



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Good Practice for Preparing Representations of Visual Impact

Introduction

In planning applications for large structures such as wind turbine installations or large industrial buildings, it is necessary to include images that illustrate the visual impact of the proposal. It has been noted that often the photomontages and other visual representations submitted by the developer are chosen to disguise rather than illustrate the impact of the development.

This document has been developed primarily as an aid to planning departments. Its purpose is twofold:

1. to be distributed to developers at the early stages of the planning process so that they are aware of how to prepare quality visual representations
2. to provide a yardstick for judging whether the visual representations submitted with an application are fit for purpose.

Developers can use the document to ensure that they produce quality visual representations.

The purpose of a visual representation

It is important to bear in mind the purpose that visual representations fulfil. There are two main reasons:

- to show the worst visual impacts of a development
- to show the impact of a development on a sensitive site

If a visual representation fails to fulfil either of these, then it is probably not fit for purpose.

Specifying viewpoints

At present planning departments either loosely describe viewpoints or, if they have already been the victim of developers liberally interpreting their descriptions, they try to ensure that they agree precise grid locations that are less open to abuse.

If instead the narrative descriptions of viewpoints are given together with their intended purpose, then there should be less scope for misinterpretation.

Good Practice

The following should be carried out to ensure that the visual representations faithfully show the impact of the development:

- use a standard 50mm lens
- include reference objects
- use low aspect ratios
- show the full picture
- use good vantage points

Use a standard 50mm lens

It is widely recognised that a 50mm lens produces the most realistic images. Wide angle lenses diminish impact and longer lenses exaggerate it.

Include reference objects

In order to assist the viewer in gauging the size of a development, visual representations should include reference object(s) close to the development. Reference objects are objects that a lay viewer would readily identify and could be a pedestrian, house, car or other well known object whose size is not ambiguous.

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The Campaign to Protect Rural England (Northamptonshire branch) exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

Use low aspect ratios

Many visual representations show panoramic views. These diminish the apparent size of the development. The breadth of the panorama should be kept to the minimum necessary to show the development in context. Where wide panoramas are used, the most relevant 4:3 section(s) should be framed, highlighted or shown separately alongside the panoramic image.

Show the full picture

The use of low aspect ratios should not be used as an excuse to exclude important buildings or other reference features from visual representations.

Use good vantage points

Any viewpoints selected should offer the least restricted view of the development that is possible. If any or all of the development is not visible from a viewpoint then it should be considered whether there is another location that provides a better view of the development, but still satisfies the purpose of the viewpoint.

The view of a well designed development from a sensitive location may well be obscured or partially obscured, but care should be taken to ensure that there is not another location that fulfils the spirit of the viewpoint specification from where the development is more visible.

Unacceptable Practice

Tricks of the trade are often used to diminish apparent impact and these are unacceptable. Some of the known tricks are:

- wide angle lenses
- visual clutter
- favourable local topography
- misleading reference objects

Wide angle lenses

The use of wide angle lenses is not acceptable as they diminish the impact of the development.

Visual clutter

The inclusion of unnecessary visual clutter of visual representations distracts the viewer's attention. This is particularly bad when it is in the foreground but can be just as distracting when larger items are incorporated in the middle distance. Items such as street furniture foliage or cables can be readily avoided by appropriate micro-siting of the camera.

Favourable local topography

Interposing a bluff or generally rising landform between the viewer and the development should not be used to reduce the apparent impact of the development unless this is present in all viewpoints that satisfy the agreed specification.

Misleading reference objects

Unnecessary reference objects placed in the foreground or even middle distance can give a misleading impression of the size of the development. These should be avoided.

Ensuring accessibility

The majority of consultees are lay readers and so it is important that visual representations should be presented in a manner in which it can readily be interpreted. Images should not require special or technical handling and should contain no distortion.

As mentioned above, panoramic views should either have the most relevant 4:3 section(s) framed, highlighted or presented as a separate image alongside the panorama.