

# **LANDSCAPE PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

## **COTMOOR SOLAR FARM LAND NORTH OF HALLOUGHTON, SOUTHWELL, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

### **PROPOSAL: CONSTRUCTION OF A SOLAR FARM AND BATTERY STATIONS TOGETHER WITH ALL ASSOCIATED WORKS, EQUIPMENT AND NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### **ON BEHALF OF JBM SOLAR PROJECTS 6 LTD**

#### **TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED) PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

**Prepared by:** ANDREW COOK BA (Hons) MLD CMLI MIEMA CENV

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## **1. AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND AND PARTICULARS**

- 1.1 My name is Andrew Cook and I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography (BA Hons) and a Masters Degree in Landscape Design (MLD). I am a Chartered Landscape Architect, Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI), Chartered Environmentalist (C Env) and Member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (M IEMA).
- 1.2 I am one of the founding Executive Directors of Pegasus Group which was established in 2003. Since then, the company has grown, establishing sixteen offices across the UK, employing approximately 350 planning and environmental planning professionals. I jointly head the environmental planning division in which planning for renewable development accounts for a significant part of the business. The company is a corporate member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and was a founding member of IEMA's Quality Mark scheme.
- 1.3 I have gained over 35 years of landscape planning consultancy experience. Prior to Pegasus, I was an Environmental Director at RPS (formerly Chapman Warren Planning Consultants) where I specialised in addressing landscape planning issues which related to a wide range of development projects. I have had considerable experience of and involvement in a wide range of renewable development and built infrastructure projects throughout the UK, many of which have involved sites in Green Belts as well as statutory protected landscapes including National Parks (NP), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as well as non-statutory landscape designations such as a Special Landscape Areas (SLAs), as 'valued landscapes'. I have presented evidence at public inquiries on many occasions to address various landscape and visual issues.
- 1.4 I am based in the Cirencester office of Pegasus where I manage a team of 22 environmental planners and landscape architects. I and the landscape architects within my team at Pegasus undertake their work in compliance with the Landscape Institute's Code of Standards of Conduct and Practice for Landscape Professionals.
- 1.5 This landscape statement is based on my own professional judgement and is presented in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution the content of which is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and is presented irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF LANDSCAPE EVIDENCE

- 2.1 I am instructed on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 6 Ltd, thereafter referred to as the Appellant, to present evidence relating to landscape and visual matters in respect of the appeal concerning the construction of a solar farm (also known as Cotmoor) and battery stations together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure on land north of Halloughton, Southwell. My landscape statement comprises this document and a separate A4 folder which forms my appendices. These also include plans that relate to the alternative scheme (Wheatcroft). This evidence should be read in conjunction with the planning statement prepared by Paul Burrell and heritage statement prepared by Laura Garcia, all of which supports the Statement of Case.

### **Scope of Evidence**

- 2.2 In presenting my evidence I explain why in landscape and visual terms the appeal scheme is considered acceptable given the character of the site and its surrounding development context, recognising that the overall planning balance is for others to comment upon. From a landscape perspective, this landscape statement addresses the Council's single Reason for Refusal with regard to landscape character and visual amenity with heritage matters addressed by Laura Garcia.
- 2.3 Following determination by the Planning Committee, the Council, Newark and Sherwood District Council, issued a notice of decision dated 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021 which stated that:

**"In the opinion of the District Council the proposed development, by virtue of its sheer scale, siting and close proximity to Halloughton Conservation Area and designated heritage assets therein would have a long-term detrimental impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area. The proposal would result in a moderate adverse landscape impact on land cover and a major adverse scale of effects on the local landscape character (Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zones 37, 38 and 39) for the 40-year lifetime of the scheme. There would also be long term visual impacts on well used public rights of way (PROW Southwell 74 and PROW Southwell 43) which would last at least until year 10 of the development and likely longer. The proposal would also fail to conserve and enhance landscape character and visual amenity and therefore would be harmful to the character, appearance and visual perception of the area. The proposed development would also result in less than substantial harm and the setting**

**and experience of Halloughton Conservation Area, as well as to the setting of the Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area, notably the church of St James (Grade II) and The Manor House (Grade II\*) in addition to resulting in less than substantial harm to the setting of designated heritage assets within the Brackenhurst complex (Grade II) and South Hill House (Grade II). This level of harm would result in loss of significance to these designated heritage assets.**

**Although the proposal would undoubtedly bring meaningful environmental and economic benefits to the district, in the context of paragraph 196 of the NPPF and in the overall planning balance, these are not considered sufficient to outweigh the harm identified on the setting of the above mentioned designated heritage assets or the landscape character and visual amenity of the area by the sheer scale and siting of the proposal. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the objective of preservation required under Section 66 of the planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) ACT 1990 and in conflict with the Development Plan with particular reference to policies CP9, 10, 13, 14 of the amended Core Strategy (2019), policies DM4, 5, 9 and 12 of the Allocations and Development Management DPD (2013) in addition to the provisions of the Southwell Neighbourhood Plan (2016), Landscape Character Assessment SPD (2013) and the NPPF (2019) when read as a whole."**

2.4 Accordingly, my landscape statement will address the following specific matters raised by Newark and Sherwood District Council namely the:

- Scale, siting and proximity to Halloughton Conservation Area
- Detrimental impact on the landscape character of the area
- Detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the area
- Moderate adverse landscape impact on land cover
- Major adverse effect on the local landscape character, zones 37, 38 and 39
- Visual impact on public right of way 74
- Visual impact on public right of way 43
- Failure to conserve and enhance landscape character thereby causing harm to character
- Failure to conserve and enhance visual amenity thereby causing harm to appearance
- Harm to the visual perception of the area

2.5 I rely upon the draft Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) where it considers landscape issues and where the parties have reached agreement. In preparing my evidence, I have reviewed the following documents to inform my professional judgement.

- Relevant Core Documents
- Notice of Decision dated 4th March 2021
- Committee Report dated 2nd March 2021
- Landscape consultation responses
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment prepared by Pegasus dated July 2020
- Addendum to LVIA December 2020
- Photomontages
- Relevant published landscape reports
- Design and Access Statement
- Application planning statement
- Relevant planning policies
- Relevant correspondence
- Plans relating to the alternative scheme

2.6 Where appropriate I draw upon relevant information from these documents. However, in presenting my evidence I do not unnecessarily state detailed amounts of information where this has been previously documented. I have reviewed the LVIA, and supplementary landscape information submitted as part of the original planning application and the alternative scheme. I have reviewed this documentation and also assessed the schemes with reference to the LVIA viewpoints surrounding the site together with the prepared visualisations that illustrate the appearance of the appeal schemes. I have set out my analysis with regard to the application and alternative scheme in this proof of evidence. (see appendices). The LVIA and addendum has helped inform my professional judgements concerning the two schemes. I rely upon the information set out in these documents with regards to matters of detail. My analysis in this proof provides further context to what is set out in those documents. In light of the recent EIA screening decision, an Environmental Statement is being prepared that will address landscape and visual issues and will be completed post completion of my proof.

### **Representative Viewpoints and Visualisations**

2.7 I consider that the LVIA photographs have been taken from a number of representative viewpoints in the landscape surrounding the site. It is anticipated that the Inspector would visit these representative viewpoints set out in the LVIA and within my appendices as an *aide memoire*.

- 2.8 It should be recognised that it is not practical to include viewpoints from every possible location. The viewpoints which have been selected illustrate a range of visual receptors at different distances and directions from the site. The locations of the viewpoints have been carefully considered and the photography has been undertaken when atmospheric conditions and visibility was good. The photography is considered appropriate given the type and scale of development. The representative viewpoints and visualisations have been prepared in accordance with the GLVIA3 and LI guidance relevant at the time of production, however, it is recognised that there is no substitute for visiting the viewpoints in the field to gain a first-hand appreciation of the viewing context.
- 2.9 With regard to the history of viewpoint analysis I would note the following. The LVIA included a wide range of representative viewpoints, by which to appropriately assess the application. Based on these viewpoints, a number of visualisations were prepared in liaison with the LPA. With this information the Case Officer was fully informed as to the visual implications of the proposal.

### **Professional Judgement**

- 2.10 Mindful of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) I have reviewed the appeal schemes based on the viewpoints as part of my field work and site visits (see appendix 4). This has allowed me to ascertain both the landscape and visual effects and to make informed professional judgements concerning these matters and to establish the level and nature of change from a landscape and visual perspective. My assessment was based on summer views, given the appeal timetable, however, I have been mindful of winter views in my analysis upon which my judgement is based. I note that the Inspector will experience winter views on site.
- 2.11 The degree of landscape or visual effect is identified by means of a descriptive scale as per the GLVIA 3rd Edition guidance. However, it is also necessary to consider the nature of the landscape and visual effects. GLVIA3 assists noting that with regard to landscape effects paragraph 5.37 states that:

**“One of the more challenging issues is deciding whether the landscape effects should be categorised as positive or negative. It is also possible for effects to be neutral in their consequences for the landscape. An informed professional judgement should be made about this and the criteria used in reaching the judgement should be clearly stated. They might include, but should not be restricted to:**



**The degree to which the proposal fits with existing character**

**The contribution to the landscape that the development may make its own right, usually by virtue of good design, even if it is in contrast to existing character**

**The importance of perceptions of landscape is emphasised by the European Landscape Convention, and others may of course hold different opinions on whether the effects are positive or negative, but this is not a reason to avoid making this judgement, which will ultimately be weighed against the opinions of others in the decision-making process.” (my emphasis)**

2.12 With regard to visual effects paragraph 6.29 states that:

**“As with landscape effects and informed professional judgement should be made as to whether the visual effects can be described as positive or negative (or in some cases neutral) in their consequences for views and visual amenity. This will need to be based on a judgement about whether the changes will affect the quality of the visual experience for those groups of people who will see the changes, given the nature of the existing views.” (my emphasis)**

2.13 In this instance and for the purposes of this statement, the effects upon the landscape are specifically considered in terms of effect upon firstly landscape elements and secondly landscape character. The statement also sets out how the proposal would have a bearing upon the general visual amenity associated with the area. The proposed design includes green infrastructure which would be in character and in keeping with the rural area. I am aware that people on the whole generally adopt an adverse reaction to change, particularly with regard to their local environments, with which they are very familiar and therefore tend to adopt a rather negative stance, and adverse reaction to any change, irrespective of whether it's harmful or indeed beneficial. I adopt a precautionary approach here and as such, I consider that the proposed solar farm would be adverse in terms of nature of effect in landscape and visual terms unless otherwise stated.

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 The application seeks planning permission to construct a 49.9MW solar farm on approximately 106ha of land, albeit the actual land take of the parcels would be 76ha as not all the land within the site area would have panels sited on them. The solar farm would be a temporary use of the land as the equipment would be removed and the land returned to its former condition when the development is decommissioned following 40 years from the date of the first export of electricity to the electrical grid, (with the exception of the on-site substation which would remain on site permanently).
- 3.2 The solar farm would comprise solar panels arranged on simple metal frameworks supported by pile driven steel pins laid out in rows across the site in an east-west orientation facing south to form tables (arrays) without the need for concrete foundations. The maximum height at the rear of the solar panels would be 3M. The arrays are proposed to be spaced to avoid any shadowing effect from one panel to another with topography dictating exact row spacing ranging from between 4 and 6.5M. The arrangement of the solar PV panels themselves would either be three in portrait or six in landscape as shown on the proposed plans. There would be 0.8M between the bottom of the panels and the ground to allow small livestock, sheep to graze the land between and amongst the panels. This is common practice for management and maintenance.
- 3.3 The panels would be dark blue or black. The site would be enclosed by a deer fence approximately 2M in height with pole mounted CCTV cameras at 3M in height positioned inside and around the site in order to provide security.
- 3.4 The 49.9MW power proposal would provide electricity equivalent to the average electrical needs of approximately 12,200 typical UK homes annually and assist towards reducing carbon dioxide emissions saving approximately 20,690 tonnes of CO2 per annum.
- 3.5 With regard to visual amenity, of particular note from my perspective is that this is an extensive solar scheme across a number of fields yet given the gently undulating nature of the local topography, combined with the field and hedgerow network and patchwork quilt of woodlands, the actual visual envelope and the degree to which this scheme would be seen from the surrounding area would be very limited. This is borne out by the fact, apart from one section of road to a farm, there would be no opportunity to observe this scheme from any

surrounding public highways, only a few short sections of public rights of way and not in general view from any settlements in the locality.

### **Broad Design Principles for the Green Infrastructure**

- 3.6 The vision for the solar farm is to form green infrastructure that would provide a high-quality network of green spaces to reinforce the character of the local farmed landscape.
- 3.7 At a macro level the proposed green infrastructure would ensure that the development would:
- Support and reinforce local landscape character
  - Protect and enhance existing green infrastructure assets namely the trees and hedgerows and land cover around the site so that they can be appreciated and valued by everyone for future generations
  - Protect and create habitats to enable biodiversity habitats and species to thrive
  - Provide a resilient and adaptive environment in the face of climate change, principally through hedge and tree planting
- 3.8 The Landscape Masterplans would be laid out in response to the opportunities that the site offers. (CD A23D and A47)
- 3.9 The green infrastructure would deliver many benefits which would include:
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation – principally tree planting for natural air cooling and CO2 absorption
  - Investment in the proposed green infrastructure bringing benefit to people, wildlife and the environment
  - Protecting and enhancing landscape character and biodiversity by using land improvements and management to deliver biodiversity gain and overall landscape enhancement
- 3.10 Access to the site would be off a highway in the south-eastern corner of the site. The proposed site access would serve the entire site and would be connected to a network of internal tracks within the site. Following completion of construction, a double width farm gate would be installed at the access point that adjoins the public highway with the solar farm security gate which would be set back from the public highway.
- 3.11 Public rights of way are proposed to be retained in their existing locations within the site.
- 3.12 Landscape mitigation and enhancement works are also proposed (mitigation planting, including new infilled hedgerow planting, tree planting and enhancement

of field margins though proposed species rich grassland). Particular aspects include the following:

- Creation of new native species rich hedgerows and maintenance and enhancement of existing hedgerows including the supplementary infilled planting, strengthening existing defunct and gappy hedgerows totally in excess of 1km
- Creation of a 0.43ha tree belt
- Creation of approximately 1km of swale habitat
- Creation of a floristically diverse grassland sward to replace low biodiversity value arable land beneath and surrounding the panels
- Installation of bird and bat boxes on suitable trees around the site and within the wider land ownership area for biodiversity

3.13 Throughout the course of the application amended plans were submitted to address the following:

- Removal of proposed panels from land closest to Halloughton village and Conservation Area at the southern end of the easternmost field in the application site
- Planting of a species rich meadow grassland where panels were previously proposed and allowance for the route of a footpath to be established across this area
- Planting of a new native hedgerow along the new southern edge of the panels in the easternmost field and along the northern edge of the access track to further establish separation between the proposed development and the village
- Removal of proposed panels from field in central section of the application site, south and east of the Southwell Bridleway 74
- Removal of proposed hedgerow along southern edge of Southwell Bridleway 74
- Reinforcement of existing trees and hedgerows along the northern boundary of the southern parcel with planting of further semi-mature trees
- Reinforcement of hedgerow along western boundary of the application site adjacent to public right of way footpath Southwell 42 with planting of native trees

3.14 A comprehensive green infrastructure strategy is proposed for the solar farm.

### **Appeal Scheme**

3.15 With regard to the northern boundary of the site, i.e., the northern boundaries to fields F1 and F2<sup>1</sup>, the mature hedgerows and treecover associated with these hedges would be retained and continue to be managed.

3.16 Field F1 is located in the north-eastern corner of the site. The eastern boundary of this field is in the main defined by a mature high hedgerow which is punctuated

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<sup>1</sup> See CD A23D for field number references

with a number of mature standard hedgerow trees which would be retained. There is an area of treecover, and scrub located in the north-eastern corner of this field which runs westward into a hedgerow, together with a number of standard trees which would be retained. The northern part of the site would accommodate a wide landscape corridor which would comprise of existing woodland areas together with areas of wildflower meadows that would be created and would separate fields F1 and F3 to the east, from fields F2 and F4 to the west. This strategic wildlife and landscape corridor would extend north-south through the northern half of the site as far south as field 6 and would retain all treecover and hedgerows within this area.

- 3.17 Field F2 is located in the north-western corner of the site and is framed by a mature hedgerow along its northern and western boundaries, which would be retained. With regard to field F4, all the hedgerows around the perimeter and tree belts that frame this field would be retained, with the western hedgerow boundary reinforced with native standard hedgerow trees. Similarly, the mature hedgerows that frame field F3 and F5 would also be retained and continue to be managed. Along the southern boundary of field F4 is an existing linear shaped small woodland. It is proposed that a hedgerow would be introduced adjacent to this woodland to provide new habitat and would increase the biodiversity of this area.
- 3.18 Running approximately halfway through the middle of the site is a small stream following a small tributary valley and is known locally as Westhorpe Dumble which is flanked by a significant amount of shrubbery and mature treecover. All of this would be retained and broadly divides the northern half of the site with the southern half of the site with this east-west orientated strategic landscape corridor. This landscape feature forms the northern boundary to field F6. The eastern boundary of this field would continue to be retained as would the southern boundary though this hedgerow tends to have a greater number of young mature trees growing in the hedge, such that it forms more of a high tree hedge than a clipped hedge. The western boundary to the field F6 is defined by a hedgerow which would also be retained.
- 3.19 A public footpath, reference no 209/43/1 runs along the northern side of a field that lies between fields F6 and F7 and broadly divides the northern half of the scheme from the southern half of the proposal. This east-west orientated rectangular field is currently managed for pasture and would be retained in its

current form with the scheme in place and does fall within the site boundary. The eastern boundary to the site is high with a number of shrub trees. The southern boundary to the pasture field is also grown out and high with a number of mature standard trees along its length as is the western hedgerow boundary to the field, which would be gapped up with tree and shrub species to ensure that it was continuous in its length or its future management.

- 3.20 The southern half of the site comprises a number of fields, F7 through to number 11. In terms of field F7, the northern boundary of which is defined by a mature high-level hedge with a number of standard trees which would be retained. The eastern boundary of the field is less well defined along part of its length. The northern half of the eastern boundary would follow the existing field boundary, though it is not physically demarcated on site but slightly further to the east of that is some further shrubbery. The southern half of the eastern boundary of field F7 is defined by a tree belt which would be retained. The southern boundary of field F7 is evident on site but is not physically demarcated by a hedgerow. It is therefore proposed that a native hedgerow with standard mature trees would be introduced along the southern boundary of field F7. The western boundary of field F7 is defined by a shrubby hedge with a standard tree, which would be retained.
- 3.21 Between fields F7 and F8 there is a substantial tree belt which would be retained and form a strategic landscape corridor between these two fields. The southern boundaries of fields F8 and F9 are defined by existing hedgerows and would be retained, together with a few isolated standard trees. However, it is proposed that a 15M wide tree belt would be introduced along this southern boundary to reinforce it, which would comprise native shrubs and tree species. The field hedgerow that subdivides fields F8 and F9 would be retained, together with its standard trees. The northern boundaries of fields F8 and F9 are demarcated by a mature outgrown hedge of shrubs and trees, which would be retained and gapped up with some further semi-mature native trees as shown on the masterplan.
- 3.22 There would be a narrow landscape corridor between fields F9 and F10 along the northern stretches of these fields, which would extend southward into a wider triangular tree belt which would be retained. Immediately to the north of this tree belt is the proposed substation which would connect into the overhead 132kV transmission line, which passes east-west over the site. The substation has been carefully located such that it is set back from the northern side of the triangular

tree belt and as such, the existing treecover would be physically unaffected by the substation.

3.23 Field F10 is framed by a number of hedgerows. The northern boundary of field F10 is defined by a tall outgrown hedge with a number of mature standard trees which would be subject to gapping up with semi-mature native trees where gaps are apparent as indicated on the landscape masterplan. The northern boundary of field F10 is demarcated by a hedgerow together with some outgrown trees, which would be retained. The southern boundary of field F10 is defined by a mature tree belt which would be retained. This tree belt wraps around in a south-eastward direction to link into further recent woodland planting, which runs along the western side of Stubbin's Lane. All of this established and more recently planted tree belt which heavily frames the eastern side of the proposal and field F11, would be retained. The southern part of field F11 would be managed as wildflower meadow and again along the northern boundary where the mature tree hedge exists, this would be supplemented with further native hedgerow and semi-mature tree planting as per the landscape masterplan.

3.24 Collectively, all the existing mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees, together with tree belts, would be retained and reinforced with additional hedgerows and standard tree planting to further reinforce these landscape features to continue define the fields and their shape and form.

#### **Alternative Scheme (Wheatcroft)**

3.25 The appeal scheme in terms of its design and layout, together with the planting proposals results in a scheme which I consider is acceptable in landscape and visual terms. However, further amendments have been made to this under the Wheatcroft provision which are illustrated in the revised planting proposals (see CD A47). The changes identified would collectively reduce some of the landscape and visual effects associated with the application scheme. I therefore consider both proposals are acceptable in landscape and visual terms.

#### **AMENDMENT 1: REMOVAL OF PANELS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE FROM A CENTRAL FIELD**

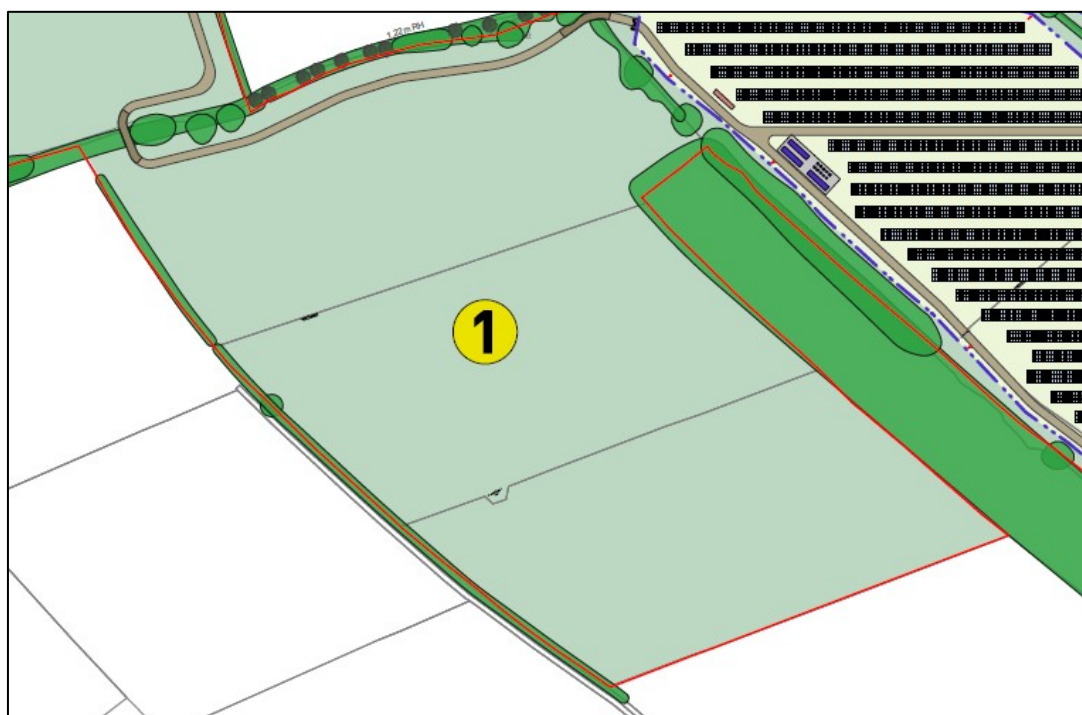
3.26 As illustrated, an amendment that has been made between the Revision L and Revision M of the Site Layout and Planting Proposals plan includes removing an area of solar panels and associated infrastructure from field F7. This amendment has been made to reduce the visual effects upon on road users at the western



extent of Halloughton and users of Public Right of Way (PRoW) Bridleway (reference: Halloughton BW3).



*Site Layout and Planting Proposals, Revision L*



*Site Layout and Planting Proposals, Revision M*



3.27 As illustrated on Revision M of the Site Layout and Planting Proposals plan below (CD A47), a belt of new trees are proposed within an existing hedgerow which encloses a section of the Site boundary to the southwest. These trees would be a mix of native standard trees which would aid in filtering and screening views of the proposals from locations on PRow Footpath (reference: Southwell FP42) to the southwest of the Site.

EXISTING HEDGEROW TO BE RETAINED AND REINFORCED WITH NATIVE TREES

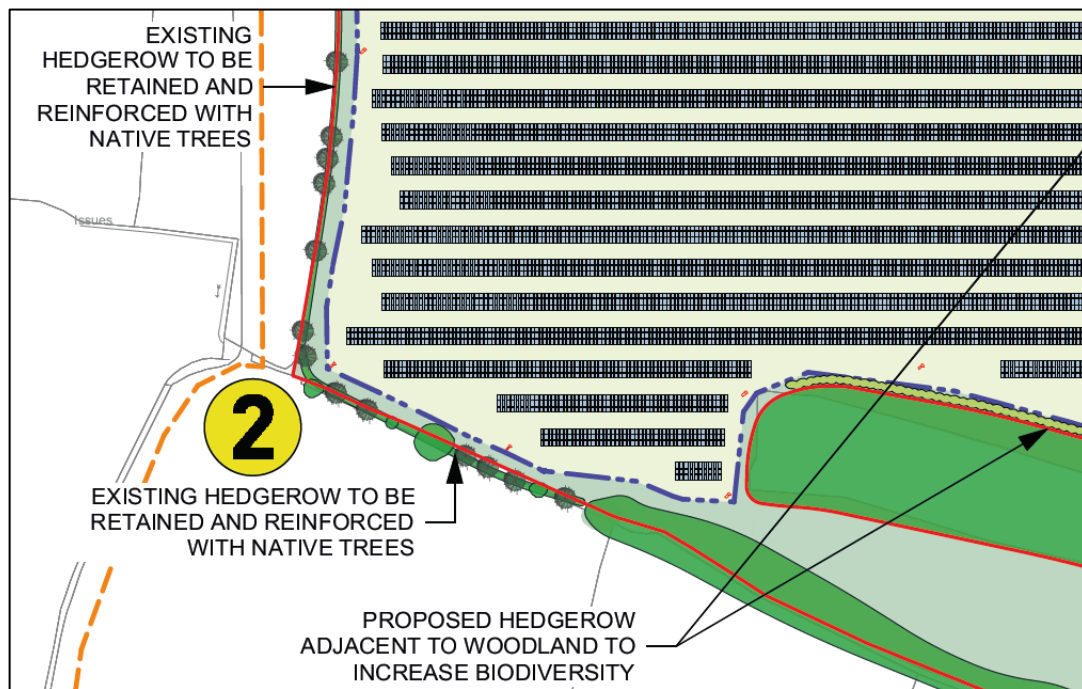
EXISTING HEDGEROW WITH TREES TO BE RETAINED

PROPOSED HEDGEROW ADJACENT TO WOODLAND TO INCREASE BIODIVERSITY

The map shows a residential development area with numerous houses represented by black rectangles. A road labeled 'ISSURS' is on the left. A dashed orange line indicates a boundary. A red line with arrows points to an 'EXISTING HEDGEROW TO BE RETAINED AND REINFORCED WITH NATIVE TREES'. A black arrow points to an 'EXISTING HEDGEROW WITH TREES TO BE RETAINED'. A green area at the bottom right is labeled 'PROPOSED HEDGEROW ADJACENT TO WOODLAND TO INCREASE BIODIVERSITY'. A blue dashed line outlines a specific area within the development.

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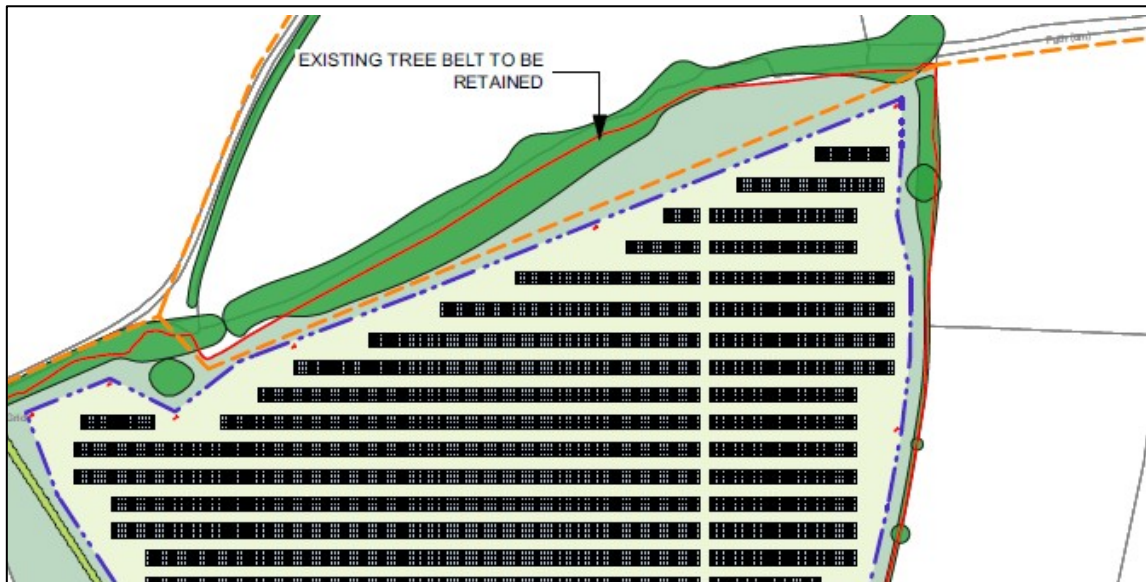
Site Layout and Planting Proposals, Revision M

**AMENDMENT 3: ADDITIONAL NATIVE HEDGEROW WITH SEMI-MATURE HEDGEROW TREES IS PROPOSED BETWEEN THE NORTHERN EXTENT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AND PROW FP43.**

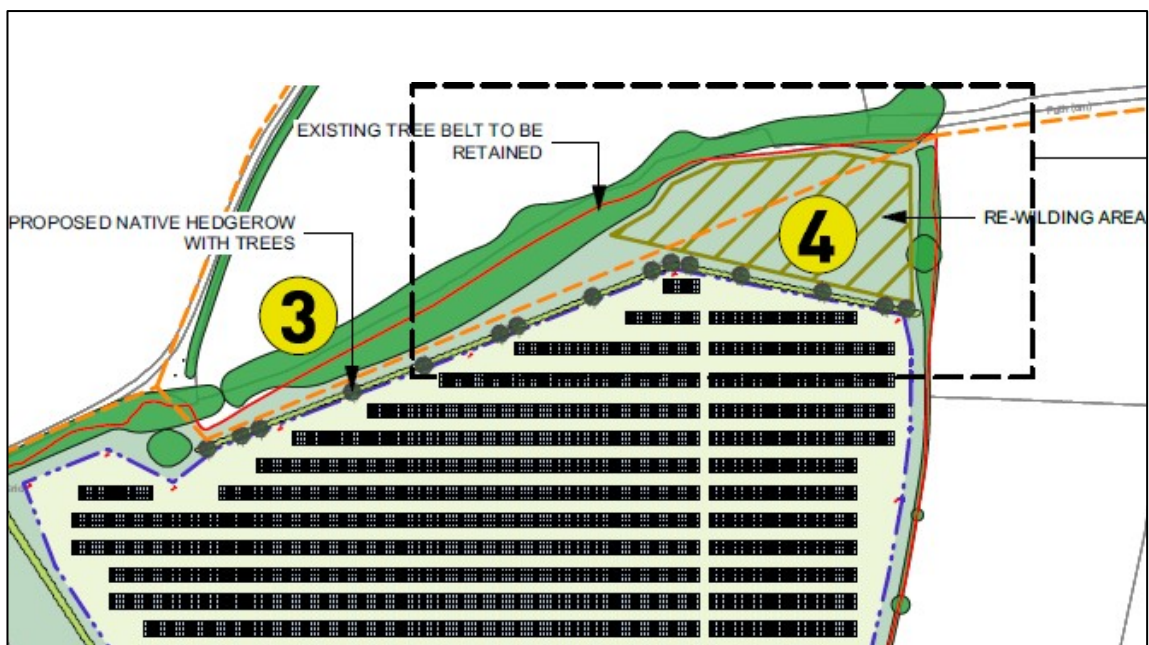
- 3.28 As illustrated below, a minor amendment as part of Revision M of the Site Layout and Planting Proposals plan (CD A47). This new hedgerow is proposed along the northern extent of the proposed built form, adjacent to the proposed security fencing. The hedgerow would be comprised of a mix of native hedgerow shrubs and semi- mature native trees and over time would aid in restricting and heavily filtering views of the proposals from locations along PROW Footpath (reference: Southwell FP43).

**AMENDMENT 4: REMOVING PANELS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE FROM THE NORTHEASTERN CORNER OF THE NORTHERN MOST FIELD TO FACILITATE THE CONTINUATION OF 'RE-WILDING OF THIS AREA**

- 3.29 As illustrated on Revision M of the Site Layout and Planting Proposals plan (CD A47), the proposed solar panels and security fencing have been pulled back from the north-eastern corner of the field located to the east of New Radley Farm. Removing the proposal from this corner will enable an area of existing re-wilding to continue to establish.



*Site Layout and Planting Proposals, Revision L*



*Site Layout and Planting Proposals, Revision M*

#### 4. EFFECT ON THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE

##### Introduction

- 4.1 There are no off-site works required associated with the appeal scheme. This section of my statement therefore assesses the effects on those landscape elements (features) that currently characterise the appeal site itself. It particularly considers the introduction of the new elements that make up the proposed development and how these will physically affect the existing features present within the site. It also explains why the appeal scheme would in overall terms result in a beneficial effect as far as landscape elements are concerned.

##### Topography

- 4.2 I note that the Council have not raised any specific concern with regard to topography, but I have addressed the matter to provide completeness. The site is located in gently undulating lowland on mid-level terrain land. The site is broadly butterfly shaped in plan form, the southern part of which extends across sloping land which broadly reflects a southerly aspect. The northern half of the site exhibits a gentle east facing slope. The topography typically ranges between 90 – 65M AOD. The existing gentle gradient across the site means that only limited earthworks would be necessary to accommodate the proposed scheme. The susceptibility of the topography to the type of development proposed is considered to be medium, which combined with a medium value, would result in an overall medium sensitivity.
- 4.3 Changes to the topographic profile would generally be irreversible, however, these changes would be only very localised and relate to drainage features, the construction of tracks and foundations such as the platforms for the inverters and substation. Consequently, there would not be any requirement for large-scale remodelling of the existing landform within the appeal site. **I consider that the overall magnitude of change to the ground profile of the site would be negligible. With a medium sensitivity and a negligible magnitude of change, the overall effect on the topography would be negligible (adverse) in terms of scale of effect.**

##### Trees

- 4.4 Trees and treecover are a significant component of the site, present either in the form of individual standard hedgerow trees, or tree hedges or forming tree belts and woodlands. The existing tree resource is considered to be of high value in

overall terms and of high susceptibility to changes arising from the development proposed. With a high value and susceptibility, the overall sensitivity of the tree resource is considered to be high. As illustrated in the site layout and planting plan (Rev L), there is significant treecover around the perimeter of the site and located within the internal hedgerows along with blocks of woodland, all of which would be retained as part of the green infrastructure. This would, however, be reinforced with a significant number of new trees, approximately 76 (heavy standard or extra heavy standard trees) along with 5,000M<sup>2</sup> forming a 15M wide new native belt. On the basis of 1M centre spacing, this would equate to 5,000 new tree and shrub species being planted as transplants. A detailed planting plan can be secured by means of a suitably worded condition. **Therefore, with a medium magnitude of change, with a high sensitivity, this is considered to result in a major (beneficial) effect on the tree resource of the site.**

#### **Hedgerows**

- 4.5 The site exhibits a significant number of hedgerows some of which are clipped and managed at a lower height, whilst others have been allowed to grow out into freeform shrubs and trees. These are located around the perimeter and also internally within the site demarcating field boundaries. While many of these are in good condition, where there are existing gaps, these would be 'gapped up' with indigenous shrub species and complimented with some entirely new hedgerows where they have previously been removed as part of farming intensification practices. 47M of hedgerow are proposed to be removed (40M for access tracks, 4M for footpath access and 3M for fencing). In contrast 1,250M of new hedgerow planting, well over 1KM of new hedges are proposed. **The susceptibility of the hedges is considered to be medium and with a high value are of high sensitivity. Combined with a medium magnitude of change would result in a major beneficial degree of effect.**

#### **Land Use/Cover/Pasture**

- 4.6 There would be an inevitable change in the existing land use of the site with the proposed scheme in place. There are some fields that are currently managed for pasture, such as field F7 and the field to its north though the majority of the fields are currently in arable use. To accommodate the solar farm, the land can continue to retain its agricultural function managed as pasture, whilst still accommodating the solar array infrastructure. The notable point here is that there would be a limited loss of agricultural land throughout the operational years and

upon decommissioning, would allow pasture to be reintroduced. Switching between pastoral and arable use is an integral part of farm management and does not require planning permission.

- 4.7 The published Landscape Character Assessments recognise that over recent years there has been a notable loss of pastureland to arable to the detriment of the landscape character of the area and that one of the primary objectives is to encourage the conversion of arable to pasture to address this issue. This scheme would assist in realising this objective through delivery approximately 17ha of wildflower meadowland, along with 80ha of grassland within the secured areas for sheep grazing purposes.
- 4.8 Incidentally, the grazing density for sheep within a solar farm is not materially different to general grazing densities. By conversion to pasture, the land would not only have the opportunity to rest, but there would be improvement in agronomy terms through sheep being kept on the land with associated increased nutrient levels. **With a medium susceptibility and medium value, resulting in a medium sensitivity combined with a high magnitude of change would result in a major (adverse) degree of effect with regard to land cover associated with the site.**

#### **Public Rights of Way**

- 4.9 There are a number of public rights of way in the locality, all those beyond the site would be physically unaffected with the scheme in place. Two public rights of way lie within the site itself, one of which passes through the middle of the site referenced Southwell 74. This is broadly orientated east-west and runs alongside existing field boundaries. The field within which the footpath is located would remain free of solar arrays and thus its immediate character would remain unchanged. The physical alignment of the footpath would remain unchanged, with the only change occurring with a new access track passing over the footpath close to the site boundary.
- 4.10 The second public right of way, a footpath, is referenced Southwell 43 and passes through and alongside the northern boundary of field 1 before connecting through to an existing farm track. Again, this route alignment would be physically unchanged.
- 4.11 No diversions of any footpaths are required to facilitate the proposed scheme. **With a high susceptibility, value and sensitivity combined with no**



**magnitude of change there would be no degree of effect on the public right of way as a resource and facility.**

#### **Watercourses and Waterbodies**

- 4.12 There would be no direct effect on any existing watercourses on site. The scheme would, however, incorporate a sustainable urban drainage system with a series of small balancing basins and swales within the green spaces. As features in landscape terms, these would be regarded as an enhancement. **With a high susceptibility value and sensitivity, combined with a low magnitude of change, there would be minor beneficial degree of effect with regard to water features within the site itself.**

#### **Summary of Effects upon Landscape Features**

- 4.13 The proposed development would result in an overall beneficial effect upon the landscape elements within the site.

*Summary of Effects on Landscape Elements table*

<i>Element</i>	<i>Effect of Appeal Scheme</i>
Topography	Negligible (adverse)
Trees	Major (beneficial)
Hedges	Major (beneficial)
Land Cover / Land Use / Pasture	Major (adverse)
Public Rights of Way	None
Water Features	Minor (beneficial)

- 4.14 Specific changes to elements include the following:
- 1250m of new hedgerow
  - 47m of hedgerow removed (40m for access tracks, 4m for footpath access and 3m for fencing)
  - 0.5 hectares/5000 square meters of 15m wide new native woodland belt
  - 76 semi-mature (heavy standard/extra heavy standard trees)

- 16.92 hectares of species rich/meadow grassland
  - 80.7 hectares of grassland inside the security fencing sown with a grazing mix
- 4.15 In overall terms the appeal scheme would result in some beneficial effects with regard to the overall landscape elements that currently define the landscape character of the site, which would change from a series of arable fields to one of a solar farm. However, the elements that currently contribute to defining the character of the site, namely trees and hedgerows would be retained and enhanced to form a more robust collection of landscape elements, albeit set within the context of a solar farm.
- 4.16 It is also worth reiterating that the proposed development can be described as long term in nature (i.e., 40 years), with the landcover being temporary; meaning that it will be possible for the land to be returned to its previous condition and use. Solar energy developments are characterised by their low profile, light footprint and reversible nature. The timescale of 40 years is similar for some other elements in the landscape such as timber crop production.
- 4.17 Collectively, if one draws the different elements of the site together it defines the overall character of the site itself and is materially defined by the fact that it would be a solar farm set within a strong farmland framework of locally typical landscape elements. The proposal is time limited for 40 years and therefore with the decommissioning stage all infrastructure would be removed except for the substation. However, all the new planting introduced would have matured along with the ongoing management and maintenance of the other retained features and as a result, there would be a clear beneficial legacy from this project in terms of landscape elements which collectively would also enhance landscape character as advocated in the published Landscape Character Assessments.

#### **Alternative Scheme**

- 4.18 As detailed in paragraphs 4.24-28, Rev M of the layout and planting plan included a number of amendments to the appeal scheme (CD A47). Whilst these amendments do not materially alter the assessment of effects upon the landscape elements of the appeal site as set out above, it should be noted that the layout and planting plan (Rev M) illustrates that the amended proposals would introduce 311m of hedgerow with hedgerow trees alongside public right of way Southwell 43, in addition to the 1250m already proposed as part of appeal scheme. An additional 6 native trees along the southern boundary of field F4 in addition to the 76 semi-mature trees already proposed. Revision M of the layout and planting



plan also accommodates the current land use and ground cover of the northern most corner of field 1 and retains it as an area of re-wilding. The solar panels and the associated infrastructure have also been removed from field F7, with the Rev M proposals illustrating that the field would be entirely planted with meadow grassland.

### **Summary**

- 4.19 I recognise that the appeal scheme would bring about an inevitable change to the character of the appeal site itself, introducing solar panels and associated infrastructure superimposed over land use that would be changed to and managed for pasture and grazing. However, such a change would in physical terms be confined within the appeal site boundaries. **I would ascribe a medium value, susceptibility and sensitivity with regard to the landscape which forms the site. This grading combined with a high magnitude of change with the introduction of the solar farm elements would result in a major (adverse) effect on the landscape character which would be limited to the site itself and immediate environs.** The alternative scheme proposals would result in the same conclusions. Field F7 without accommodating solar panels with the alternative scheme would remain materially unchanged in terms of character like that of field F12.

## 5. EFFECT ON THE WIDER LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

5.1 This section of my statement explains how the scheme would have a bearing upon the landscape character of the surrounding area, which lies beyond the site itself. As defined in the GLVIA 3 glossary landscape character is defined as **"A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different to another..."**.

5.2 To further clarify a distinction in the use of terms, Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape, as opposed to Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which are defined in GLVIA 3, page 157 as follows:

**"These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical lands use and settlement pattern, and perceptual and aesthetic attributes"**

5.3 A number of landscape character assessments have been undertaken in recent years to identify landscape character types and areas and published to assist professionals in understanding how decisions can affect landscape character.

5.4 Further to my own assessment, summarised in the schedule provided in Appendix 12 of my statement I have provided some narrative to explain how the proposed scheme would have a bearing upon the wider landscape character of the area beyond the site.

### **National Level**

#### **NCA Trent and Belvoir Vales**

5.5 The appeal site and the surrounding area are located within the National Character Area (NCA) Trent and Belvoir Vales referenced number 48. This NCA forms part of an assessment of the character of England's landscape, first undertaken by the Countryside Agency but now the responsibility of Natural England. The key characteristics of this NCA are described on internal page 7 of the document as follows:

**"A gently undulating and low-lying landform in the main, with low ridges dividing shallow, broad river valleys, vales and flood plains. The mature, powerful River Trent flows north through the full length of the area,**

meandering across its broad flood plain and continuing to influence the physical and human geography of the area as it has done for thousands of years

The bedrock geology of Triassic and Jurassic mudstones has given rise to fertile clayey soils across much of the area, while extensive deposits of alluvium and sand and gravel have given rise to a wider variety of soils, especially in the flood plains and over much of the eastern part of the NCA

Agriculture is the dominant land use, with most farmland being used for growing cereals, oilseeds and other arable crops. While much pasture has been converted to arable use over the years, grazing is still significant in places, such as along the Trent and around settlements

A regular pattern of medium to large fields enclosed by hawthorn hedgerows, and ditches in low-lying areas, dominates the landscape

Very little semi-natural habitat remains across the area; however, areas of flood plain grazing marsh are still found in places along the Trent

Extraction of sand and gravel deposits continues within the Trent flood plain and the area to the west of Lincoln. Many former sites of extraction have been flooded, introducing new waterbodies and new wetland habitats to the landscape

Extensive use of red bricks and pantiles in the 19th century has contributed to the consistent character of traditional architecture within villages and farmsteads across the area. Stone hewn from harder courses within the mudstones, along with stone from neighbouring areas, also feature as building materials, especially in the churches

A predominantly rural and sparsely settled area with small villages and dispersed farms linked by quiet lanes, contrasting with the busy market towns of Newark and Grantham, the cities of Nottingham and Lincoln, the major roads connecting them and the cross-country dual carriageways of the A1 and A46

Immense coal-fired power stations in the north exert a visual influence over a wide area, not just because of their structures but also the plumes that rise from them and the pylons and power lines that are linked to them. The same applies to the gas-fired power station and sugar beet factory near Newark, albeit on a slightly smaller scale.” (my emphasis)

- 5.6 On the internal page 4 of the document, it sets out statements of environmental opportunities. SEO2 notes that:

**“Enhance the woodland and hedgerow network through the planting of small woodlands, tree belts, hedgerow**

**trees and new hedgerows to benefit landscape character, habitat connectivity and a range of eco-system services, including the regulation of soil erosion, water quality and flow.** (my emphasis)

- 5.7 It goes on to note that one of the objectives SEO4 is to maintain and enhance the character of this gently undulating rural landscape.
- 5.8 The document notes that the Trent and Belvoir Vales offer a gently undulating and low-lying landform with low ridges dividing shallow broad river valleys and floodplains. That is the case with the landscape that surrounds the site here.
- 5.9 The document goes on to note on page 9 that major industrial developments are mainly focused along the Trent floodplain corridor including power stations and associated overhead power lines, a sugar beet factory, industrial estates, sewage treatment works and active sand and gravel extraction sites. I note that in the vicinity of the site there are overhead power lines and a freestanding wind turbine. It goes on to note that two power stations have a very dramatic visual impact in the north of the area, their prominence undiminished in the low-lying open landscape.
- 5.10 The impermeable Mercia Mudstone has trapped reservoirs of oil and several wells are in operation over the Gainsborough Beckingham oil field. It goes on to note that brick clay is also dug and processed into bricks at, while gypsum is mined south of Newark and processed at the plaster works at Balderton. Major infrastructure routes traverse the area, notably the A1, the A46 and the east coast mainline railway. Road infrastructure is visually prominent around the towns and cities and in some other places such as the A46 around Bingham and along part of the A1. Traffic noise and light pollution from the major roads have a significant impact on the tranquillity of what is otherwise a relatively quiet rural area.
- 5.11 Page 18 of the document provides further information with regard to objective SEO2. This seeks to enhance woodland and hedgerow network through the planting of small woodlands, tree belts, hedgerow trees and new hedgerows to benefit landscape character, habitat connectivity and a range of eco system services including the regulation of soil erosion, water quality and flow. It proceeds to identify some examples, one of which notes considerably that:

**"Considerably increasing the number of hedgerow trees even though these are not a significant feature at present to enhance landscape diversity and eco system**

**services including carbon storage and to counteract the threat to landscape character and biodiversity from tree diseases such as ash die back.” (my emphasis)**

5.12 It goes on to cite another example stating that:

**“Expanding existing woodlands and planting new woodlands to increase carbon sequestration and storage, the provision of biomass following the guidance produced for the area...”**

5.13 It also recommends using native preferably local provenance stock for all new plantings and species characteristic of the National Character Area. This solar farm adopts these recommendations.

5.14 Objective SEO4 is set out on internal page 20 which is concerned with maintaining and enhancing the character of this gently undulating rural landscape. By promoting and carefully managing the many distinctive elements that contribute to the overarching sense of place. It cites two examples, one noting that ensuring that new development incorporates well designed green infrastructure providing enhanced access and recreational opportunities for local communities and secondly, supporting the rural economy to ensure that the prevailing character of the area is able to remain predominantly rural and tranquil.

5.15 On internal page 25 it addresses the subject of boundary features and patterns and in paragraph 5.1 noting that hedgerows which were previously often gappy or excessively trimmed are now slowly becoming taller and wider benefiting wildlife and landscape character in response to a different management approach through agricultural stewardship schemes. With regard to boundary features, it notes on page 32 that the assessment of hedgerows between 1999 and 2003 concluded that poor hedgerow condition had been commonplace across the area with hedgerows often being excessively trimmed and gappy and that the few surviving trees were often in poor condition.

5.16 Internal page 33 is concerned with the settlement development in the area, noting that power station cooling towers are not as prominent in the landscape as they used to be with Staythorpe and High Marnham having now been demolished in 1995 and 2012 respectively. Internal page 35 is concerned with drivers for change, the first of which is climate change. It notes under this heading that there are a range of potential threats from climate change which could include the following:

- **"Increases in river temperatures adversely affecting existing cool water invertebrae and fish species**
- **Changes to river morphology and hydraulic characteristics**
- **Changes in species abundance and habitat preferences which could mean more non-native invasive species but also could be an increased range and population of some native species**
- **Changes to the timings of seasonal events, for example tree budding and coming into leaf, eggs hatching, animals migrating and a resulting loss of synchrony between species**
- **Generalist species may benefit through increased competitive advantage over species leading to a homogenisation of biodiversity**
- **Increased flooding and waterlogging during wetter winters leading to a shift in community composition in wetland and lowland habitats**
- **Changes in soil water both increases and decreases leading to loss of elements of soil biota reducing soil function leading to a loss of soil structure and changes in nutrient cycling, fixing and soil carbon storage**
- **Increased episodic events including precipitation, flow rate, temperature caused by extreme events**
- **The introduction of new and different crops and techniques in response to changing climate within the United Kingdom**
- **Increased demands of food security and energy crops which may be in competition with extensive agriculture and habitat conservation**
- **Re-intensification of agriculture due to longer growing seasons"**

5.17 Collectively, these changes would have a significant effect on the character of the local landscape. Finally on page 36 of the document it notes that under of the heading of Drivers for Change and other Drivers, that there is pressure to accommodate wind energy schemes across the NCA, however, I would note that there is no reference to solar farms requiring guidance or raising concern in the same way.

5.18 Of these underlined key characteristics of the NCA, these would be physically unaffected and would continue to remain and prevail with the proposed scheme in place. The field pattern hedgerows and hedgerow trees and the grain of the landscape would all remain in place. The only material change would be that

instead of there being a combination of arable and pastoral land, that it would all be managed as pasture for sheep grazing and that solar panels would be introduced in the fields as per the layout. There would be no loss of any features other than the arable use, the only difference is that the solar panels would be introduced along with the other infrastructure within the framework of the fields. In character terms, beyond the site and its immediate environs, there would be no material change to the physical and experiential characteristics of the landscape.

- 5.19 The overall key characteristics of the NCA reveal a settled and farmed landscape with many specific references to built infrastructure. This Natural England document is inevitably a high-level character assessment, but which provides a useful overview to understand the character of the local and wider landscape and its surroundings. At this higher level, it is considered that the appeal scheme would bring about no material change to the key characteristics of this NCA as identified above. **Beyond the environs of the site, this character area has a medium susceptibility and value, resulting in a medium sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude, would result in a negligible (adverse) degree of effect as a consequence of the proposed solar farm being in place as far as the wider landscape beyond the site is concerned. Within the site and immediate environs with a medium susceptibility, value and sensitivity, with a high magnitude of change would result in a major adverse effect.**

### **Regional Level**

#### **East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment**

- 5.20 The East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment was published in April 2010 which was commissioned by the East Midlands Landscape Partnership and prepared by LDA Design Consulting LLP. In the introduction it recognises that this is a new tier in landscape character assessment hierarchy in England and the first regional assessment to not only provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of the region's landscape, but also to address seascape characterisation. It goes on to note that the character assessment identifies 31 Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs), the purpose of which is to provide strategic regionwide evidence base to help decision making on issues that will have implications for the landscape and wider environment.

- 5.21 Section 1 provides an introduction to the assessment and notes in section 1.3 that one of the aims of the assessment is to provide protection which seeks action to conserve and maintain the significance of historic features of a landscape, along with management where action from a perspective of sustainable development to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.
- 5.22 The site and the immediate surrounding area fall within group 5, referred to as Village Farmlands and sits within the sub-category 5b, which is the Wooded Village Farmlands.
- 5.23 Internal page 159 of the document sets out the key characteristics that relate to the Wooded Village Farmlands, referenced 5b, as follows.
- **“Varied topography, ranging from gently undulating farmlands to rolling hills, becks and steep sided valleys, known locally as Dumbles**
  - **Scattered farm woodlands, ancient woodlands on prominent hills and tree lined valleys contribute to a well wooded character**
  - **Well maintained pattern of hedged fields enclosing pasture and arable fields with evidence of decline close to urban areas**
  - **Sparsely settled with traditional pattern of farms and small rural villages linked by quiet country lanes**
  - **Strong sense of landscape history”** (my emphasis)
- 5.24 Of these key characteristics, these would be physically unaffected and would continue to remain and prevail with the proposed scheme in place beyond the site itself. The fields within the site that are currently in arable use would be converted to pasture with the introduction of solar panels and associated infrastructure. However, the local field pattern would continue to remain at the local level so that the scheme would have a negligible degree of effect concerning the character area.
- 5.25 Internal page 160 of the document is concerned with landscape character. With regard to the Wooded Villages Farmlands Landscape Character Type, it is characterised by productive and well wooded rolling farmlands and valleys. It goes on to note that the base rich soils can be easily improved are widely used for arable cropping but there is also improved pasture in the area. It goes on to



note that the landscape, whilst not particularly tranquil, retains a quiet rural character that appears to have changed little over recent decades.

- 5.26 Under the subheading 'Shaping the Future Landscape' on internal page 163, it notes that planting of trees can help integrate new development into a landscape. This theme is further picked up under the subheading 'Shaping the Future Landscape' where it particularly focuses on managing road improvements, but also sees the opportunity to provide positive environmental and landscape enhancements and maintain the character of the rural road network. It goes on to refer to measures may include grassland, hedgerows and tree planting to enhance character and increase the occurrence of semi-natural habitats.
- 5.27 Similarly, it refers to East Midlands airport and identifies the opportunity to mitigate against visual effects using offsite woodland planting. Under the heading 'Forces for Change', on internal page 164, it notes that there is marked evidence of agricultural intensification accompanied by a move towards arable production. It goes on to note that the loss of pasture is particularly evident along various rivers and streams which traverse the countryside. That is the case here locally.
- 5.28 It also notes that energy crops such as miscanthus and short rotation coppice have been cultivated to meet renewable energy targets (seen adjacent to the footpath 43). That these are fast growing, and tall crops can radically change the appearance of the landscape. It goes on to note that restoration of hedgerows should be given priority along with an increasing pasture creating a stronger and more mixed pattern of land use under the heading 'Shaping the Future Landscape'. The proposals adopt these recommendations. I consider that with regards to the Wooded Village Farmlands, its susceptibility, value and sensitivity are medium, which when combined with a negligible magnitude of change would result in negligible effects.
- 5.29 **Beyond the environs of the site, this character area has a medium susceptibility and value, resulting in a medium sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude, would result in a negligible (adverse) degree of effect as a consequence of the proposed solar farm being in place as far as the wider landscape beyond the site is concerned. Within the site and immediate environs with a medium susceptibility, value and sensitivity, with a high magnitude of change would result in a major adverse effect.**

### **Local Level**

#### **Newark and Sherwood Landscape Character Assessment (December 2013)**

- 5.30 The Newark and Sherwood Landscape Character Assessment forms adopted Supplementary Planning Document and is a landscape character assessment based on a district level assessment of landscape character which forms part of the wider assessment for the county. It notes that identifying specific Landscape Policy Zones (LPZs) and related actions across the LCA will play an important role in the planning framework and in decisions for new development.
- 5.31 There are other landscape publications which have been prepared by the district which includes the Newark and Sherwood Green Infrastructure Strategy. The site and the landscape surrounding it and indeed, much of the landscape surrounding Southwell settlement falls within the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Landscape Character Area. Internal page 13 of the document, figure 1.3, identifies Landscape Policy Zones and landscape actions for each policy zone. The site falls within areas referenced MN38 along with 37 and 39. The area 38 is identified as an area for conservation, together with reinforcement whereas zones 37 and 39 are identified as areas to be conserved.

### **Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands**

- 5.32 The Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands is addressed in chapter 3 of the document and addresses a number of aspects relating to it including the physical and human influences with regard to the shape of the land and landscape history. It also considers the visual character of the landscape, noting in section 3.2, internal page 11, that the character of the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands is the strong sense of enclosure which exists over most of the area and is reiterated in the proceeding text noting that the landscape has a generally well wooded character. Internal page 3 of the document notes the characteristic features of the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands as follows.
- **"Varied undulating topography**
  - **Ancient woodlands, often predominantly sited on hilltops**
  - **Well defined pattern of hedged fields**
  - **Streams defined by lines of trees and permanent pasture**
  - **Traditional pattern of farms and small rural villages**

- **Red brick buildings with pantile roofs**
- **Quiet country lanes**
- **Small remnant orchards and permanent pastures around villages"**

5.33 These characteristics would all continue to remain and prevail with regards to the landscape beyond the environs of the site.

5.34 It goes on to note on page 14, that the wooded farmlands are a remote rural area that has been relatively unaffected by urban and industrial development. However, it does go on to note that the Ollerton and Marnham Power Station Mineral Line and Butterley Brickworks near Kirton have a localised impact and goes onto note that probably more intrusive are the lines of pylons which dominate some areas. This is the case with regard to the site and its immediate environs I would note.

5.35 It goes onto note in section 3.3 with regard to landscape evolution and change, that agriculture has influenced the character of the area, noting that a large proportion of the farmland in the region is under arable rotation. Interestingly, it notes that the main change in agricultural practice since the Second World War has been the swing from a mixed agricultural economy to one dominated by arable farming with an associated increase in holding size. The size of permanent pasture has vastly reduced since 1939 and that traditional cattle farming was widespread and in the 1930s, strong corridors of pasture flanked most of the Beck valleys. This scheme would provide the opportunity to address this matter and reintroduce a significant area of pasture for a 40-year period.

5.36 The document goes on to address energy, specifically on internal page 27, noting that the power generating industry warrants separate consideration due to its enormous impact on the landscape of the region. It notes that there are two functioning coal-fired power stations located in the Trent washlands, Cottam and West Burton. That the power stations and associated web of high voltage powerlines constitute the most dominant and visually intrusive landscape features within and outwith the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands. It goes on to note that National Power are currently constructing a power station at Staythorpe on a redundant energy site. This in line with the form of Structure Plan policies for use and reuse of existing energy sites. The nature, location and scale of further developments will be dependent on future national economic factors and refers to gas powered plans.

- 5.37 It also specifically addresses renewable energy, noting that the East Midlands Regional Plan states that by 2020 at least 20% of the electricity supplied by the East Midlands should be provided from renewable energy resources. Currently this figure sits at just 2% noted that this is a document dated 2009. Regional policy encourages planning policies to develop plans and strategies to promote and encourage, rather than to restrict the use of renewable energy resources. There are likely to be future applications for the location of windfarms in the area. These structures have the potential to change the landscape character of the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands. It refers to one windfarm being granted planning permission for a 25-year operational period. There is no mention of solar farm development.
- 5.38 Section 3.4 is concerned with landscape policy sheets and landscape character parcels, noting that the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands regions being subdivided into 62 landscape description units and this information has been tabulated to form draft policy zones. In terms of the site, the southern half of the site and its eastern portion falls within zone 38, with a very small part of the southern part of the site in zone 39, with the northern half of the site located in zone 37 adjacent to 38 and 39. The site straddles an area where all these three zones abut one another and effectively is a transition zone between these three areas. I proceed to consider each of these in turn.
- 5.39 **Beyond the environs of the site, this character area has a medium susceptibility and value, resulting in a medium sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude, would result in a negligible (adverse) degree of effect as a consequence of the proposed solar farm being in place as far as the wider landscape beyond the site is concerned. Within the site and immediate environs with a medium susceptibility, value, and sensitivity, with a high magnitude of change would result in a major adverse effect.**

#### **MN37 Land Parcel**

- 5.40 In terms of the summary concerning the character of this area, it notes that the landscape is interrupted intermittently by pylons and powerlines running east west to the south of the area. A predominantly arable agricultural landscape with medium to large-scale fields with irregular geometric pattern with smaller scale pastoral fields. It goes on to note that boundaries of the fields tend to be composed of well-maintained hedgerows with some outgrown hedgerow tree

species along the lines of the hedgerows. It identifies the characteristic visual features as follows:

- **“Very gently undulating and rounded topography**
- **Medium distance views to frequently wooded skylines although often enclosed by vegetation hedgerows, woodland etc**
- **Mixture of intensive arable fields with strongly trimmed hedges and some low intensity farming with permanent improved pasture”**

5.41 These key characteristics would continue to remain and prevail with the proposed solar farm in place regarding the landscape beyond the boundaries of the site.

5.42 It goes on to note with regard to landscape condition, that the land is considered to be very good in terms of its landscape condition and that it has few detracting features which include a section of pylon line and a caravan park. It goes on to note that in terms of a combination of condition and sensitivity, that the area is identified as an area to conserve. With regard to landscape sensitivity, the document notes that this is high along with a moderate sense of place and high visibility. I would disagree with this assessment, noting that the landscape is of medium sensitivity, moderate visibility. With regard to actions, the document goes on to address landscape features, referencing hedgerows and prevention of fragmentation. To also conserve the historic field pattern by containing and limiting any new development within historic enclosed boundaries and to conserve and enhance tree cover and landscape planting generally to improve visual unity and habitat across the policy zone.

5.43 **Beyond the environs of the site, this character area has a medium susceptibility and value, resulting in a medium sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude, would result in a negligible (adverse) degree of effect as a consequence of the proposed solar farm being in place as far as the wider landscape beyond the site is concerned. Within the site and immediate environs with a medium susceptibility, value, and sensitivity, with a high magnitude of change would result in a major adverse effect.**

#### **MN38 Land Parcel**

5.44 The policy for this area is to conserve and reinforce the landscape. In terms of the characteristic visual features, these are noted as follows:

- **“Very gently undulating and rounded topography  
Medium distance views to frequently wooded**
- **skylines although often enclosed by vegetation  
hedgerows, woodland etc**
- **Mixture of intensive arable fields with strongly  
trimmed hedges and some low intensity farming  
with permanent improved pasture**
- **Small commercial agriculture, mushroom farm,  
strawberry polytunnels**
- **Small industrial estate**
- **Leisure facilities surrounding Southwell golf  
course, horsiculture sports fields”**

5.45 These key characteristics would continue to remain and prevail with the proposed solar farm in place regarding the landscape beyond the boundaries of the site.

5.46 It goes on to note in terms of landscape analysis, that the landscape condition of the environment is considered good, and that the area has a coherent pattern of elements composed of predominantly arable fields, blocks of deciduous woodland and isolated farms and there are some detracting features including pylon lines running east west.

5.47 In terms of landscape sensitivity, it notes that this is considered to be of moderate category and the landform is apparent with intermittent areas of woodland giving a generally moderate visibility vale within the policy zone. Views are intermittent due to numerous block of woodland and hedgerows. A moderate sense of place and a moderate visibility leads to a moderate landscape sensitivity overall.

5.48 It goes on to note with regard to actions, that these are to conserve and to reinforce the landscape and in terms of landscape features, the strategy is to conserve and reinforce hedgerows where these are gappy and in poor condition, particularly internal hedgerows and to seek opportunities to restore the historic field pattern and boundaries where these have been lost and introduce more hedgerow trees. To essentially reinforce with new planting to replace post and wire fencing.

5.49 **Beyond the environs of the site, this character area has a medium susceptibility and value, resulting in a medium sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude, would result in a negligible (adverse) degree of effect as a consequence of the proposed**

**solar farm being in place as far as the wider landscape beyond the site is concerned. Within the site and immediate environs with a medium susceptibility, value, and sensitivity, with a high magnitude of change would result in a major adverse effect.**

#### **MN39 Land Parcel**

5.50 The policy is to conserve this land parcel. In terms of the summary relating to its character, it notes that this area is a relatively large policy zone with numerous fragmented blocks of mixed, deciduous woodland throughout it. Predominantly rolling and undulating topography with some areas of relatively flat landscape, views are often medium to long distance with frequently wooded skylines. Some areas are enclosed to some extent due to woodland vegetation and hedgerows along tracks and lanes. It also notes that land use is dedicated principally to intensive arable agriculture within regular geometric field patterns. However, there are some smaller scale regular and irregular geometric pastoral fields exist in the vicinity of settlements and isolated farmhouses. It goes on to note the characteristic visual features as follows:

- **“Very gently undulating and rounded topography**
- **Medium distance views to frequently wooded skylines although often enclosed by vegetation, hedgerows, woodland etc**
- **Mixture of intensive arable fields with strongly trimmed hedges and some low intensity farming with permanent improved pasture**
- **Numerous blocks of woodland and plantations of varying scale**
- **Predominantly vernacular settlements dwellings**
- **Good network of mainly intact and well-maintained hedgerows”**

5.51 These key characteristics would continue to remain and prevail with the proposed solar farm in place regarding the landscape beyond the boundaries of the site.

5.52 With regard to landscape analysis, it notes that the landscape conditions defined as very good but does note that there are detracting features including views to pylon lines running east west and north south through the area. The document ranks landscape sensitivity as high, and that the landform is dominant and intermittent areas of woodland give a generally high visibility value within the policy zone. However, views are intermittent due to numerous blocks of woodland and hedgerows. There is a moderate sense of place and high visibility leads to a

high landscape sensitivity overall. I would disagree with this assessment and consider landscape sensitivity to be medium and visibility medium value also. The document identifies this area to conserve, and that the first priority is to look at conserving permanent pasture and to seek opportunities to restore arable land to pasture. I note that this is the case here with regard to this proposal.

- 5.53 **Beyond the environs of the site, this character area has a medium susceptibility and value, resulting in a medium sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude, would result in a negligible (adverse) degree of effect as a consequence of the proposed solar farm being in place as far as the wider landscape beyond the site is concerned. Within the site and immediate environs with a medium susceptibility, value, and sensitivity, with a high magnitude of change would result in a major adverse effect.**

#### Summary

- 5.54 Beyond the site itself, the pattern of the land cover, trees, and hedges as well as the agricultural mix, undulating topography, variety of buildings and settlement pattern generally along with the drainage network of streams as identified in the various published reports, would all remain unchanged with the appeal scheme in place. It is considered that those key characteristics that define the wider landscape beyond the appeal site boundary as identified above, would be physically unaffected with the appeal scheme in place. Furthermore, regarding experiential factors of landscape character any noise associated with the proposal would be negligible in the wider landscape.
- 5.55 The appeal scheme would not materially change the broad character of the wider area as a settled agricultural scene, which would continue to prevail with the appeal scheme in place. **I would note that this landscape is of medium value, susceptibility and sensitivity and combined with a negligible magnitude of change, there would be a negligible degree of effect as a consequence of this scheme being in place, with regard to the landscape beyond the vicinity of the site.** The change to the character of the landscape would therefore be very localised and limited to the site and its immediate environment.
- 5.56 The changes set out in the alternative scheme would not make any material difference to the analysis and findings set out above.



## 6. EFFECT ON GENERAL VISUAL AMENITY

6.1 To reiterate, character and appearance are two different aspects. The physical character of the surrounding landscape including settlement pattern would remain unaltered with the scheme in place.

6.2 In order to gain a better understanding of the extent and nature of the change brought about by the appeal scheme on the appearance of the local landscape, I examine the effect of the proposed scheme on the general and recreational amenity of the landscape and the perception of those visual receptors (people) using the landscape.

6.3 My assessment relates to the representative LVIA viewpoints.

6.4 Visual amenity is defined on page 158 in the Glossary of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Third Edition (April 2013) as:

**“The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provides an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area.”**

6.5 The LVIA analysis demonstrated that much of the landscape within the locality would be visually unaffected by the proposed scheme. In reality, the actual visual envelope from where the proposed scheme would be seen would be severely constrained owing to the layering effect of vegetation including the field boundaries and hedge trees in the intervening landscape between the visual receptor (person) and the appeal site boundary. I rely upon the detailed analysis set out in the LVIA and addendum and visualisations which I do not repeat in my proof. I set out further analysis to provide context to this detailed analysis. The application documentation addressed the appeal scheme. subsequently, this has been revised as an alternative scheme (Wheatcroft). The visual analysis relating to this alternative scheme is set out at Appendix 4.

6.6 The appreciation of views from the countryside is mainly gained from vantage points accessible to the public. The two main ways in which members of the public can gain an appreciation of views when in the countryside are primarily from public highways and by using the various public rights of way that pass through the landscape. Firstly, I address highways.

### **Public Highways**

- 6.7 The detailed analysis is set out within the LVIA. I comment here to provide further context to that analysis. Within the local area the network of public highways is limited. It includes a number of unclassified roads that connect the various settlements in the landscape. The typical character of these minor roads tends to be narrow, with hedgerows, hedgerow trees and built form situated immediately beyond the metalled surface of the carriageway.
- 6.8 Consequently, within the local landscape, the presence of such roadside vegetation and built form means that a road user using these highways often has only a restricted opportunity to gain views of the countryside. The view of the user is most often channelled along the lane itself in the direction of travel. The user's appreciation of the wider countryside is very much limited to the direction of travel and to a narrow landscape corridor associated with the highway in front of the vehicle. Thus, the opportunity to gain a panoramic appreciation of the landscape and of the proposed solar farm within the appeal site would be very restricted from a limited number of roads in the locality. This would be the case here. I proceed to provide further clarification with regard to highways locally as set in in the proceeding paragraphs.
- 6.9 A short distance to the north of the site is a main road orientated east-west linking Oxton with Southwell. Due to topography and adjacent vegetation, there would be no opportunity to observe the proposed solar farm and as such, users of this route would be visually unaffected by the proposal.
- 6.10 There is a main road a short distance to the east of the site linking Southwell to Thurgarton, known as the Nottingham Road. Topography and adjacent treecover would restrict views such that users of this route would be visually unaffected by the proposals. Off this main road is an unclassified lane that serves the hamlet of Halloughton and runs through the village as a high street. Views from this highway northward look across rising ground such that this topography, treecover and built form would ensure that there would be no views of the solar farm from this route and as such, users would be visually unaffected.
- 6.11 West of this village, this road continues only to serve one farm, Halloughton Wood Farm. From this short stretch of highway, the scheme would be screened from view by the intervening vegetation.

### **Public Rights of Way**

- 6.12 The detailed analysis is set out within the LVIA. I comment here to provide further context to that analysis. There are a number of public rights of way in the vicinity of the site which I proceed to address.

### **Bridleway 186/3/1**

- 6.13 There is a public right of way which lies to the south of the site and the hamlet of Halloughton which is broadly orientated north-east to south-west linking Halloughton to the north-east and is referenced 186/3/1 and form a local bridleway. The far eastern section of this route which is in close proximity to the hamlet of Halloughton would be visually unaffected as lines of sight towards the proposed scheme would be interrupted by mature hedges, treecover and built form.
- 6.14 Further west of Halloughton, this public right of way is located on local higher ground in the vicinity of Halloughton Wood. From a short stretch of this footpath there is the opportunity to gain northward views over an existing hedgerow and post and wire fence which sits alongside the track. From this location due to the mature tree belts and hedgerows and treecover generally in the intervening landscape, the opportunity to gain views of the solar farm would be very limited. Certainly, there would be no opportunity to gain a full extent of the proposed scheme. There would be some limited views of the proposed solar farm associated with field F11 set in front of an existing tree belt. All the proposed solar farm located north of field F7 would sit beyond the horizon and would fall from view and similarly, most of the scheme which is located to the east of field F7 beyond the linear tree belt would also be screened from view. Solar panels in field F7 would be visible to a limited degree based on the appeal scheme. With the alternative scheme solar panels would be removed from field F7 and as a result there would be no visibility of the solar farm in views relating to this field. The consequence of this change would be that the degree of visual effect upon this route would be very limited to negligible.

### **Footpath 209/4/1**

- 6.15 This footpath is broadly orientated north-south with a bridleway to the south reference 209/80 with bridleway Southwell 43 to the north. The footpath at its most north-eastern end connects with a further bridleway Southwell 43, specifically 43/1 and 43/2 at the point where these two bridleways meet on the

track. The bridleway 209/42 passes along an existing gravel track which is broadly orientated east-west. Users of this stretch of route would note that this section is flanked to the south by a mature outgrown hedge and as such, would prevent southward views towards the solar farm.

- 6.16 The footpath then passes into a large field to the south of Thorney Abbey Farm. This field is currently managed as pasture. The southern boundary of this field is defined by a mature hedge, together with some treecover and the ground is rising slightly towards the south, such that there would be no opportunity to observe the solar farm associated with field F2 along this stretch of route to the north of the solar farm. The route follows this field and turns southward into another field which is long and orientated north-south and runs along the western side of the appeal site.
- 6.17 The mature hedgerows that run along the western boundary of both fields F2 and F4 given the nature of the topography would be no opportunity to observe the solar farm along the route of 209/42/1 except for the odd location where there is a gap in the existing hedgerow under existing mature trees. But this would be gapped up with new shrub native planting, together with hedgerow standard trees. Apart from the odd glimpsed view through the hedge to some solar arrays associated with field F2, there would be no opportunity to observe the solar scheme. Apart from being able to see some solar panels in field F2, there would be no opportunity to appreciate the solar arrays within the other fields on this section of route.
- 6.18 This footpath extends further south towards a woodland south-west of the site. Where the bridleway runs along the eastern side of an existing woodland which also comprises an outlier to the site. The treecover and hedgerows in the intervening landscape would substantially limit the opportunity to gain views of the solar farm. What does dominate the scene is a pylon nearby and the overhead transmission lines. Where the footpath cuts through a field adjacent to the site would and into another field close to the existing pylon, there would be the opportunity to observe the solar farm located within field F4. However, it would only be this field that the solar arrays would be observed in. All the other fields associated with the solar farm would be screened from view, due to treecover and hedgerows. There would as a consequence be no appreciation of the wider extent of the solar farm from this viewpoint location.

- 6.19 Where this bridleway continues southward alongside a wood that forms an outlier to the scheme, the solar farm would be screened by hedgerows and treecover in the intervening landscape and the existing views of the overhead lines and pylons would continue to dominate the view. Where this bridleway terminates and connects with BOAT 209/80/1 and 2, this route is flanked on either side by mature hedgerows and treecover such that users of this recreational route would be visually unaffected by the proposed solar farm.

#### **Visual Effect on Public Right of Way 74**

- 6.20 Public right of way Southwell 74 is located to the north of Halloughton and is broadly orientated east-west. This majority of this bridleway runs through farmland subdivided into fields, the boundaries of which are demarcated by hedgerows and treecover. This vegetation together with accommodation of topography and other treecover and hedgerows in the intervening landscape would mean that most sections of this route would be visually unaffected by the proposed solar farm. The route itself passes through several fields which are managed for miscanthus, which is grown as an energy crop for biomass and when growing would flank the footpath and further limit views from this route.
- 6.21 This section of bridleway which is closest to and passes through the centre of the site is visually influenced by the line of pylons and overhead cables associated with the National Grid 132 kV transmission line. The field through which the bridleway passes within the site, would not accommodate any solar arrays, and would continue to remain a field in pastoral use. The footpath extends around two sides of this pastoral field before connecting with two BOATs in the vicinity of Halloughton Wood. From this route, the topography, hedges and treecover would substantially limit viewing opportunities to only a few glimpsed views through mature hedges which would be gapped up and reinforced with further native planting as part of the proposals. As a result, the visual amenity of this route would not be materially affected, and the rural character context of this route would continue to remain and prevail with the scheme in place. This would be particularly achieved with the absence of any solar development associated with the field located between fields six and seven through which this route passes.

#### **Visual Effect on Public Right of Way 43**

- 6.22 Public right of way Southwell 43 is an existing footpath which links the west side of Southwell to the main Oxton Road. From this main highway, the footpath extends southward towards the site. Apart from a glimpsed view through a field

gate, this footpath would be barely visually affected due to screening effect of adjacent vegetation. At its southern point it meets the site boundary and would run along the northern side of field one where views of solar arrays would be limited to only this field. There would be no perception of the wider scheme, indeed, there would be no perception of the depth and extent of the arrays in this field as only the northern arrays adjacent to the path could be observed on this route.

- 6.23 Revision M of the layout and planting plan illustrates that a new hedgerow with hedgerow trees is proposed along the south side of the footpath. This new planting would form effectively a green lane with an existing and new hedge either side of the footpath. This would be in keeping with the character of the route further east close to Southwell and would over time restrict views of the proposals.
- 6.24 Whilst there would be some visibility of adjacent arrays, this would only relate to the length of one field along the route of this path and whilst there would be an adverse visual adverse effect, this would nonetheless be geographically very limited, only to the length of this path in this field. Amendments made in the alternative scheme would significantly reduce this visual effect.

### **Summary**

- 6.25 Detailed analysis regarding visual receptors is set out in the application documentation. Having reviewed this and assessed both the application and alternative scheme I consider that the geographical extent of visibility associated with the proposal would be very limited and local to the site. Where visible only small elements of the scheme would be visually evident with no opportunity to experience the full extent of the proposal from any one location.

## 7. LANDSCAPE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

### Amended Core Strategy (2019)

#### Core Policy CP9: Sustainable Design

7.1 Policy CP9 is concerned with sustainable design and notes that:

**"The District Council will expect new development proposals to demonstrate a high standard of sustainable design that both protects and enhances the natural environment and contributes to and sustains the rich local distinctiveness of the district. Therefore, all new development should:**

- **Achieve a high standard of sustainable design and layout that is capable of being accessible to all and of an appropriate form and scale to the context complimenting the existing built and landscape environments**
- **Through its design proactively manage surface water including where feasible the use of sustainable drainage systems**
- **Minimise the production of waste and maximise its reuse and recycling**
- **Demonstrate an effective and efficient use of land that where appropriate promotes the reuse of previously developed land and that optimises site potential at a level suitable to local character**
- **Contribute to a compatible mix of uses particularly in the towns and village centres**
- **Provide for development that provides to be resilient in the long-term taking into account the potential impacts of climate change and the varying needs of the community**
- **Take account of the need to reduce the opportunities for crime and the fear of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour and promote safe living environments**

**..."**

7.2 The proposed solar farm is inherently a sustainable form of development. It would not only protect but provide the opportunity to enhance the natural environment. By overlaying the infrastructure over the fields, the agricultural use can continue and would make efficient use of the farmland optimising site potential. This scheme would provide resilience for the medium and long term in terms of addressing climate change. Accordingly, the proposed scheme would be in accordance with this policy.



- 7.3 In terms of the explanatory memorandum that relates to this, it notes in internal paragraph 5.39 that the fundamental to the role of planning is the delivery of sustainable development that maximises resource efficiency and the use of more sustainable forms of energy.

#### **Core Policy 13: Landscape Character**

- 7.4 Policy CP13 is concerned with landscape character and notes that:

**“Based on the comprehensive assessment of the district’s landscape character, provided by the Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document, the District Council will work with partners and developers to secure:**

- New development which positively addressed the implications of relevant landscape in policy zone(s) that is consistent with the landscape conservation and enhancement aim for the area(s) ensuring that landscapes, including valued landscapes have been protected and enhanced.”**

- 7.5 The proposal and application have had regard to the published Landscape Character Assessments and in so doing, has identified opportunities for conservation and enhancement in line with these landscape management strategies. The solar farm would therefore be in accord with Policy CP13 for the reasons articulated in this statement.
- 7.6 The explanatory text relating to this policy is set out at internal paragraph 5.65. the Council refers to protecting and enhancing valued landscapes as part of conserving and enhancing the natural environment. The site and the immediate surrounding area are not identified as a valued landscape in the Development Plan. For each of the landscape policy zones, conservation and enhancement aims for each zone have been identified and are categorised into a number of categories which require particular policy actions. With regard to those landscapes which are identified as action for conserve, actions should encourage the conservation of distinctive features and features in good condition and in terms of those zones identified as conserve and reinforce, it notes that actions should conserve distinctive features and features in good condition and strengthen and reinforce those features that may be vulnerable.

#### **Core Policy CP14: Historic Environment**

- 7.7 Policy CP14 is concerned with the historic environment heritage assets and their settings in line with their identified significance as required in national policy. This

policy is addressed by my colleague, Laura Garcia, in her heritage statement and as such, I do not address the policy here.

**Adopted Allocations & Development Management, Development Plan Document (2013)**

- 7.8 With regard to this Development Plan, the Reason for Refusal cites three policies which I proceed to address with regard to Policy DM4, DM5 and DM12 in the proceeding paragraphs.

**Policy DM4: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation**

- 7.9 Policy DM4 is concerned with renewable and low carbon energy generation and is addressed by Paul Burrell in the Planning Proof of Evidence.

**Policy DM5: Design**

- 7.10 Policy DM5 is concerned with design and states that in accordance with the requirements of Core Policy 9, all proposals for new development shall be assessed against the following criteria:

**"1. Access**

**2. Parking**

**3. Amenity**

**4. Local distinctiveness and character**

**The rich local distinctiveness of the district's landscape and character of built form should be reflected in the scale, form, mass, layout, design, materials and detailing of proposals for new development. Proposals creating backland development will only be approved where they would be in keeping with the general character and density of existing development in the area and would not set a precedent for similar forms of development, the cumulative effect of which would be to harm the established character and appearance of the area.**

**5. Trees, woodland, biodiversity and green infrastructure**

**6. Crime and disorder**

**7. Ecology**

**8. Unstable land**

**9. Flood risk and water management**

**10. Advertisements"**

- 7.11 In terms of local landscape character, the proposed solar farm has had careful regard for the character of the farmland and includes enhancement as well as conservation measures. There would be no cumulative issues. There would be no

material harm to the landscape character of the area or to the appearance of the area in the medium and longer term upon establishment of mitigation planting and as such, would not offend this policy.

- 7.12 In the explanatory memorandum relating to this policy internal paragraph 7.22 is concerned with trees and biodiversity and green infrastructure and notes that:

**"Features of natural importance such as trees and hedges significantly contribute to the landscape character of the district and can also be used to help integrate new development into it. Where a site contains or is adjacent to such features, proposals should take account of their presence and wherever possible incorporate or enhance them as part of the scheme of development in order to improve the connectivity of the green infrastructure. Where it is proposed to move features, justification will be required, and replanting should form part of the development proposals."**

**Policy DM9: Protecting and Enhancing the Historic Environment**

- 7.13 Policy DM9 is concerned with protecting and enhancing the historic environment and specifically addresses Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas along with other heritage assets. My colleague, Laura Garcia addresses this policy from a heritage perspective.

**Policy DM12: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development (no explanatory text)**

- 7.14 Policy DM12 is concerned with presumption in favour of sustainable development and notes that:

**"A positive approach to considering development proposals would be taken that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. Where appropriate, the Council will work proactively with applicants jointly to seek solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions within the district.**

**The Development Plan is a statutory starting point for decision making. Planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Newark and Sherwood including where relevant policies in Neighbourhood Development Plans, will be approved without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise**

**Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making**

**the decision, then planning permission will be granted unless material considerations indicate otherwise taking into account whether**

**Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole. Where adverse impacts do not outweigh benefits consideration should be given to mitigation where harm would otherwise occur, or**

**Specific policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted."**

- 7.15 A positive approach to considering the development should be adopted by the Council. However, unfortunately the Council have not worked proactively with the applicants to seek solutions with regard to the proposals.

#### **The Southwell Neighbourhood Plan (2016)**

- 7.16 The Southwell Neighbourhood Plan is dated 2015-2026 and as set out in the introduction the Neighbourhood Plan is for the town of Southwell and is focused on this settlement. The designated Neighbourhood Plan area is defined by the Southwell Parish boundary.
- 7.17 With regard to the status of the Neighbourhood Plan once adopted the Neighbourhood Plan will form a new tier of the Development Plan at the local level in concert with the Newark and Sherwood Core Strategy (2011) and the Allocations and Development Management DPD (2013). The vision of the document and strategy comprises three elements which is to build a strong community, support a vibrant trading environment and deliver a good place in which to live. Objective 1 is concerned with sustainable development and seeks to ensure that proposals for new development are presented within the wider, social economic and environmental context and that informed decisions about future growth can be made. Objective 2 is concerned with the environment and climate change and seeks to effectively protect and manage the natural environment in and around Southwell to achieve sustainable development and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- 7.18 Policy SD1 is concerned with delivering sustainable development and states that:

**"Only proposals for sustainable development will be supported where they demonstrate:**

- **How sustainability has been addressed for the site with reference to the NSDC and NP policies applicable to it**

- That account has been taken of the Southwell Design Guide to help ensure that it is appropriate to the location, enhances the natural and built environment
- That account has been taken of the need to avoid increasing the risk of flooding both on and off site in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan policies...
- That where appropriate a multifunctional approach has been taken to help provide an enhanced integrated blue and green infrastructure including public rights of way with an equitable distribution of green and amenity space across the Parish of Southwell
- Where any development triggers the requirement for developer contributions as set out in the NSDC developers' contribution and planning obligations SPD. These should wherever possible be delivered on site rather than as commuted sums
- That where applicable the effects on the capacity and quality of transport access to, from and within Southwell have been addressed
- That where applicable account has been taken of the wellbeing and social development needs of Southwell residents"

7.19 With regard to this policy, the solar farm is inherently sustainable development and would bring about enhancement in terms of the green infrastructure and would accordingly not offend Policy SD1.

### **Policy E3 Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity**

7.20 Policy E3 is concerned with green infrastructure and biodiversity and notes that:

**"Development proposals must aim to protect and enhance local wildlife sites, the local Nature Reserve and priority habitats and species identified through the Natural Environment and Rural Committees (NERC) Act, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the Nottingham Local BAP. Any development proposal must also comply with the Natural England standing advice for protected species.**

**Where it is apparent or becomes apparent during the course of a planning application that a site has significant ecological value development proposals must include a baseline assessment, the habitat species and overall biodiversity value of the site where appropriate expressed in terms of the biodiversity accounting offsetting metric, advocated by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), proportionate to the size of the development. The**

**assessment must demonstrate how biodiversity will be conserved and enhanced by the development.**

**Where the loss of habitat cannot be avoided proposals should include appropriate offsetting to create a compensatory habitat to ensure that there is no loss of biodiversity.**

**Development proposals will create additional habitat space including roosting, nesting or shelter opportunities for wildlife and will be looked on favourably when considering the biodiversity value of a development.**

**Development proposals that fail to mitigate or compensate for loss of important habitat or wildlife species will not normally be granted planning permission.**

**Unless it can be shown to be impractical or financially unviable a buffer strip must be provided between the boundaries of properties or plots within a development and any existing historic, landscape or ecological valuable hedgerow, trees and any other features of merit for maintaining effective blue and green infrastructures. The width of the buffer strip should have regard to guidance in the Southwell Design Guide.**

**The provision of non-woody herbaceous species to be established on created buffer strips should have regard to guidance in the Southwell Design Guide.**

**Where the loss of protected trees is a result of a development proposal is unavoidable, appropriate replacement planting should be incorporated as part of the scheme.**

**As part of development proposals provision should be made for long term maintenance of any retained or created habitat, existing historic landscape or ecologically valuable vegetation and buffer strip provisions."**

- 7.21 The solar farm integrates a comprehensive green infrastructure strategy which would facilitate the conservation and enhancement of both the ecology and local landscape character. It would introduce new landscape features, hedgerows and trees along with extensive pastureland and as such, would accord with Policy E3.

#### **Policy E4 Public Rights of Way and Wildlife Corridors**

- 7.22 Policy E4 is concerned with public rights of way and wildlife corridors and states that:

**"Developers must ensure that existing and any new PRowS including footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways, which cross their sites, are retained wherever possible and enhance the green infrastructure in Southwell Parish.**

**PRoWs should be considered to be multifunctional contributing not only to the green infrastructure but also where relevant to open spaces including those due under developer contributions.**

**Unless it can be shown to be impracticable the minimum total width for a public right of way shall be sufficient to allow for machine maintenance, the inclusion of an allowance or hard surface to provide inclusive access for the public and with associated vegetation margins for it to be effective as a wildlife corridor.**

**The provision or retention of trees, wooded species and hedges along public rights of way should have regard to guidance in the Southwell Design Guide.**

**When a new PRoW is to be provided or revisions made to existing PRoWs on a development, any alignment should avoid the use of estate roads for the purpose wherever possible and preference given to estate paths through landscape or open space areas away from vehicle traffic.**

**Provision should be made for the long-term maintenance of any PRoWs that are part of development proposals."**

- 7.23 The solar farm would retain the public rights of way in the locality and those that pass through the site itself, without the need for any diversion such that they would remain physically unchanged and as such, the proposal would not offend Policy E4.

#### **Policy E6 Climate Change and Carbon Emissions**

- 7.24 Policy E6 is concerned with climate change and carbon emissions and states that:

**"Proposals for low carbon energy generation schemes will be supported providing they comply with relevant national, NSDC and Neighbourhood Plan policies, with specific reference to the following criteria:**

- Does not impact negatively on the local landscape character and the setting of the settlement in accordance with other development planning policies**
- Does not impact negatively on the setting and character of any heritage asset**
- Fully assess the impact of any tall structures within the landscape or townscape**
- Takes account of the Southwell Protected Views policies...**
- Demonstrates compliance with the NSDC Wind Energy Supplementary planning document**

**Development proposals will need to demonstrate that they have taken account of the current industry and government best practice principles for energy saving**



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**construction in design of buildings and landscape treatments and guidance in the Southwell Design Guide. This may include considering the use of on-site renewable technologies where they comply with other policies within the Development Plan."**

- 7.25 The solar farm is a low carbon energy generation scheme. It would not have any harmful effect on the wider landscape character beyond the site. Whilst within the site the character would change to a solar farm, this would only relate to a few fields within several extensive local character zones. The change to character would therefore be very localised and limited. It would not affect any of the Southwell protected views. From a landscape perspective, reading the Policy E6 in the round, the proposal would be in accord with Policy E6.

## **8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

- 8.1 I am instructed on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 6 Ltd to present evidence relating to landscape and visual issues in respect of the appeal scheme for which planning permission is sought for the construction of a solar farm and battery stations together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure. This statement should be read in conjunction with the planning proof of evidence prepared by Paul Burrell and the evidence prepared by Laura Garcia submitted on behalf of the Appellant. The application to which this appeal relates was a full application to the Council reference LPA 2/01242/FULM. Having visited the site and surrounding area and having reviewed all the relevant documentation pertaining to this scheme, I have drawn the following conclusions which are set out in the proceeding paragraphs. The structure of this section of my statement reflects the key points which are articulated in the Reason for Refusal.

### **Scale, Siting and Proximity to Halloughton Conservation Area**

- 8.2 With regard to the proposed development, I comment upon the three parameters that are set out in the Reason for Refusal, namely, scale, siting and proximity to the Conservation Area.
- 8.3 With regard to scale, the proposal seeks to deliver a 49.9MW solar farm that by virtue of its scale would generate a meaningful contribution of renewable energy which would contribute significantly towards the Council's own renewable energy target in light of the climate emergency the Council itself has declared. The quantum of development that is anticipated would extend over eleven separate existing fields, however, in terms of Halloughton and its Conservation Area, there would be no opportunity to appreciate the scale of this scheme as there would be no material line of sight from this hamlet. This small settlement is essentially located in a local topographical bowl and as such is situated at a lower level than the proposed scheme. This topographical difference together with mature treecover, woodlands, tree belts, hedges in the intervening landscape between the Conservation Area and the proposal would mean that there would be very limited opportunity to appreciate the scale of the proposed development.
- 8.4 In terms of the siting and proximity of the proposed solar farm, in relation to Halloughton Conservation Area, it would appear that at least in plan form the scheme is close to this designation. It is accepted that the vehicular access point

for the solar farm would extend slightly into the Conservation Area at its eastern end close to the Southwell Road/Nottingham Road junction. However, it is proposed that this route would be located within an area of existing tree cover and woodland landscape and as such, this track and access route would not be visible from the rest of the Conservation Area to the west. This route extends north-westward and would wrap around an existing woodland tree belt, whilst the rest of the solar farm is located behind tree belts, woodland and hedgerows, such that it would be very difficult to appreciate or be aware of the solar farm's presence from the context of the Conservation Area.

### **Effect on the Landscape Character of the Area**

- 8.5 The proposed scheme involves solar arrays and some associated infrastructure located in eleven adjacent fields. These in the main, are managed for arable use. However, depending on farm management and maintenance and crop rotation, these fields could revert to pasture for a fallow period without any recourse to planning and similarly, grazed as pasture, again without any recourse to planning, such is the minor consequence to such a change of use in farming circumstances terms. It is intended that whilst the solar arrays would be installed and operational, that the fields would continue to function as fields and accommodate grazing stock, sheep for farming circumstances for the whole duration of the lifetime of the project. The site would continue to have an agricultural use.
- 8.6 Most of the existing landscape elements, vegetation, trees, hedges would continue to remain and be reinforced. Therefore, the character of the fields would continue to remain accepting that they would also accommodate a solar farm, a renewable energy generating installation and as such, would change the current existing character of those developed fields. The remaining parcels of land within the red line would remain materially unchanged in terms of their character as farmland and woodland and beyond the confines of the red line site boundary, again there would be no material change to the physical fabric of the landscape character of the area beyond the site.

### **Effect on Land Cover**

- 8.7 Land cover is a specific term which refers to the way in which the land is managed. Most of the site is currently managed as arable but does include some pasture. Alternating between these two elements, pasture and arable is not a matter subject to planning. The scheme would require the host fields to be

managed as pasture for the duration of a project but would be grazed and would benefit the fields from a soil/agronomy perspective.

- 8.8 Furthermore, the introduction of wild plant meadows would bring about material ecological enhancements recognised and accepted by the Council. Indeed, the local published Landscape Character Assessment in its objectives advocates the reversion of arable land to pasture which is precisely what this scheme would seek to achieve. It is accepted that solar panels would be suspended above the grass swards. The introduction of the solar farm would have a major adverse degree of effect with regard to land cover associated with the site.

#### **Effect on the Local Landscape Character, Zones 37, 38 and 39**

- 8.9 The site is situated at the confluence of these three character areas. Whilst a line may be drawn on the plan as to where one finishes and another one starts; the reality is that on the edges of these character zones there is clearly going to be an area of transition as the character of one area morphs into another adjacent area, which occurs where the site is situated. Furthermore, the majority of the southern part of the scheme is located in an area identified as conserve and enhance. The character of a few field parcels within the site would inevitably change in terms of their landscape character with the solar farm in place, but the character of the landscape beyond the immediate environs of the site would remain unchanged with the scheme in place and that would apply to the vast majority of the Landscape Character Area zones 37, 38 and 39. Only a fraction of these zones would physically change in terms of their character. This is an inevitable consequence of delivering renewable energy infrastructure and if the Council are going to achieve their own local plan objectives.

#### **Effect on the Visual Amenity of the Area**

- 8.10 With regard to visual amenity, of particular note from my perspective is that this is an extensive solar scheme across a number of fields yet given the gently undulating nature of the local topography, combined with the field and hedgerow network and patchwork quilt of woodlands, the actual visual envelope and the degree to which this scheme would be seen from the surrounding area would be very limited. This is borne out by the fact, apart from one section of a road to a farm, there would be no opportunity to observe this scheme from any surrounding public highways, only a few short sections of public rights of way and not in general view from any settlements in the locality.

- 8.11 There are many public rights of way in the locality, however, there are only three paths in the immediate vicinity where from some short sections it would be possible to see some arrays associated with one field from any one of the locations. No opportunity to observe the whole scheme to understand its scale, but rather a field size solar scheme not dissimilar to the existing one immediately to the north of Halloughton and where the solar arrays would be observed, it would always be in the context of the pylons and overhead lines associated with the 132kV transmission line, which is recognised as a feature in all the character assessments alongside other energy infrastructure such as single wind turbines. Energy infrastructure is an integral part of the local landscape as well as the wider Trent Vale environment. The scheme's effect upon visual amenity of the area would be very limited in degree and very localised in extent.

#### **Visual Effect on Public Right of Way 74**

- 8.12 Public right of way Southwell 74 is located to the north of Halloughton and is broadly orientated east-west. This majority of this bridleway runs through farmland subdivided into fields, the boundaries of which are demarcated by hedgerows and treecover. This vegetation together with accommodation of topography and other treecover and hedgerows in the intervening landscape would mean that most sections of this route would be visually unaffected by the proposed solar farm. The route itself passes through several fields which are managed for miscanthus, which is grown as an energy crop for biomass and when growing would flank the footpath and further limit views from this route.
- 8.13 The section of bridleway which is closest to and passes through the centre of the site is visually influenced by the line of pylons and overhead cables associated with the National Grid 132 kV transmission line. The field through which the bridleway passes within the site, would not accommodate any solar arrays and would continue to remain a field in pastoral use. The footpath extends around two sides of this pastoral field before connecting with two BOATs in the vicinity of Halloughton Wood. From this route, the topography, hedges and treecover would substantially limit viewing opportunities to only a few glimpsed views through mature hedges which would be gapped up and reinforced with further native planting as part of the proposals.
- 8.14 As a result, the visual amenity along the majority of this route would not be materially affected, and the rural character context of this route would continue to remain and prevail with the scheme in place. This would be particularly

achieved with the absence of any solar development associated with the field located between field six and seven through which this route passes.

#### **Visual Effect on Public Right of Way 43**

- 8.15 Public right of way Southwell 43 is an existing footpath which links the west side of Southwell to the main Oxton Road. From this main highway, the footpath extends southward towards the site. Apart from a glimpsed view through a field gate, this footpath would be barely visually affected due to screening effect of adjacent vegetation. At its southern point it meets the site boundary and would run along the northern side of field one where views of solar arrays would be limited to only this field. There would be no perception of the wider scheme, indeed, there would be no perception of the depth and extent of the arrays in this field as only the northern arrays adjacent to the path could be observed on this route
- 8.16 The alternative scheme illustrates that a new hedgerow with hedgerow trees is proposed along the south side of the footpath. This new planting would form effectively a green lane with an existing and new hedge either side of the footpath. This would be in keeping with the character of the route further east close to Southwell and would over time restrict views of the proposals with the establishment of the new hedgerow. With establishment of this new hedge, visibility would fall to a negligible degree.
- 8.17 Whilst there would be some visibility of adjacent arrays, this would only relate to the length of one field along the route of this path and whilst a substantial (major) visual adverse effect, would nonetheless be geographically very limited, only to the length of this path in this field.

#### **Conserve and Enhance Landscape Character**

- 8.18 Beyond the environs of the site the landscape character of the area would remain materially unchanged. With the proposed scheme in place, the character of the fields within the site would change as they would now accommodate solar arrays, but the underlying character of the fields would still be there and would fully return with decommissioning of the solar farm in the longer term. However, it is proposed that as an integral part of the scheme, new hedgerow and tree planting would be introduced, and wildflower meadows created with arable land converted to pasture as advocated in the Council's own landscape character documents. All of these elements could and would remain after decommissioning as a positive

legacy of the scheme and bring about enhancement to the landscape character in the long- term.

### **Visual Amenity**

- 8.19 In terms of visual amenity, whilst the scheme is large-scale and extensive, the actual extent to which the scheme would actually be visible from the surrounding area would be very limited. Visibility (and associated adverse effects) would be restricted to a few short lengths of public rights of way in the immediate locality. Furthermore, where the proposal would be seen, it would be in the context of existing electricity infrastructure, wind turbine, overhead lines and pylons. The visual effects would be very limited given the scale of the proposal. Policies require careful integration through existing landscape features and new planting to mitigate adverse effects to minimal levels. No policy in the Development Plan specifies absolutely no visibility whatsoever. I consider that to set such a high bar would be impossible to achieve.
- 8.20 Detailed analysis regarding visual receptors is set out in the application documentation. Having reviewed this and assessed both the application and alternative scheme I consider that the geographical extent of visibility associated with the proposal would be very limited and local to the site. Where visible only small elements of the scheme would be visually evident with no opportunity to experience the full extent of the proposal from any one location.

### **Visual Perception of the Area**

- 8.21 If the Council are to honour their commitment to addressing their declared climate emergency, renewable energy infrastructure is an inevitable consequence of following through that policy. It should be recognised that this local area right down to the level of the site and out to the Trent Vale has had strong routes and continues to do so today in providing energy for the region. The strong association with energy infrastructure is documented in all the published Landscape Character Assessments and forms an integral part of the visual perception of the area. However, this scheme would have an extremely limited and local effect on the general visual amenity of the area.

### **Conclusions**

- 8.22 For the reasons articulated in the preceding paragraphs, it is my professional judgement that whilst there would be some limited adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity, but these would be localised. I consider there are



no substantive reasons for refusing planning permission for the proposed solar farm on land north of Halloughton Southwell. Therefore, the Inspector is respectfully requested to uphold the appeal and allow the grant of planning permission so far as landscape visual issues are concerned.