

SUMMARY TO 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**

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CONTENTS:

Page No:

1.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	1
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1. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

- 1.1 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

- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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

- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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

- 1.7 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.

- 1.8 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

- 1.9 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

- 1.10 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.

1.11 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

1.12 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.

1.13 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.

1.14 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

- 1.15 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
- 1.16 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.
- 1.17 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

- 1.18 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

- 1.19 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.
- 1.20 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

- 1.21 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

- 1.22 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.