

Appendix 11.2

Extracts from Published Landscape Character Assessments



APPENDIX 11.2 – Extracts from Published Landscape Character Assessments

Introduction

This appendix collates and where necessary provides commentary on relevant extracts from the following published landscape character assessments which cover the study area:

- *National Character Area Profile 108 – Upper Thames Clay Vales*, 2015, Natural England
- *National Character Area Profile 109 – Midvale Ridge*, 2015, Natural England
- *National Character Area Profile 88 – Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands*, 2014, Natural England
- *Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment*, 2008, Land Use Consultants
- *Defining the Special Qualities of local landscape designations in Aylesbury Vale District*, 2016, Land Use Consultants

National Character Areas

At a national level the Site falls almost wholly within NCA 108 – Upper Thames Clay Vale; the exception being the southern extents of the road access extending to an approximate 1.4 km section to the north western edge of NCA 109: Midvale Ridge as presented on **Figure 11.3: National Character Areas** in **Volume 2**.

The northern and north eastern extents of the study area lie within NCA 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands. The ZTVs (**Figures 11.7 – 11.14** in **Volume 2**) demonstrate some intervisibility with NCA 88, however, any limited views would predominantly be at distances of over 5 km from Rosefield Solar Farm and would have a negligible effect on the NCA as a whole, hence this NCA has been excluded from further study.

NCA 108 – Upper Thames Clay Vales

NCA 108 is located between the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands to the north and the Chilterns to the south and east. The summary description of the NCA states:

“The Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area (NCA) is a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clay... The area encircles the Midvale Ridge NCA and covers an extensive area of low-lying land extending from Wiltshire and Gloucestershire to the west of Swindon through to Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire in the east. It comprises two separate sub-character areas: the Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Vales to the north; and the Vales of White Horse and Aylesbury to the south. The area is dominated by watercourses, including the Thames and its tributaries, and there are also lakes associated with mineral extraction areas, such as the Cotswold Water Park. Watercourses and lakes provide important areas for wildlife and recreation. There

are a number of major transport routes and patches of intensive industrial influence, including Didcot Power Station. There is little woodland cover (around 3 per cent) but hedgerows and mature field and hedgerow trees are a feature, and many watercourses are fringed with willow or poplar.”

In relation to the above statement, it is noted that sub-character area of the Buckinghamshire Vale, and certainly the area that encompasses the Site, contains little in the way of the larger surface water features as described above. Transport routes are present in the form of major rail infrastructure, currently under construction in the form of HS2 and East West Rail, and woodland cover is locally much more prevalent than as described over the majority of the NCA.

The key characteristics of NCA 108 are recorded as follows:

- *“Low-lying clay-based flood plains encircle the Midvale Ridge. Superficial deposits, including alluvium and gravel terraces, spread over 40 per cent of the area, creating gently undulating topography. The Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous clays and the wet valley bottoms give rise to enclosed pasture, contrasting with the more settled, open, arable lands of the gravel.*
- *The large river system of the River Thames drains the Vales, their headwaters flowing off the Cotswolds to the north or emitting from the springline along the Chilterns and Downs escarpments. Where mineral extraction takes place, pits naturally fill with water, and limestone gravels from the Cotswolds give rise to marl formation. There are a high number of nationally important geological sites.*
- *Woodland cover is low at only about 3 per cent, but hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent. Watercourses are often marked by lines of willows and, particularly in the Aylesbury Vale and Cotswold Water Park, native black poplar.*
- *Wet ground conditions and heavy clay soils discourage cultivation in many places, giving rise to livestock farming. Fields are regular and hedged, except near the Cotswolds, where there can be stone walls. The Vale of White Horse is made distinct by large arable fields, and there are relict orchards on the Greensand.*
- *In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates, with limited areas of historic wetland habitats including wet woodland, fen, reedbed and flood meadow. There are two areas of flood meadow designated for their importance at a European level as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). There are also rich and extensive ditch systems.*
- *Gravel extraction has left a legacy of geological exposures, numerous waterbodies and, at the Cotswold Water Park, a nationally important complex of marl lakes.*
- *Wetland habitat attracts regionally important numbers of birds including snipe, redshank, curlew and lapwing and wintering wildfowl such as pochard. Snake’s head fritillary thrives in the internationally important meadows. The area also supports typical farmland wildlife such as brown hare, bats, barn owl, tree sparrow and skylark.*
- *Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, including its Capability Brown landscape, is the finest of many examples of historic parkland in this NCA. There are many*

heritage features, including nationally important survivals of ridge and furrow, Roman roads, deserted medieval villages and historic bridges.

- *Brick and tile from local clays, timber and thatch are traditional building materials across the area, combined with limestone near the Cotswolds and occasional clunch and wicert near the Chilterns.*
- *Settlement is sparse on flood plains, apart from at river crossings, where there can be large towns, such as Abingdon. Aylesbury and Bicester are major urban centres, and the outer suburbs of Oxford and Swindon spread into this NCA. Market towns and villages are strung along the springlines of the Chilterns and Downs. Major routes include mainline rail, canals, a network of roads including the M40 and M4 and The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails.”*

Under the heading of ‘Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas’, the NCA profile notes that:

“The Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area (NCA) covers an extensive area of low-lying land extending from west of Swindon through to Aylesbury in the east, and completely encircles the Midvale Ridge NCA.”

The extensive area of this NCA is divided into two distinct areas: Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Vales to the north and west of the Midvale Ridge; and the Vales of the White Horse and Aylesbury to the south. The site lies within the “Vale of Aylesbury”.

Under the heading of ‘The Upper Thames Clay Vales Today’, the NCA describes the Aylesbury Vale as:

- *“...dissected by alluvial flats and low river gravel terraces around the confluence of the Ock and the Thame. Farther east into the narrower Aylesbury Vale, sandy brownearths, developed from the ledge of Greensand below the Chalk scarp of the Chilterns, provide some of the most productive soils in the area. Aylesbury Vale is drained by the River Thame and numerous independent streams that flow south-west into the Thames. Where drainage is impeded, underlying waterlogged brown earths give rise to wet meadows. Predominantly an agricultural landscape, arable fields, dairy herds, hedges, hedgerow trees and field trees are frequent and characteristic. In places, mature field oaks give a parkland feel. The Chalk scarp of the Chilterns and the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs is prominent in many views from the Vales to the south.”* And
- *“Aylesbury Vale is a continuation of the Vale of White Horse’s agricultural landscape, with a geometric enclosure of farms set among large hedged fields with regularly spaced hedgerow trees. Around villages the fields are generally smaller and more irregular. Black poplar tree stands are distinctive features. Bankside willows and flat, open watermeadows fringe the River Thame, which drains towards the Thames in the south-west.”* And
- *“Although the NCA retains many tranquil spaces, the overwhelming impression is of an area criss-crossed by transport routes including motorways, major roads, canals and railway lines...”*

Under the heading of 'The Landscape through Time' the NCA provides commentary on the evolution of the landscape over time. The following extracts are relevant in the context of the study area:

- *“Around Aylesbury, deserted villages such as Quarrendon, Fleet Marston and Creslow are also significant medieval features. Ridge and furrow survives across the area, with nationally important survivals at West Hanney, Denchworth, Lodgershall, Hogshaw and Creslow. Straight-sided large fields enclosing the northern Vales are typical of a ‘planned countryside’. Domesday records little woodland cover, with scarcely any placenames relating to woodland”.*
- *“Villages that were slow to develop have remained small and retained their early settlement layout and old buildings. Aylesbury is the only town of any size, growing partly from its trade in Aylesbury ducks as the breed was refined and popularised during the 18th century.”*
- *“The population of Aylesbury had more than doubled by 2011, and this change is reflected across the area.”*

NCA 109 – Midvale Ridge

The Site lies primarily outside and to the north of NCA 109 – Midvale Ridge, albeit a section of the road access extends to within its northern edge.

NCA 109 is entirely enclosed by the Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA. The summary description of the NCA states:

“The Midvale Ridge National Character Area (NCA) is a band of low-lying limestone hills stretching east-west from the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire to Swindon. It is surrounded by the flat lands of the Oxfordshire clay vales, giving extensive views across the surrounding countryside. It is a predominantly agricultural area with a mixed arable/pastoral farming landscape, cereals being the most important arable crop. The main towns are Swindon, at the western end, and Oxford, which lies across the centre of the area, but otherwise the settlement pattern is characterised by small nucleated villages along the top of the ridge and along the springline... The NCA is notably more wooded in character than the surrounding Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA with about 9 per cent woodland coverage... Today, about a third of the woodland in the NCA is designated as ancient woodland”

In relation to the above statement, it is noted that, with regard to the study area of this report, woodland cover is locally much more prevalent within NCA 108 than that of NCA 109.

The key characteristics of NCA 109 are recorded as follows:

- *“Low, irregular wooded limestone ridge giving way to a series of isolated steep-sided tabular hills in the east which rise from the surrounding clay vales.*
- *Contrast between the moderately elevated limestone hills and ridges and the surrounding low-lying clay vales.*

- *Drained mostly by small springs and streams which run into the Thames, Thame and Ock.*
- *Well wooded – a third of the woodland is designated ancient woodland.*
- *Mixed pastoral and arable landscape with large, geometric fields divided by hedges and regularly spaced hedgerow trees punctuated by blocks of woodland.*
- *Fragmented but rare and important semi-natural habitats, including acid grassland, calcareous fens and flushes, wet woodland and calcareous grass heaths particularly around Frilford and Cothill.*
- *Evidence of previous land use such as iron-age and Romano-British settlements and ridge and furrow through to old quarries still visible in the landscape.*
- *Locally quarried limestone commonly used as building material for local houses.*
- *Settlement pattern of nucleated villages on the hill tops and along the springline with low density of dispersed settlement.*
- *Recreational opportunities include the Thames Path National Trail.”*

Under the heading of ‘Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas’, the NCA profile notes that:

“Midvale Ridge National Character Area (NCA) is completely enclosed by the surrounding Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA and offers wide views across the adjacent countryside from many points. In places it is possible to see the hills of the Chilterns NCA to the south-east, the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs NCA to the south-west and the Cotswolds NCA to the north-west.”

Under the heading of ‘Midvale Ridge Today’, the NCA is described as:

- *“The Midvale Ridge is a low-lying, irregular outcrop of limestone rising as a distinctive feature above the surrounding flat clay vales, running westwards from the Vale of Aylesbury to Swindon. Tabular hills at its eastern end give way to a thin ridge that in some places is low and narrow, but in others stands out as a striking feature. In all directions there are sweeping views across the adjacent countryside.”* And
- *“Hill top villages are a distinctive feature of the ridge. They are often clustered round a village green and are linked by small sunken lanes enclosed by low hedges. To the east, houses are built of the local limestone or sometimes red brick and timber frame with thatch or tiled roofs. In contrast, to the west houses are typically of local limestone, either Cornbrash or Corallian, with stone slate roofs. Settlements have also grown up along springlines. Isolated farmsteads mostly result from late enclosure.”* And
- *“The past is reflected in the landscape with the remains of Roman settlements still visible and the nationally important examples of ridge and furrow ploughing at Ashendon, Dorton, Quanton and North Marston. Windmills are a characteristic feature of the area and can be found throughout the ridge top.”*

Under the heading of ‘The Landscape through Time’ the NCA provides commentary on the evolution of the landscape over time. The following extracts are relevant in the context of the study area:

- *“Throughout the region in the Middle Ages the open field system of agriculture was widespread and ridge-and-furrow earthworks can still be seen, particularly in the eastern half of the region. Enclosures and reorganisation of farmland during the 18th and 19th centuries saw the introduction of large regular fields. The area is described in Domesday Book as being well forested but in a national context the extent of woodland cover was probably low at that time.”*

Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment

At a district level, the Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment identifies five regional Landscape Character Types (LCTs) of interest within the study area and ZTV. The Site and area of interest falls within LCT 4 Undulating Clay Plateau; LCT 5 Shallow Valleys; LCT 7 Wooded Rolling Lowlands; LCT 8 Vale; and LCT 9 Low Hills and Ridges.

Despite the fact that the ZTVs indicate some distant visibility for LCT 4 and LCT 8, fieldwork has established that any intervisibility between the Site and these LCT would be negligible in scale.

The LCTs are further subdivided into Landscape Character Sub-Areas (LCAs). The northern and eastern extents of the Site fall within LCA 5.6 – Claydon Valley and LCA 5.7 - Hogshaw Claylands, the central and western extents within LCA 7.3 – Claydon Bowl LCA and the southern extents within LCA 9.1 – Finemere Hill.

LCAs 5.4 – Twyford Vale, 5.8 – North Marston Undulating Claylands, 9.2 – Quanton Hill and 9.3 – Pitchcott-Whitchurch Ridge, lie outside of the Site boundary and are included as indirectly affected landscapes potentially experiencing effects approaching the threshold of a likely significant effect during either the construction, operational (including maintenance) or decommissioning phases of Rosefield Solar Farm.

All other LCA receptors were proposed to be scoped out of further assessment within the EIA Scoping Report and the Scoping Opinion agreed with this approach but requested the ‘ZTV should be reviewed with the final scheme and presented in the ES to demonstrate that there is no intervisibility’ (ID 3.6.2), in particular, for LCA 8.1, which it stated should be included or explanation provided as to why significant effects were unlikely to occur. This information is provided in **Table 11.2** in **Volume 1**.

LCT 5 – Shallow Valleys

Relevant key characteristics of LCT 5 – Shallow Valleys are described as:

- *“Shallow often poorly defined valleys*
- *Flat or gently sloping landscape*

- *Elevation range 65M to 105M AOD*
- *Mixed land use with predominance of pasture in most areas*
- *Medium sized fields*
- *Strong hedgerow pattern*
- *Low level of woodland cover*
- *Scattered very small woodlands*
- *Ponds*
- *Lack of settlement*
- *Highest historic landscape sensitivity associated with meadow adjacent to streamlines and settlement*
- *Remote and tranquil away from roads.*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Small bridges over rivers and streams*
- *Willows often pollarded adjacent to watercourses*
- *Limited road access*
- *Views contained by surrounding higher ground*
- *Views up to historic settlements and church spires*
- *Black poplars*
- *Ridge and furrow*
- *Nucleated well preserved historic villages*
- *Disused railway lines*
- *Quainton windmill.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCT 5 include the following:

“The Shallow Valleys are located from the south-east of Buckingham to the south-west of Aylesbury. To the north they drain into the Great Ouse and to the south into the river Thame... The valleys are generally shallow with the gradient often imperceptible. In geological terms the type is divided between Oxford Clays and Boulder Clays in the north and Kimmeridge clays in the south, overlain by a layer of Greensand in the Thame valley west of Aylesbury. The Shallow Valleys lie between the higher ground of LCT 4 Undulating Clay Plateau, LCT 7 Wooded Rolling Lowland and LCT 9 Low Hills and Ridges.” And

The historic landscape of greatest sensitivity tends to be focused in areas close to the rivers and streams where there are pre eighteenth century meadows and on the small historic settlements often on slightly higher ground. Locally there is a pre 18th century enclosure pattern but this is generally on the more defined valley sides the

majority of the area on gently sloping ground tends to be associated with Parliamentary and later enclosure. The predominance of grassland has resulted in the preservation of ridge and furrow, particularly fine examples of this can be found at Granborough and North Marston. Historic villages are well preserved and have often retained the historic transition between historic settlement and countryside without new development.”

LCA 5.4 – Twyford Vale

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 5.4 – Twyford Vale are described as:

- *“Shallow gently sloping valley*
- *Meandering watercourses*
- *Meadows*
- *Good hedgerow pattern*
- *Predominantly pasture*
- *Parliamentary enclosure*
- *Predominantly pre 18th and 19th century enclosure*
- *Low density of settlement*
- *Very little woodland*
- *Good views across valley*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Pollarded willows*
- *Farms on slightly higher ground*
- *Abandoned railways*
- *Scrub along disused railway line*
- *Ridge and Furrow*
- *Twyford settlement earthworks*
- *High proportion of unimproved grassland*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Pylon lines.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 5.6 include the following:

“The shallow valley of the Claydon and Padbury Brooks and their confluence. The valley has gently sloping sides with areas towards the centre which seem almost flat. The farming is mixed with slightly more pasture particularly close to the rivers. The area has a low density of settlement. There are good views across the valley, which often focus on villages and church spires on the valley sides. There is little woodland

and tree cover in hedgerows is variable. The strongest tree lines and the greatest visual interest is generally adjacent to the meandering watercourses, where pollarded willows are a feature. Remote and tranquil close to watercourses.” And

“Watercourses are a major feature of this area the eastern side contains the Claydon Brook the catchment for which extends south to the watershed for LCA 9.1 Finemere Hill and the surrounding LCAs. The western side is drained by the Padbury Brook which has its source in Oxfordshire. The watercourses are fed by a large number of tributary streams and ditches. The course of the brooks is very meandering and often hidden from view by trees along the river banks. The area feeds into the Padbury Valley and from there into the Great Ouse east of Buckingham.

There are large areas with little road access. There is however, quite a good network of footpaths particularly around Twyford. Footpaths also give access close to the confluence of the two rivers in the centre of the area.” And

“The principle habitats are arable and grassland which are unevenly distributed. Many of the arable fields are found to the north whereas grassland is more prevalent in the south and close to the brooks.

A relatively high proportion of the grassland is unimproved when compared to other parts of the District, and a few fragments of neutral grassland - a broad habitat type, are found in the far east and far west. An area of lowland meadow – priority habitat type, is also present in the western part.

Aquatic habitats are a common thread throughout this LCA associated with the two brooks and their tributaries and the ditches that drain into them. A number of ponds are also found in the western part to the south of the watercourse. The streams which are a broad habitat type, and the hedgerow network combine to provide a high degree of habitat connectivity.” And

“The hedgerow pattern in this area is predominantly the result of 18th and 19th century enclosure. There are some pre 18th century features including some sinuous enclosure, well preserved meadows, fossilised strips and settlement.”

“The built environment is dominated by the nucleated villages of Twyford and Adstock and the periphery of Steeple Claydon. The village of Adstock is designated as a conservation area.” And

“The landscape has a good amenity value and it is served by several promoted Rights of Way, including the Bernwood Jubilee Way and Cross Bucks Way.”

Condition

“The condition of this landscape is good. An historic hedgerow pattern and a low level of settlement unify it. The only visual detractor that has a wide visual impact is a pylon line in the east of the area. The area is therefore strongly unified. The cultural integrity is considered to be variable. The landscape contains some good examples of meadows fossilised strips and ridge and furrow although it has some loss of boundaries and is vulnerable to change in more intensive areas of arable farming. Ecological integrity is moderate due to strong connectivity and the large number and

areas of designated sites and habitats of District significance. The functional integrity is considered to be coherent.”

Sensitivity

“The landscape is distinct and has a good sense of historic continuity emanating from the historic hedgerow pattern the meandering watercourses and the low level of settlement. This creates an area with a moderate sense of place. The landform is apparent and the tree cover intermittent reflecting the lack of woodland and the widely spaced hedgerow trees away from the watercourses. This gives the area a moderate visibility. Overall the moderate strength of place and the moderate visibility combine to give the area a moderate level of sensitivity.”

The following ‘Landscape Guidelines’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of the Proposed Development:

- *“Encourage the retention and strengthening of the historic hedgerow pattern by infilling gaps and establishing new hedgerow trees.*
- *Encourage the management of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.*
- *Promote the management and conservation of vegetation adjacent to the meandering watercourses including the pollarding of willows.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible. Encourage good management practices.*
- *Improve the management of historic meadows and pastures.*
- *Close to watercourses promote the use of permanent pasture, with low stocking density and flooding regimes to promote biodiversity and landscape enhancement.*
- *Maintain connectivity of habitats.*
- *New housing and alterations to existing housing should be designed to reflect the traditional character of the area and use locally traditional materials.*
- *Identify key views to surrounding higher ground from publicly accessible land and promote the preservation and enhancement of these views.*
- *Ensure the preservation of archaeological earthworks by maintaining grassland.”*

LCA 5.6 – Claydon Vale

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 5.6 – Claydon Vale are described as:

- *“Shallow valley*
- *Meandering brook on flat valley bottom*
- *Lack of settlement apart from isolated farms on slightly higher ground above flood plain*
- *Strong irregular field pattern*

- *Predominantly small and medium fields*
- *Mixed farming - greater area of pasture but large arable fields are visually dominant.*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Biggin Grange archaeological earthworks*
- *Good mix of tree and shrub vegetation adjacent to brook*
- *Narrow bridge and ford crossing brook to north of Granborough*
- *Disused railway line with trees and shrubs*
- *Tuckey Covert*
- *Unimproved grassland.*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Pylon lines radiating from sub-station northwest of Granborough*
- *Traffic on A413*
- *Small sewage works.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 5.6 include the following:

“The shallow valley has a strong agricultural character notable for its lack of settlement and locally strong field pattern. The area has very small blocks of woodland and variable tree cover in hedgerows. There are good views across the valley from the upper valley sides.” And

“Agriculture predominates and is mixed varying from very small fields of pasture to large arable fields where hedgerows have been removed. Elsewhere the hedgerow pattern is strong with well established mature hedgerows.

The area is notable for its lack of settlement. There are no villages within the valley; the only settlements are isolated farms on slightly higher ground close to the valley floor and a few cottages.

Five pylon lines radiate from the electricity sub-station to the west of Granborough beyond the boundary. Some cross the LCA, others are visible from it and in combination have a significant negative visual impact.” And

“There are no major woodlands but small dispersed pockets or coverts occur on the valley sides. The banks of the brook and tributary have a higher level of tree cover including many unmanaged willows in places forming small linear areas of wet woodland. There is also good tree and scrub cover along the disused railway line. Trees within hedgerows are variable tending to be most evident on the higher valley sides. Patches of significant young elm regeneration suggest this was once a significant tree locally.” And

“The area contains a high proportion of arable habitat although large areas of grassland are also present throughout. Most of the grassland is improved but

unimproved areas can be found largely in the southern half. A block of neutral grassland – a broad habitat type, and of unimproved grassland can also be found in the northwest.

Fragments of woodland are generally small and do not form a significant area of habitat within this area. Woodland is largely restricted to the northern half of the area and is broadleaved in nature – a broad habitat type.

Another broad habitat type is found in the aquatic habitats provided by brook and streams, which thread through the agricultural habitats and in conjunction with the hedgerows and woodlands provide good habitat connectivity. Small areas of standing water habitat are also present as ponds.” And

“The area contains no historic buildings of note although the landscape does form a part of the setting for Winslow Hall, it’s south facing aspect commands views across this landscape. The archaeology of the area comprises some surviving ridge and furrow which is found in patches across the area.” And

“The landscape has a good amenity value with several promoted rights of way running through the area.”

Condition

“Generally the condition of the landscape is considered to be good. The hedgerow pattern remains largely intact although in places hedges have been removed to create large arable fields. Good strong high hedgerows are particularly evident on the slopes below Winslow. The general pattern is considered to be coherent. Five pylon lines radiating out of the electricity sub-station northwest of Granborough are the most significant detracting feature of the area. As the most significant impact of the pylons is localised, there are generally considered to be few detracting features. The cultural integrity is considered to be variable containing early parliamentary enclosure and a few sensitive locations. Ecological integrity is moderate due to good connectivity and the areas of designated sites and habitats of District significance. Overall the functional integrity is coherent.”

Sensitivity

“The area has a distinctive character stemming from the landform and strong hedgerow pattern, with detailed interest focused on the vegetation beside the watercourse and narrow bridge crossings. Overall the sense of place is moderate. The landform is apparent but not dominant. The tree cover is variable in hedgerows. Interest is focused on the trees either side of watercourses and the associated small wet woodlands. Visibility is variable depending on location and is rated as moderate. Overall the moderate sense of character combined with the moderate visibility give the landscape a moderate sensitivity.”

The following ‘Landscape Guidelines’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of Rosefield Solar Farm:

- *“Conserve the pattern of smaller field and woodland parcels.*

- *Conserve agricultural land use on suburban fringes and discourage inappropriate use.*
- *Encourage the retention and strengthening of the historic hedgerow pattern by infilling gaps and establishing new hedgerow trees.*
- *Encourage the management of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.*
- *Promote the management and conservation of vegetation adjacent to the meandering watercourses including the pollarding of willow.*
- *Encourage the management of existing woodland and consider promoting the establishment of new woodland particularly where it will reduce the visual impact of pylon lines.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible. Encourage good management practices.*
- *Close to watercourses promote the use of permanent pasture, with low stocking density and flooding regimes to promote biodiversity and landscape enhancement.*
- *Maintain and enhance connectivity.*
- *Encourage the restoration and management of ponds and the area around them to provide a succession of habitats from open water through to mature trees.*
- *Identify key views to surrounding higher ground from publicly accessible land and promote the preservation and enhancement of these views.”*

LCA 5.7 – Hogshaw Claylands

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 5.7 – Hogshaw Claylands are described as:

- *“Gently sloping bowl of low ground*
- *Mixed agriculture with more pasture*
- *Good hedgerow pattern*
- *Meandering streams*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Mature oaks in hedgerows*
- *Small plantations of poplar planted in a grid*
- *Disused railway line*
- *Views up to surrounding high ground*
- *Ponds in fields*
- *Good bridleway and footpath network*
- *Ridge and Furrow*
- *Roman road*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Pylon lines particularly in the north of the area.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 7 include the following:

“A gently sloping bowl of low ground in mixed agricultural use. There is very little settlement and access is via narrow lanes and a good network of Public Rights of Way. Hedgerows are good and often have mature oak trees. The main meandering watercourses tend to have trees and shrubs along their banks. Small plantations of mature poplars in a grid are a feature of the area. Views tend to focus on the surrounding higher ground. The two pylon lines through the area are visually intrusive. There is an electricity grid sub-station just to the north of the area, within Claydon Valley LCA 5.6, which these lines join. The sub-station and other pylon lines are visually intrusive in the very north of the area. The area is quiet but not wild or remote.” And

“This is a small shallow valley area surrounded on the east, south and west by distinctly higher ground. The ground falls gently away from the higher ground to the lowest area in the north. Elevation from 105m to 90m AOD.” And

“There are no major watercourses and a series of minor streams and ditches drain the area. The main tributaries have a meandering course but many of the smaller tributaries are straight and follow field boundaries. There is a scattering of ponds throughout.” And

“This is a mixed agricultural landscape with a slight tendency towards grassland. There are also small areas of woodland and scrub.

There is very little settlement within the area just a scattering of farms some with large barns. A disused railway line passes north-south through the area.” And

“The woodlands are small with a notable plantation of mature poplars in a grid next to a lane. The tree cover within hedgerows is generally better adjacent to roads where there are frequent mature oak trees. Elsewhere the tree cover is good adjacent to streamlines and there is scrub along the disused railway track.” And

“The principle habitats of the Hogshaw Claylands are a mix of arable and grassland habitat. The grassland is mostly improved however, some unimproved is present throughout.

The agricultural habitats are relieved by a few fragments of woodland habitat - both broadleaved and coniferous are present the most significant area being associated with the line of the disused railway where scrub also occurs. The broad habitat types of rivers and streams and standing open water are well represented by the streams and the ponds across the area.” And

“Another broad habitat type is found in the aquatic habitats provided by brook and streams, which thread through the agricultural habitats and in conjunction with the hedgerows and woodlands provide good habitat connectivity. Small areas of standing water habitat are also present as ponds.” And

“The landscape has no historic settlements of note, only isolated historic farmsteads of Lower & Middle Farm.” And

“The landscape is traversed by promoted footpaths from the Bernwood Jubilee Way.”

Condition

“The condition of the landscape is moderate. It has a unified pattern of elements with a strong hedgerow pattern and little settlement and only minor roads. There are considered to be few visual detractors across the area as a whole but the impact of the pylon lines running through the area is significant although the rural integrity of the landscape is maintained. The cultural integrity is variable, there is some good surviving examples of ridge and furrow in the landscape and the hedgerow pattern, is in good condition but the condition of the hedgerow trees is generally mature or over mature. Ecological integrity is weak due to suboptimal connectivity and the low area of designated sites and habitats of District significance present compared to other parts of the District. Overall the functional integrity is considered to be weak.”

Sensitivity

“The area has a distinct landscape character with a good sense of historic continuity. This gives the area a moderate sense of place. The landform is apparent and the tree cover intermittent with very little in the way of woodland. This produces an area with a moderate level of visibility. Overall the combination of a moderate sense of place and a moderate visibility combine to create a landscape which is considered to be of moderate sensitivity.”

The following ‘Landscape Guidelines’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of Rosefield Solar Farm:

- *“Encourage the retention and strengthening of the historic hedgerow pattern by infilling gaps and establishing new hedgerow trees. Oaks are a feature of hedgerows in this area.*
- *Encourage the management of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.*
- *Promote the management and conservation of vegetation adjacent to the meandering watercourses including the pollarding of willow.*
- *Encourage the management of existing woodland and promote the establishment of new woodland particularly where it will reduce the visual impact of pylon lines.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible. Encourage good management practices.*
- *Improve the management of historic meadows and pastures.*
- *Close to watercourses promote the use of permanent pasture, with low stocking density and flooding regimes to promote biodiversity and landscape enhancement.*
- *Encourage the restoration and management of ponds and the area around them to provide a succession of habitats from open water through to mature trees.*

- *Where possible link ponds to adjacent hedgerows with grassland.*
- *Enhance connectivity of habitats.*
- *Identify key views to surrounding higher from publicly accessible land and promote the preservation and enhancement of these views.*
- *Encourage the preservation of Ridge and Furrow by maintaining grassland.”*

LCA 5.8 – Hogshaw Claylands

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 5.8 – North Marston Undulating Claylands are described as:

- *“Undulating landform*
- *Small hills and ridges*
- *Meandering streams*
- *Predominantly pastoral*
- *Settlement on high ground*
- *Good hedgerow pattern*
- *Ridge and furrow*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Minor roads and gated road*
- *Ponds*
- *Willows and poplars*
- *Historic earthworks*
- *Neutral grassland*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Pylon lines*
- *Traffic on A413 has a localised impact.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 7 include the following:

“An undulating landscape between the hills of Quainton, Oving and Dunton to the south and the Claydon Valley LCA 5.6 to the north. The area drains from the south to the north with several meandering streams with adjacent flat ground. Small hills and ridges are a feature of the area. The settlement tends to focus on areas of higher ground with the villages of North Marston and Granborough being notable for their strong historic character. It generally has a good hedgerow network over this lively landform. Pasture is the dominant land use. Although well settled in comparison to other areas within LCT 5 Shallow Valleys it remains quiet with minor lanes and gated roads enhancing a sense of remoteness in some areas. The only visual intrusion comes from pylon lines and localised impact of the A413 on high ground. Views are

often enclosed by the undulating landform or focus on the higher ground of the ridge to the south.” And

“An undulating character created by streamlines cutting into higher ground. There are a number of small distinct hills and ridges.” And

“There are no major watercourses but small meandering streams are a feature particularly through the centre. Ponds are relatively common both within villages and fields.” And

“This is a predominantly pastoral landscape with about one fifth of the area arable including some areas of prairie fields and new enclosure. The settlement is concentrated on higher ground.” And

“The area has a low level of tree cover with a few small woodlands. The hedgerows have a moderate amount of trees, which tend to be oak in the higher ground to the south and more ash in the north. Willow and poplar are notable in wetter areas and adjacent to streams and ponds.” And

“Grassland habitats dominate – much is improved, but some is unimproved or neutral...

The other habitats are arable which is more prevalent in the northeast; broadleaved woodland - small fragments of which are present throughout; and the aquatic habitats of the numerous ponds and the stream network.” And

“The historic landscape of this area is largely composed of the characteristic rectilinear parliamentary enclosure fields, laid out for the parishes of Granborough and North Marston in 1796 and 1780 respectively.

The settlement pattern of the area is mostly nucleated forms, typified by the settlements of Granborough and North Marston. Both villages contain important listed buildings. North Marston’s conservation area contains the very fine perpendicular church of St Mary’s which is a Grade 1 listed building.

The predominance of grassland in this area has resulted in the preservation of archaeological earthworks; the most evident feature is the abundance of ridge and furrow, relicts of a communally farmed pre-enclosure landscape.” And

“The area has a high amenity value the Swan Way promoted as a recreational footpath. North Marston in particular contains a plethora of Rights of Way radiating from the village. This unusual density of footpaths may be attributable to the village’s past as a place of medieval pilgrimage to the healing well of John Schorne.”

Condition

“This landscape is generally in a good condition it has a strong hedgerow pattern over an undulating landscape there is little in the way of interruption or fragmentation. There are few visual detractors and their impact tends to be fairly localised. The landscape is strongly unified. The cultural integrity is considered to be good it has attractive historic settlement with a well preserved landscape of parliamentary enclosures and nationally important ridge and furrow although the age structure of

the trees is generally mature or over mature. Ecological integrity is weak due to suboptimal connectivity and the low area of designated sites and habitats of District significance present compared to other parts of the District. The area has a coherent functional integrity.”

Sensitivity

“The landscape has a distinct character with a good sense of historic continuity, particularly around the historic settlements. This gives the area a moderate sense of place. The landform is apparent with small hills and ridges within a gently sloping valley landscape. The tree cover is intermittent with low clipped hedgerows and fairly widely spaced hedgerow trees. This gives the area a moderate visibility. Overall the sensitivity of this landscape is considered to be moderate.”

The following ‘Landscape Guidelines’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of Rosefield Solar Farm:

- *“Encourage the retention and strengthening of the historic hedgerow pattern by infilling gaps and establishing new hedgerow trees. Oak and ash trees are a feature of hedgerows in this area.*
- *Encourage the management of hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.*
- *Promote the management and conservation of vegetation adjacent to the meandering watercourses including the pollarding of willow.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of woodland.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of neutral, unimproved and semi-improved grassland wherever possible. Encourage good management practices.*
- *Close to watercourses promote the use of permanent pasture, with low stocking density and flooding regimes to promote biodiversity and landscape enhancement.*
- *Encourage the restoration and management of ponds and the area around them to provide a succession of habitats from open water through to mature trees.*
- *Promote the conservation and interpretation of rich historic environment.*
- *Where possible link ponds to adjacent hedgerows with grassland.*
- *Enhance connectivity of habitats.*
- *Identify key views to surrounding higher ground from publicly accessible land and promote the preservation and enhancement of these views.*
- *Encourage the preservation of historic earthworks and ridge and furrow by maintaining a continuous grass sward.*
- *Maintain the historically open landscape by discouraging the planting of new woodlands and sub-division of fields.*
- *Conserve the distinctive historic character and form of the village and its settings, especially the green and fossilised strips associated with North Marston.”*

LCT 7 – Wooded Rolling Lowlands

Relevant key characteristics of LCT 7 – Wooded Rolling Lowlands are described as:

- *“Rolling and undulating ground*
- *Drains to lower ground on all sides*
- *Elevation range 60M to 130M AOD*
- *Mixed land use predominantly grassland in most areas*
- *Medium sized fields*
- *Generally strong hedgerow pattern*
- *Large blocks of ancient woodland*
- *High density of woodland cover*
- *Hedgerow trees notably mature oak*
- *Low density of settlement.*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Registered historic parks and gardens*
- *Views often enclosed by woodland*
- *Small areas of wet poorly drained soil associated with marshy vegetation.*
- *Views to the Chilterns escarpment from the south of the area*
- *Ridge and furrow*
- *Narrow meandering lanes.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCT 7 include the following:

“Wooded Rolling Lowlands is located along the western side of Aylesbury Vale and extends from south of the Twyford valley over the district boundary into Oxfordshire. The landform is undulating with a few notable small ridges and hills. In geological terms it comprises of predominantly Oxford Clays in the north but overlaps into Kimmeridge Clays in the south. The edge of the area is bounded to the west and south by LCT 8 Vale and to the south and east by LCT 5 Shallow Valleys.

Many of the extant woodlands are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest... To the north lies Grendon and Doddershall Woods and further north Sheephouse Wood, all SSSI's. These too support black hairstreak populations... Various other woodlands are designated as County Wildlife Sites.

A high proportion of the type is identified as historic landscape of the highest sensitivity this particularly relates to ancient woodland, parkland, assarts, fossilised strips and small areas of pre eighteenth century meadow. The woodland is mostly remnants of Bernwood medieval hunting forest. The areas of parkland at Claydon, Dorton Park and Wotton House are all registered parks and gardens and at Claydon particularly the influence of the historic estate can be seen in the landscape well

beyond the present parkland boundary. The rest of the area retains a pattern of primarily pre eighteenth century enclosure. Historic settlement is thinly scattered across the area, concentrated in the north on the small ridgelines at Poundon and Claydon.

This is a complex and rich landscape where much visual interest is associated with woodland, parkland and a strong hedgerow pattern. The underlying landform enlivens these features. The remnants of the Bernwood and designed parkland along with the large areas of pre eighteenth century enclosure mean that the landscape has strong visual historic associations and a remote character - strengthened by the generally quiet meandering lanes and areas of low intensity farming with large numbers of oak trees, areas of scrub and wet grassland.”

LCA 7.3 – Claydon Bowl

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 7.3 – Claydon Bowl are described as:

- *“Bowl with high ground around the edge*
- *Gently sloping ground*
- *Moderate level of woodland cover*
- *Mixed farming with slightly more arable*
- *Small straight lanes*
- *Settlement on high ground*
- *Claydon House and parkland.*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Ridge top villages*
- *Ponds in villages*
- *Vernacular buildings*
- *Traditional farm buildings*
- *Views to ridges and woodland to the south*
- *Plantation of mature poplars in grids*
- *St Michael’s Church Steeple Claydon*
- *Large blocks of broadleaved woodland*
- *Parkland.*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Possible glimpses of landfill operations at Calvert.”*

It is noted that the Calvert energy from waste plant has been commissioned since the publication of the AVLCA and is potentially a more intrusive element than the landfill itself due to the vertical height of its emissions stack.

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 7 include the following:

“A bowl with high ground on the edge and a gently undulating centre sloping from east to west. This is a transitional area between the wooded farmland in the south and Twyford Vale in the north. It is a lively and visually rich area with historic settlements running along the ridges and Claydon Park in the centre of the bowl. The influence of estate management goes beyond the parkland. There is generally more settlement and activity than in the surrounding low ground. The landscape character is that of a cohesive agricultural landscape with attractive historic settlements in prominent locations. The house and parkland with lakes lie at the centre of the area. The surrounding woodland and gateway are visible from the wider landscape. Views within the area tend to focus on the parkland, woodland on the southern edge and villages on the ridge.” And

“There are no major watercourses. Streams drain the area from high ground on the edges to the northwest. The streams and ditches tend to be straight and follow field boundaries. On the high ground several wells are marked and one spring. Ponds are a notable feature of the ridge top villages of Botolph Claydon and East Claydon. The designed parkland around Claydon House includes a sinuous lake along the small, shallow valley to the west of the house.” And

“This is a mixed agricultural landscape with a slight predominance towards arable farming. The area has more woodland than most of the surrounding area. Settlements along the ridge to the north are a feature of the area and they have retained their historic character. Vernacular houses many with timber frames and thatch roofs, and historic farm buildings and ponds are common in the villages. Claydon House and parkland is a National Trust property the house and terrace has fine views over parkland to the west and south..” And

“Almost a tenth of this area is woodland, which is significantly more than the lower areas to the east and north. The woodland is mainly concentrated on the southern edge and around Claydon House; Sheephouse Wood, Shrubs Wood and Home Wood are amongst several ancient woodlands. There are also small plantations of poplar planted in a grid. The tree cover within hedgerows is fairly good with some fine oak trees.” And

“Claydon Bowl has a high proportion of arable land distributed throughout. There is also grassland almost half of which is unimproved, with a small amount of the broad habitat type neutral grassland, notably in the central part.

The main biodiversity interest in the area lies within the parkland at Claydon House with its open water body, and in the woodlands. Both key and broad habitat types are present - lowland mixed deciduous and wet woodlands, and broad leaved deciduous woodland respectively.

Some of the woodlands, particularly in the south are relatively large. They include in close proximity Sheephouse Wood SSSI and the CWSs at Home Wood, Shrubs Wood and Decoypond Wood. The former includes the wet woodland. Relic hazel coppice is present, there has been replanting and the woods include rides, they are also part of a wider group of woodland extending into LCA 9.1.” And

“The most prominent historic landscape feature is the nationally important Claydon House and Parkland which is also registered as a conservation area. This is the historic seat of the Verney family and was originally a 16th century manor house, though the current house is an 18th century adaptation. The gardens were landscaped in the 18th century and have ornamental bridge, pavilions and lodges. The design of the parkland has had an influence on the surrounding landscape. In particular the ancient woodland of Home Wood and Romer Wood to the south of the park, forms a setting for the house as they contain a number of woodland rides aligned to the house, one in particular to the centre of the house. The remaining landscape is composed of woodland assarts and pre 18th century fields believed to have been laid out in the 17th century. To the south and east of Claydon Park parts of the historic landscape pattern have been lost to more recent enclosure and prairie farming.

... In addition to the historic park, the settlement pattern of the area is mostly composed of ‘nucleated’ forms including the villages of Botolph, Steeple, and East Claydon, each village contains a number of listed buildings including St Michael’s church at Steeple Claydon which is a prominent landmark. The village of Boltoph Claydon has been designated a conservation area, and contains a number of attractive timber ‘box’ framed buildings. There are also a handful of isolated farmsteads in the area some such as Muxwell Farm and Knowhill Farm are associated the Claydon House.” And

“The area has a high amenity value, despite Claydon House being occupied by the Verney family; it is in the custodianship of the National Trust and open to the public. The Rights of Way and the surrounding landscape is also promoted in the Bernwood Jubilee Way guide books. Iconic views of the steeple of the church at Steeple Claydon are characteristic.”

Condition

“The landscape is generally in a very good condition. It is a harmonious landscape unified by a good hedgerow pattern and a higher level of woodland cover than in most of the surrounding landscape. There are few visual detractors, although the landfill operations at Calvert are just beyond the high ground on the south western side and can sometimes be seen close to this boundary. The landscape is considered to be strongly unified. The cultural integrity of the area is good with strong historic association given by Claydon House, parkland and estate along with the historic villages, good hedgerow pattern and good woodland cover. Ecological integrity is moderate due to relatively large areas of designated sites and broad habitats of District significance and good connectivity. Overall the functional integrity is considered to be very strong.”

Sensitivity

“The landscape of this area has a distinct character and strong sense of historic continuity giving the area a moderate sense of place. The landform is apparent and the tree cover is considered to be intermittent due to the variation between some well

wooded areas and other parts of intensively managed fields with few hedgerow trees. This combines to give a moderate sense of visibility. Overall the sensitivity of the landscape is considered to be moderate.”

The following ‘Landscape Guidelines’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of Rosefield Solar Farm:

- *“Encourage the retention and strengthening of the historic hedgerow pattern by infilling gaps and establishing new hedgerow trees. Oaks are a feature of hedgerows in this area.*
- *Maintain and improve the condition of existing hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.*
- *Promote the management and conservation of vegetation adjacent to watercourses including the pollarding of willow.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of existing woodland and promote the establishment of new woodland.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of unimproved and semi-improved grassland. Encourage good management practices.*
- *Promote the connectivity of habitats, particularly woodland.*
- *Maintain extent of parkland and broadleaved woodland.*
- *New housing and alterations to existing housing should be designed to reflect the traditional character of the area and use locally traditional materials.*
- *Survey, maintain and restore features of Claydon estate which extend into the surrounding agricultural area.*
- *Promote the conservation and interpretation of rich historic environment.*
- *Identify key views to Claydon house and parkland and ridge top villages from publicly accessible land and promote the preservation and enhancement of these views.*

LCT 9 – Low Hills and Ridges

Relevant key characteristics of LCT 9 – Low Hills and Ridges are described as:

- *“Clearly defined small hills and ridges*
- *Prominent features in low vale landscape*
- *Elevation range 190M to 60M AOD*
- *Predominantly grassland...*
- *Medium sized fields*
- *Low level of woodland cover*
- *Settlement on ridge or hill tops*

- *Dramatic views*
- *Areas of early enclosure.*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Views to Chilterns escarpment and AONB*
- *Ridge and furrow next to settlements*
- *Ash dominant hedgerow trees*
- *Sunken lanes on ridge slopes*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCT 9 include the following:

“Narrow ridges and small hills with steep sides are distinctive features on the south west side of Aylesbury Vale...the areas of greatest historic landscape interest tend to be associated with the historic settlements on the tops of the ridges and hills. As well as vernacular buildings and a number of unexpanded villages there are also crofts, common, assarts, fossilised strips and other small areas of parkland. Away from the villages the field pattern primarily reflects pre eighteenth century enclosure and Parliamentary enclosure.

Wooded areas provide ecological interest with the areas of Finemere Hill, Waddesdon Manor (National Trust)... Also present are a number of woods that are remnants of the ancient Bernwood Hunting Forest, that includes Finemere Wood SSSI and a cluster of woods including Runts Wood, Balmore Wood and part of Romer Wood to the north that are County Wildlife Sites.

The clearly defined small hills and ridges are of interesting character and afford spectacular views over the surrounding lower ground and across to the Chilterns escarpment. Settlement is generally on the highest ground... Access to the villages is predominantly by narrow; sometimes sunken lanes. The hedgerow pattern is largely intact but there are significant areas of modern enclosure and prairie farming which has weakened the landscape character. In addition in some areas, particularly those associated with arable farming, where the hedgerows are cut very low and have become gappy with few hedgerow trees. The greatest visual detractors are the... hedgerow removal creating bleak open areas.

The landform and settlements are the landscape elements of highest quality throughout the area. Where the hedgerow pattern remains strong and there are frequent hedgerow trees the landscape quality is significantly enhanced. Views out are a major feature of this area. There are Scheduled Ancient Monuments just north of the village of Quinton and at Whitchurch.”

LCA 9.1 – Finemere Hill

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 9.1 – Finemere Hill are described as:

- *“Hill with steep sides particularly to the south*
- *Very high level of woodland cover*

- *Source of several streams including the river Ray*
- *Predominantly grassland, half of which is unimproved*
- *Good Rights of Way network following distinctive historic tracks*
- *Ancient woodland with probable assarts.*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Views from the top of hill*
- *Views of Waddesdon Manor parkland*
- *Finemerehill House*
- *Woodland flora*
- *Ponds on top of hill*
- *Medieval moat, fishponds and ridge and furrow*
- *Large blocks of woodland*
- *Calcareous grassland*
- *Watershed.*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Pylon line*
- *Small area of prairie farming.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 7 include the following:

“A hill, which is most distinct where it rises from lower ground to the south, and is notable for its very high density of woodland cover, the majority of which is ancient woodland. The majority of the rest of the area retains a pre 18th century enclosure pattern and has good strong hedgerows around small irregular fields. Although in places the hedgerow pattern has been lost or the hedgerows are very fragmented. The only settlement in the area is a few scattered farms and Finemere Hill house close to the top of the hill and a local landmark. There is no road access to the area but a good network of Public Rights of Way. The bridleway along the top of the hill affords panoramic views. The area has great visual appeal this largely relates to the landform, high level of woodland cover and long distance views. In some locations particularly on the top of the hill or within woodland there is a remote and wild character.” And

“The hill has strong steep slopes on the southern side but the surrounding land on the other sides is higher so the hill landform is less steeply. This is particularly evident in views from the north within Claydon Bowl LCA 7.3. There is a small flat ridge along the top of the hill. The elevation ranges from around 135m to 85m AOD.” And

“There are no major watercourses within the area. Several streams arise from the steep sides. The stream on the south of the hill is the source of the river Ray. The top

of the hill marks the change in water catchments between water that falls to the south and the river Thames and then the Thames and precipitation that falls to the north and drains into the Great Ouse and out to the Wash. There are several ponds including some on top of the hill.” And

“Besides the large area of woodland this is a mixed agricultural landscape with more grassland and about half of this is unimproved. The area has no villages but a scattering of farms most of these are on the lower slopes but Kitehill Farm and Finemerehill House are situated close to the top of the hill on its more dramatic southern side. Finemerehill House is a feature in views from below being a small brickhouse with tall chimneys, situated at the top of steep slopes surrounded by woodland. There are no roads through the area but a network of footpaths and bridleways crosses it. The bridleway across the ridge top has exhilarating panoramic views across lower ground, with Waddesdon Manor woodland being a key feature in these views.” And

“The area has a very high level of woodland cover at about 40% most of this is broadleaved but about a quarter is coniferous. The woodland is predominantly on the western end of the hill. Finemere Wood has rich ground flora and is a Wildlife Trust Reserve managed as oak standards with coppice. Much of the woodland is ancient in origin.

The tree cover within hedgerows is generally good although the eastern side has an area with few hedgerow trees.” And

Almost one third of Finemere Hill is covered in woodland habitats, both broadleaved and coniferous, which is distributed mainly in the western half and includes all three priority and broad habitat types found within the District. Finemere Wood is an SSSI and the designation corresponds to the area of ancient woodland. The nearby woodlands of Runts Wood, Balmore Wood, Greatsea Wood and Romer Wood are all designated as CWSs and are also ancient woodlands displaying a range of habitat and species. Further ancient woodlands are present close by within LCA 7.3 Claydon Bowl making this an important concentration of woodland habitat within the District.

The rest of the habitat is comprised largely of grassland grouped in blocks on the northwest, to the east and a central block, whilst arable land is grouped centrally. The grassland includes calcareous and unimproved pasture, with calcareous grassland restricted to the south. With the exception of standing water, there is little other natural habitat.” And

“This area was part of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood. This would have been a mixed agricultural landscape of woodland rough grazing land shared out between nearby settlements and arable open fields. The historical connection with Bernwood Forest is emphasised by the large surviving blocks of ancient woodland, which makes up a quarter of the landscape. Woodlands such as Finemere Wood, has lost a proportion of its broadleaf character through coniferous replanting. The other significant characteristic of landscape is the irregular shaped fields, some of which are assarts, created as a result of woodland clearance in medieval period. It is likely historically this area was influenced by land improvement by the Verneys at Middle Claydon. About 80% of this area is likely to represent woodland and

enclosure that is pre 18th century in origin. There are small areas of later enclosure and secondary woodland and some recent enclosure and prairie farming on the north side.

There are no nucleated settlements - the historic settlement pattern is one of isolated farmsteads. The only listed building is the 19th century Finemerehill House. In terms of the archaeological dimension the area contains some well preserved ridge and furrow, fishponds and also contains the earthworks of a moated site and church at Hogshaw Farm which originated as a preceptory of the Knights Hospitaller. St. John's Church was destroyed in the English Civil War.

The area has a high amenity value, there are numerous rights of way which follow the distinctive pattern historic routes winding into the centre of this area and are actively promoted through the Bernwood Jubilee Way guides."

Condition

"The landscape of this area is generally in a very good condition there is a unified pattern of woodland and hedgerows across the strong landform. The only real visual detractors are the pylon line on the eastern side and the small areas of prairie farming which fragment the sense of unity. Overall the landscape is considered to be strongly unified. The cultural integrity is good with a good sense of history from the hedgerow pattern, ancient woodland and archaeological interest. The sense of historic continuity is enhanced by the lack of roads but good historically-based rights of way network. Additionally woodland that is being managed with the traditional method of coppice with standards gives strong historic associations. Ecological integrity is moderate because of the areas of designated sites and broad habitats of District significance present relative to the rest of the District, and because connectivity is not at a maximum. The good cultural integrity and moderate ecological integrity combine to give the area a strong functional integrity."

Sensitivity

"This area has a distinct landscape character from the variety and quality of landscape features it also has a good sense of historic continuity giving it a moderate sense of place. The landform is a dominant feature in the character of the area. Although the area has a much higher level of woodland cover than in most of the surrounding countryside the tree cover is considered to be intermittent as there are large areas where the only cover is from fairly widely spaced hedgerow trees. This gives the area a high level of visibility. Overall the moderate sense of place and the high visibility combine to give a landscape of high sensitivity."

The following 'Landscape Guidelines' are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of Rosefield Solar Farm:

- *"Encourage the retention and strengthening of the historic hedgerow pattern with new hedgerow trees, predominantly oak.*

- *Encourage the restoration of the historic hedgerow pattern where it has been lost. To enhance the landscape character and strengthen connectivity of habitats. Where necessary use historic maps to identify where hedgerows have been lost.*
- *Maintain and improve condition of existing hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of woodland using traditional techniques to create and manage a wide diversity of habitats.*
- *Maintain the existing extent of the calcareous grassland.*
- *Promote connectivity of habitats, particularly the calcareous grassland and woodland.*
- *Maintain the distinctive pattern of historic routeways.*
- *Support and promote recreational access by footpaths and bridleways to the hill.*
- *Promote information and understanding about the historic importance and appropriate management of historic woodland features such as irregular edges, assarts, banks and ditches.*
- *Maintain the sparsely settled remote character of the landscape.*
- *Retain and enhance views from publicly accessible land.*
- *Ensure the preservation of archaeological earthworks by maintaining grassland.*

LCA 9.2 – Quainton Hill

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 9.2 – Quainton Hill are described as:

- *“Prominent network of hills*
- *Pastoral land use*
- *Long distance views over surrounding countryside*
- *Area is exposed in winter*
- *Incised steep sided valleys*
- *Narrow ridges and promontories*
- *Lack of woodland cover*
- *Ridge and furrow.*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Streams draining off the hill*
- *Historic earthworks and former moated settlements*
- *Mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees*
- *Irregular shaped field pattern*

- *Dominance of grassland.*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Telecommunication masts*
- *Underground water storage infrastructure.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 7 include the following:

“Directly north of the village of Quainton, slopes are steep and the predominant land use is grazing. The hill tops are exposed and are used for water storage (reservoir). The area is unsettled except for some local farmsteads however, Quainton village (not within the LCA) sits on lowest slopes of southern edge. There are long distance views over surrounding open countryside including to Waddesdon. Quainton Windmill, located within Quainton is a local landmark and in the foreground of views to the south. The area is popular with recreational walkers being on the route of the North Buck Way long distance footpath.” And

“The highest point on Quainton Hill is noted at 187m AOD (Triangulation point). Grange Hill, Simber Hill, Woad Hill and Denham Hill are slightly lower. The land drops away on all sides to an average level of approximately 100m AOD along the southern edge and an average level of 110m AOD along the northern edge.” And

“The slopes of Quainton Hill have been eroded by small streams which drain in a variety of directions. There are also a number of small ponds dispersed over the sides of the hill. To the north at Fulbrook Farm and to the south at Denham Lodge are old moats. Both sites were spring fed by water from the hill. The top of Quainton Hill is occupied by an underground water storage reservoir.” And

“Predominantly pastoral land use. Dispersed farmsteads.

No woodlands but oak and ash hedgerow trees.

The range of habitat at Quainton Hill is limited as it is almost exclusively grassland, about two thirds of which is improved but one third is unimproved. Aquatic habitats are limited to very small occurrences of standing water relating to the moated sites and a small number of minor streams. Hedgerows often tall and with trees, subdivide the landscape and provide additional habitat and biodiversity potential especially where linked to the streams. There are no biodiversity designations and no priority habitat types are recorded.” And

“This landscape was part of Bernwood Forest in the early 13th century. Bernwood had been a hunting ground from the time of Edward the Confessor. Although today forests are synonymous with woodland, this part of Bernwood has historically been an open landscape of arable or pasture. The landscape contains a mixture of pre 18th century enclosure, parliamentary enclosure and 19th century enclosures. There are some prairie fields to the north east of the area as result of boundary loss. The landscape contains no substantial settlements; there are isolated farmsteads with listed buildings at Fulbrook Farm and Denham Lodge.

By contrast the area contains a wealth of archaeology. The most prominent are the earthworks of ridge and furrow that are found throughout the landscape; these are

amongst the finest surviving examples to be found in England. Associated with these former open field earthworks are two deserted settlements, the first is located at Denham Lodge, although the present house dates to the 17th century, it was built on the site of the medieval manor house. There is a complex of features around it, including fishponds and house platforms to the north, a 16th century gatehouse on the south arm of the moat, and the brick walls of a deer park enclosure. The second site is to the north of the area at Fulbrook Farm where the earthworks of a former moated site can be seen. Another notable site in the area is the discovery of a cemetery at Woad Hill, the date of which is unknown. The landscape has a good amenity value with a number of publicised Rights of Way running through it including the Bernwood Jubilee Way.”

Condition

“The condition of the landscape is considered to be good. The irregular pattern of pastoral fields is supported by mature hedgerows over a distinctive steeply sloping landform. These factors support the assessment of a unified pattern of elements and contribute to a strong sense of visual unity. There are few visual detractors other than the telecommunications mast on top of the hill and the underground reservoir. Cultural integrity is good and there are a number of moated sites and earthworks and extensively well preserved ridge and furrow found throughout the area. Ecological integrity is considered to be weak due to sub-optimal connectivity and low areas of designated sites and habitats of District significance. Functional integrity is coherent.”

Sensitivity

“The dominance of the landform combined with the strong field pattern contributed to the area’s distinctiveness. There is good historic continuity supported by the intrinsic rural character and lack of development pressure. Sense of place is considered to be moderate. Tree cover is a feature of the hedgerow network however it is not consistent and is considered to be intermittent. The elevation of the hill over the surrounding areas allows for high visibility and long distance views. Overall the sensitivity of the area is considered to be high.”

The following ‘Landscape Guidelines’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of Rosefield Solar Farm:

- *“Conserve the extensive network of hedgerows and tree cover.*
- *Strengthen the field pattern especially around the northern slopes of the hill by planting up gaps and encouraging development of hedgerow trees.*
- *Conserve existing pattern or irregular shaped fields.*
- *Improve the management of historic meadows and pastures where they have been ‘poached’ due to intensive stock pressure.*
- *Preserve the open character of the hill where it facilitates long distance views over the surrounding countryside.*

- *Preserve and manage the rights of way to facilitate pedestrian access to the hill and its importance as a link to the Midshires Way long distance path.*
- *Encourage the preservation of historic earthworks and ridge and furrow by maintaining a continuous grass sward.*
- *Maintain and improve connectivity.”*

LCA 9.3 – Pitchcott-Whitchurch Ridge

Relevant key characteristics of LCA 9.3 – Pitchcott-Whitchurch Ridge are described as:

- *“Broad ridge eroded by network of small streams*
- *Gently rolling landform with distinctive local promontories*
- *Predominantly pastoral land use*
- *Small fields enclosed by mature hedges*
- *Extensive settlement along top of ridge*
- *Long distance views over surrounding landscape*

Distinctive Features are described as:

- *Church towers*
- *Large area of arable land north of Whitchurch adjacent to A413 corridor*
- *Historic earthworks of Bolbec castle*
- *Mature woodland around earthworks to west of Whitchurch*
- *Limestone walls and thatched properties*
- *Timber framed buildings*
- *Thatched roofs*
- *Ridge and Furrow*
- *Creslow*

Intrusive elements are described as:

- *Traffic on A413*
- *Horse paddocks.”*

Other relevant extracts relating to LCA 7 include the following:

“This is an extensive prominent ridge with rolling landform, predominantly in pastoral land use where the settlement is concentrated on the ridge tops. Earthworks support evidence of earlier historic settlement. The overgrown hedges contain mature trees and eroded valleys draining off the ridge are distinctive features. There are distant views in all directions and the church towers are local landmarks. Some settlements have stone walls and thatched roofs but buildings are predominantly of brick and tile

construction. There has been some local development with intensive land use as horse paddocks.” And

“The landform is a prominent ridge. The highest ground levels at 150 – 160m AOD cover the central section of the ridge and extend from the village of Oving to the western edge of Whitchurch. Pitchcott at the western edge of the ridge sits at an elevation of between 130 -150m AOD whilst to the east, the south eastern edge of Whitchurch is also lower at circa 130m AOD.” And

“The area is a local watershed with streams draining to the north into the Claydon Brook catchment which flows in the river Ouse. Streams that flow south from the ridge and east from Whitchurch collect together to flow into the river Thame catchment.” And

“The predominant land use is grazing land but with a large area of arable land north of Whitchurch.

Several blocks of broadleaved woodland are present west of Whitchurch. Species are predominantly oak and ash with some pine.

The area is largely grassland, but it also contains significant areas of arable habitat. Most of the grassland forms a continuous block with grassland in adjacent LCAs. It is mainly improved, but also present are improved grasslands and an area of the broad habitat type neutral grassland to the west of Whitchurch and the subject of site BNS designation.

Further habitat interest and biodiversity potential is provided by the mature tree cover associated with the settlements and by the hedgerows again often with mature trees.” And

“A complex area with a multi-layered history of enclosure. The LCA is covered by a mosaic of pre 18th century enclosure and subsequent 19th century and parliamentary enclosure in varying sized parcels covering the whole area. This also includes a scattering of 20th century enclosure land principally around the edges of the settlement. There are also some prairie fields north of Whitchurch adjacent to the A413 corridor.

The settlement pattern comprises the nucleated linear village of Whitchurch the village of Oving and the hamlets of Pitchcott & Creslow. Both Whitchurch and Oving are designated as conservation areas and contain a high concentration of listed buildings many of them timber framed.

Apart from the richness of the built environment, the landscape also contains a good concentration of archaeological sites, some of which are designated as scheduled ancient monuments.

This area has good amenity value, the heritage of Whitchurch is visibly promoted with a number of walks and illustrated information boards placed at various points in the village; Oving also has signage promoting the settlement’s past. The landscape is served by a number of Rights of Way. When considering the nature of the topography at Whitchurch the elevation makes the church towers visible from a distance either side of the ridge.”

Condition

“Overall the condition of the landscape is considered to be good. The ridge represents the boundary between the Vale landscape to the south and the rolling landscape of shallow valleys and eroded clay plateau to the north. The general pattern of elements is considered to be unified. There are few visual detractors, notably these are mainly associated with small pockets of horse paddocks enclosed by post and rail fencing concentrated around the fringes of the main settlements. Cultural integrity is good as disruption of field pattern is minimal. The landscape also contains several historic settlements and some significant archaeological sites. Ecological integrity is weak due to poor connectivity and a lack of designated sites and habitats of District significance. Overall the functional integrity is very coherent.”

Sensitivity

“The area has a distinctive character deriving from the relationship of the ridge to the surrounding landform. There is a perception of historic continuity and the sense of place is considered to be moderate. The degree of visibility increases with the elevation of the ridge above the lower slopes to the north and the Vale to the south. Tree covers is intermittent. Overall the degree of sensitivity is considered to be high.”

The following ‘Landscape Guidelines’ are identified in the character assessment and are relevant in the context of Rosefield Solar Farm:

- *“Conserve the extensive network of hedgerows and tree cover.*
- *Strengthen the field pattern around the arable areas to the north by planting up gaps in hedgerows and encouraging the development of hedgerow trees.*
- *Promote good woodland management to conserve the extent of woodland cover.*
- *Maintain and improve connectivity.*
- *Protect the integrity and vernacular character of the settlements.*
- *Encourage planting around suburban fringes in relation to new development.*
- *Conserve the sites and wider setting to the Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other Archaeological Notification Sites.*
- *Encourage the preservation of historic earthworks and ridge and furrow by maintaining a continuous grass sward.”*

Area of Attractive Landscape

The document, ‘Defining the special qualities of local landscape designations in Aylesbury Vale District’, has been prepared to enhance the Council’s landscape evidence base and to inform the Local Plan by defining the landscapes special character and qualities.

Quinton – Wing Hills

The Quainton – Wing Hills Area of Attractive Landscape consists of a large area of undulating hills and ridges extending east – west and settled by a series of small villages. The statement of significance states:

“Undulating hills and ridges with distant panoramic views across the strongly rural and picturesque landscape, including to the Vale of Aylesbury to the south. Together with the Brill-Winchendon Hills they form a series of low, generally open limestone hills with hilltop settlements, between the foot of the Chilterns escarpment and the dip slope of the Cotswolds. The prominent hills form a backdrop to many views in the district. Nucleated villages create texture, a sense of history, variety and rhythm. The strong sense of history is present in the many Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments and landscape features such as ridge and furrow and irregular enclosed fields.”

The special qualities of Quainton -Wing Hills are described as:

- *“Distinctive landform of low, generally open limestone hills and ridges, enhanced by field boundaries which accentuate the shape of the undulating landform.*
- *Nucleated historic villages, often on hilltops, arranged consistently throughout the landscape and connected by a strong network of rural roads and footpaths. Landmark church towers provide focal points amongst the rhythm of hills and undulations. The landscape provides a strong setting to the many villages and Conservation Areas both within the area and in views from outside the area.*
- *The windmill at Quainton provides a recognisable landmark from Quainton Hill, and an interesting element in the foreground of views across the Vale of Aylesbury.*
- *Spectacular panoramic views from frequent vantage points, providing picturesque views across the undulating rural and agricultural landscape – e.g. the plateau landscape in the east of the area, of the Chilterns from Wingrave and from many of the villages.*
- *Strong sense of rural tranquillity, openness and a coherent landscape character. A lack of intrusion from developments that are out of character, gives prominence to the landscape character and landform, a sense of unity of agricultural land use and visual character of scattered hilltop villages.*
- *Cultural features providing a sense of history - many Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments and landscape features such as ridge and furrow and irregular enclosed fields impart a strong sense of time depth to the landscape.*
- *Public rights of way and road network which enable views of and appreciation of the landscape.*
- *The importance of the hills in views from other areas of the district, providing a backdrop and sense of enclosure to Aylesbury Vale.*
- *Remaining ancient woodland in the west of the area that was once part of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood, irregular and assart fields.”*

The following criteria are relevant to the study area:

“Distinctiveness

Distinctive band of low, generally open limestone hills, ridges and plateau to the north of Aylesbury Vale. Strong character and sense of place as a result of the coherent character of the landform, consistent land use of agricultural fields (pastoral and arable) and the scattering of attractive villages

Perceptual character

Strong sense of rural tranquillity, openness and sense of the dominance of landscape. The dominance of landscape and sense of openness – particularly on the plateau in the east of the area, provides opportunities to appreciate the landscape from roads and public rights of way. Frequent attractive views of the undulating hills from the many vantage points. Views to the Vale of Aylesbury to the south from vantage points and many of the villages perched on the ridge– e.g. Quainton Hill, Wingrave, Aston Abbots – with the landscape providing an attractive setting to villages. Wheat fields provide attractive tones of yellowy-orangey colour in summer that glints in the sunshine.

Landscape and scenic quality

High scenic quality of the undulating hills and ridges from within the area and within views from outside the area (e.g. Middle Claydon Conservation Area; refer to other relevant Conservation Area Appraisals for specific views)... Some very old and characterful historic buildings – e.g. in Aston Abbots, Whitchurch and Oving. Picturesque villages present a smaller scale, and the landscape is usually visible from vantage points within them (e.g. from Wingrave). Church towers are local landmarks. Mature trees and hedgerows nestle buildings and structures into the landscape.

Natural character

- *Ancient woodlands, with a particular concentration in the west of the area – many of which are also SSSI/ LWS.*

Cultural character

- *Strong sense of history – remaining ancient woodland in the west of the area that was once part of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood, irregular and assart fields*
- *Large number of Scheduled Monuments, concentrated within the medieval villages.*
- *Large number of Conservation Areas – .., containing characterful listed buildings, many of them timber framed*
- *Earthworks of well preserved ridge and furrow e.g. North Marston, and at Quainton Hill are amongst the finest surviving examples to be found in England.*

Function

Good network of public rights of way including long distance trails – e.g. the Bernwood Jubilee Way, North Buckinghamshire Way, Outer Aulesbury Ring, Matthew’s Way.”

Guidelines for management, based on those from the landscape character areas, are described as:

- *“Maintain and improve condition of existing hedgerows through traditional cutting regimes.*
- *Maintain the condition and extent of woodland using traditional techniques to create and manage a wide diversity of habitats.*
- *Promote connectivity of habitats, particularly the calcareous grassland and woodland.*
- *Maintain the distinctive pattern of historic routeways.*
- *Support and promote recreational access by footpaths and bridleways – e.g. to Finemere Hill.*
- *Promote information and understanding about the historic importance and appropriate management of historic woodland features such as irregular edges, assarts, banks and ditches.*
- *Maintain the sparsely settled remote character of the landscape.*
- *Retain and enhance views from publicly accessible land.*
- *Ensure the preservation of archaeological earthworks and ridge and furrow by maintaining grassland.”*



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