



# **Mercia** EnviRecover

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**PUBLIC INQUIRY UNDER SECTION 77 OF THE TOWN AND  
COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED) INTO THE  
PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENERGY FROM WASTE  
FACILITY ON LAND AT HARTLEBURY TRADING ESTATE,  
HARTLEBURY, WORCESTERSHIRE**

**PINS REFERENCE: APP/E/1855/V/11/2153273  
LPA REFERENCE: 10/000032/CM**

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## **LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT**

**MWM 9**

**PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF JONATHAN MASON**

## **SUMMARY**

**October 2011**



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(Land at Waresley Park, Hartlebury)

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF EVIDENCE**

### **1.1 Qualifications and Relevant Experience**

1.1.1 I am Jonathan Mason, a landscape architect and a Technical Director of AXIS. My qualifications and experience are set out in my main proof of evidence.

### **1.2 Scope of Evidence**

1.2.1 I have prepared this proof of evidence for the Inquiry arising from the Secretary of State's decision to call in the planning application for the Mercia EnviRecover facility for his own determination under Section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

1.2.2 My evidence is divided into a number of sections, which cover the following matters:

- 1) A synopsis of the Landscape and Visual Impact assessment submitted as part of the Environmental Statement;
- 2) Consideration of matters relevant to landscape and visual assessment that have been raised by the Secretary of State;
- 3) Consideration of other matters relevant to landscape and visual assessment;

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## **2.0 SYNOPSIS OF THE LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT**

- 2.1.1 A detailed Landscape and Visual Assessment was submitted as part of the Environmental Statement (ES) for the proposed development.
- 2.1.2 The assessment found that there would not be significant effects on landscape fabric, landscape character or visual receptors.
- 2.1.3 I am satisfied that the assessment has been carried out correctly, with an appropriate scope and in accordance with a clear and appropriate methodology. I endorse the findings of the assessment.
- 2.1.4 The assessment was undertaken on the basis of viewpoints agreed with the local planning authority. Further viewpoints suggested by the rule 6 party have been assessed within my evidence and alter the findings of the visual assessment. A number of long distance viewpoints have also been considered in response to statements made by the rule 6 party and reveal that the development would be difficult to discern from locations which include distant, protected landscapes.
- 2.1.5 I have noted that for the purposes of this inquiry, whether or not an impact is classed as significant is perhaps less important than a consideration of 'acceptability' of the changes in views and the weight that the 'harm' caused is given in the planning balance.
- 2.1.6 In this respect, I have highlighted appeal findings in relation to wind energy developments, which I believe to be relevant to this development in so much as they address effects upon visual amenity of dwellings. In one such example at Carland Cross, development in closer proximity to dwellings and involving taller and moving structures in a less developed setting the inspector found that was not sufficient reason to find the visual impact unacceptable
- 2.1.7 Measures have been taken in the design of the proposed development which I believe have succeeded in minimising its effects.
- 2.1.8 The landscape and visual effects of the proposal were fully appreciated by the planning committee prior to their decision to approve the development,

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with the Members of the Council having visited the area during an exercise to demonstrate the height of the facility using a balloon.

2.1.9 Neither the County Landscape Officer nor the County Design Unit Manager objected to the proposal

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### 3.0 MATTERS IDENTIFIED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

- 3.1.1 The Secretary of State has asked to be informed on four matters regarding the extent to which the proposal is consistent with PPG2: Green Belts:
- 3.1.2 I have addressed the third specific point – whether there would be harm to the visual amenities of the green belt as a result of the development and have also addressed the related issue of whether there would be harm to the openness of the Green Belt
- 3.1.3 My finding is that the introduction of the proposed EnviRecover facility within the Hartlebury Trading Estate would not substantively alter the visual amenities of the green belt, although I acknowledge there would be a degree of harm to views from some areas. This harm would be both small in degree and limited in its extent and as such in my view does not justify planning permission being refused. I am of the view that overall the visual amenities of the Green Belt would not be materially altered.
- 3.1.4 With respect to openness, my finding is that existing development in the Green Belt locally is extensive. In terms of the immediate site, the existing development plot at Oak Drive is fully enclosed by development such that it is not visible from the open countryside surrounding the Trading Estate at all. It is in fact only visible from Oak Drive itself, and from the southern flank of the Waresley landfill site
- 3.1.5 If the intent is to keep land open, then it is fair to say that for this site that the land is not open – and in the lifetime of the Green Belt designation, never has been.
- 3.1.6 I have considered the proposed development in terms of both *Actual* openness and *Perceived* openness.
- 3.1.7 With regard to actual openness I considered that the lack of physical intervisibility with areas beyond the site, and the strong likelihood that the site will be built out both mean that the development can have very limited harm to the openness of the site.

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3.1.8 In respect of perceived openness I conclude in a similar manner to when addressing the effects upon the visual amenities. The introduction of the proposed facility within the Hartlebury Trading Estate would not substantively alter the openness of the green belt. The greater height of the proposed structures would mean that built development would be seen from some new areas. In views that already include built development the development would in some cases cause this built component of the view to be more prominent. However I do not consider that these minor increments of change would harm the general perception of openness.



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#### 4.0 OTHER LVIA MATTERS

- 4.1.1 A number of additional matters have been raised by third parties, notably by the rule 6 party WAIL. These primarily relate to matters which are dealt with in the preceding sections (long distance views, impacts on Green Belt).
- 4.1.2 In addition, Wychavon District Council have set out an objection to the application by virtue of its impact on the setting of Waresley House Mansions (formerly St Gilberts School), a Grade II\* Listed Building. I have given consideration to the landscape setting and found myself in agreement with both English Heritage (who describe the setting as being already *seriously compromised* by residential development undertaken in the 1980's) and the Environmental Statement, which found that impacts would be negligible.