

Culham Battery Storage Limited

Land to the north of the Culham
Science Centre, Culham

APP/Q3115/W/24/3358132

Proof of Evidence on Heritage Matters

Ianto Wain BA MCIFA

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Witness

1.1.1 I am Ianto Wain. I am Head of Heritage Management Services at Oxford Archaeology.

1.1.2 I have an honours degree in History and English from the University of Surrey and a Post-Graduate Diploma in British Archaeology from Oxford University Department of Continuing Education. I am a Member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (MCIfA).

1.1.3 I have 36 years of experience as a professional archaeologist and have been a Heritage Consultant since 1991. I have been Head of the Heritage Management Department, a specialist department within Oxford Archaeology dedicated to the production of Heritage reports and research projects for 25 years.

1.1.4 I understand my duties to the Inquiry, to give independent and objective evidence on matters within my expertise, based on my own independent opinion and uninfluenced by the instructing party. I confirm that I have stated the facts and matters on which my opinion is based, and that I have not omitted to mention facts or matters that could detract from my conclusions. I believe that the facts stated within this Proof are true and that the opinions expressed are correct. I will continue to comply with my duties to the Inquiry.

1.1.5 I have adhered to the standards and duties of the professional body the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) of which I am a member of and will continue to adhere to those standards and duties.

1.2 Involvement with the case

1.2.1 I am involved with this case as an expert witness on behalf of Culham Storage Limited which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Statera Energy Limited. My evidence is confined to heritage issues. My role is to assess the impact that the proposed development will have on the significance of heritage assets. The question of whether such impacts are acceptable in the planning balance is dealt with by Mr. Hall in his Proof of Evidence.

1.2.2 I have been involved in the case since March 2023 when Oxford Archaeology produced an initial Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (HEDBA) for the outline proposals. I oversaw and managed this element of the project and provided expert advice and input into the project. I have continued to oversee and advise upon further elements of Oxford Archaeology's work on the project including the production, in December 2024, of an updated HEDBA.

1.3 Scope of evidence

1.3.1 This proof of evidence is concerned with Reason for Refusal 3 and pertains to the potential effects of the proposed development upon the heritage assets within the proposed scheme area and in its environs. In particular, it will address the potential impact of the proposed development upon the significance and survival of the Grade I Registered Park and Garden at Nuneham Courtenay, within the area of which the scheme is partially located. The evidence will address the potential effects of the revised Appeal Scheme.

2 RELEVANT PLANNING GUIDANCE

2.1 Legislation and Policy

- 2.1.1 This evidence has been prepared with reference to all relevant legislation, development plan policies and national planning policies which include the following:

Legislation

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953

National Planning Policy

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as revised in December 2024 and updated in February 2025
- Planning Practice Guidance. This was last updated in December 2024 although the section pertaining to Heritage has not changed since July 2024. .

Development Plan

- South Oxfordshire Local Plan (2035)

3 BACKGROUND AND PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 The Site

- 3.1.1 A more detailed description of the appeal site is given in the Statement of Case and in the landscape evidence prepared by Mr. McDermott. However, in summary, the appeal site measures 26.8 hectares. It is located to the north of Thame Lane and the Culham Science Centre, within the parishes of Culham and Nuneham Courtenay and within the administrative district of South Oxfordshire. The majority of the site comprises six agricultural fields located to the north of the Culham Science Centre. The eastern part of the site includes the access road leading to the Science Centre and an undeveloped green space on the northern edge of the Science Centre complex. The site is bounded by agricultural land to the north and east, Culham Science Centre to the south and the Cherwell Valley railway line to the west. The northern part of the site extends approximately 250m into the Grade I Registered Nuneham Courtney Park and Garden.

- 3.1.2 The site is situated on a low-lying and fairly flat area of the Thames floodplain. The majority of the site is situated at a height of 65m above Ordnance Datum (aOD), rising to a maximum height of 69m aOD in the north-east.

3.2 Proposed Development

- 3.2.1 The proposed development will entail the construction of a Battery Storage System (BESS) comprising a 500-megawatt battery storage facility with associated infrastructure, access and landscaping with a connection to the Culham Jet National Grid Substation.

- 3.2.2 A full description of the proposed development is provided in the Statement of Case and has been agreed in Section 4 of the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) which has been submitted as part of this appeal.

3.3 Planning Background

- 3.3.1 Proposals for a Battery Energy Storage System within the site were submitted to the local planning authority under planning application ref. P24/S1498/FUL. The original scheme was refused by South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) for eight reasons. Reason for refusal 3 referred to impacts upon the Registered Park and Garden at Nuneham Courtenay and was as follows:

RFR3 – Heritage Impacts to RPG

“The proposed development of an industrial nature would encroach into the Nuneham Courtenay Grade I Registered Park and Garden (RPG), a highly significant C18 parkland landscape, which contains several listed buildings and structures. The development will result in significant adverse impacts to the designated heritage asset, and the setting of the RPG. The proposed landscape mitigation fails to respect the character of the RPG and its setting and would result in further harm. The harm to the heritage assets considerably outweighs the benefits of the proposed development and the proposal is therefore contrary to the NPPF and Policies ENV6 and ENV10 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Further, this proposal, in addition to the development on allocated sites STRAT8 and STRAT9, will create an increased cumulative impact harmful to the setting of the designated Registered Park and Garden, contrary to Policies ENV6 and ENV10 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035, the NPPF.”

- 3.3.2 As part of the appeal, the proposals for the development were subject to major amendments which addressed the concerns raised by SODC, Historic England and the Gardens Trust. The amendments are as follows:
- i. The connection tower has been relocated to the main battery storage compound (outside the Registered Park and Garden); and
 - ii. The landscaping proposals have been revised to remove the previously proposed artificial bunds, to extend woodland planting further south along the western boundary of the site, and to remove the proposed scrubland from around the former location of the connection tower.
- 3.3.3 Following the Case Management Conference, it was agreed that the determination would be made on the basis of the Appeal Scheme. Accordingly, my evidence is directed to the potential effects of the Appeal Scheme only.
- 3.3.4 The Appeal Scheme retains the proposed inclusion of a naturalist tree belt along the former park boundary as well as areas of tree planting which better reflect the original character of the park in this area. However, the proposed areas of tree planting will no longer be situated on artificial bunds and the shape of the proposed tree belt has been altered to better match the historic woodland layout.

3.4 Other Relevant developments

- 3.4.1 While not a part of the proposed development, the areas surrounding the site to the west, south and south-east are also scheduled to be developed, both as part of two Strategic Site Allocations in accordance with the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (STRAT8/STRAT9) (SODC Local Plan 2020) and as part of the upcoming redevelopment of the Joint European Torus (JET) Decommissioning and Repurposing (JDR) programme at the Culham Science Centre (UKAEA 2025a).

Local Plan Allocations (STRAT8 & STRAT9)

STRAT8: Culham Science Centre

- 3.4.2 '*STRAT8: Culham Science Centre*' pertains to the redevelopment and intensification of the Culham Science Centre, located immediately south/south-east of the site. The policy stipulates that, in combination with the adjacent strategic allocation (Policy STRAT9), this site will deliver at least a net increase in employment land of 7.3 hectares (with the existing 10 hectares of the No.1 site retained but redistributed across the two strategic allocations) (SODC 2020, p48). The exact siting and phasing of the employment development has not been finalised; however, it is anticipated that some of this allocation will be achieved as a part the JET JDR programme (see below).

STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre

- 3.4.3 Local Plan Strategic Allocation Policy '*STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre*' pertains to a 217-hectare area of agricultural land located predominantly to the west, and immediately south of the site. The allocation site will be expected to deliver (in combination with adjacent Science Centre) a net increase in employment land of 7.3 hectares, approximately 3,500 new homes with sufficient additional educational capacity (likely totalling two new primary schools, with one secondary school with on-site sixth form and Special Educational Needs (SENS) provision), sufficient health-care capacity (likely one additional GP surgery), and provision for convenience floorspace (shops and retail).
- 3.4.4 While exact specifications for this allocation have not yet been finalised, its development is anticipated to result in the widespread urbanisation of the areas west and south of the site. As part of two ongoing planning applications, Environmental Scoping Assessments have been produced for the areas west (P17/S3719/SCO) and south (P22/S0877/SCO) of the site. A further application (P24/S1759/O), involving the demolition/partial redevelopment of the areas south of the site, is also ongoing.

4 THE SITE AND RELEVANT STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The northern part of the site is situated within the Nuneham Courtenay Registered Park and Garden. The environs of the site (defined for the purposes of this proof as representing a 1km study area around the perimeter of the scheme area) also contains:

- (1) two Conservation Areas (Nuneham Courtenay and Clifton Hampden);
 - (2) one Grade II* Listed Building, (Culham Station Ticket Office)
 - (3) two Grade II Listed Buildings (Thame Lane Bridge and Fullamoor Farmhouse); and
 - (4) one locally listed building (Culham Station House).
- 4.1.2 Assessment of the heritage significance of the known heritage assets within the environs of the site that have the potential to receive effects from the proposed development has been carried out in accordance with Step 2 of Historic England's The Setting of Heritage Assets (2017). This section of my evidence assesses whether and to what degree the site contributes towards the setting and heritage significance of these heritage assets.

4.2 Registered Parks and Gardens

- 4.2.1 The north-west boundary of the site extends approximately 250m into the Grade I Registered Nuneham Courtenay Park and Garden (NHLE 1000122). The landscape park and pleasure grounds extend south around the Grade II* listed Nuneham House and form its landscape setting. The site and the Culham Science Centre are included within the rural setting located to the south of the main parkland.
- 4.2.2 The park is considered nationally important because of its architectural, historic and artistic elements which are derived from the topography of the park, its association with prominent historical figures such as Capability Brown, England's most influential and best-known designer of 'informal landscapes', of which this park is an early example, and the views over the River Thames river and Oxford's spires.
- 4.2.3 The transformation of Nuneham Courtenay into a grand landscaped park began with Simon Harcourt, 1st Earl Harcourt, a member of a politically prominent family. In 1756, Harcourt commissioned the architect Stiff Leadbetter to design a new Palladian-style mansion, which would be known as Nuneham House. Constructed between 1756 and 1764, the neoclassical villa was part of a broader vision to create an idealised estate in the image of Enlightenment aesthetics.
- 4.2.4 In pursuit of this vision, Harcourt demolished the original village of Nuneham Courtenay and its 12th-century church, displacing its inhabitants to a newly constructed village about a mile to the north (the existing village of Nuneham Courtenay). The Earl subsequently created a classical deer park around the house, and designed, with assistance from James Stuart, All Saints' church as a Greek temple garden feature (1764). William Mason designed an informal flower garden for the second Earl in 1771–1777 – each of these features are key aspects of the existing Registered Park and Garden, contributing to its overall significance, and are generally clustered in the central/eastern extent of the park, rather than in the southern section which lies adjacent to, within the area of the appeal scheme.
- 4.2.5 The landscape surrounding Nuneham House was initially laid out in a formal, classical style. But over time, the estate evolved into a model of the English landscape garden. In the 1770s, William Mason, a poet and landscape gardener,

- was commissioned to create a picturesque flower garden. Mason's design introduced romanticized natural elements, providing a subtle transition from the structured world of Palladian architecture to the sweeping naturalistic vistas that would come to define the estate (OGT 2025).
- 4.2.6 This transformation was further expanded upon by Lancelot "Capability" Brown, the era's pre-eminent landscape designer. Between 1779 and 1782, Brown redesigned the grounds to embody the pastoral ideal. His work involved removing earlier formal elements, reshaping the terrain with gentle undulations, planting groves of trees, and creating serpentine paths and water features that appeared natural but were meticulously constructed. Brown also made enhancements to the park's 'South Drive' access. The South Drive, now disused, was the principal approach into the landscape park from London before 1900 and was used to enter the park 2km south-east of the house. The drive curved north-east through the park with views to the west, south and east opening up at various points.
- 4.2.7 The resulting park was a quintessential example of the English landscape garden style – intended to reflect nature's beauty while subtly displaying human control and refinement. Other changes implemented by Brown included the planting of a screen of trees between the house and the river, and the creation of a terrace walk (Brown's Walk) to the south of the house together with a ha-ha to separate it from the deer park. In addition, Brown assisted by Henry Holland, enlarged the house and established a walled kitchen garden to the north-east of the house (c. 1780) (OGT 2025).
- 4.2.8 It is likely that the formal boundaries of the park (while already partially in place) were further defined at this time; the planting of tree-screens by Brown between the house and the river was likely done in unison with, or to compliment that of, a rows of tree-planting that surrounded the entire landscape park – this tree-lined boundary can be seen clearly on Davis's 1797 map of Oxford.
- 4.2.9 Nuneham was eventually inherited by Edward Vernon-Harcourt who employed William Sawrey Gilpin in 1832 to design Italianate terracing overlooking the river on the west side of the House, and to alter the gardens around the House. In 1835 Gilpin was also responsible for the creation of the pinetum or arboretum (now the Harcourt Arboretum) next to the turnpike road, east of the park (Historic England 2025). It is understood that Gilpin made no alterations to any of the other boundaries to the park.
- 4.2.10 During the Second World War, Nuneham House and the surrounding parkland were requisitioned by the Air Ministry and used as RAF Nuneham Park, or 'HMS Hornbill'. The estate served as a base for photographic reconnaissance interpretation, which played a key role in military intelligence (ABCT 2024). The base extended into the eastern part of the site and removed a row of tree-planting which had, notably, made up the south-western boundary of the Landscape Park. This boundary would be re-instated as part of the proposed scheme. Aerial photography of the site also suggests that 'South Drive' of the park was destroyed in the areas adjacent to the airfield during the levelling prior to its construction.

- 4.2.11 After the war, the Harcourt family returned to the property but struggled to maintain it. Like many large English estates in the postwar period, the cost of upkeep became prohibitive. In 1948, the estate was sold to the University of Oxford. While the University did not use the house as a residence, it did preserve the landscape and incorporated the Harcourt Arboretum into its academic and public programs. In the late 1950s, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) identified Culham as a suitable site for the construction of a new laboratory for plasma physics and fusion research that officially opened in 1965 (UKAEA 2025). All the buildings and roadways associated with the base were dismantled and replaced with infrastructure relating to the UKAEA facility.
- 4.2.12 Today, Nuneham House is leased to the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, which uses it as a spiritual retreat centre. The broader parkland remains largely intact, with the exception of the south-western part of the park (the site) which has had much of its initial, 'Brownian' character degraded by the later development of the Naval Base and UKAEA facility. The Harcourt Arboretum is open to the public and continues to serve as an educational and conservation-focused component of Oxford University's botanical outreach.
- 4.2.13 Historic England provided comments on the significance of the park as part of their consultee response to the (refused) Application Scheme. These comments identify a range of key heritage assets/features from which the Park and Garden derives its significance, principally; the All Saints Church which was designed to take advantage of the topography with sweeping views over the Thames valley and rural vista towards the north of the park; The Flower Garden and the related Temple of Flora, which were laid out along the informal principals of the Poet, William Mason; the Carfax Conduit (a major example of Jacobean architecture removed from Carfax in Oxford city to improve the traffic flow and re-erected within the Park and Garden as a focal point of the view southwards from outside the main house; and the additions/improvements to the landscape park made by Capability Brown between 1778-82, including an enhancement to South Drive. This assessment agrees with the Historic England and SODC assessment of the significance of these features and the conclusion that they make a high contribution to the overall significance of the Registered Park and Garden.
- 4.2.14 The majority of these parkland features are located in the central/northern areas of the Park and Garden, in the immediate environs of the main house, approximately 1km north-east of the site and the majority of these assets can be best appreciated from this part of the park. The tower of All Saints Church was intended to be appreciated from further afield (primarily from the northern approach to the estate). South Drive originally passed through the southern part of the park continuing beyond Abingdon Lodge as a tree-lined avenue which connected the estate with the newly built Culham railway station. South Drive as it passed to the east of the site appears to have been subsumed into the Culham airfield (RNAS Culham/ RMS Hornbill) from 1944 onwards; however, its former trajectory has been partially preserved by an access track. North of the site, South Drive appears to have been removed and is no longer a functioning access route to the Park and Garden.

4.2.15 The site extends into the southern part of the Park. The southern park boundary is located along the Nuneham Courtenay/Culham parish boundary and was previously marked by a treeline (shelter belt), which is visible on historic mapping of the site from the Davis County Map of 1797. The treeline marking the park boundary was removed during the construction of the Naval Station in the 1940s and the boundary is not currently defined by any visible boundary features or planting. The section of the park within the appeal scheme has also lost all its parkland trees, removed during the inclusion of the site within the wartime airfield. Since the 1940s, the landscape character of the part of the Registered Park and Garden within the site has principally been that of enclosed fields used for agriculture. This landscape character is distinct from the original 'Brownian' character of the park which would have included grassland and mature parkland trees. The original 'Brownian' character of the park, in the form of grassland with mature parkland trees, survives in the north section of the park but has clearly been lost from the site, which lies within an area that was affected by the wartime and later modification of the site which have blurred the historic parkland character of this area. These modifications can be clearly seen in the open, featureless character of this part of the Registered Park and Garden. The character of the southern part of the park has been further degraded by the more urban areas that have been constructed south of the Registered Park and Garden throughout the later 20th century.

4.2.16 As a consequence of the loss of the original parkland layout (including areas of former tree planting, the shelterbelt defining the boundary of the park and portions of South Drive) these southern areas of the Registered Park and Garden are considered to make a lesser (Low) contribution to the heritage significance of the Registered Park and Garden as a whole when compared with the areas to the north which still retain their original planned layout and aesthetic character.

4.3 Conservation Areas

4.3.1 There are no Conservation Areas located within the site. The area around the site contains two Conservation Areas:

- (1) Nuneham Courtenay; and
- (2) Clifton Hampden.

The Nuneham Courtenay Conservation Area partly intersects with the Nuneham Courtenay Park and Garden. The southern part of the landscape park (including the site) does not fall within the Conservation Area.

4.3.2 Except for the new development at the north of the village, the village hall, and one later house on the west side of the street, the village was designed by Harcourt to complement his landscaped park and his classical house. It is one of only two examples in the country of a completely planned estate village. The village and its environs, meaning the landscaped park, are considered nationally important because of their unique architectural, historic, and artistic elements.

4.3.3 The site is located c 270m to the south of the Conservation Area. Views of the site from the Conservation Area are blocked by topography and the presence of Lock Wood, which is over a ridge immediately to the north of the site. The

village, which is the focus of the Conservation Area is located behind the northern ridge upon which Lock Wood is situated, and it is not visible from the site due to the topography of the area. The southern section of the park, and the area to the south which forms the focus of the development, have no clear association with the village or the Conservation Area and make only a neutral contribution to the significance of the village.

- 4.3.4 The Clifton Hampden Conservation Area lies at the southern edge of the study area, c 1.4km from the site. This area was designated in the 1970s and includes the historic village of Clifton Hampden, a distinctive riverside settlement, characterised by series of vernacular, thatched cottages (Burcot and Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Plan 2020: 10). Beyond relative proximity the village has no clear association or historic link to the park or the village of Nuneham Courtney and makes no contribution to its setting or significance.

4.4 Listed Buildings

Culham Station Ticket Office

- 4.4.1 Culham Station Ticket Office is a Grade II* Listed Building designed by Brunel for the Great Western Railway, probably at the same time as the Thame Lane Bridge. Built as 'Abingdon Road Station', it was renamed 'Culham Station' in 1856. It lies 1km to the south of the southern boundary of the park. This station is considered to be significant due to its architectural and historic interest which are derived from the fact that it is reputed to be the unique survival out of four of this station design known as the domestic Tudor style, and more broadly one of the few Brunel-designed stations surviving.
- 4.4.2 The station has a clear associative link with the park forming the southern end of the South Drive which was constructed at least partially to link the park with the newly built station but this link has now been effectively severed with the loss of the line of the drive during the wartime use of the site and the station is now separated from the park by modern infrastructure, distance and intervening planting. The site and the park as a whole make no contribution to the setting or significance of the structure.

Thame Lane Bridge

- 4.4.3 Thame Lane Bridge is the Grade II Listed Building built in 1843–4 by Brunel for the Didcot-Oxford line. The flying segmental arch road bridge is a rare architectural feature, opposed to the more common larger triple arches. Its historic interest lies in the fact that it was an early subsidiary line, built under Brunel, giving Great Western Railways access to the Midlands in rivalry with the London and Birmingham railway. This bridge is considered to be significant due to its architectural and historic interest which are derived from its unusual architectural features, its survival without major works or alterations, its connection to the important historic figure Isambard Brunel, and the Didcot-Oxford line's role in the history of the Great Western Railway. The Great Western Railway, founded in 1833, ran from London to Bristol, and in the 1840s the company decided to open a route to the Midlands through Didcot and Oxford, in open rivalry with the London & Birmingham Railway.
- 4.4.4 The site is located c 170m to the east of the Thame Lane Bridge and is separated from the site the intervening distance and surrounding planting and

development in the form of an electricity pylon. The structure is associated with the railway and is industrial in nature. There is no historical or cultural link between the bridge and the park or the area of the scheme directly to the south of the park. This area is therefore considered to make no contribution to the heritage significance of the feature.

Fullamoor Farmhouse

- 4.4.5 The 18th-century Fullamoor Farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building that possibly originated in the 17th century. It was named Clifton Farm on the 1st edition (1830) OS map. The high-quality construction of the east-west range may reflect the prosperity of the farm during the mid to late 18th century. This building is considered to be significant because of its architectural and historical interest, which are derived from its architectural features, its age, and the survival of the historic fabric within the building. It also provides insight into the changing needs and social aspirations of its owners.
- 4.4.6 The site is located c 1.2km to the north of this Listed Building. There is no historic or cultural association between the farm and the park and it is separated from the site by intervening distance and surrounding planting and development. The area of the scheme therefore makes no contribution to the heritage significance of the listed building.

The Europea School

- 4.4.7 The Europa School is modern multi-lingual school incorporating the site of a 19th century teacher college. It is a Grade II Listed Building located approximately 1.5km south-west of the site. The listing applies to the original 19th century school, comprising a two storeyed, U-shaped building centred around a courtyard plan in 'High Victorian Gothic' style, with later additions in 'Early English' style and a brutalist 1960's Chapel at its western extent.
- 4.4.8 The school was founded as the Diocesan Training college for Schoolmasters, with the foundation stone laid on the 28th October 1851 by Bishop Wilberforce.
- 4.4.9 There are general (non-designed) views between the westernmost extent of the Nuneham Park Registered Park and Garden and the present-day school; however, there is no historic connection between these two assets, and neither makes a significant contribution to the setting or significance of either asset.

4.5 Locally Listed Buildings

Culham Station House

- 4.5.1 The Station House at Culham Station is the only locally listed building within the study area. It was thought to have been possibly designed by Brunel. It is built in red brick with English bond brickwork. The 1901 census records the then Station Master, George William Townsend and his wife Louise, as boarding with Charles Lewis and family at 'Station House'. Its historical interest is due to the possible connection with Brunel; accordingly, this asset is considered to be of moderate historic interest/significance.
- 4.5.2 The station has a clear associative link with the park forming the southern end of the South Drive which was constructed at least partially to link the park with the newly built station, but this link has now been effectively severed with the

loss of the line of the drive during the wartime use of the site. The station is now separated from the park by modern infrastructure, distance and intervening planting. The site and the park as a whole makes no contribution to the setting or significance of the structure.

5 EFFECT OF THE DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1.1 As set out above, in the Appeal Scheme the proposed development has been revised to respond to the concerns raised by SODC, the Gardens Trust and Historic England.
- 5.1.2 Key changes to the scheme which help to address the heritage concerns raised by the SODC, the Gardens Trust and Historic England comprise:
- Relocation of the connection tower to the main battery storage compound (outside the Registered Park and Garden). The proposed connection tower will be installed next to an existing electricity pylon, located in the southern part of the site and is notably shorter (c 1/3 in height) than the adjacent pylon. The proposed scrub planting surrounding the former location of the connection tower in the refused Application Scheme has also been removed from the proposals.
 - Updates to the landscaping proposals, to abandon the use of 'artificial bunds'; to extend woodland planting further south along the western boundary of the site.
 - The naturalistic tree belt along the former park boundary have been retained within the Appeal Scheme. However, in response to the SODC and Historic England comments the woodland would no longer be sited on top of artificial bunds and the shape of the proposed woodland has been altered to more closely reflect the historic woodland layout.

Assessment of the Appeal Scheme

5.2 Direct Impacts

- 5.2.1 The site extends into Nuneham Courtenay Park and Garden and will involve some re-landscaping and planting within the Registered Park. This will involve some direct impacts including:
- (1) tree planting and landscaping along the southern boundary of the park;
 - (2) the possible installation of an attenuation/wildlife pond in the centre of the site; and
 - (3) replacement of a farm track with a new macadam surface (4.5m wide) in the north-eastern part of the site.
- 5.2.2 These proposals have been substantially modified in response to the Historic England and SODC comments upon the refused Application Scheme which stated that the proposed landscaping within the Registered Park and Garden, particularly the artificial bunds, were 'historically inaccurate and insensitively designed'. Historic England objected to the proposed landscaping (and connection tower) on the grounds that it would 'to all intents permanently remove the chance of meaningful restoration of lost planting in these areas',

which was a key recommendation of the 2019 Parkland Management Plan (produced by Askew Nelson. Their response (July 10th, 2024) goes on to say:

“A key feature of restoration in the southern portion of the park would be the reintroduction of a naturalistic shelter belt in its original location and supplementary or restoration planting of the woodland pasture (at least for landscaping to demonstrably respond to Brownian naturalistic planting principles and the restoration of features where possible).”

- 5.2.3 The landscaping proposals have therefore been altered in favour of a more naturalistic landscaping design which is more in keeping with Brown's park layout. The artificial bunds have been removed from the scheme and the landscape proposals will seek to change the land use in this part of the Registered Park and Garden to better reflect the original character of this part of the park, as clearly recommended by Historic England. The proposed tree planting along the southern boundary of the park will, as closely as possible within modern constraints, replicate the stretch of historic woodland that formerly marked the south-western boundary of the Registered Park and Garden.
- 5.2.4 These landscaping works within the boundary of the Registered Park will have a direct **beneficial effect** upon the park, helping help to restore the lost parkland character of an area of the park which was much modified as part of the wartime landscaping. These works will be carried out in line with the general recommendations within the parkland management plan and the Historic England recommendations. In particular the proposed shelter belt would broadly follow the layout of the woodland shown in the park on Davis's 1797 map of Oxfordshire and help to re-define the historic park boundary (and former parish boundary).
- 5.2.5 It would have a key benefit in screening the park from the existing and proposed industrial electrical and housing developments adjacent to the site. As the planting and woodland boundary matures it will increasingly benefit the character and setting of the park over the 40 year operational life of the scheme. Following decommissioning the compound area will be returned to grass and trees and the scheme would leave a legacy in terms of the restored woodland boundary that will protect the setting of the park from the existing Culham Science Centre and the proposed Strat 8 & 9. developments.
- 5.2.6 The effect of the landscaping proposals will have a direct **beneficial impact** upon the area of the park within their footprint. The overall effect upon the Registered Park and Garden, in helping to restore the former parkland landscape of the southern area of the park and to soften the visible effects of the war time and post-war modifications to the site would be an overall **minor direct beneficial effect**.

5.3 Indirect Impacts

- 5.3.1 The proposed development set out in the Appeal Scheme will increase the industrialisation of the landscape to the south of the park through the construction of the battery storage facility and connection tower, which will be located next to the Culham Science Centre.

- 5.3.2 The historic loss of woodland and tree planting which occurred during the war time development of the site, coupled with the modern agricultural land use in the southern part of the park and the areas of industrial and semi-industrial infrastructure including the electrical installations has contributed, in part, to a general loss of the historic parkland character in this part of the Registered Park and Garden. This assessment has suggested that due to the erosion/loss of its historic parkland character the part of the site that falls within the Registered Park and Garden is considered to make only a low contribution to the heritage significance of the registered park.
- 5.3.3 Historic England, SODC and the Gardens Trust (in their comments on the refused Application Scheme) argued that the loss of the green space in the southern part of the site (which falls outside of the Registered Park and Garden) would be harmful to the setting of the Registered Park and Garden as it would remove an area of green space that, at present, acts to separate the Registered Park and Garden from the more industrial landscape to the south (Culham Science Centre). The consultee comments state that the green space separating the park from the Culham Science Centre allows the park to be considered as a separate entity that isn't encroached upon by industrial development.
- 5.3.4 However, this effect will be mitigated by the landscaping proposals presented as part of the scheme. In particular the proposed woodland planting along the edge of the Registered Park and Garden will help to reduce this loss of separation by defining the edge of the Registered Park and Garden and physically separating it from the industrial landscapes to the south.
- 5.3.5 The proposed development will also introduce battery storage units into views looking south from the Registered Park and Garden. This would reduce the arable landscape visible from these assets. However, the proposed tree planting along the southern boundary of the park would help to screen the proposed development in these views. Any remaining views would be experienced against the backdrop of an existing industrial complex, the Culham Science Centre, and as a result, the proposed development would not significantly alter the character of the existing views.
- 5.3.6 In response to the Historic England, Gardens Trust and SODC comments the proposed connection tower has been relocated from within the Registered Park and Garden to the southern part of the site, where it will sit next to an existing electricity pylon. The proposed connection tower would be shorter than the existing pylon and would not substantially alter the character of the views looking south from the site as these views already contain the Culham Science Centre and the existing pylon and power line.
- 5.3.7 The Gardens Trust has also supplied comments upon the scheme. Its original objection to the Application scheme dated 21/6/2024 identified the importance of the park and cited the potential effect of the scheme, in particular referring to the physical effects of the installation of the transmission tower and the raised bund. These impacts have now been removed as part of the appeal scheme but the Trust has not changed its position or severity of its language which is somewhat surprising. Indeed, it reiterates its view that the scheme would cause substantial and permanent harm to the Grade I listed RPG and its
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- setting. It is not clear from the letter whether the Gardens Trust has understood the changes which have been made.
- 5.3.8 During construction, the introduction of additional noise, dust and visual disturbance into the environs of the Registered Park and Garden and Conservation Area would have a **moderate impact** on the setting of these assets. This impact would be temporary and short-term.
- 5.3.9 Overall and given the limited extent to which setting contributes to the significance of the Registered Park and Garden in general and this part of the RPG in particular, the operational phase of the proposed development as set out in the Appeal Scheme would have a **minor adverse effect** upon the significance of the Registered Park and Garden.. As set out in Mr Hall's evidence, in the language of the NPPF, harm to the significance of Registered Park and Garden and Conservation Area would therefore be at the **lower end of the Less than Substantial Harm category**.
- 5.3.10 Thame Lane Bridge is infrastructure associated with the railway and is industrial in nature. The railway line forms the immediate setting of this asset, and this would not be affected by the proposed development. The increased industrialisation of the site would not significantly alter the character of the views looking north-east from this designated heritage asset. The construction of the battery storage facility would thus have no more than a **minor adverse effect** upon the setting of the designated Listed Building. In the language of the NPPF, the significance of the listed building would be at the **lowest end of the Less than Substantial Harm category**.
- 5.3.11 The area of the site has been assessed as making no contribution to the historic setting or significance of any of the other nationally Listed Buildings (Fullamoor Farmhouse, Culham Station Ticket Office, Schola Europea) or Locally Listed (Culham Station House) buildings within the vicinity of the site and therefore the proposed development will have no clear effect upon these structures. It will also have no effect upon the setting or significance of the Conservation Areas in the scheme environs.

6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

6.1 Proposed Developments within environs of site

- 6.1.1 The nature of the other proposed developments within (to the south) of the proposed scheme are discussed above.. In summary they will consist of:
- 'STRAT8: Culham Science Centre' representing the redevelopment and intensification of the Culham Science Centre, located immediately south/south-east of the site.
 - 'STRAT9: Land Adjacent to Culham Science Centre' a proposed housing and employment scheme located on a 217-hectare area of agricultural land located predominantly to the west, and immediately south of the site.
- 6.1.2 These developments have the potential to permanently affect the landscape setting of the Registered Park and Garden In concert with the Appeal Scheme which will temporarily increase the amount of electrical infrastructure within the landscape and the level of urbanisation within the area. The appeal
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scheme is of small scale compared to the larger Strat 8 and 9 allocations. The scheme will cover 26.8 ha although the majority of this will consist of areas of proposed landscaping and landscape improvement, with the scheme compound and connection tower covering approximately 5 hectares. This element of the scheme will sit closely adjacent to or within the existing Culham Science Centre. By comparison STRAT9 covers 217 hectares and STRAT8, 77 hectares, a total of 294 hectares.

- 6.1.3 The potential cumulative effect of the appeal scheme in concert with STRAT 9 is uncertain prior to the definition of detailed development and associated landscaping proposals and it is noted that this scheme, if consented, is likely to still be in planning at the time of the appeals scheme coming on line. This timeline would suggest that the scheme will be in operation prior to or during the formulation of any final cumulative assessment which may be required in support of the future STRAT9 applications.
- 6.1.4 The potential cumulative effects of the scheme can be considered in concert with the potential effects of two proposed developments within the Culham Science Centre (CSC), namely the Fusion Demonstration Plant (FDP) (P22/S1410/FUL) which is consented and the Culham No 1 application (P24/S1759/O) (which is an ongoing application). Buildings within both schemes will be visible from the Site and the Registered Park. Assessment suggests that both schemes will increase the density of the development within the CSC and STRAT9 site east of the railway, with buildings of greater height and areas of greater development density. The proposed scheme will add cumulatively to this by adding largely low-level electrical infrastructure adjacent to and within the CSC, similar to the infrastructure within the northern end of the CSC. This will largely be screened by the proposed tree planting, while the taller buildings of the FDP and Culham No 1 are likely to be more visible from the RPG.
- 6.1.5 Previous heritage assessment of the FDP proposals, carried out by Donald Insall Associates in 2022 (and accepted by the Planning Committee) has suggested that the scheme individually would have a less than substantial effect upon the RPG. The potential effect of Culham No1 upon the RPG has not been defined but is likely, with appropriate landscaping or detailed design, to be at a similar low level. The minor setting effect upon the RPG (judged to be Less than Substantial at the lower end of the scale) will not significantly increase this potential effect.
- 6.1.6 Further I consider that the landscaping proposals in particular the reinstatement of the tree belt along the parish boundary/park boundary will offset the potential impact of the Appeal Scheme and assist in reducing the potential effects of Strat 9 (and ultimately Strat 8) upon the setting of the park. Further, on decommissioning of the Appeal Scheme the tree belt along the Parish boundary will remain, restoring the setting of the RPG and protecting it from the permanent development within STRAT8 and STRAT9. Therefore, in terms of landscape character and the landscape character and setting of the RPG, the Appeal Scheme will leave the legacy of a permanent beneficial effect on landscape character.

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Appeal Scheme

- 7.1.1 I acknowledge that the Appeal Scheme will extend into the Grade I listed Nuneham Courtenay Park and Garden and would therefore have a temporary but nevertheless long lasting effects upon the Registered Park and Garden for the duration of the development. The landscaping proposals will have a direct impact upon the southern edge of the park (that section within the site) although it is clear that the historic loss of woodland and tree planting and the existing presence of electrical infrastructure as well as the modern agricultural character of the southern part of the park has contributed, in part, to a general loss of the historic parkland character in the part of the Registered Park which would be affected by the scheme.
- 7.1.2 Relocation of the proposed connection tower has directly addressed one of the key SODC, Historic England and Gardens Trust objections to the Application scheme and has clearly reduced the potential effect of the scheme by a significant degree. The proposed connection tower would be shorter than the existing pylon and would not significantly alter the character of the views looking south from the site. These views already contain the Culham Science Centre and the existing pylon and power line.
- 7.1.3 The landscape proposals seek to change the land use in this part of the Registered Park and Garden to better reflect its original character.. The proposed tree planting along the southern boundary of the park will replicate a stretch of historic woodland that formerly marked the south-western boundary of the Registered Park and Garden. These changes present an opportunity to reinstate the parkland character of this part of the Registered Park and Garden which would positively impact on its significance. The proposed woodland would define the historic park boundary (and former Parish boundary) and would screen the park and Conservation Area (north of the site) from the more industrial elements of the scheme (south of the site). It would also reinstate a lost area of woodland from the 18th- and 19th-century park as far as is possible, given modern-day constraints.
- 7.1.4 I acknowledge that the Appeal Scheme would increase the industrialisation of the landscape to the south of the park through the construction of the battery storage facility and connection tower, which will be located next to the Culham Science Centre., However this would be alleviated by proposed woodland planting along the edge of the Registered Park and Garden will help to alleviate any perceived loss of separation by defining the edge of the Registered Park and Garden and physically separating it from the industrial landscapes to the south.
- 7.1.5 The proposed development will also introduce battery storage units into views looking south from the Registered Park and Garden and from the edge of the conservation area. However, the proposed tree planting along the southern boundary of the park would help to screen the proposed development in these views. Any remaining views would be experienced against the backdrop of an existing industrial complex, the Culham Science Centre, and as a result, the proposed development would not significantly alter the character of the existing views.
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- 7.1.6 Overall and given the limited extent to which setting contributes to the significance of the Registered Park and Garden in general and this part of the RPG in particular, the operational phase of the proposed development as set out in the Appeal Scheme would have a **minor adverse effect** upon the significance of the Registered Park and Garden. As set out in Mr Hall's evidence, in the language of the NPPF, harm to the significance of Registered Park and Garden and Conservation Area would therefore be at the **lower end of the Less than Substantial Harm category**.
- 7.1.7 These works will have a **direct beneficial effect** upon the park helping to restore the lost parkland character of an area of the park which was much modified as part of the wartime landscaping. These works will be carried out in line with the general recommendations within the parkland management plan and the Historic England recommendations.
- 7.1.8 In particular the proposed shelter belt will help to re-define the historic park boundary (and former parish boundary). This would have a key benefit in screening the park from the existing and proposed industrial electrical and housing developments adjacent to the site. As the planting and woodland boundary matures it will increasingly benefit the character and setting of the park over the 40 year operational life of the scheme. Following decommissioning the compound area will be returned to grass and trees and the scheme would leave a legacy in terms of the restored woodland boundary that will protect the setting of the park from the existing Culham Science Centre and the proposed Strat 8 & 9. developments.
- 7.1.9 The overall effect upon the Registered Park and Garden, in helping to restore the former parkland landscape of the southern area of the park and softening the visible effects of the war time and post-war modifications to the site would be an overall **Minor direct beneficial** effect.
- 7.1.10 Construction of the appeal scheme would no more than a minor impact upon the setting of the Thame Lane Bridge which is a designated listed building. In the language of the NPPF, this means that harm to the significance of the listed building would be at the lowest end of the Less than Substantial Harm category. It will have no effect upon any of the other listed assets within the environs of the scheme.

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