence in due course.



3. The Appeal Site Location & Description

- 3.1. The Appellant will seek to engage with the LPA (and other interested parties) to agree a Site Description through a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG).
- 3.2. A Draft SoCG has been prepared by the Appellant and has been submitted as part of this Appeal.



4. The Appeal Proposals

- 4.1. The Appellant will seek to engage with the LPA (and other interested parties) to agree a description of the Appeal Proposals through a SoCG.
- 4.2. A Draft SoCG has been prepared by the Appellant and has been submitted as part of this Appeal.

Application Plans and Documents

- 4.3. The Application plans and supporting documents that comprised the planning application at the time that it was <u>appealed</u> are set out in full in the accompanying Draft SoCG.
- 4.4. Copies of these documents have been provided to the Inspectorate with the Appeal submission.

Proposed Amendments to the Application ("the Amended Scheme")

- 4.5. The Appellant is proposing minor amendments to the proposed Site Layout following the determination of the planning application (referred to in this Statement hereafter as "the Amended Scheme"). In order to assist in identifying the proposed changes the Appellant has prepared a Clarification Note which identifies the type and location of the changes proposed in the Amended Scheme (Appendix 1).
- 4.6. The Amended Scheme is shown on the drawings 3223-01-03a / 03b General Arrangement and 3223-01-13 Landscape Proposals which comprises the following proposed amendments:
 - Amendment A Increased offset between Church Lane and the fenceline for the solar development on both the east and west sides. The increased offset allows for additional woodland belt planting to be incorporated either side of Church Lane, increasing screening, landscape integration, and habitat connectivity.
 - Amendment B Additional woodland belt planting to the north side of Falstaff Manor to reduce any potential intervisibility between the site and the Manor.
 - Amendment C Additional woodland belt planting along the eastern side of the eastern parcel to provide greater screening to this edge of the development, between the solar farm and the railway line.
 - Amendment D Proposed transformer within the central part of the western parcel has been moved north slightly, for operational reasons.
 - Amendment E Gaps introduced to hedgerows to provide access between fields.
- 4.7. The following drawings are proposed to be revised:
 - 3223-01-03a / 03b General Arrangement (to be replaced by 3223-01-03a / 03b Rev A)
 - 3223-01-13 Landscape Proposals (to be replaced by 3223-01-13 Rev A)



- 4.8. Applying the Holborn Principles, the amendments proposed by the Appellant in the Amended Scheme are minor, so as not to substantively change the scheme proposed, and would not result in prejudice to any party as the Appellant proposes that they be consulted upon. The Appellant will ensure that all relevant parties are consulted upon the validation of the appeal, including consultees, neighbours who were consulted on the original application and groups and individuals who responded to the Council's consultation on the planning application. In all, they consist of what the Appellant regards as minor amendments comprising additional landscaping together with the minor relocation of one element of built development from one part the Proposed Development. The Amended Scheme would result in an overall benefit over the determined scheme.
- 4.9. The Appellant has been proactive in seeking to overcome objections to the Proposed Development, but the overall planning application is not so changed that to allow these amendments would deprive those who should have been consulted on the changed development of the opportunity of such consultation.
- 4.10. Further consultation is being undertaken by the Appellant at the time of lodging this appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in order to ensure that any party who wishes to comment on the proposed changes shown in the Amended Scheme, has the opportunity to do so at the outset of the appeal process. The LPA have also been informed of the intention to amend the Proposed Development to that shown on the Amended Scheme General Arrangement and Landscape Proposals drawings.



5. Planning History

- 5.1. The planning history that is of most relevance to this Appeal will be set out in the Statement of Common Ground.
- 5.2. A Draft SoCG has been prepared by the Appellant and has been submitted as part of this Appeal.



6. Planning and Energy Policy

6.1. The planning policies and guidance that are of most relevance to this appeal are set out in the draft SoCG. It is anticipated that the main planning policy issues will be agreed with the LPA prior to the opening of the Public Inquiry.

National Policy and Guidance

- 6.2. The Appellant will refer to relevant national policies and guidance set out in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).
- 6.3. The Appellant will refer to the relevant climate change legislation and policy statements in evidence as part of its case.
- 6.4. This will include:
 - Climate Change Act 2008;
 - Climate Change Act (2050 target amendment) Order 2019;
 - Clean Growth Strategy published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ("BEIS") in October 2017;
 - UK Parliament's declaration of an Environmental and Climate Change Emergency in May 2019;
 - Energy White Paper: Powering our Net Zero Future published in December 2020;
 - 'Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener' published by the UK Government in October 2021;
 - UK Climate Change Risk Assessment January 2022;
 - British Energy Security Strategy April 2022;
 - Powering Up Britain suite of documentation March 2023;
 - Connections Action Plan November 2023;
 - NPS EN-1 and EN-3 November 2023 (as designated in January 2024), and amended consultation draft NPS EN-1 and EN-3 published in May 2025;
 - Written Ministerial statement May 2024
 - National Grid ESO Future Energy Scenarios July 2024
 - Clean Power 2030 November 2024
 - Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A new era of clean electricity December 2024



- UK Food Security Report 2024 (December 2024) and Land Use Consultation (January 2025)
- Solar Roadmap United Kingdom Powered by Solar, June 2025
- 6.5. If relevant any further announcements or policy updates by the Government between the submission of the Appeal and the opening of the Public Inquiry will be referred to.
- 6.6. Reference will also be made to progress made to meeting these carbon reduction targets, including:
 - 'Achieving Net Zero' published by the National Audit Office in December 2020;
 - The latest version of the 'Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics', which is currently the July 2025 version;
 - The Climate Change Committee's 2025 Report to Parliament 'Progress in reducing emissions June 2025.

The Development Plan

- 6.7. The Appellant will explain that the Development Plan for the area currently comprises the following:
 - Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan, adopted in 2023
 - Bentley Neighbourhood Plan, made in 2022

Supplementary Planning Guidance

6.8. Where relevant, reference will be made to supplementary planning guidance, documents and advice.

Local Energy Policy and documents

- 6.9. Reference will also be made by the Appellant to:
 - BDC's declaration of a climate emergency in 2019



7. Proofs of Evidence

- 7.1. On the basis that the Planning Inspectorate agrees to the appeal being dealt with under the Public Inquiry procedure, the Appellant will prepare written evidence in advance of the Inquiry.
- 7.2. The evidence will also consider any other valid issues raised by Third Party objectors or by statutory consultees.
- 7.3. At this stage, it is anticipated that evidence will be presented by the Appellant as follows:-

Heritage

Laura Garcia

Landscape and Visual Impact

Jon Mason

Planning and Energy Policy

- Paul Burrell
- 7.4. The Appellant reserves the right to introduce additional witnesses as necessary to address any other issues that may be raised by the LPA and/or any other Third Parties.



8. Statement of Case

8.1. The Appellant will present evidence to demonstrate that planning permission should be granted without delay. The Appellant will submit that the Proposed Development accords with the adopted Development Plan when read as a whole. If the Inspector determines that the Proposed Development would not comply with the adopted Development Plan, then the Appellant will refer to other material considerations which justify the grant of planning permission in this instance.

Main Issues.

- 8.2. The Appellant considers that the main issues for determining the Appeal will be as follows:
 - Issue 1 the extent of harm to the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets, and how this is weighed in the planning balance.
 - Issue 2 consideration of the newly designated Bentley Conservation Area, within which the Site now lies in its entirety.
 - Issue 3 the extent of landscape harm and benefits arising from the Proposed Development.
 - Issue 4 whether the public benefits arising from the Proposed Development outweighs any harm identified in respect of Issues 1, 2 and 3 above.
- 8.3. There are a number of other issues raised by third parties which the Appellant does not believe to main issues based on the responses received by the LPA from relevant statutory consultees.

Issues 1 and 2 - Effect on Heritage Assets.

- 8.4. The Appellant will explain that the only listed building that would be sensitive to the Proposed Development is the Grade II* Listed Church of St Mary.
- 8.5. The Appellant will demonstrate that the harm arising to the significance of this listed building, from a change to the setting would be less than substantial in the terms of the NPPF. The Appellant will articulate where on the less than substantial 'spectrum' the proposals will lie. This will include commentary on how the Proposed Development has been developed in response to the Appellant's consideration of the historic environment and further refined through the proposed amendments set out in the Amended Scheme.
- 8.6. It is noted that the Heritage RfR sets out that the Grade I Bentley Hall Barn and the Grade II*
 Bentley Hall and Bentley Hall Stables would experience less than substantial harm from the
 Proposed Scheme. The Appellant disagrees with this conclusion and considers that these
 assets would not experience any harm to their significance arising from the Scheme. The
 Appellant will set out the reasons for this in their evidence.
- 8.7. In consideration of Issue 2, the Appellant will address this in two parts. The first part will seek to examine the designation of the Conservation Area itself and the robustness and appropriateness of the mechanism of adopting and designating Conservation Areas in terms



of the level of scrutiny applied. This is important when it is considered that statutory duties are imposed within the boundary when a Conservation Area is designated.

- 8.8. The second part of the consideration of Issue 2 will be that as the Conservation Area was designated post-refusal of permission, it is not clear at this stage what position the LPA will take in terms of harm, if any, they consider would arise to the special interest of the Conservation Area from the Proposed Development. It is the position of the Appellant that the Scheme would result in less than substantial harm at the low end of the scale upon the significance of the Conservation Area when seen as a whole. The Appellant will expand these arguments in their submissions.
- 8.9. The Appellant will set out why the following non-designated heritage assets are sensitive to the Proposed Development in terms of changes to setting which contribute to significance:
 - Falstaff Manor;
 - Grove Farm; and
 - Red Cottages and Potash Cottages.
- 8.10. The Appellant will draw attention to the appropriate test in the NPPF for considering harm to non-designated heritage assets and will identify where the LPA apparently misdirected themselves in their consideration of this in the Committee Report.

Issue 2 - Effect on Landscape

- 8.11. The Appellant will explain the context of the Appeal Site in relation to surrounding landscape designations, including that the Appeal Site lies outside both the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscape and the boundary of the proposed National Landscape extension.
- 8.12. The Appellant will explain that the exclusion of this area from current and proposed designated areas, follows from two distinct professional landscape assessment processes firstly the work which determined the original National Landscape boundaries and secondly the 2017 AONB extension study. It can be inferred that both studies determined that the area does not meet the criteria for landscape designation. These findings reinforce the Appellant's position that the site is not of such landscape value as to warrant formal protection at a national level. The lack of intervisibility or other relationship between the Appeal Site and the National Landscape is such that it cannot be inferred that it contributes meaningfully to its setting.
- 8.13. The Council, in its reason for refusal, refers to the Appeal Site being located in the Additional Project Area (the "APA") of the National Landscape. The Appellant will set out that the APA carries no formal landscape policy weight and that whilst the APA is referenced in the AONB Management Plan, the justification for its inclusion is unclear and poorly evidenced. Any influence that the APA may have on the determination of the appeal should be limited to a proportionate and site-specific assessment of landscape harm not applied as a blanket constraint.
- 8.14. The August 2024 Landscape Briefing Note prepared by Michelle Bolger Expert Landscape Consultancy (commissioned by the LPA), acknowledges that the Appeal Site has been denuded of its historic field pattern. The claim in that report that the open fields serve as a "gentle transition" between fragments of ancient landscape is at best a subjective



interpretation. These vast fields are a visual consequence of modern agricultural priorities eclipsing traditional landscape stewardship.

- 8.15. The Appellant will explain that the Proposed Development would not significantly affect the defining characteristics or special qualities of the wider landscape. Specifically, there would be no direct impact on:
 - Historic hall and church complexes;
 - Areas of remnant parkland;
 - Veteran trees;
 - Sinuous or winding lanes;
 - Wavy woodland edges;
 - Historic park boundaries;
 - Enclosure patterns;
 - Wooded skylines.
- 8.16. Whilst the Appellant will acknowledge some degree of change to open views it will be explained that this openness is not representative of the prevailing character around the Bentley Hall area. Rather, it is a modern anomalous feature within an otherwise more enclosed and structured landscape framework.
- 8.17. The Appellant will set out that the proposed development includes a comprehensive landscape mitigation strategy. Setbacks, species-rich meadow areas, and new hedgerow planting will help reintroduce a field structure sympathetic to the historic pattern. Over time, this will restore greater legibility to the landscape, offering visual containment, ecological value, and a more coherent relationship with the intact historic landscape to the north. It will also establish stronger visual and structural connections with the sinuous lanes to the west, south, and east of the site.
- 8.18. The Appellant will set out that in the medium to long term, the landscape will be enhanced and more closely aligned with the wider landscape character in contrast to the current expansive and featureless condition of the site.

Issue 3 – Other Material Considerations and the Overall Planning Balance.

- 8.19. Having regard to the relevant Development Plan policies, the Appellant will argue that that the following material considerations should be afforded neutral weight in the overall planning balance:
- 8.20. With regard to **Vehicular Access for Construction and Operation**, acceptable traffic and access arrangements can be achieved during the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development.



- 8.21. With regard to **Residential and Visual Amenity**, there would not be unacceptable visual effects to private residential properties; from potential glint and glare; nor noise effects arising from the Proposed Development.
- 8.22. With regard to **Flood Risk and Drainage**, the Appellant will explain that a site specific Flood Risk assessment has been undertaken,. The Proposed Development is considered to be compliant with national and local planning policy, will remain safe from flood risk and can be suitably drained for its operational lifetime.
- 8.23. The Appellant therefore will explain that it is considered that the Proposed Development is acceptable with regard to all the above matters.
- 8.24. The Appellant will draw attention to the immediate and pressing need for deployment of renewable energy generation in the UK, to assist with meeting the challenging legally binding obligations to reach "net zero" by 2050. It is clear that the continued deployment of Solar PV, and renewable energy technologies more generally, are recognised by the Government as a key part of the UK's transition to achieving a low carbon economy and tackling Climate Change.
- 8.25. Having regard to the above, the application proposals make an appreciable contribution to meeting the amended Climate Change 2008 targets. It is clear that in order for the UK to meet the ambitious target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 100% or "net zero" compared to 1990 levels by 2050, a presumption in favour of increasing the number and output of low carbon energy sources, such as Solar Farms, is entirely appropriate and necessary.
- 8.26. The Appellant will explain that the following matters are considered to weigh in favour of granting planning permission:
 - Generation of renewable energy and the national planning policy and energy policy support for the UK's transition to a low carbon economy, addressing the climate emergency. Given its significance in terms of national and indeed international policy and commitments, this consideration should be afforded <u>substantial weight</u>.
 - Contribution to the energy security of the UK, in accordance with National Policy Statement EN-1 together ether with the British Energy Security Strategy and the Powering Up Britain report should be afforded <u>substantial weight</u>.
 - Significant and valuable contribution to assisting the achievement of set emission targets, both at a national and a local level should be afforded <u>substantial weight</u>.
 - Grid connection availability and proximity to the Appeal Site. Given the national shortage in available grid capacity the ability of the Proposed Development to connect to the grid with a confirmed grid connection offer should be afforded <u>significant weight</u>.
 - Provision of biodiversity and ecological enhancements and green infrastructure.
 Given the scale of biodiversity net gain achieved in excess of 100% for both habitat and hedgerow units this should be afforded <u>substantial weight</u>.
 - Economic benefits arising from construction activity, investment into the local economy and business rates. This should be afforded <u>moderate weight</u>.



- Improvements to soil resource and agricultural land quality. This should be afforded limited weight.
- Aiding farm diversification. This should be afforded <u>limited weight</u>.
- Removal of existing farm traffic away from the village via the new access proposal.
 This should be afforded limited weight.
- Creation of a lasting, positive landscape legacy after the proposed development is decommissioned. This should be afforded limited weight.
- 8.27. The following matters will be argued by the Appellant to be neutral in consideration of the Planning Balance:
 - Other effects on highways and transport (subject to appropriate planning conditions).
 - · Effect on residential amenity.
 - Glint and glare effects (subject to appropriate planning conditions).
 - Noise (subject to appropriate planning conditions).
 - Flood risk and drainage.
- 8.28. The following matters are considered by the Appellant to be negative in consideration of the Planning Balance:
 - Effect on setting of heritage assets The Appellant will consider and explain the national policy requirements of the NPPF with regard to the great weight to be afforded to harm to the significance of a heritage asset, and that where there is a level of less than substantial harm, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the Proposed Development. Having regard to the public benefits that would be derived from the Proposed Development, the Appellant will explain that this test is passed. Further, in respect of the overall planning balance, whilst affording great weight to this matter, given the limited extent of the harm identified, this should be afforded moderate weight in the overall planning balance.
 - Effect on landscape and visual amenity The Appellant will argue that although there is some localised harm to landscape and visual amenity, taking into account the lasting positive legacy arising from the proposed tree and hedgerow planting which would remain beyond the operational life of the scheme, the harm so identified should be afforded limited weight in the overall planning balance.
- 8.29. The Appellant will submit that the Proposed Development is in general accordance with the Development Plan when read as a whole and, even if the Inspector were to conclude that there would be some conflict with relevant policies:
 - That would not necessarily lead to a conflict with the Development Plan taken as a whole; and



• If it did, there are significant identified benefits that constitute material considerations indicating development should be approved notwithstanding that conflict.



9. Planning Conditions and Obligations

Planning Conditions

9.1. An agreed set of Conditions will be provided to the Inspector before the start of the Public Inquiry.

Planning Obligations

9.2. The Appellant does not anticipate that a S106 Undertaking will be required in respect of this Appeal.



Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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