

Submission to Braintree District Council

by

Belchamp St Paul and Belchamp Otten Parish Council

17 October 2023

Planning Application 23/01413/FUL

Conflict of Interest

as it relates to the Applicant and their

Agent/Consultant RSK ADAS Ltd

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Opening Statement

In the light of new information gained from further investigations relating to the above application the Belchamp St Paul and Belchamp Otten Parish Council (PC) are filing this submission out of a deep concern that the said application does not meet the critical test of impartiality.

We find the evidence provided by the applicant to be selective and incomplete in one vital respect namely the process of site selection which has undermined our confidence in the data presented and the conclusions drawn.

Accordingly, the PC has concluded that a perceived and/or actual conflict of interest has arisen which we consider substantially compromises this application.

This submission was considered and unanimously adopted by the PC at their 17 October 2023 meeting.

Synopsis

1. As with any planning application that would impact significantly on a given community (with standing as an affected third party) there has to be confidence in the evidence presented in support of the said application. Such confidence is established through the said evidence being accurate, complete and impartial and delivered by entities that enjoy a good standing in terms of their reputation.
2. The PC, as the democratic body representing the said community must be satisfied, to the extent possible, that the evidence as presented is a true and sufficiently comprehensive representation of the real world position and is being projected in a fair and balanced manner. Further, that it meets the standard required by prevailing regulation and guidance. Only in such circumstance will it be possible for the planning authority to arrive at a safe and sound planning decision.
3. The PC note that it is for the applicant to prove that the implementation of the proposal as laid out in the application would result in a net beneficial gain to the local community and/or society in general. That said, no real world situation perfectly aligns with an applicant's aspirations and it is therefore a matter of their balancing the

positives against the negatives without undue accentuation of the one or suppression of the other.

4. It is with regard to this last point that the PC has become increasingly concerned as to the reliability and trustworthiness of the subject application.
5. Where planning applications are concerned there are many factors to take into account. That said, the local community most directly affected are almost always laypeople without the necessary knowledge and expertise to fully assimilate and interpret the evidence presented which is sometimes of a technical nature. Nor do they normally have the financial resources to employ their own specialists in order to secure a second opinion where there is a lack of confidence in the evidence.
6. Furthermore, the community is routinely given a limited time in which to submit their responses whereas the applicant may have spent as much as 2 years or more building their case. This situation places the local community at a distinct disadvantage when considering how they might be impacted were the application to succeed.
7. Without trust in the evidence it becomes impossible for the local community to support any development project being proposed for their locality. This in turn fosters suspicion and increases opposition which, the PC argues is the case here.
8. It is therefore with regard to the matter of trust or the lack thereof that the PC makes this submission. We are deeply concerned that a conflict of interest may have resulted in the suppression of evidence leading to misrepresentation of the facts by omission.
9. In conducting our investigation the PC have reviewed other applications submitted by the applicant in other jurisdictions where they have appointed RSK ADAS as both their planning agent and planning consultant. Our findings have been included in this submission in order to demonstrate a pattern of behaviour which we contend has been carried over to the subject application.

Due Diligence

10. Given the foregoing it is for the PC to exercise such due diligence as it is able. Accordingly, in serving the interest of our community the PC must rely in large measure on the professional reputation of the applicant's chosen consultants and their commitment to produce such accurate reports with fair and balanced conclusions as may be required by prevailing policy and guidance. In doing so the PC has considered the nature of the relationship RSK ADAS have with their client.
11. When it comes to planning consultancy all practitioners claim to operate according to an adopted code of ethics. RSK ADAS is no exception. One indispensable element of such a code is to avoid any action or arrangement that could conceivably be considered by a person or party with knowledge of the facts to be likely to give rise to a perceived or, where there is evidence, an actual conflict of interest.

The Role of the Planning Consultant

12. Where a planning consultant has been engaged to conduct research into and to report on a particular aspect of a development project which they know will be submitted to a planning authority in support of a planning application they must maintain an arm's length relationship with their client.
13. The limit to a planning consultant's interest in such a situation must be restricted to producing a fit for purpose report that gives all the required facts neutrally presented together with a fair and balanced conclusion based exclusively on those facts in return for a fee. They must do so without fear or favour and regardless of whether such report supports or undermines the client's interest as it relates to the securing of approval for the subject planning application.
14. In other words a professional planning consultant must adopt a nonpartisan position even though they are being paid for their work by the client. The client is buying information and professional advice, not favour.
15. To put it another way, if the client were opposing the said application the report produced by the engaged advisor should read precisely the same. All planning

consultants understand this requirement of nonpartisanship and address this in their code of ethics.

The Role of the Planning Agent

16. The planning agent on the other hand is a partisan role. The planning agent works on behalf of the client and uses their expertise and knowledge in order to assist the principal in their objective of securing planning permission.
17. Due to their extensive experience in planning matters, planning agents are often planning consultants by qualification and employment.

Avoiding a Conflict of Interest

18. Planning consultants must not only avoid situations where a conflict of interest could arise but must also avoid situations where it may be perceived by a third party with knowledge of the facts that a conflict of interest might have arisen.
19. The PC note that while a complainant may have evidence of a conflict of interest, such level of proof may be to their advantage but is not a prerequisite for a complaint to succeed. The credible perception that a conflict of interest may have occurred and that this has been made known to the planning authority will be sufficient to require further investigation.
20. To address such risk planning consultants routinely publish a code of ethics designed to mitigate against the possibility of a conflict of interest arising or the perception of one.
21. RSK ADAS have published the following statement on their website

“Conflicts of interest and data protection

To avoid conflicts of interest, RSK always ensures that project teams working on similar projects are working independently. Our team members can never work on competing projects, project files are stored in locked cabinets within the RSK office,

electronic media are password protected and non-disclosure agreements are signed by project managers and team members.”

22. The PC note that this does not fully address the circumstances pertaining to the subject planning application i.e. where the same legal entity, in this case RSK ADAS, is fulfilling both functions of planning agent and planning consultant as outlined above.
23. That said, if the above code were to be applied on the basis that these 2 functions are themselves considered to be competing interests in that one is partisan and the other nonpartisan and adequate arrangements for separation had been put in place then it might be that this would satisfy the conflict of interest test. The PC have no evidence that this is the case in this instance.
24. The PC express their surprise that the risk of a conflict of interest arising across their many planning application engagements has not already been addressed by RSK within their code of ethics given their extensive involvement both as planning agent and planning consultant where this relates to the same planning application.

Level of Involvement on the part of the Planning Consultant

25. Where a planning consultant's engagement with their client is limited to one planning topic (e.g. landscape, heritage, flood risk, etc) the resulting report will play a small or modest part in the overall application offering. It is relatively easy for an interested third party to determine that the resultant report has most likely been provided on an arm's length basis. There are a number of such reports submitted by various advisors as part of the subject application that the PC does not question as to their accuracy, completeness and impartiality.
26. The PC note there is no limit as to the number of topics a planning consultant may undertake on behalf of an applicant with respect to a single application. However, where this becomes substantial it will inevitably place a strain on the required arm's length relationship which is so vital in ensuring the necessary accuracy and balance of the reports produced.
27. The table below demonstrates the level of involvement (expressed as the number of reports produced) on the part of RSK ADAS for each of the 6 applications published

on the applicant's website where RSK ADAS have been retained as planning consultant. It would be fair to say that RSK ADAS's position is dominant in all 6 cases.

28. When taking over ADAS in 2016, RSK argued that the synergy between the two companies was high and would enable the new company RSK ADAS to offer an

No.	Site	No of principal reports	Provided by RSK ADAS	% of total
1	World's End	7	6	86
2	Preston Farm	19	17	89
3	Park Farm	15	14	93
4	Town Farm	22	18	82
5	Dengie	16	10	63
6	Knowl Green	20	11	55

extensive range of services to the client thereby giving them access to a one stop shop for the bulk of their needs.

29. Today RSK ADAS can offer expertise on Planning, Landscape, Ecology, Agricultural Land Classification, Heritage, Flood Risk, Transport, Archeology, Arboriculture, Biodiversity, Noise Impact and more. When it comes to the subject application the applicant have availed themselves of many of these services from RSK ADAS whereby the applicant is receiving advice relating to over half of the principal reports that have been published on the LPA's planning portal. The PC note that where the other applications are concerned this number is even higher.
30. While such an inter-dependant arrangement between consultant and client breaks no rules or regulation it will inevitably result in a higher level of cooperation and interaction between the parties. This in turn is likely to lead to personal relationships forming. As such a code of ethics suitably applied becomes an indispensable requirement in order that the reports produced remain accurate, complete and impartial and that a conflict of interest or a perception thereof is avoided.

The Relationship between the Applicant and RSK ADAS Ltd.

31. As referred to above the PC note that, according to their website the applicant has engaged RSK ADAS on 5 planning applications¹ not including the subject application. In all 6 cases RSK ADAS have been appointed as planning agent. In all six cases they have been the majority contributors in their capacity as appointed planning consultants.
32. By any measure RSK ADAS holds a dominant position in all six applications. And yet, despite the claims made on their website, they have made no attempt to consider the ethics of their position and the risk this might bring with regard to a conflict of interest arising.
33. Indeed, in the PC's opinion it is arguable that a possible conflict of interest has arisen in all but one (World's End) of the cases below since there is clearly no separation applied between RSK ADAS acting as planning agent and RSK ADAS acting as planning consultant.

No.	Site	Agent	Author	Reviewer	Issuer	Report
1	World's End	D	No Data	No Data	No Data	
2	Preston Farm	C	E	C	C	PDAS
3	Park Farm	C	A	C	C	PDAS
4	Town Farm	B	A	B	B	PDAS
5	Dengie	C	D	B	B	PDAS
6a	Knowl Green	A	A	B	A	PDAS
6b	Knowl Green	A	D	A	A	SSSR

34. The PC will bring forward below evidence that we contend demonstrates the consequence of inadequate governance and how this can lead to a loss of objectivity and integrity in the production of reports.
35. In the table above each member of the RSK ADAS team is identified by a letter (A through E). The table gives an indication as to the distribution of tasks relating to the

¹ Dengie, Maldon; Town Farm, East Suffolk; Park Farm, East Suffolk; Preston Farm, Basingstoke; World's End, Stroud;

role of agent and the production of the planning design and access statement (PDAS) for each application.

36. In 4 of the cases (2,3,4 and 6a) the individual fulfilling the planning agent role is also a contributor to the PDAS as either reviewer or issuer or a combination of both.
37. In the case of the subject application (6a & 6b) RSK ADAS goes one step further in that the planning agent is also the author of the PDAS as well as reviewer and issuer of the accompanying sequential site selection report² (SSSR).
38. Please note that the World's End application has been included in the table for completeness but is not considered further in this submission as its PDAS is in an entirely different format and makes no reference to any contributors.
39. Also note that applications 2 through 5 above are collectively referred to in this submission as "the other applications".
40. The persons in the table above appear to swap roles freely between that of agent and consultant seemingly unconstrained by any code of ethics and without any consideration as to whether such free movement might give rise to a conflict of interest. They are a close knit group that appear to regularly and freely cooperate and communicate with each other regarding the various projects in which they are engaged.
41. Such an unregulated arrangement may be to the mutual benefit of applicant and consultant but potentially to the disadvantage of any interested third party such as the community in whose locality the solar farm would be situated given the propensity for a conflict of interest to arise.

The Planning, Design and Access Statement

42. The PC have examined the PDASs of the 4 other planning applications (numbered 2 through 5 above) with respect to the section entitled "*Alternative Site Appraisal &*

² Aka: Sequential Assessment, Alternative Site Appraisal, Sequential Site Assessment, Sequential Test: These terms are used interchangeably in this submission.

Sequential Test". The relevant section in each of these PDASs is included with this submission as Exhibits A through D.

43. The PC have included these sections in this submission in order to demonstrate a modus operandi that supports the central tenet of the submission being that of a pattern of misrepresentation by omission and which, the PC contends, has arisen as a consequence of a conflict of interest borne out of an absence of effective governance.
44. It should be noted that this section in all 4 versions is based on a single pro forma text which has been copied and pasted into each PDAS with minor alterations to suit the individual case. Whilst this somewhat defeats the notion that each PDAS is a bespoke offering in its own right it nevertheless makes the analysis thereof somewhat easier due to the near identical paragraph numbering in each case.
45. Accordingly, in the interest of readability, just the last digit of the paragraph number as presented in the aforementioned exhibits is used as a reference in the following sections of this submission. With one exception this is sufficient to unambiguously identify the relevant paragraph in all 4 exhibits such is their level of similarity.

The Alternative Site Appraisal/Sequential Test

46. The other planning applications are located in 3 different local planning authorities each with their own planning policies within their respective local development plan. Treatment by each planning authority will therefore differ to some extent.

47. However, the guidance they must all follow is found at PPG 5-013 which states that

"Particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider include encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non agricultural land"

and

"... where a proposal involves greenfield land, [to determine] whether the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land".

48. The PC note that paragraph 3 of all 4 PDASs states that

“The site for this proposed development is greenfield land”.

49. A definition of what constitutes greenfield land is not provided by general guidance but it is known to include all grades of agricultural land as a minimum. All 4 sites that are the subject of the aforesaid applications are situated on agricultural land as confirmed by their respective agricultural land classification report.

50. Accordingly, and in line with the above guidance, in paragraph 1 the applicant claims that they conducted sequential site assessments as follows

“A review of the local area was undertaken in order to compare potential locations for a development of this type. This review includes a sequential assessment, which considers factors such as grid connectivity, land area and sunlight when assessing the appropriateness of a site for a solar PV development”.

51. Each PDAS then goes on to say at paragraph 6 (paragraph 7 in Exhibit D) that

“As a result of the above considerations and restrictions, it is considered that following the alternative site appraisal, the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area.”

52. The PC note that, according to the PDAS for all 4 applications a review of the “*local area*” was undertaken looking for potential locations on which to site a large scale solar farm. However prevailing guidance requires that such review should be conducted within a “*reasonable area of search*”. While the extent of such area of search is not defined it is taken to mean an area reaching beyond the local area and, if necessary, beyond the district in which the proffered application site is situated³.

53. It is not sufficient for the applicant to simply claim that there are no suitable sites in the local area and therefore the planning authority should accept their selection of the proffered site. Given that there are no sites of lower agricultural quality within the local area, it is clear from the guidance that the applicant is obligated to widen the area of search.

³ “A reasonable area of search” - See the PC’s submission of 22 August paragraphs 144 to 147 and the planning inspector’s comments re appeal APP/D3505/A/13/2204846 Valley Farm, Wherstead, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP9 2AX at paragraph 76

54. It is also noted that in all 4 cases the proffered application site was not the best choice but the only choice. There is no way such a claim can be evaluated as the applicant has failed to provide any supporting evidence for their assertion. Such a claim cannot therefore be trusted for its objectivity and comprehensiveness.
55. The sequential site assessment is the accepted process by which a search is made for sites of poorer agricultural quality within a reasonable area of search which could be substituted for the proffered application site. The agricultural quality of the land is the overriding consideration when conducting such a search. Sites that meet the criteria in that they are of a poorer quality than the proffered site will then be considered in terms of their other attributes with regard to their suitability as a replacement.
56. Nowhere in any of the PDASs is reference made to the overriding purpose of the alternative site appraisal. Rather “*factors such as grid connectivity, land area and sunlight*” are cited as if these are the primary considerations. Whilst the PC cannot say for certain that such omission is intentional it is nevertheless highly misleading given the context of the PDASs’ conclusion.
57. To quote the planning inspector referenced in footnote 3 “*the [Applicant] has not demonstrated that poorer agricultural land has been chosen in preference to higher quality land*” which paraphrases PPG 5-013. The PC contends that this is the case with all 4 of the other applications (since no alternative site appraisal is presented) as well as the subject application where the Sequential Site Selection Report is demonstrably unfit for purpose⁴.
58. Given the applicant’s claim that the alternative site appraisal supports their conclusion that “*the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area*” it is scarcely credible that they have elected not to publish this document in any of these applications which is apparently so beneficial to their cause in every case.
59. The choice of site for a large scale ground based solar farm will often be contentious and it is infeasible that, armed with such supporting evidence the applicant would elect not to publish it and submit it to public scrutiny as with every other document provided as part of the application.

⁴ See the section entitled The Sequential Site Assessment Test in the PC’s submission of 22 August 2023

60. To do this on 4 consecutive occasions strongly suggests that, despite the obvious benefit that would be gained in each case, the decision not to publish has been intentional thereby implying a modus operandi designed to favour a different agenda.
61. The guidance does not say that such an appraisal should be conducted and then withheld. The clearly accepted interpretation of the wording of PPG 5-013 is that the exercise of conducting an alternative site appraisal will include its findings being published and submitted to public scrutiny as with all other reports that make up a planning application.
62. The PC note that in making their assertion that "*the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area*" the author of the PDAS resorts to the third person by stating "... *it is considered that ...*". The obvious question is, considered by whom? In failing to present any supporting evidence this statement must be regarded simply as an unsupported opinion on the part of the applicant and their advisors and as such can carry no weight when it comes to the planning authority's consideration of the proffered site.
63. We note that in no instance has the respective planning authority so far addressed this aspect by calling for the alternative site appraisal to be published by the applicant. Despite this, one application has already been granted and one refused (but not for this reason) and 2 are pending.
64. The PC considers this an oversight on the part of the respective planning authorities which may have acted as an encouragement to the applicant to suppress the publication of the said appraisals and to produce the wholly inadequate sequential site selection report in the case of the subject application.

Predetermination and Conflict of Interest

65. With regard to the other applications there is no indication of when an alternative site appraisal might have been concluded as it relates to the date on which each decision was made by the applicant to go with the proffered application site.
66. In as much as every solar farm application, in exceeding the 0.5 hectare area limit, would have been subject to an EIA screening opinion, the choice of site proffered at

that time would needed to have been informed by a robust alternative site appraisal concluded and documented prior to the submission of the EIA screening request.

67. Since no alternative site appraisal has been published in any of the cases there is no way to know whether this was the case but the unexplained suppression of the relevant reports strongly suggests that there were no appraisals timeously conducted that might otherwise have informed the choice of site and it is left open to speculation as to whether any meaningful appraisal was actually undertaken.
68. Any suggestion that the required alternative site appraisal might effectively be conducted after the planning authority's consideration of the EIA screening request stretches credibility to breaking point.
69. It is the PC's firmly held view that the foregoing details strongly suggest that the applicant has been less than forthcoming regarding the circumstances surrounding their choice of site in all 4 cases and that this has been intentional.
70. It raises the real possibility that the choice of site in each case was predetermined through an agreement between the applicant and landowner ahead of the consideration of any possible alternative sites of lower agricultural quality within a reasonable area of search as called for by PPG 5-013.
71. It is the PC's strongly held view that the decision not to publish the relevant alternative site appraisals will have required the tacit and systematic cooperation of the applicant's appointed planning consultant resulting in the repeated suppression of evidence that we see today.

So how does this affect the Subject Application?

72. The alternative site appraisal section in the PDAS that accompanies the subject application is also based on the same pro forma text as the other applications. It has also been modified. This section appears in this submission as Exhibit E.
73. In this instance however the applicant has published an alternative site appraisal (its sequential site selection report). This was considered in detail by the PC in our submission of 22 August 2023 at paragraphs 130 through 174. The PC found this report to be wholly inadequate and not in any way fit for purpose. Its reference to a

single alternative site and its summary dismissal thereof on the basis of an erroneous conclusion means that it falls lamentably short of a standard that might reasonably be expected of a professional planning consultancy given that it fails comprehensively to meet its intended purpose.

74. The PC note that LPP 73 of the Braintree local plan requires that

“Where appropriate, large scale solar farms shall be accompanied by a sequential assessment which considers alternative brownfield sites and lower quality agricultural land”.

75. In the case of the subject application it is clear that the applicant had no choice but to submit a sequential assessment since LPP 73 states that such a report must *“accompany”* the application.

76. Given the PDAS’s ubiquitous reliance on pro forma text and the applicant’s consistent pattern of behaviour with regard to the other 4 applications it is reasonable to suppose that, had it not been for the requirement of LPP 73, it is highly probable that any alternative site appraisal for this application would also have been suppressed.

77. Notwithstanding, the applicant nevertheless still reaches the same conclusion as with the other applications. In paragraph 6 of the PDAS they also state

“As a result of the above considerations, it is considered that following the alternative Site appraisal, the proposed Site is in the only viable location in the area.”

78. We are therefore required to accept the further verbatim conclusion that, as with with the previous 4 applications, the proposed site *“is in the only viable location in the area”*. Given the geographic spread of all these sites this seems highly improbable. Had the applicant made reference to *“the most suitable site within a reasonable area of search”* and supported this with evidence this might have given the application a vestige of credibility.

79. The obvious question is how would the applicant even know it’s the only viable location *“in the area”* when there is no evidence that they have undertaken any meaningful level of research. If the applicant did carry out the necessary research,

why have they not documented such research in their alternative site appraisal and published it as evidence supporting their conclusion?

80. In the case of the subject application we know that the entirely inadequate sequential site selection report was conducted after the choice of site was made as confirmed by the date of the applicant's submission of their EIA screening request and the later date of the said report.
81. This reinforces the PC's view that, as with the other applications, despite the alternative site appraisal having been published it has not informed the choice of site as required by PPG 5-013 and also LPP 73.
82. Accordingly, the PC finds that the situation that prevails with the subject application mirrors that of the other 4 applications albeit that an alternative site appraisal, such that it is, accompanies this application as directed by LPP 73.

Conclusion

83. When all 5 applications are viewed holistically we see a pattern not visible with just the subject application. We see a seemingly inexplicable systematic suppression of evidence supposedly favourable to the applicant in 4 of the applications and an alternative site appraisal that is essentially devoid of meaningful content in the case of the subject application.
84. Without presenting any evidence a verbatim conclusion is exclusively reached by the applicant across all 5 applications that the proffered site is "*in the only viable location*".
85. In the case of the subject application there is evidence to support the premise that the proffered application site was decided upon prior to an alternative site appraisal having been conducted. This is reinforced by a claim on the part of the landowner that an agreement had been in place with the applicant for a number of years prior to the submission of the application⁵.

⁵Stated by the landowner himself at the public meeting held on 3 August 2023 and witnessed by those in attendance

86. Based on all the evidence before us it is the PC's view that far from being guided by the requisite alternative site appraisal the applicant had selected the subject application site through a prior contractual arrangement with the landowner and that it is this circumstance that has led to the essentially empty alternative site appraisal being presented by the applicant.
87. Since the alternative site appraisals have not been published with regard to the other 4 applications the PC cannot say when these might have been carried out. However, the fact that they have all been suppressed together with a unilateral and identical assertion in favour of the proffered site in every case strongly suggests that the same prior arrangement between the applicant and the landowner may have been the primary consideration.
88. As the production of the sequential site appraisal was the responsibility of the applicant's planning consultant this raises the reasonable question as to whether a conflict of interest has arisen in that this report has been deliberately constructed to support the applicant's requirement by intentionally electing not to conduct or document a meaningful search for sites of lower agricultural quality. This would be one explanation as to why the report is so obviously devoid of content and not fit for the purpose intended.
89. This view is further reinforced by the apparent lack of effective governance relating to the consultant's failure to apply an effective code of ethics resulting in the free nature of the relationship between the planning agent and his planning consultant colleagues.
90. Accordingly, the PC are hereby bringing to the attention of the planning authority our considered view, as it relates to the subject application and based upon the evidence presented herein, of there being a probability of a misrepresentation of evidence through omission.
91. And that this action has been undertaken with the intention of enabling the applicant's prior choice of application site without regard for the prerequisite process of sequential site selection as called for by PPG 5-013 and LPP 73.
92. And that this has been driven in part by a conflict of interest on the part of the applicant's planning agent/consultant as both author of the subject application's planning, design and access statement and also the sequential site selection report.

Exhibit A : Preston Farm Solar Farm, Basingstoke

Extract from Preston Farm Solar PV Development Planning Statement
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council - 21/03398/FUL

4.2 Alternative Site Appraisal & Sequential Test

4.2.1 A review of the local area was undertaken to compare potential locations for a development of this type. This review includes a sequential assessment, which considers factors such as grid connectivity, land area and sunlight when assessing the appropriateness of a site for a solar PV development.

4.2.2 In regard to the available site size, it is noted that following the removal of the Government's solar subsidy, larger scale sites are required in order to allow for the development to reach economies of scale and therefore be financially viable.

4.2.3 It is noted that grid connectivity is one of the main restrictions when reviewing and assessing a suitable for solar development, with areas being limited due to available grid infrastructure and capacity, as well as the potential to secure a viable connection. It is confirmed that the site is in a suitable location in respect of access to grid connections.

4.2.4 The site for this proposed development is greenfield land. Whilst a development of this type on brownfield land would be preferable, there were no brownfield sites considered to be suitable in this area. Additionally, it is noted that a brownfield site would have to be available for a period of 40 years. It is considered that this is uncommon due to the wider development potential of such land for competing land uses such as residential and commercial. Further to this, the point would also be raised that the development of a solar PV array is often not an economically competitive development on brownfield sites due to this wider development potential.

4.2.5 The site's rural location, and the fact that it is not shaded by any nearby features in the landscape make highly suitable for this type of development. This provides a clear benefit to a scheme of this nature as it results in significantly more electricity generation than at other locations.

4.2.6 As a result of the above considerations and restrictions, it is considered that following the alternative site appraisal, the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area.

Exhibit B : Park Farm Solar Farm, East Suffolk

Extract from Park Farm Solar PV Development Planning Statement
East Suffolk Council - DC/21/5550/FUL

4.2 Alternative Site Appraisal & Sequential Test

4.2.1 A review of the local area was undertaken in order to compare potential locations for a development of this type. This review includes a sequential assessment, which considers factors such as grid connectivity, land area and sunlight when assessing the appropriateness of a site for a solar PV development.

4.2.2 In regard to the available site size, it is noted that following the removal of the Government's solar subsidy, larger scale sites are required in order to allow for the development to reach economies of scale and therefore be financially viable.

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4.2.4 The site for this proposed development is greenfield land. Whilst a development of this type on brownfield land would be preferable, there were no brownfield sites considered to be suitable in this area. Additionally, it is noted that a brownfield site would have to be available for a period of 40 years. It is considered that this is uncommon due to the wider development potential of such land for competing land uses such as residential and commercial. Further to this, the point would also be raised that the development of a solar PV array is often not an economically competitive development on brownfield sites due to this wider development potential.

4.2.5 Coastal areas and sites in close proximity receive very high levels of sunshine when compared to the country as a whole. The site's open, rural location, and the fact that it is not shaded by any nearby features in the landscape make highly suitable for this type of development. This provides a clear benefit to a scheme of this nature as it results in significantly more electricity generation than at other locations.

4.2.6 As a result of the above considerations and restrictions, it is considered that following the alternative site appraisal, the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area.

Exhibit C : Town Farm Solar Farm, East Suffolk

Extract from Town Farm Solar PV Development Planning Statement
East Suffolk Council - DC/21/5515/FUL

4.2 Alternative Site Appraisal & Sequential Test

4.2.1 A review of the local area was undertaken in order to compare potential locations for a development of this type. This review includes a sequential assessment, which considers factors such as grid connectivity, land area and sunlight when assessing the appropriateness of a site for a solar PV development.

4.2.2 In regard to the available site size, it is noted that following the removal of the Government's solar subsidy, larger scale sites are required in order to allow for the development to reach economies of scale and therefore be financially viable.

4.2.3 It is noted that grid connectivity is one of the main restrictions when reviewing and assessing a suitable site for solar development, with areas being limited due to available grid infrastructure and capacity, as well as the potential to secure a viable connection. It is confirmed that the site is in a suitable location in respect of access to grid connections.

4.2.4 The site for this proposed development is greenfield land. Whilst a development of this type on brownfield land would be preferable, there were no brownfield sites considered to be suitable in this area. Additionally, it is noted that a brownfield site would have to be available for a period of 40 years. It is considered that this is uncommon due to the wider development potential of such land for competing land uses such as residential and commercial. Further to this, the point would also be raised that the development of a solar PV array is often not an economically competitive development on brownfield sites due to this wider development potential.

4.2.5 Coastal areas and sites in close proximity receive very high levels of sunshine when compared to the country as a whole. The site's open, rural location, and the fact that it is not shaded by any nearby features in the landscape make highly suitable for this type of development. This provides a clear benefit to a scheme of this nature as it results in significantly more electricity generation than at other locations.

4.2.6 As a result of the above considerations and restrictions, it is considered that following the alternative site appraisal, the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area.

Exhibit D : Dengie Solar Farm, Maldon

Extract from Dengie Solar PV Development Planning Statement
Maldon District Council - 23/00244/FULM

4.2 Alternative Site Appraisal & Sequential Test

4.2.1 A review of the local area was undertaken to compare potential locations for a development of this type. This review includes a sequential assessment, which considers factors such as grid connectivity, land area size, land availability, and sunlight when assessing the appropriateness of a site for a solar PV development with co-located BESS.

4.2.2 In regard to the available site size, it is noted that following the removal of the Government's solar subsidy, larger scale sites are required in order to allow for the development to reach economies of scale and therefore be financially viable for the applicant.

4.2.3 It is noted that grid connectivity is one of the main restrictions when reviewing and assessing a suitable for solar and BESS development, with such areas being limited due to available grid infrastructure and capacity, as well as the potential to secure a viable connection. It is confirmed that the site is in a suitable location in respect of access to grid connections.

4.2.4 The site for this proposed development is greenfield land. Whilst a development of this type on brownfield land would be preferable, there were no brownfield sites considered to be suitable in this area due the size requirements of a Solar PV project. Additionally, it is noted that a brownfield site would have to be available for a period of 40 years. It is considered that this is uncommon due to the wider development potential of such land for competing land uses such as residential and commercial.

4.2.5 Further to this, the point would also be raised that the development of a solar PV array and BESS is often not an economically competitive development on brownfield sites due to this wider development potential and such brownfield sites are often adjacent to existing settlements which can be used for sustainable urban extensions for much needed housing need.

4.2.6 The site's rural location, and the fact that it is not shaded by any nearby features in the landscape makes it highly suitable for this type of renewable energy development. This provides a clear benefit to a scheme of this nature as it results in significantly more electricity generation than at other locations given the excellent sun radiance levels experienced on this site.

4.2.7 As a result of the above considerations and restrictions, it is considered that following the alternative site appraisal, the proposed site is in the only viable location in the area.

Exhibit E : Knowl Green Solar Farm, Braintree

Extract from Knowl Green Solar PV Development Planning Statement
Braintree District Council - 23/01413/FUL

3.2 Alternative Site Appraisal & Sequential Test

3.2.1 A review of the local area was undertaken in order to compare potential locations for a development of this type. This Planning Application is accompanied by a Sequential Site Assessment, which considers factors such as grid connectivity, the availability of an adequate amount of land area, access and sunlight exposure when assessing the appropriateness of the Site for a solar farm.

3.2.2 In regard to the available site size, it is noted that following the removal of the Government's solar subsidy, larger scale sites are required in order to allow for the development to reach economies of scale and therefore be financially viable.

3.2.3 It is noted that grid connectivity is one of the main restrictions when reviewing and assessing a suitable location for solar development, with areas being limited due to available grid infrastructure and capacity, as well as the potential to secure a viable connection. It is confirmed that the Application Site is in a suitable location in respect of access to grid connections.

3.2.4 The site for this proposed development is greenfield land. Whilst a development of this type on brownfield land would be preferable, there were no brownfield sites considered to be suitable in this area. Additionally, it is noted that a brownfield site would have to be available for a period of 40 years. It is considered that this is uncommon due to the wider development potential of such land for competing land uses such as residential and commercial. Further to this, the point would also be raised that the development of a solar PV array is often not an economically competitive development on brownfield sites due to this wider development potential.

3.2.5 Coastal areas and sites in close proximity receive very high levels of sunshine when compared to the country as a whole. The site's open, rural location, and the fact that it is not shaded by any nearby features in the landscape makes it highly suitable for this type of development. This provides a clear benefit to a scheme of this nature as it results in significantly more clean and green electricity generation than at other locations.

3.2.6 As a result of the above considerations, it is considered that following the alternative Site appraisal, the proposed Site is in the only viable location in the area. For the full assessment, please see the Site Sequential Assessment which accompanies this Planning Application.