



# **Halloughton Solar Farm, Southwell - Planning Inquiry**

**APP/B3030/W/21/3279533**

## **Landscape Proof of Evidence**

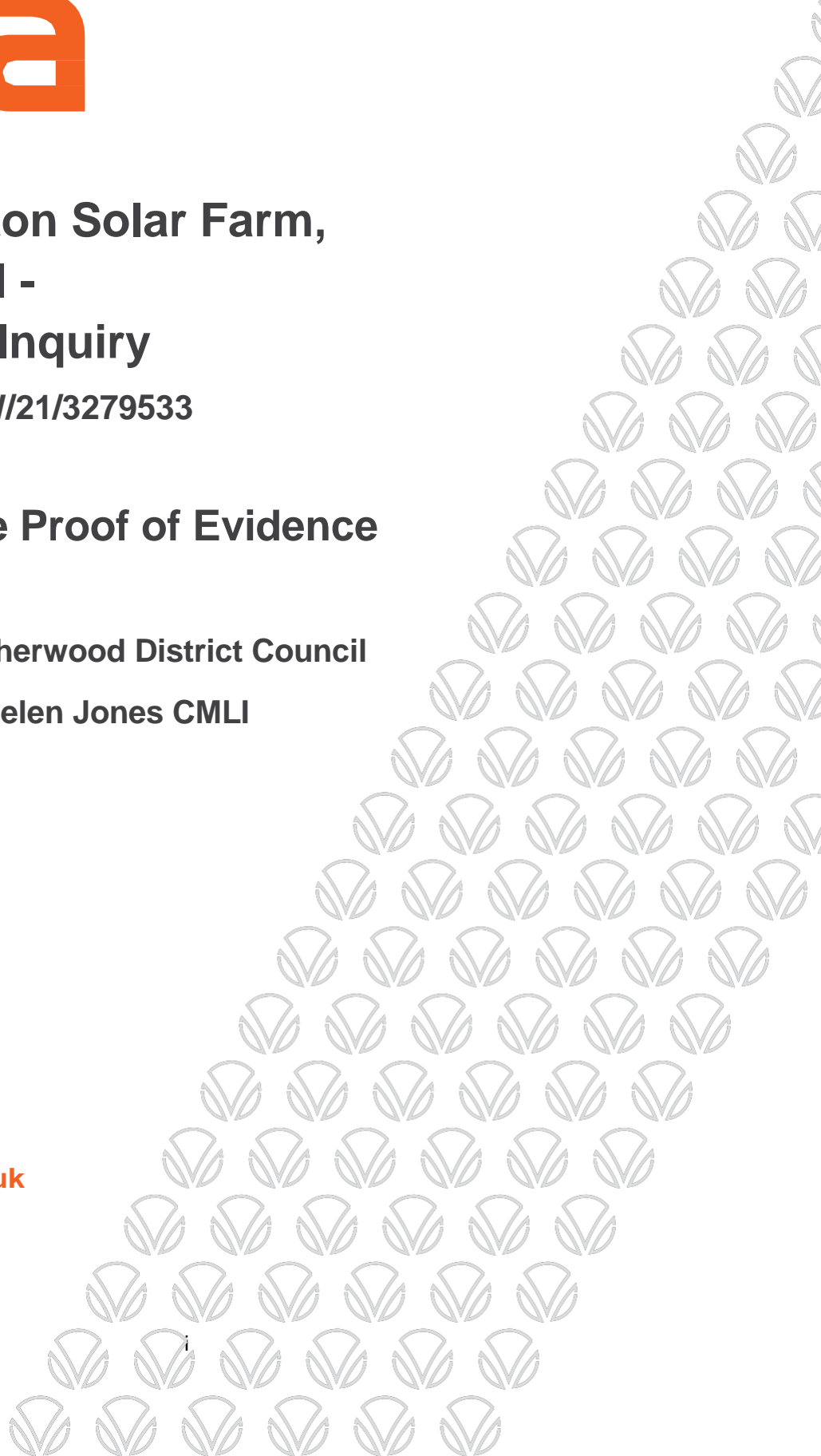
**on behalf of**

**Newark and Sherwood District Council**

**Prepared by Helen Jones CMLI**

Date: October 2021

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# Proof of Evidence

This proof of evidence relates to the following development proposal:

**LPA ref: 20/01242/FULM**

**Planning Inspectorate ref: APP/B3030/W/21/3279533**

## **Development proposal**

**Construction of a solar farm and battery stations together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure at Land North of Halloughton, Southwell**

This document has been prepared by Helen Jones CMLI of VIA East Midlands working as independent Landscape Consultant on behalf of Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC)

October 2021

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Witness Qualifications and Experience

- 1.1.1 My name is Helen Jones. I am a landscape architect and Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (C.M.L.I).
- 1.1.2 I hold a Post Graduate MA in Landscape Design (MALD) from the University of Manchester (1987).
- 1.1.3 I am a Landscape Architect and have been employed by Nottinghamshire County Council since 1987, and by Via East Midlands since 2016 as a Landscape Architect and a member of the multi-disciplinary Environmental Management and Design Team. I regularly provide advice on the landscape and visual aspects of planning applications to Nottinghamshire County Council Development Planning Policy Team and Nottinghamshire County Council Development Planning Team including on the new Nottinghamshire Mineral Local Plan.
- 1.1.4 I have also acted as an independent consultant on the landscape and visual issues of planning applications to both Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC) and Bassetlaw District Council (BDC). This work has included applications for solar farms, wind turbines and hydro-electric power schemes. Most recently I have provided comments on 2 other large solar farm applications for NSDC both of which, following amendments to the original design layout or additional mitigation measures, I resolved to support approval at planning determination from a landscape perspective (Crifton Lodge Solar Farm, Bilsthorpe, Nottinghamshire - Planning application reference 19/01299/FULM and Inkersall Grange Solar Farm, Bilsthorpe, Nottinghamshire – Planning Application Reference 19/01165/FULM)).
- 1.1.5 I have been involved since 2008 in the production of the Nottinghamshire Landscape Character Assessment and have managed the process of both developing the methodology of the assessment and training staff within both the county council and the district councils within Nottinghamshire in the use of the methodology, including NSDC. I therefore have a sound understanding of the wider landscape character and context of the area.

1.1.6 The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this inquiry is true and has been prepared in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution, the Landscape Institute, and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## 1.2 Background

1.2.1 I was commissioned by NSDC to provide impartial, expert evidence, based on my own professional judgement. My evidence is limited to the landscape and visual effects of the proposal.

1.2.2 I have read the relevant parts of the planning application, including the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (A13A) by the Appellant (and the Addendum (A13B)), the planning statement (A15), the design and access statement (A7), the biodiversity management plan (A8C) and the relevant plans submitted illustrating the proposals, development parameters and site layout.

1.2.3 I have undertaken two thorough visits to the site and surroundings (August 2020 and September 2021).

1.2.4 My evidence supports the Council's reasons for refusal in the NSDC planning committee decision notice of 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021 (A45) as it relates to landscape and visual effects:

- *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 forty-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 on the setting and experience of Halloughton Conservation Area, as well as to the setting of 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 Planning 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 abovementioned 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.'*

## 1.3 Scope of Evidence

1.3.1 My statement addresses the potential effects of the proposed solar development on landscape character and visual amenity. My intention is to provide the Inquiry with a proportionate and technically sound summary of the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposal and explain where there are differences in my judgement to that of the Appellant.

1.3.2 During the course of the planning application I reviewed the Appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (A13A). Whilst, this was generally a technically sound document, there were some omissions in the original application and additional information was requested by myself and provided by the Appellant. My comments and information provided by the applicant followed the following sequence.

- a) Pegasus Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment July 2020 (Core Document A13A)
- b) Via East Midlands comments dated 18th September 2020 (Core Document B21)

- c) Pegasus additional information dated December 2020 Landscape and visual impact Assessment addendum (Core Document A13B)
- d) Via East Midlands comments dated 26th January 2021 (Core Document B21B)
- e) Pegasus additional information dated 2nd February 2021 (Core Document A40)
- f) Via East Midlands comments dated 12th February 2021 (Core Document B21C)
- g) Pegasus additional information dated 22nd July 2021 (Core Document A46)
- h) Via East Midlands comments dated 27th August 2021 (Core Document B26)

1.3.3 I have not conducted a stand-alone Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment because this was not a requirement of my commission by NSDC. However as part of my independent assessment I have undertaken a thorough review and evaluation of the Appellant's methodology, references to correct baseline information, assessment application, Landscape Character findings, viewpoint selection, site visits to clarify and confirm viewpoint findings, respective conclusions of independent sections and cumulative impacts, and all other information supplied by the Appellant relevant to Landscape & Visual Impacts as part of the application.

1.3.4 My comments have been guided by the 3rd Edition Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3). Any other relevant planning or landscape guidance referred to is identified in the reference list in section 8.

1.3.5 Further information to support my evidence is provided in the appendices.



## 2. The Site, Landscape Character & Visual Context

### 2.1 The Proposal

2.1.1 The Appeal Scheme is fully detailed in Section 3 of the Statement of Common Ground (C4) and the Appellant's Statement of Case (C2). It is also detailed in the submitted LVIA documents (A13A/A13B) and shown on drawing reference P18-2917\_12 Revision L (A23D).

2.1.2 A 'Revised Scheme', submitted by the Appellant under the Wheatcroft Principle, amended Revision L (A23D) (dated 01.02.2021) of the Site Layout and Planting Proposals Plan (the Refused Scheme) to Revision M (A47) (dated 29.06.2021). The amendments proposed are as follows:

- Amendment 1: Removal of panels and associated infrastructure from a central field. The red line boundary of the scheme remains the same at 106.4 hectares, but the extent of the solar array within it is reduced by approximately 4.2ha. Resulting in ca. 7 fewer CCTV masts.
- Amendment 2: Belt of new trees are proposed within an existing hedgerow which encloses a section of the Site boundary to the southwest.
- Amendment 3: Additional native hedgerow with semi-mature hedgerow trees is proposed between the northern extent of the Proposed Development and PRoW FP43.
- Amendment 4: Removing panels and associated infrastructure from the north-eastern corner of the northern most field to facilitate the 're-wilding of this area, reducing the array by approximately 0.4Ha.

2.1.3 Within this Proof of Evidence, where relevant, details of the 'Revised Scheme' are explained separately. Otherwise, the term 'Appeal Scheme' where referring to the Schemes, is used collectively.

## 2.2 The Site and Context

2.2.1 The Appeal Scheme site is within the administrative district of Newark and Sherwood District Council, and within the area of jurisdiction of both Southwell and Halloughton Parish Councils, with approximately half of the proposed site located in each parish area. The Appeal Scheme site is to the north western edge of the village of Halloughton, and 2.6 km from the village of Halam to the north. The largest adjacent settlements are the town of Southwell 2.7 km to the north east, and the larger town of Newark on Trent, 10 km to the east of the Appeal Scheme site. Isolated farms in the area include New Radley Farm - with access off B6386 Oxtan Road, Stubbins Farm – to the east of the Appeal Scheme site (off Stubbins Lane), and Halloughton Wood Farm – to the south west.

2.2.2 The land use of the surrounding study area is predominately agricultural, but also contains transport infrastructure connecting the surrounding villages with the town of Southwell, the site of the 12th century Southwell Minster and many other listed buildings. The A612 connects Halloughton to Southwell and several roads converge in Southwell, the B6386 Oxtan Road, Lower Kirlington Road, and Hockerton Road.

2.2.3 There are many small to medium woodland blocks within the study area. Halloughton Wood to the immediate south west of the Appeal Scheme site is classified as a replanted ancient woodland. There is also riparian woodland vegetation along small watercourses and dumble woodlands such as that of the Westhorpe Dumble which crosses the centre of the Appeal Scheme site. There are also well established mixed mature hedgerows with trees throughout the Appeal Scheme site, these contain tree species such as ash, oak and scots pine, and hedgerow species such as blackthorn, dog rose, elder, field maple, hazel, and hawthorn.

2.2.4 The study area has a gently sloping landscape containing deeper steep sided Dumble valleys such as Westhorpe Dumble. Generally, the land slopes away to the east towards Southwell which sits at 40 -50 AOD in the valley of the River Greet. To the south east of the site the landform slopes towards the River Trent which flows in a north east south west orientation towards Newark on Trent.

2.2.5 Heritage Designations:

The whole of the built area of the village of Halloughton is a Conservation Area and has the following listed buildings:-

- C13 Tower House at Halloughton Manor Farm - Grade II\* listed
- The church of St James, Halloughton - Grade II listed

- Pigeoncote, granary and stable block at Manor Farm - Grade II listed
- Barn at Halloughton Manor Farm - Grade II listed
- Barn at Bridle Road, Farm - Grade II listed

The centre of the town of Southwell to the north east is also a Conservation Area with many listed buildings including Southwell Minister which is Grade I listed (the Minster Church of St Mary the virgin and Chapter House, and the Bishops Manor and remains of Bishops Palace). The Conservation Area extends into the Westhorpe area of Southwell which lies to the north east of the proposed Appeal Scheme site area.

#### 2.2.6 Ecological Designations:

There is one Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the study area.

- Newhall reservoir meadow – 1.7 km north west of the site.

The following Local Wildlife Sites are within 3 km of the site:-

- Cotmore Lane Ref 2/719– within the northern area of the site
- Radley House Scrub Ref 5/3390 – within the northern area of the site
- Westhorpe Dumble Ref 2/524 – within the centre of the site
- Westhorpe Dumble Head Drain Ref 2/724 – within the centre of the site
- Halloughton Wood Ref 2/532 – immediately adjacent to the south west corner of the site
- Cotmore Plantation Ref 2/723 – 0.3km west
- Brackenhurst Ref 2/729 – 0.4 km west
- Halloughton Verge Ref 2/525 – 0.6 km south east
- Oxton Road woodland 5/3388 – 0.6kmwest
- Halloughton Dumble Ref 2/540 – 0.6 km south west
- Radley road grassland Ref 5/3391 – 0.6 km north west
- Epperstone Dumble (north) Ref 2/531 – 1.7 km south west
- Epperstone Dumble (south) Ref 1/113 – 3 km – south west
- Foxhole Wood Ref 2/514 – 3 km south west
- Thristley Coppice Ref 2/518 – 3 km south west
- Halam Osier beds Ref 5/174 – 3km north east

### 2.2.7 Public Rights of Way:

There is a network of PRowWs within the study area, these are referred to in the LVIA by the numbers in brackets:

- Southwell Footpath 43 – (209/43/2) – passes from the B6386 Oxtan Road towards the northern edge of the Appeal Scheme site before connecting with Southwell Footpath 42 (209/42/1)
- Southwell Footpath 43 (209/43/1) – is located within northern extent of the Appeal Scheme site and continues in an easterly direction towards Southwell.
- Southwell Footpath 42 – (209/42/1) – continues in a southerly direction before connecting with Southwell Byway 80 (209/80/2).
- Southwell Byway 80 (209/80/2) - passes along the edge of Cotmore Plantation, to the west of the Appeal Scheme site.
- Halloughton Byway 9 – (186/9/1) – passes along the edge of Cotmore Plantation, to the south west of the Appeal Scheme site.
- Southwell Bridleway 74 (209/74/1) - crosses the central portion of the Appeal Scheme site and continues past Stubbins Farm towards Cundy Hill Road.
- Bridleway Halloughton 3 186/3/1) – lies to the south of Halloughton.
- The long-distance footpath the Robin Hood Way passes to the east of the proposed Appeal Scheme site (at this point Southwell Footpath 37 – 209/37/2) and then up on to a ridgeline to the north of the Appeal Scheme.

2.2.8 The Appeal Scheme site can be divided into 2 halves, a northern section and a southern section separated by Southwell Bridleway 74 (209/74/1). The Appeal Scheme site has an area of 107.81 hectares (taken from the application form dated 07.07.2020 Core Document A1) and comprises 13 fields.

2.2.9 The land use of the proposed site is grazing pasture and cereal production, there is a single High Voltage power line passing from east to west, into which the solar farm electrical supply will connect; and a single line of telegraph poles to the far eastern side of the Appeal Scheme site.

- 2.2.10 The proposed access to the Appeal Scheme site is off Bridle Farm Road, which is a single track road which forms the main street through Halloughton Village. The road is not a through road but joins the access track into Halloughton Wood Farm. The Appeal Scheme site access passes along a field boundary and adjacent to a small copse of plantation woodland to emerge onto Bridle Farm Road at the entrance to the village of Halloughton.
- 2.2.11 The boundaries of the Appeal site are predominantly hedgerows with trees, some of the hedgerows are mature, mixed species hedgerows. Small linear belts of trees are dotted throughout the area. Westhorpe Dumble crosses the centre of the Appeal Scheme site on an east west axis with riparian vegetation, including mature trees along its course. Other small bands of riparian vegetation occur along smaller watercourses within the Appeal Scheme site.
- 2.2.12 The highpoint of the Appeal site is at 93m AOD in the far northwest corner, the lowest point is near to the proposed site access in south east corner at a height of 60m AOD.
- 2.2.13 The closest residential dwelling is New Radley Farm within the northern extent of the site. Other close buildings include Stubbins Farm to the east of the centre of the Appeal site, Halloughton Wood Farm to the south west of the south east extension of the site and Thorney Abbey Farm on the B6386 to the north of northern boundary of the Appeal site.
- 2.2.14 Manor Farm on the north western edge of Halloughton village is approximately 215 metres from the closest point of the Appeal Scheme site boundary. There is also another group of houses which extend out from the north western edge of Halloughton village – Pear Trees, Orchard End and two further properties to the north of these (adjacent to the Appellant's Viewpoint 11) which are approximately 85 metres from the Appeal site boundary.
- 2.2.15 The Appeal site and its context are also fully detailed in Newark & Sherwood District Council's Landscape Character Assessment (F5) and the drawings contained within Core Documents A13A and A13B.

## 2.3 Landscape Character Context

2.3.1 At a national level the Appeal Scheme site is located in Natural England National Character Area 48 –Trent and Belvoir Vales (F3).

2.3.2 At a regional level the Appeal Scheme site is located in Regional Landscape Character Type group 5 Village farmlands and division 5b wooded Village farmlands, of the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment (F4).

2.3.3 At the local level the Appeal Scheme site falls within 3 policy zones of the Newark and Sherwood Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (F5). All three policy zones are within the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Landscape Character Area and are as follows:

- Policy Zone 37 – Halam Village Farmlands with Ancient woodlands
- Policy Zone 38 – Halloughton Village Farmlands
- Policy Zone 39 –Thurgaton Village Farmlands with Ancient woodlands

Each policy zone within the LCA is awarded one of nine policy zone actions which is determined by consideration of the Landscape Condition and the Landscape Sensitivity. The full range of landscape actions and how they are determined is shown on Table 1 below (taken from F5)

**Table 1: Landscape Action matrix from the NSDC Landscape Character Assessment**

<b>Landscape Condition</b>	Good	<b>Reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve and Reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve</b>
	Moderate	<b>Create and Reinforce</b>	<b>Conserve and create</b>	<b>Conserve and Restore</b>
	Poor	<b>Create</b>	<b>Restore and create</b>	<b>Restore</b>
		Low	Moderate	High
		<b>Landscape Sensitivity</b>		

2.3.4 The northern section of the Appeal site is in the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Landscape Character Area - **Policy Zone 37 – Halam Village Farmlands with Ancient woodlands.**

2.3.5 For the Policy Zone 37 - the landscape condition is assessed as very **good** and the landscape sensitivity as **high**. The Policy Zone landscape action is **Conserve**. The conserve action within the LCA is the highest category for those landscapes in the best condition with the highest sensitivity and whilst this does not preclude development it must be taken into account in the determination of planning applications.

2.3.6 The Policy Zone has the following characteristic features:-

- 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.

2.3.7 The Policy Zone has the following Landscape actions:-

#### Landscape Features

- Conserve hedgerows and prevent fragmentation (through lack of management and intensification of arable farming).
- Conserve historic field pattern by containing and limiting any new development within historic enclosed boundaries.
- Conserve the ecological diversity and setting of the designated SINCs.
- Conserve and enhance tree cover and landscape planting generally to improve visual unity and habitat across the Policy Zone.

#### Built Features

- Conserve the rural character of the landscape by limiting any new development to around the settlement of Halam.
- Maintain use of vernacular materials, style and scale in any new developments.
- Promote measures for reinforcing the traditional character of existing farm buildings using vernacular building styles.

2.3.8 The southern section of Appeal site is in Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands - **Policy Zone 38 –Halloughton Village Farmlands**. The landscape condition is assessed as **good**, and the landscape sensitivity as **moderate**. The Policy Zone Landscape action is **Conserve and Reinforce**. The conserve and reinforce action is the second highest category within the LCA and whilst this does not preclude development it must be taken into account in the determination of planning applications.

2.3.9 The Policy Zone has the following characteristic features:-

- 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, Horsey-culture, Sports Fields.

2.3.10 The Policy Zone has the following Landscape actions:-

#### Landscape Features

- Conserve and reinforce hedgerows where these are gappy and in poor condition, particularly internal hedgerows.
- Seek opportunities to restore the historic field pattern/boundaries where these have been lost and introduce more hedgerow trees.
- Reinforce with new planting to replace post and wire fencing.
- Conserve and Reinforce the ecological diversity of Norwood Park and other designated SINC's where appropriate.



#### Built Features

- Conserve the local built vernacular and reinforce this in new development.
- Conserve and reinforce the rural character of the Policy Zone by concentrating new development around existing settlements of Southwell and Halloughton.
- Recognise the contribution of existing heritage assets within Southwell, visible from the northern part of this DPZ, to the wider landscape character
- Ensure that development proposals address the policy approach set by the Core Strategy and Allocations and Development Management DPD, taking account of the Southwell Landscape Setting Study (November 2012)

2.3.11 A section of the southern part of the Refused Scheme site (A23D), would see panels proposed within the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Landscape Character Area - **Policy Zone 39 –Thurgaton Village Farmlands with Ancient woodlands**. The landscape condition is assessed as **very good**, and the landscape sensitivity as **high**. The Policy Zone Landscape action is **Conserve**. The conserve action is the highest category within the LCA and whilst this does not preclude development it must be taken into account in the determination of planning applications.

2.3.12 The Policy Zone has the following characteristic features:-

- 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 plantation, of varying scale.
- Predominantly vernacular settlements and dwellings.
- Good network of mainly intact and well-maintained hedgerows.

2.3.13 The Policy Zone has the following Landscape actions:-

Landscape Features

- Conserve permanent pasture and seek opportunities to restore arable land to pastoral.
- Conserve hedgerow planting along roadsides, seek to reinforce and enhance as appropriate.
- Conserve the biodiversity and setting of the designated SINC's, seek to enhance where appropriate.
- Conserve and enhance woodland/plantation blocks, seek to reinforce green infrastructure as appropriate.

Built Features

- Conserve the rural character of the landscape by concentrating new development around existing settlements.
- Conserve and respect the local architectural style and local built vernacular in any new development

2.3.14 The landscape character context is explained in further detail in F5 and shown on the drawings contained within A13A/A13B.

## 2.4 Visual context

- 2.4.1 To assess visual effects of the Appeal Scheme the Appellant selected 18 representative Viewpoints (see A13A and A13B). These Viewpoints were agreed in advance with NSDC, and the Environmental Management & Design Team of Via East Midlands with an additional 3 Viewpoints (A, B and C) requested from locations of heritage interest by NSDC, and an additional 1 Viewpoint by Via East Midlands (Viewpoint 18). It was noted that the Viewpoint photographs had been taken in Summer 2019 when the trees and hedgerows were in full leaf. In accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLIVA3) Viewpoint photographs should also represent seasonal changes. It was therefore recommended that a set of Viewpoint photographs were provided which showed the representative views and 3 additional heritage Viewpoints when the vegetation was not in leaf. There were provided as Core Document A20.
- 2.4.2 The Appellant's LVIA (Core Document A13A) contains a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) drawing using digital terrain data (Figure 8 – Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility). The visual effect of the Appeal Scheme was assessed at 3 m height to represent the general level of the highest point of the solar panels.
- 2.4.3 I have undertaken my own review of the Screened ZTV submitted by the Appellant, full details of these can be found in comments provided by VIA East Midlands 18.09.2020 (Core Document B21A). In summary the Screened ZTV formed a constrained area extending out from the boundary of the Appeal Scheme site, with additional outlying areas of theoretical visibility on higher ground to the north west, north east, south east, and with a distinct, small area to the south of Southwell and to the east of the Appeal Scheme site. The ZTV covers the whole of the village of Halloughton.

## 2.5 Policy Context

### Development Plan Policies

- 2.5.1 The Site lies within the jurisdiction of Newark and Sherwood District Council and is subject to the policies set out in the Newark and Sherwood Amended Core Strategy DPD (Adopted March 2019) (E1), the Allocations and Development Management DPD (July 2013) (E2) and the Southwell Neighbourhood Plan (2016) (E3). Natural Environment and other development plan policies relevant to my statement and are fully detailed in the Proof of Evidence provided by Miss Honor Whitfield (C8A).
- 2.5.2 Of particular relevance to my Evidence is Core Policy 13 of the Newark and Sherwood Amended Core Strategy (March 2019). This policy relates to the landscape character of the district, and states that *“District Council will work with partners and developers to secure: New development which positively addresses the implications of relevant landscape Policy Zone(s) that is consistent with the landscape conservation and enhancement aims for the area(s) ensuring that landscapes, including valued landscapes, have been protected and enhanced”*. The policy also sets out the expectation that development proposals will positively address the implications of the LPZs and demonstrate that the aims and objectives for that area would be contributed to.
- 2.5.3 Policies DM4 and DM5 of the Newark and Sherwood Allocations & Development Management DPD (The A&DM DPD) are also relevant.
- 2.5.4 Policy DM4 provides a policy framework in which to assess applications for renewable and low carbon energy generation schemes. The policy indicates that the decision maker should take a balanced approach to the assessment, *“where its benefits are not outweighed by detrimental impact from the operation and maintenance of the development and through the installation process upon [inter alia]:*
1. *The landscape character or urban form of the district or the purposes of including land within the Green Belt arising from the individual or cumulative impact of proposals; [...]*”

- 2.5.5 Policy DM5 states that all proposals for new development shall be assessed against a series of criteria including consideration of, inter alia, local distinctiveness and character. The policy states that the rich local distinctiveness of the District's landscape and character of built form should be reflected in new development. In accordance with Core Policy 13, all development proposals will be considered against the assessments contained in LCA Supplementary Planning Document. Furthermore, where local distinctiveness derives from the presence of heritage assets, proposals will also need to satisfy Policy DM9.
- 2.5.6 Policy E6 of the Southwell Neighbourhood Plan is also relevant which states that proposals for low carbon energy generation schemes will be supported provided they, inter alia, do not *"impact negatively on the local landscape character and the setting of the settlement in accordance with other development plan policies"*.

### **NSDC Landscape Character Assessment SPD (F5)**

- 2.5.7 This is relevant as a key document that provides the district level assessment of landscape character in order to describe the landscape sensitivity of the Appeal Site.
- 2.5.8 The LCA is a District- level assessment of landscape character which forms part of the wider assessment for the County. Its preparation has followed the County-level methodology and the document provides an explanation of the differences between landscapes that is based around a sense of place, local distinctiveness, characteristic wildlife, and natural features.
- 2.5.9 In identifying specific Landscape Policy Zones (LPZs) and related actions the LCA plays an important role in the planning framework and in decisions about new development. Reflecting this importance the LCA has been a key part of the evidence base informing the production of the Council's Development Plan documents which comprise of the Amended Core Strategy (CS) (E1) and the Allocations & Development Management Development Plan Document (A&DM) (E2). The LCA has also been a significant factor in the making of decisions on site allocations within the A&DM DPD.

2.5.10 The LCA offers an objective methodology for assessing the varied landscape within Newark and Sherwood and gives a greater understanding of what makes the landscape within the District locally distinctive. This is reflected through the identification of Policy Zones across the 5 Landscape Character Types represented within Newark and Sherwood. The Landscape Character Assessment provides the basis for the implementation of Core Policy 13 and as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is a material consideration within the planning process.

2.5.1 The LCA was originally published in 2010. In October 2011 consultation was carried out on the document by Landscape Architects within Nottinghamshire County Council in order that it could be incorporated into the Newark & Sherwood Local Development Framework as a Supplementary Planning Document. Following the consultation further work was undertaken to address the issues raised by consultee, resulting in the finalised SPD which was adopted in July 2013.

## **National Planning Policy Framework (2021)**

2.5.2 Chapter 15 (Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment) of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (inter alia) (at paragraph 174):

- a) *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland; [...].*

## **National Planning Policy Guidance**

2.5.3 The Natural Environment guidance in the PPG considers key issues in implementing policy to protect and enhance the natural environment. Paragraph 036 (reference ID: 8-036-20190721) explains the importance of recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and how policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This section also explains how the cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be carefully considered.

**See list of reference guidance documents in section 8**

## 3. Effects on Landscape Character

### 3.1 Effects on Landscape Character

3.1.1 The landscape character of the study area is fully described in Chapter 2 and in Core Document F5. The area contains the following Policy Zones

- Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zone 37 - Halam Village Farmlands with ancient woodlands – which has a high landscape sensitivity – approximately 50 % of proposed development area
- Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zone 38 - Halloughton Village Farmlands – which has a moderate landscape sensitivity – approximately 40% of proposed development area.
- Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zone 39 - Thurgarton Village Farmlands – which has a high landscape sensitivity – approximately 10% of proposed development area.

(This portion of the Policy Zone covers an area within the Appeal Scheme site boundary but which as a result of the revisions shown on Drawing reference P18 -2917\_12 Revision M (A47) does not now contain solar panels.)

3.1.2 The process by which these landscape sensitivities were derived as part of the landscape character assessment was based on desk-based study and field survey. The full methodology of the LCA and field worksheets are included in the appendices to the Newark and Sherwood LCA. These have not been disputed by the Appellant. The Policy Sheets, the character description and the Condition and Sensitivity Field sheets for each of these Policy Zones are included as Appendix B, C and D of this document.

3.1.3 From reviewing the Appeal Scheme I consider there will be a **major scale of landscape effect** on the landscape character of Policy Zone 37, within the Appeal Scheme area, as a result of the high landscape sensitivity derived from the NSDC LCA combined with the Appellant's assessment of a high magnitude of change as result of the development (see A13B). This is a matter of agreement between parties. In respect of the Revised Scheme this conclusion remains the same.

3.1.4 I also consider there will be a **major scale of landscape effect on the landscape character of Policy Zone 38** within the Appeal Scheme area, as a result of the moderate landscape sensitivity derived from the NSDC LCA combined with the Appellant's assessment of a high magnitude of change as result of the development (see A13B). This is a matter of agreement between parties. In respect of the Revised Scheme this will remain the same.

3.1.5 I also consider the Appeal Scheme would result in a **major scale of landscape effect** on the landscape character of Policy Zone 39 within the Appeal Scheme area, as a result of the high landscape sensitivity derived from the NSDC LCA combined with the Appellant's assessment of a high magnitude of change as result of the development (see A13B). This is a matter of agreement between parties. However, it is accepted that in respect of the Revised Scheme, (A47) this relatively small area would have the panels omitted and therefore would not be subject to the same degree of change as Policy Zones 37 and 38.



## 3.2 Discussion of Effects on Landscape Character

- 3.2.1 The Appeal Scheme will result in long term adverse impacts as described above on the landscape character of the area within the site boundaries. Long term in this context will extend for the 40 year life of the scheme. While the scheme may be considered reversible with minimum physical impact upon the landscape, the long-term life span of the scheme is well over a generation long, as identified in Core Document C3 and therefore should not be regarded as insignificant.
- 3.2.2 Eleven of the fields contained in the Appeal Scheme site area are in arable agricultural use, one field is currently pasture. The majority of these fields will change from a familiar and appropriate rural agricultural use to industrial scale energy production, physically altering the land use and perception of this sensitive and historic landscape through the insertion of massed modern elements and infrastructure. This is contrary to the policy zone action; '*Conserve and reinforce the rural character of the Policy Zone*', identified in all three policy zones (see sections 2.3.7, 2.3.10, and 2.3.13 in Chapter 2.3 above).
- 3.2.3 This Appeal Scheme is large, covering approximately 107 hectares of landscape with solar panels and/or associated infrastructure as described in the application and illustrated in Drawing reference revision L (A23D), and with regard to the Revised Scheme Drawing reference revision M (A47). While the Appellant has indicated that these fields will be able to be grazed this will be an incidental benefit of the Appeal Scheme with the main purpose, production value, and perception of the land use being one of modern industrial energy production. Again, I would argue this is contrary to policy zone actions as mentioned in 3.2.2 above.
- 3.2.4 Furthermore, paragraph 4.3.38 of the Heritage Impact Assessment (Appendix C to C7C) undertaken by Mr Partington also details that as evidenced by the Nottinghamshire HLC (Nottinghamshire County Council, 2000), the field morphology of the proposed development area remains strongly reflective of medieval land management regimes, therefore although the pattern of the field boundaries will remain, the land use within this pattern will be changed as a result of the proposed development.

- 3.2.5 Point 3.2.4 above is further evidenced in the Newark and Sherwood LCA (F5) which includes an assessment of the distinctiveness of the landscape components and their time depth in the assessment of the landscape sensitivity of the individual Policy Zones.
- 3.2.6 The Appeal Scheme includes 2 metre high timber post and mesh security fencing to the solar farm field boundaries around the panels and will also include eleven battery containers (size 2900mm height x 12490mm length x 2440 mm width), two customer substations (ca. 3m high), nine central inverters (size 3191mm height x 12492mm length x 2738mm width), one spares container (size 3191mm height x 12492mm length x 2738mm width), over 100 3m high CCTV masts and a central customer compound (ca. 6.2m high). The solar panels have a maximum height of 3m above ground. These are fully described on drawings contained with the application. The Appellant proposes in their landscape design to screen this fencing, the panels, battery containers and other infrastructure through the use of new woodland screening features, improved/new hedgerows, and existing vegetation screening that will be allowed to grow out.
- 3.2.7 However, high outgrown hedgerows are not in keeping with the general existing hedge systems within this landscape character area which are generally well managed lower features. While this proposed landscaping may well eventually successfully screen a majority of the views evaluated within the Appellant's assessment, the perception of the landscape character as you walk through it will be changed, and physically reinforced by the incongruous outgrown hedge height, closing down views of the wider landscape and spatial perception (see sections 2.3.6, 2.3.9, 2.3.12 in Chapter 2.3 above).

## 4. Effects on Landscape Features

### 4.1 Assessment of effects on Landscape Features

- 4.1.1 For clarification the term Landscape Feature used here refers to the various elements or components that make up the Landscape, such as topography, trees, hedgerows, fences, waterbodies, etc.
- 4.1.2 Following Via East Midlands comments on the application and amendments to the original LVIA by the Appellant, the final assessment of the effect on the particular landscape feature of land cover is included in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment addendum produced in December 2020 (Core Document A13B).
- 4.1.3 Originally the Appellant had considered the changes land cover to be 'beneficial', as the Appellant had considered only the biodiversity benefits of the scheme rather than the changes to the landscape character of the site. The Appellant was requested to reconsider this assessment approach.
- 4.1.4 In respect of Landscape Features, the layout of these components would not be changed by the development and the amount of vegetation requiring removal would be minimal to allow the construction of maintenance vehicle access tracks around the proposed site.
- 4.1.5 In the LVIA addendum (A13B) the magnitude of change on Land Cover was assessed by the Appellant as high, which combined with a low sensitivity (of the land cover element) results in a **moderate adverse scale of effect**. This is a matter of common ground between parties.
- 4.1.6 The high magnitude of change reflects the introduction of the built panel elements. The Appeal Scheme would therefore result in **long term moderate adverse impacts on land cover** as described above, within the Site boundaries. Although not as great as the impacts on Landscape Character, the impact on Landscape Features will still extend for the 40 year life of the Appeal Scheme.

- 4.1.7 While the structure of features within the landscape will largely remain unchanged, the form of vegetative screening elements, in particular the tall outgrown hedgerows, will result in a mass change in style of a particular feature. The mitigation landscaping proposed would result in a change to both the management and scale of hedgerows around the site, in my view this would also result in an effective change in experience and perception of the landscape.
- 4.1.8 The proposed change in management of hedgerows and increased screening through woodland belts would close down views which again has an effective change in experience and perception of the landscape. This issue is further addressed in Chapter 5 sections 5.5 to 5.9.

## 5. Effects on Visual Receptors

### 5.1 Current Position

- 5.1.1 It is noted that the Appellant has not provided any evidence to update their assessment of the impact of the Revised Appeal Scheme (A47) on the Viewpoints referred to in the LVIA.
- 5.1.2 Considering the amendments made to the Scheme by the Appellant I am now largely in agreement with their assessment of the visual effects of the scheme as set out in Core documents A13A/A13B. However some levels of visual effect remain unassessed by the Appellant and the areas of disagreement are set out below.
- 5.1.3 For the avoidance of doubt, I am in agreement with the Appellant's assessment of the visual effects of the Appeal Scheme for the following Viewpoints:

Viewpoint Reference	Scale of Visual Effect		
	Construction	Year 1	Year 10
4	Major-Moderate	Major-Moderate	Moderate-Negligible
5	Moderate	Negligible	Negligible
6	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
7	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
8	Moderate	Minor	Minor
9	Minor	Minor	Negligible
10	Moderate	Moderate	Negligible
11	Minor	Minor	Negligible
12	Major	Moderate	Negligible
13	Moderate	Moderate	Negligible
14	Major	Major	Moderate-negligible

15	Major	Major	Major
16	Moderate	Moderate	Negligible
17	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
18	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Heritage A	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Heritage B	Moderate-Negligible	Low-Negligible	Negligible
Heritage C	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

5.1.4 I disagree with the Appellant's assessment of the visual effects of the Appeal Scheme the following Viewpoints:

Viewpoint Reference	Assessment	Scale of Visual Effect		
		Construction	Year 1	Year 10
1	Appellant	Moderate	Moderate	Negligible
	Council	Major-Moderate	Major-Moderate	Negligible
2	Appellant	Moderate	Moderate	Negligible
	Council	Major-Moderate	Major-Moderate	Negligible
3	Appellant	Moderate	Negligible	Negligible
	Council	Major-Moderate	Moderate	Negligible

5.1.5 A number of viewpoints will be discussed in greater detail below.

## Viewpoints in Dispute

### 5.2 Viewpoint 1

#### **View from PROW bridleway 209/74/1 looking east – 76 metres from site boundary**

- 5.2.1 The Appellant in their comments of 02.02.2021 (A40) stated that there would be a moderate adverse scale of visual effect at the Construction Stage, a moderate adverse scale of visual effect in Year 1 and a negligible visual effect by Year 10 on Viewpoint 1. I disagree with this assessment of the scale of effect for the Construction Stage and Year 1.
- 5.2.2 The closest field of solar panels lies to the north of this Viewpoint. It is separated from the Viewpoint by an existing hedgerow. This is a grown-out hedgerow approximately 2 metres in height (August 2020) and gappy in places. From Viewpoint 1 views of the field to the north will be oblique, not direct, but at the Construction Stage movement of vehicles and lifting machinery close to the hedge line will be apparent whilst the panels are being put into place (albeit it is acknowledged that this could be for a relatively short period of time). The hedgerow is to be *'retained and infilled where necessary'* but before this infilling and strengthening takes place and becomes established there may be views of the panels that are closest to this hedge line, and also above this hedge line from Viewpoint 1. In my view, these potential views are likely to extend into the medium term while full establishment takes place.
- 5.2.3 At the Construction Stage the Appellant assesses a low magnitude of change for high sensitivity receptors (recreational users of the PROW) leading to a moderate scale of visual effect. During Year 1 the Appellant assesses a low magnitude of change for high sensitivity receptors (recreational users of the PROW) leading to a moderate scale of visual effect. However, in my view the magnitude of change should be greater than low for the reasons described above during the Construction Stage and during Year 1, leading to a major to moderate adverse scale of visual effect until at least Year 1 of the Appeal Scheme.

## 5.3 Viewpoint 2

### **View from PROW bridleway 209/74/1 looking west – 0 metres from site boundary**

- 5.3.1 The Appellant in their comments of 02.02.2021 (A40) stated that there would be a moderate adverse scale of visual effect at the Construction Stage, a moderate adverse scale of visual effect in Year 1 and a negligible visual effect by Year 10 from Viewpoint 2. I disagree with this assessment of the scale of effect for the Construction Stage and Year 1.
- 5.3.2 The closest field of solar panels lies to the north of this Viewpoint. It is separated from the Viewpoint by the same existing hedgerow as Viewpoint 1. From Viewpoint 2, views of the field to the north will be oblique, not direct, but at the Construction Stage again movement of vehicles and lifting machinery close to the hedge line will be apparent whilst the panels are being put into place, there will be clear views from a gap in this hedgerow to the north of the PROW route. This Viewpoint is much closer to the northern field than Viewpoint 1. The hedgerow is to be *'retained and infilled where necessary'* but before this infilling and strengthening takes place and becomes established there may be views of the panels that are closest to this hedge line, and above this hedge line from Viewpoint 2.
- 5.3.3 At the Construction Stage the Appellant assesses a low magnitude of change for high sensitivity receptors (recreational users of the PROW) leading to a moderate scale of visual effect. During Year 1, the Appellant assesses a low magnitude of change for high sensitivity receptors (recreational users of the PROW) leading to a moderate scale of visual effect. However, in my view the magnitude of change should be greater than low for the reasons described above during the Construction Stage and during Year 1, leading to a major to moderate adverse scale of visual effect until at least Year 1 of the Appeal Scheme.



## 5.4 Viewpoint 3

### **View from PRow bridleway 209/74/1 looking west - 81.7 metres from site boundary**

- 5.4.1 The Appellant in their comments of 02.02.2021 (A40) stated that there would be a moderate adverse scale of visual effect at the Construction Stage, a negligible visual effect in Year 1 and a negligible visual effect by Year 10. I disagree with this assessment of the scale of effect for the Construction Stage and Year 1.
- 5.4.2 The closest field of solar panels lies to the north of this Viewpoint. It is separated from the Viewpoint by the same existing hedgerow as Viewpoints 1 and 2. To the south of this bridleway is a dense stand of Miscanthus which creates a tunnel like effect on this section of the PRow. From Viewpoint 3, views of the field to the north will be oblique, not direct, but at the Construction Stage again, movement of vehicles and lifting machinery close to the hedge line will be apparent whilst the panels are being put into place. As above it is acknowledged that this could be for a relatively short period of time. However there will be clear views from a gap in this hedgerow to the north of the PRow route. The hedgerow is to be *'retained and infilled where necessary'* but before this infilling and strengthening takes place and becomes established there may be views of the panels that are closest to this hedge line, and above this hedge line from Viewpoint 3 that could extend into the medium term.
- 5.4.3 At the Construction Stage the Appellant assesses a low magnitude of change for high sensitivity receptors (recreational users of the PRow) leading to a moderate scale of visual effect. During Year 1 the Appellant assesses a negligible magnitude of change for high sensitivity receptors (recreational users of the PRow) leading to a negligible visual effect. In my opinion, the magnitude of change should be greater for the reasons described above during the Construction Stage and during Year 1, leading to a major to moderate adverse scale of visual effect during construction, reducing to a moderate adverse scale of visual effect until at least Year 1 of the proposed development.

## Viewpoints Not in Dispute

### 5.5 Viewpoint 4

#### **View from PRow bridleway 209/74/1, looking south west – 123.2 metres from site boundary**

- 5.5.1 For Viewpoint 4 the scale of visual effect assessed by the Appellant is not in dispute. The Appellant has assessed that there is a major to moderate adverse scale of visual effect at the Construction Stage, and a major to moderate adverse scale of visual effect during Year 1 which decreases to between a moderate adverse scale of visual effect and negligible visual effect by Year 10.
- 5.5.2 This view looks south to rising land which screens the village of Halloughton situated beyond the rising land. There are 4 fields on this rising land which are proposed to have solar panels placed within them (Fields F1, F2, F3 and F4 as shown on Figure 5 Site plan with field parcel and woodland reference in the Heritage Impact Assessment - Core Document C7C ). In order to screen the view of these solar panels the Appellant intends to '*retain the existing hedgerow with trees and infill with semi mature native trees.*' As this vegetation matures it will have a significant effect of closing off the view of the wider landscape and in particular these 4 fields on the rising land from this Viewpoint. I consider that this impact is negative as it will affect the visual perception of the Landscape which at present has open mid distance views and is described in the Heritage Impact Assessment (C7C) as fields that form part of the setting of the village of Halloughton, although the village itself is not visible from this point.

## 5.6 Viewpoint 10

### **View from PRow bridleway 186/3/1, looking north – 416 metres from the site boundary**

- 5.6.1 For Viewpoint 10, the scale of visual effect assessed by the Appellant is not in dispute. The Appellant has assessed that there is a moderate adverse scale of visual effect at the Construction Stage, and a moderate adverse scale of visual effect during Year 1 which decreases to a negligible visual effect by Year 10.
- 5.6.2 From this Viewpoint users of the footpath look down on the village of Halloughton from PRow bridleway 186/3/1, the path continues to rise until it abruptly changes direction. The 4 fields described earlier are now viewed rising to the north of the village with houses nestled at the base of the rising land (Fields F1, F2, F3 and F4 as shown on Figure 5 Site plan with field parcel and woodland reference in the Heritage Impact Assessment – Core Document C7C). In order to screen the view of the solar panels in these fields the Appellant intends to *'plant a 15 metre wide belt of native trees.'* This will have the effect, however, of closing off the interconnection of the village with these 4 fields on the rising land from this Viewpoint once this tree belt begins to become established. As described above these fields form part of the setting of the village of Halloughton and this change will have a negative impact upon the perception of this interconnected landscape.

## 5.7 Viewpoint 12

### **View from southern extent of Cotmoor byway looking north east – 356.6metres from the site boundary**

- 5.7.1 As explained at para. 2.1.2, the Appellant has made amendments to the Scheme (A46/A47). In my opinion this could lead to a reduction in the scale of visual effect on this Viewpoint, but this reduction has not been described or assessed by the Appellant. Therefore, I have assessed the amended scheme on the basis that the previous conclusions relating to the scale of visual effects as detailed in A13B remain unchanged.
- 5.7.2 For Viewpoint 12 there would be a major adverse scale of visual effect for the Construction Stage, a moderate adverse scale of effect for Year 1 of the scheme, and a negligible effect by Year 10. This is a matter of agreement between parties.
- 5.7.3 The Revised Scheme (A47) shows the complete removal of solar panels in the field to the north east of this Viewpoint. In my view this could reduce the visual impact of the proposed scheme from this Viewpoint because it would have the effect of confining the area of panels behind an existing small strip of woodland which would create a full stop to the proposed scheme and the extent of the fields with solar panels. If this field is not removed from the scheme however, then the scale of visual effects described will remain and will be experienced by recreational receptors on their approach towards the village of Halloughton when walking in a south easterly direction.

## 5.8 Viewpoint 14

### **View from PRoW footpath 209/42/1, on the access track to New Radley Farm looking south – 10.4 metres from site boundary**

- 5.8.1 As explained at para. 2.1.2, the Appellant has made amendments to the Scheme (A46/A47). In my opinion this could lead to a reduction in the scale of visual effect on this Viewpoint, but this has not been described or assessed by the Appellant. Therefore, I have assessed the Revised scheme on the basis that the previous conclusions relating to the scale of visual effects detailed in the original LVIA submitted by the Appellant (CD A13B) remain unchanged.
- 5.8.2 For Viewpoint 14 there would be a major adverse scale of visual effect for the Construction Stage, a major adverse scale of effect for Year 1 of the scheme, and a moderate to negligible effect by Year 10. This is a matter of agreement between parties.
- 5.8.3 When walking along PRoW footpath 209/42/1 and 209/43/1 in an easterly direction from the outskirts of Southwell, the walker passes through a wooded area and then the views open out to the south to give views of undulating and rising fields, typical of the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Landscape Character Type, beyond the access track to New Radley Farm the views close down again behind a mature hedge line. This Viewpoint is on footpath 209/42/1 and is at the centre of the northern border of the proposed scheme
- 5.8.4 The Revised Scheme (A47) shows an area of *'proposed native hedgerow with trees'* and a *'rewilding area'*. Whilst this proposed planting will reduce views of the field of solar panels immediately adjacent to the footpath user it will take some time to establish, therefore views at the Construction Stage are likely to remain at a major adverse scale of visual effect, likely extending beyond Year 1. While successful vegetation establishment will screen these views of the solar farm, in my opinion it would also have a countering negative effect on the perception of the landscape with users of the footpath being in a 'corridor' of vegetation as there is a strong mature area of vegetation to the north and the former open views to the south would be lost.

## 5.9 Viewpoint 15

### **View from PRow footpath 209/43/1, looking south – 0 metres from the site boundary**

- 5.9.1 As explained at para. 2.1.2, the Appellant has made amendments to the Scheme (A46/A47). In my opinion this could lead to a reduction in the scale of visual effect on this Viewpoint, however this reduction has not been described by the Appellant. Therefore, I have assessed the Revised Scheme on the basis of conclusions relating to the scale of visual effects detailed in the original LVIA submitted by the Appellant (A13B).
- 5.9.2 For Viewpoint 15 there would be a major adverse scale of visual effect for the Construction Stage, a major adverse scale of effect for Year 1 of the scheme, and a major adverse scale of effect by Year 10. This is a matter of agreement between parties.
- 5.9.3 As above when walking along this PRow footpaths 209/42/1 and 209/43/1 in an easterly direction from the outskirts of Southwell, the walker passes through a wooded area and then the views open out to the south to give views of undulating and rising fields typical of the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Landscape Character Type, beyond the access track to New Radley Farm the views close down again behind a mature hedge line. This Viewpoint is on footpath 209/43/1 and is at the north eastern corner of the Appeal Scheme.
- 5.9.4 The Revised Scheme (A47) shows an additional area of '*proposed native hedgerow with trees*' and a '*rewilding area*'. As explained above, this planting whilst reducing views of the field of solar panels immediately adjacent to the footpath user will firstly take some time to establish, therefore views at the Construction Stage are likely to remain at a major adverse scale of visual effect. After the Construction Stage, dependent in which planting season the planting takes place and dependent on the success of vegetation establishment these views will reduce over the course of Year 1. As Viewpoint 14, while successful vegetation establishment will screen these views of the solar farm it will have a countering negative effect on the perception of the landscape with users of the footpath being in a 'corridor' of vegetation as there is a strong mature area of vegetation to the north and the former open views to the south will be lost.

5.9.5 Similarly to Viewpoint 14 above, this planting, whilst reducing views of the field of solar panels immediately adjacent to the footpath user, will firstly take some time to establish, therefore views at the Construction Stage are likely to remain at a major adverse scale of visual effect. Dependent on the success of vegetation establishment these views will reduce over time. However, even with successful establishment screening these views of the solar farm it will have a countering negative effect on the perception of the landscape with users of the footpath being in a 'corridor' of vegetation as there is a strong mature area of vegetation to the north and the former open views to the south will be lost.

## 6. Mitigation and enhancement

### 6.1 Biodiversity Management Plan

- 6.1.1 The mitigation of enhancement to be included in the scheme by the Appellant has been detailed in the Biodiversity Management Plan (Core Document A8C) and the final proposals have also been illustrated on Drawing reference P18 -2917\_12 Revision M (Core Document A47)).
- 6.1.2 Save for my comments relating to the impact of additional planting as detailed above, I do not disagree with the Appellant's planting proposals and would only add that should the application be successful that the species list for the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Type should be referred to (Appendix E) for inclusion in the detailed landscaping scheme. This is included within the Newark and Sherwood LCA.



## 7. Summary and Conclusion

### 7.1 Summary Key points

- 7.1.1 In considering the overall impact of the Appeal Scheme I must consider the level of significance of the effect the scheme would have on the landscape, both in its character and context, as well as the significance of any visual effect.
- 7.1.2 In my view, a '*significant effect*' is any landscape or visual effect that is greater than '*moderate adverse*'.
- 7.1.3 Based on the assessment undertaken in the previous sections of my evidence I have the following conclusions:

### 7.2 Landscape Effects

- 7.2.1 Landscape effect on Landscape character type Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zone 37 - Halam Village Farmlands with ancient woodlands:
- Refused Scheme: **Major scale of landscape effect – Significant**
  - Revised Scheme: **Major scale of landscape effect – Significant**
- 7.2.2 Landscape effect on Landscape character type Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zone 38 - Halloughton Village Farmlands
- Refused Scheme: **Major scale of landscape effect – Significant**
  - Revised Scheme: **Major scale of landscape effect – Significant**
- 7.2.3 Landscape Effect on Landscape Character type Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zone 39 – Thurgarton Village Farmlands
- Refused Scheme: **Major scale of landscape effect – Significant**
  - Revised Scheme: **Negligible** - This area would no longer contain solar panels

*Please note that the landscape effect to PZ39 will only apply if the original Refused Scheme rather than the Revised Scheme (Core Document A47) is being considered.*

## 7.3 Landscape Elements Effects

### 7.3.1 Landscape effect on Landscape Elements/Land Cover:

- Refused Scheme: Long term **Moderate scale of effect** on land cover – **Not Significant**
- Revised Scheme: Long term **Moderate scale of effect** on land cover – **Not Significant**

## 7.4 Visual effects

### Viewpoints in Dispute

#### 7.4.1 Viewpoint 1 — effects on users of PR0W bridleway 209/74/1:

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Major to Moderate adverse level of visual effect – Significant**
- **Year 1 – Major to Moderate adverse level of visual effect –Significant**
- **Year 10 – Negligible – Not Significant**

Revised Scheme: Assessment of Helen Jones

- The above conclusions remain unchanged

#### 7.4.2 Viewpoint 2 — effects on users of PR0W bridleway 209/74/1:

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Major to Moderate adverse level of visual effect – Significant**
- **Year 1 – Major to Moderate adverse level of visual effect –Significant**
- **Year 10 – Negligible – Not Significant**

Revised Scheme: Assessment of Helen Jones

- The above conclusions remain unchanged

#### 7.4.3 Viewpoint 3 – effects on users of PRow bridleway 209/74/1

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Major to Moderate adverse level of visual effect - Significant**
- **Year 1 - Moderate adverse level of visual effect – Not Significant**
- **Year 10 – Negligible – Not Significant**

Revised Scheme: Assessment of Helen Jones

- The above conclusions remain unchanged

### Viewpoints in Agreement

#### 7.4.4 Viewpoint 4 — effects on users of PRow bridleway 209/74/1

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Major to Moderate adverse level of visual effect - Significant**
- **Year 1 - Major to Moderate adverse level of visual effect – Significant**
- **Year 10 – between a Moderate adverse level of visual effect and a negligible effect – Not Significant**

Revised Scheme:

- The above conclusions remain unchanged

#### 7.4.5 Viewpoint 10 – effects on users of PRow bridleway 186/3/1:

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Moderate adverse level of visual effect – Not Significant**
- **Year 1 - Moderate adverse level of visual effect – Not Significant**
- **Year 10 – Negligible visual effect – Not Significant**

Revised Scheme:

- The above conclusions remain unchanged

7.4.6 Viewpoint 12 — effects on users of Cotmoor byway (PRoW Halloughton Byway 9— (186/9/1). as shown on drawing reference P18 -2917\_12 Revision M (Core Document A47)

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Major adverse level of visual effect - Significant**
- **Year 1 - Moderate adverse level of visual effect – Not Significant**
- **Year 10 – Negligible visual effect – Not Significant**

Revised Scheme:

- **The Appellant has not provided an amended assessment of the effect on VP12, however in my opinion this is likely to reduce.**

7.4.7 Viewpoint 14 – effects on users of PRoW footpath 209/42/1:

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Major adverse level of visual effect - Significant**
- **Year 1 – Major adverse level of visual effect – Significant**
- **Year 10 – Moderate to Negligible visual effect – Not Significant**

Revised Scheme:

- **The Appellant has not provided an amended assessment of the effect on VP14, however in my opinion this will remain as above until vegetation becomes established - Significant effects for Construction and Year 1**

7.4.8 Viewpoint 15 — effects on users of PRoW footpath 209/43/1:

Refused Scheme:

- **Construction – Major adverse level of visual effect - Significant**
- **Year 1 – Major adverse level of visual effect – Significant**
- **Year 10 – Major adverse visual effect –Significant**

Revised Scheme:

- **The Appellant has not provided an amended assessment of the effect on VP15, however in my opinion this will remain as above until vegetation becomes established – significant affects for Construction, and Year 1**

## 7.5 Conclusion

- 7.5.1 The impact upon the Landscape Character of the site is the most significant point of concern with regard to Landscape & Visual Impact issues.
- 7.5.2 In my opinion the Appeal Scheme would result in a major adverse scale of effects on the local landscape character for the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands Policy Zones 37, 38 and 39 [PZ39 is omitted from the Revised Scheme] for the forty-year lifetime of the scheme which I conclude to be significant impacts [save for PZ39 for the Revised Scheme]. These identified scale of effects on landscape character are also matters of agreement between parties (see para. 8.51 of the SoCG).
- 7.5.3 All three Policy Zones have Landscapes in Good condition with Sensitivity ranging from High to Moderate. This is borne out in the harmonious configuration of landscape elements across the Appeal Scheme site that exhibits almost all of the key characteristics identified within the respective policy zones and significantly contributes to the historic sense and spatial perception of this landscape.
- 7.5.4 The scale of the Appeal Scheme is large covering over 100 hectares of landscape and the majority of the fields within the site would be covered with solar panels. While the fields will be able to be grazed by smaller livestock such as sheep this will be an incidental benefit of the scheme. The insertion of massed modern elements and infrastructure will physically alter the land use with the main purpose, production value, and sense of land use being one of modern industrial scale energy production.
- 7.5.5 In respect of Landscape Character, in my opinion the Appeal Scheme [and Revised Scheme] would result in a long term moderate adverse scale of effect on land cover for the forty-year lifetime of the scheme. This identified scale of effect on land cover is also a matter of agreement between parties (see para. 8.50 of the SoCG (C4)). The proposed 40-year life span of the scheme is well over a generation long, this Scheme would therefore radically change the historic sense and spatial perception of this landscape for a large portion of any individual's lifetime.

- 7.5.6 Furthermore, I have also identified that the necessary vegetative screening to cover security fencing, solar panels battery containers and other infrastructure of both the Refused Scheme and Revised Scheme would not be characteristic of the general existing hedge systems within this landscape character area. While this may well eventually successfully screen a majority of the views of the development, the perception of the Landscape Character as you walk through it will be changed, and physically reinforced by the incongruous outgrown hedge height, closing down views of the wider landscape and spatial perception generating a further negative effect on the Landscape Character.
- 7.5.7 With regard to visual effects, it is agreed at paragraph 8.52 of the SoCG that the Appeal Scheme would result in some adverse visual effects during the Construction Stage, Year 1 and Year 10 of the development. I have concluded that having regard to the conclusions of the Appellant's submitted LVIA and Addendum (A13A, A13B) there is common ground on the majority of Viewpoints. The Viewpoints in dispute are Viewpoints 1, 2 and 3.
- 7.5.8 I have explained my position on Viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 12, 14 and 15 and consider that as a result of the Appeal Scheme the majority of these Viewpoints are likely to have Major or Moderate adverse visual impacts during the Construction phase and Year 1. Whilst the majority of these are expected to decrease to a Negligible level of visual impact by Year 10 (when the screening vegetation has had sufficient time to establish), this would be expected for a solar farm installation where elements are generally not above 3 metres in height.
- 7.5.9 While the panels and infrastructure should effectively be screened by the mitigation planting proposed I have explained that in my view, the extensive and uncharacteristic outgrown hedges will significantly alter the visual experience of this Landscape
- 7.5.10 Despite the mitigation planting proposed there would still be significant adverse effects on Viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 12, 14 and 15 as a result of the Refused Scheme (A23D) and significant adverse effects on Viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 14 and 15 as a result of the Revised Scheme (A47). These Viewpoints relate to well used public rights of way (PRoW Bridleway 209/74/1, PRoW Footpath 209/42/1, PRoW Footpath 209/43/1 and Cotmoor Byway – PRoW Halloughton Byway 9 – 186/9/1).

- 7.5.11 Whilst the Revised Scheme (A47) would reduce the most significant adverse visual effects on Viewpoint 12, significant effects would nevertheless remain for Viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 14 and 15.
- 7.5.12 Furthermore, while the development will largely be effectively screened by the maturing landscape design there would remain a significant change in views of the wider landscape, both from within and outwith the site, as a result of the solar farm infrastructure itself and the uncharacteristic landscape management and planting proposed which would result in a change to taller outgrown hedgerows and the addition of the southernmost 15 metre wide belt of native tree species. This mitigation planting itself will close down or block middle distance views at certain Viewpoints (particularly Viewpoints 4, 10, 14 and 15) creating an effective change in the experience / perception of this sensitive landscape where time depth is apparent.
- 7.5.13 The crux of the issue in Landscape terms comes down to the conflict between the potential Visual Impacts of the Appeal Scheme if unmitigated, against the impacts on Landscape Character brought on by radically different, industrial change in land use and necessary mitigation screening that is required with that.
- 7.5.14 Leaving views open would obviously have a massive visual impact from the modern regimented industrial scale of the scheme. Conversely screening the Appeal Scheme by wholesale increase of vegetative boundaries to a scale not in keeping with the Landscape Character equally damages this Landscape setting by closing down mid-distance, changing the spatial perception of those experiencing the landscape and disconnecting elements & features that relate to each other. Either approach has a significant negative impact upon the Landscape Character of the Area.
- 7.5.15 I contest that given the conflict identified above and the scale of the proposal within this setting, neither option is an acceptable compromise on this site. While I wholeheartedly support green energy production in principle, there are locations where such developments are inappropriate in Landscape terms. This is determined by the setting, context and whether the scheme can be successfully mitigated without significantly damaging the sense and essence of the Landscape Character. In my opinion the Appeal Scheme is unable to achieve this successful balance.

## 8. References

- Newark & Sherwood District Council Landscape Character Assessment SPD (2013)
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition 2013 – The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2002);