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5TH MARCH 2025

David Lamb

East Herts Council
Wallfields
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Hertfordshire SG13 8EQ

Dear David,

**LAND TO THE WEST OF THE A507 BETWEEN COTTERED AND CROMER, HERTFORDSHIRE,
SG9 9PU. Application No. 3/24/2245/FUL**

This letter is in response to the archaeology comments you received on the 10th January 2025 from Historic England and on 28th January 2025 from the Historic Environment Advisor at Hertfordshire LEADS on the above application site.

The proposal site comprises open agricultural land (also incorporating a private, civil airfield strip of grass) west of the village of Cottered and northeast of the hamlet of Cromer in Hertfordshire. It is divided into two areas, the main body of the site and a further separate field (henceforth described as SW1) to south-west of the main site area and proximate to the hamlet of Cromer. It is bounded to the north-east by the A507, to the south by the B1037 and the River Beane crosses the site on an approximate ENE/WSW alignment, along with a tributary stream further south. Overall, the proposal site measures approximately 79.5 hectares. and is within the administrative area of East Hertfordshire.

Planning Context

Section 16 of the NPPF, published December 2024, provides guidance on the conservation and investigation of heritage assets. Overall, the objectives of Section 16 can be summarised as seeking the:

- Delivery of sustainable development;
- Understanding the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits brought by the conservation of the historic environment;
- Conservation of England's heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance; and
- Recognition that heritage makes to our knowledge and understanding of the past.

Paragraph 207 states that applicants should provide a description of the significance of any heritage assets affected and that the level of detail supplied by an applicant should be proportionate to the importance of the asset and should be no more than sufficient to review the potential impact of the proposal upon the significance of that asset.

The supporting NPPG reiterates that the conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is a core planning principle, requiring a flexible and thoughtful approach. Key elements of the guidance relate to assessing harm. An important consideration should be whether the proposed works adversely affect a key element of the heritage asset's special architectural or historic interest. Additionally, it is the degree of harm, rather than the scale of development, that is to be assessed. The level of 'substantial harm' is considered to be a high bar that may not arise in many cases. Essentially, whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision taker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the NPPF.

Also relevant to this application is National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3), published in November 2023. Although not a nationally significant infrastructure project, Paragraph 5 of the NPPF notes that "National policy statements form part of the overall framework of national planning policy, and may be a material consideration in preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications."

Paragraphs 2.10.109 & 2.10.110 relating to cultural heritage note that below ground impacts of solar PV developments are generally limited and equally may have a positive effect, for example archaeological assets may be protected by a solar PV farm as the site is removed from regular ploughing.

Planning policies CC3, HA1 and HA3 of the East Herts District Plan provide the local planning framework for the application site.

Summary of archaeology information provided to date

In order to address the archaeological requirements of national and local planning policies, a geophysical (magnetometer) survey has been undertaken of the entirety of the site and a Heritage Statement has been provided (combined archaeology/built heritage).

No magnetic anomalies of clear archaeological potential were identified by the geophysical survey. This includes in proximity to the projected Roman road and at the location of cropmarks (recorded on the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record and interpreted as possible pits and ditches), where anomalies in the data are strongly suggestive of natural features. The authors concluded that based on the results, the archaeological potential of the site is low.

The Heritage Statement considered the results of the geophysical survey, along with relevant data from other sources including the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), the National Heritage List for England, and the Environment Agency LiDAR dataset (1 m DTM). A site visit was also undertaken. The Statement identified an overall low to moderate potential for currently unrecorded archaeological remains to be present on the site.

Comments on Consultee Responses

In respect of Historic England's response, the Heritage Statement has identified that there is very limited intervisibility between the proposal site and Cumberlow Manor House. It is concluded that the harm to its significance is less than substantial, at the low to very low range of that scale. In terms of the projected line of the Roman road, a buffer has been maintained in the current design proposals on the presumed route of the road adjacent to the extant field boundaries.

In respect of LEADS' response, the overall size of site is not a direct correlation to likely harm of any archaeological assets. Solar PV developments have very limited below ground impacts compared to other forms of development, eg residential. This is recognised in NPS EN3 para 2.10.109. Solar farms are completely reversible and can be removed quickly, returning land to its previous state if necessary. In cognisance of NPPG it is the degree of harm, rather than the scale of development, that should be assessed.

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Furthermore, we would suggest that NPS EN3 para 2.10.110 applies in this case as the site is arable farmland where any below-ground archaeological remains continue to be eroded and truncated by ploughing (and highly unlikely to be well preserved). The proposals would protect any such remains from this ongoing harm.

The results of the geophysical survey and research to date indicate limited potential for significant archaeological remains, and it is our professional opinion that any such remains would likely be of low (local) significance and no more than moderate (regional) significance. In combination with the inherently limited construction impacts, the resulting level of harm to the archaeological resource would be less than substantial. We maintain that the level of information supplied to date is proportionate to the likely importance/significance of any assets, as required by the NPPF, and sufficient to determine the application.

Specifically on the request for further geophysical survey, we have consulted with the geophysicists who undertook the initial survey and they are of the opinion that this would be a burdensome activity that would not provide the necessary data to identify the specific significance of any buried archaeology on the site. This can only be done by invasive fieldwork in the form of targeted trial trenching. As is the standard approach where remains of high significance are not anticipated, and particularly in the case of low impact development, it is proposed that targeted trial trench evaluation to characterise and record any archaeological assets at risk is undertaken following the granting of planning consent secured by an appropriately worded archaeological planning condition.

If you wish to discuss the above points in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



Alistair Robertson MA (Joint Hons), MCIfA, FSA Scot
Director - Heritage



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