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Solar PV Developments in the Landscape

Summary of the Supplementary Planning Document

Prepared by LUC for Mid Devon District Council
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Summary of the Solar PV Developments in the Landscape SPD

What is the purpose of the SPD?

The 'Solar PV Developments in the Landscape' Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides guidance on:

- Key landscape issues associated with field-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) developments.
- Relative landscape sensitivities of different areas within Mid Devon to solar PV developments (through a specific landscape sensitivity assessment).
- Good siting and design of solar PV schemes including guidance on how potential impacts could be minimised.
- Landscape information which developers should provide when submitting an application for a solar PV development.

Which policies does the SPD support?

The Planning Act 2008 requires that Local Plans contain policies that '*...contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change*'. Local policy in Mid Devon supports the principle of renewable energy development provided that potential impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including those which may affect landscape character.

Relevant policies that this SPD will support, taken from the Mid Devon Core Strategy (2007) and Local Plan Part 3: Development Management Policies (2013), are as follows:

- COR2: Local distinctiveness
- COR5: Climate change
- COR18: Countryside
- DM2: High quality design
- DM5: Renewable and low carbon energy
- DM27: Development affecting heritage assets
- DM29: Protected landscapes

Who is the SPD for?

The SPD has been prepared for:

- **Planning officers** and **elected members** - to provide guidance on the relative landscape sensitivities of different areas within Mid Devon to solar PV development and to provide a consistent framework for considering the potential landscape effects of planning applications for such developments within the District.
- **Developers** of solar PV installations - to provide guidance on the key landscape considerations that need to be taken into account when siting and preparing planning applications for solar schemes and how potential impacts can be minimised.
- **Members of the public** - who have an interest in or may wish to comment on proposed solar PV developments through the planning process.

Key principles underpinning this SPD

Principle 1: Solar PV developments should minimise their effects on the landscape through sensitive siting and design.

See Chapter 2: Context.

In order to design and locate solar PV developments to minimise their effects on the landscape, it is important to firstly understand the characteristics of this development type and the impacts schemes may have on landscape character. The main characteristics of ground-mounted solar PV schemes are described in Chapter 2, along with a summary of their potential landscape effects.

Principle 2: Solar PV development should be of a size and scale appropriate to the landscape, with particular regard to its sensitivity to change as a result of such development.

See Chapter 3: The landscapes of Mid Devon; Chapter 4: Method for undertaking the landscape sensitivity assessment; Chapter 5: Strategic patterns of landscape sensitivity across Mid Devon and the detailed Landscape Sensitivity Assessments provided in Appendix 2.

The SPD includes a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for solar PV developments, based on the spatial framework of Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas found in Mid Devon (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.1). Chapter 4 sets out the method followed for undertaking the assessment, considering various scales of solar PV development from very small (<1ha) to very large (>15ha). Sensitivity is judged on a five-point scale from low to high (see Table 4.6).

A summary of the strategic patterns of landscape sensitivity to solar PV developments across Mid Devon is provided in Chapter 5, with district-scale maps illustrating the sensitivity of the different LCTs to the different scales of solar PV development (Figures 5.1 to 5.5). Paragraphs 5.9 to 5.11 provide summary conclusions for siting and designing solar PV developments within the Mid Devon landscape.

Appendix 2 contains detailed assessments and guidance for each LCT found in Mid Devon. Proposals should be designed with all of this information in mind.

Principle 3: Solar PV development proposals should include an assessment of landscape and visual effects, taking into account the location of the site's landscape sensitivity as well as that of adjoining Landscape Character Types and Areas (where appropriate). The cumulative effects of existing and consented solar PV development in the surrounding area should also be considered.

See Chapter 6 and the LCT assessments at Appendix 2.

An assessment of potential landscape and visual effects is a key consideration when proposing solar PV development. It is likely that an assessment of landscape and visual effects, including cumulative effects, will be required to accompany a planning application. Guidance on undertaking Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and cumulative LVIAs are provided in Chapter 6.

Certain developments require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) where thresholds are exceeded as set out in the EIA Regulations (2011). In the case of solar PV development, proposals in excess of 0.5 hectares or in sensitive areas may require a screening for an EIA. Consultation should be undertaken with the Council at the earliest opportunity to clarify if an EIA is required. Guidance on EIA is also provided in Chapter 6.

The LCT assessments provided at Appendix 2 include consideration of views between the different landscapes (other Landscape Character Types and Areas) of Mid Devon, as well as surrounding landscapes beyond the district boundary including Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks, where appropriate. This information should be used when considering a solar PV development proposal.

Structure of the SPD

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Context Policy context for solar development Main characteristics of solar PV developments and how they might impact on the landscape
Chapter 3	The landscapes of Mid Devon Landscape variations across Mid Devon Summary of the Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) that form the framework for the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment
Chapter 4	Method for undertaking the landscape sensitivity assessment Summary of method used to undertake the landscape sensitivity assessment including: key sources of evidence, description of solar PV developments and assessment criteria
Chapter 5	Strategic patterns of landscape sensitivity across Mid Devon Results of landscape sensitivity assessment for solar PV development across the Landscape Character types within Mid Devon
Chapter 6	How to consider landscape in planning applications for solar PV Summary of the planning and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process in relation to solar PV developments Detailed guidance on preparing landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIAs) and cumulative landscape and visual impact assessment (cLVIAs) Further References
Appendix 1	Character Area Summaries
Appendix 2	Detailed Landscape Character Type Assessments

How to use the SPD

This brief User Guide is designed for both developers and decision-makers to help them consider landscape character and sensitivity issues in solar PV development proposals. It is arranged under three key stages, setting out a series of questions as prompts to help determine the landscape impact of a solar PV development. References to where information in the SPD and Devon Landscape Policy Group (DLPG) Advice Note 2¹ can assist in answering these questions are included. Following this process is designed to help shape proposals and assist in planning decisions.

Stage 1 – Landscape sensitivity

- What size is the footprint of the proposed solar PV development (in hectares)? *Please refer to the size bandings set out in Table 4.1 of the SPD.*
- Which Landscape Character Type (LCT) is the proposed development in? *Please refer to Figure 3.1.*
- Is the site characteristic of the wider LCT? *Please refer to the key characteristics provided at the beginning of each LCT assessment in Appendix 2.*
- What is the sensitivity rating for the LCT for the scale of solar PV development being proposed? *See Table 5.1 or the relevant LCT assessment(s) in Appendix 2.*
- Do any of the 'Sensitive Features/Characteristics' set out for the relevant LCT, in Appendix 2, apply to the proposed development site?

Stage 2 – Detailed siting and design considerations

- Is the size of the solar PV development proposed in line with the 'Guidance for Development' provided for the relevant LCT, including the 'Additional guidance specific to particular Landscape Character Areas'? If not how does it differ? *Refer to the relevant LCT assessment(s) in Appendix 2.*
- Does the proposal accord with the generic guidance for solar PV development contained in the Devon Landscape Policy Group (DLPG) Advice Note 2 (Chapter 3)? If not, what aspects of the proposed development conflict with which parts of the guidance?
- Does the siting and design of the scheme accord with the 'Guidance for Development' for the relevant LCT? If not, what aspects of the proposed development conflict with which parts of the guidance? *Refer to the relevant LCT assessment(s) in Appendix 2.*
- Have opportunities been taken to mitigate significant adverse effects and opportunities for landscape enhancement been included as part of the proposal? *Refer to para 6.18 of the SPD and Chapter 3 (page 47) of the DLPG Advice Note 2.*

Stage 3 – Cumulative impact

- Is the development in line with the guidance on 'Designing for Multiple Developments' set out in Chapter 3 of DLPG Advice Note 2 and the 'Guidance Development' set for the relevant LCT? *Refer to the relevant LCT assessment(s) in Appendix 2.*
- If not, which guidance does it conflict with?
- Will solar PV developments have a defining influence on the overall experience of the landscape of that LCT?

¹ DLPG (2013) Advice Note 2: Accommodating Wind and Solar PV Developments in Devon's Landscape. Available at <http://www.devon.gov.uk/devon-guidance-v6-june-2013-final-report.pdf>