

FULL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SOLAR FARM TOGETHER WITH ALL ASSOCIATED WORK, EQUIPMENT AND NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

BELVOIR SOLAR FARM, LAND WITHIN THE BELVOIR ESTATE, GRANTHAM, NG32 1PE

ON BEHALF OF JBM SOLAR PROJECTS 10 LTD.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 10 Limited ("The Applicant") to support a full planning application for a Solar Farm with associated equipment and infrastructure on Land within the Belvoir Estate, Grantham, NG32 1PE ("The Application Site").

1.2 This application seeks full Planning Permission for a ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) development with the following Description of Development:

"Construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure."

1.3 The Proposed Development would have an export capacity of 49.9MW and will provide a reliable source of clean renewable energy which will be supplied to domestic and commercial consumers via the District Network Operator (DNO) grid network. The main element of the Proposed Development comprises the construction, operation, management and decommissioning of a grid connected Solar Farm with associated infrastructure. Planning Permission is sought for a temporary period of 40 years from the date of first exportation of electricity from the Site. The substation will be required on a permanent basis, as the substation will become part of the local electricity distribution network.

1.4 The purpose of this document is to demonstrate that the Applicant has fully considered the design and access issues as part of the comprehensive preparation of the scheme prior to submission of the planning application. This report therefore covers the following matters:

- Use;
- Amount;
- Layout;
- Scale;
- Landscaping;
- Appearance;
- Access.

1.5 This Statement will detail the process behind the design and indicate how through good design, the proposals can be delivered in a sustainable manner to meet local

and national objectives of climate change, energy security, biodiversity enhancement, and a prosperous rural economy.

- 1.6 Whilst the DAS is set out to be read as a standalone document, it should be read in conjunction with the entire application submission in order to fully understand the Proposed Development, its potential impacts and planning merits. The accompanying Planning Statement sets out the planning policy context relevant to the design and access issues of this application's proposal.
- 1.7 The purpose of the Proposed Development is to support resiliency and sustainability objectives at both the local and national level. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), and the Melton Local Plan 2011-2036 in principle support the delivery of renewable energy infrastructure. NPPF Section 14 sets out how the planning system should support a transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and states that Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) should approve applications for renewable and low carbon development if the impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. For further information please see the accompanying Planning Statement.

2. APPLICATION SITE AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 The Site extends to 103.53 hectares and comprises agricultural land. The Site is located to the west of the settlement of Muston and south-east of Bottesford. The Site is described as Land within Belvoir Estate, Grantham, NG32 1PE, being centred on co-ordinates: X: 482177 and Y: 337450.
- 2.2 The Site is located to the immediate south of the A52 which is a strategic trunk road linking the A1 to the A46, connecting Grantham to Nottingham. Castle View Road partially follows the western Site boundary. To the south of the Site is the disused Grantham Canal.
- 2.3 The Proposed Development will be accessed via the existing access point on Castle View Road. Castle View Road is a single carriageway providing a link between the A52 in the north and Belvoir Road in the south. Castle View Road is accessed via a simple priority junction with the A52. The A52 leads to Nottingham in the west and Grantham in the east.
- 2.4 There are no International or European designated sites (Ramsar, Special Protection Area or Special Areas of Conservation) within close proximity of the Site. Muston Meadows National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Site of Special Scientific Interest is positioned adjacent to the southern Site boundary and is split into two separate land parcels. In terms of local designations, the Site is c.800m west of a Local Wildlife Site.
- 2.5 The Site does not fall within any statutory landscape designations. The Site is not situated within or near a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Application Site is located within National Landscape Character Area No. 48: Trent and Belvoir Vales.
- 2.6 Some existing vegetation and hedgerows are present along field boundaries around and within the Site, which would provide screening and / or filtering of views available.
- 2.7 Public Rights of Way are located within and in close proximity to the Site. These include footpaths F82/3 which connects Muston in the east to Castle View Road in the west, F74/1 and F90/4 footpaths connecting Castle View Road to F82/3 footpath bisecting the Site. South of these PRow's there is a bridleway F85a/2 which starts at Castle View Road and leads south towards Grantham Canal.

- 2.8 The entirety of the Application Site is located within Environmental Agency (EA) Flood Risk Zone (FRZ) 1 meaning the Site has less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of flooding by river sources.
- 2.9 No designated heritage assets are located within the Site boundary; however, a number of assets are located in close proximity to the proposed Site, detailed below:
- Moated grange with fishpond at Muston (Scheduled Monument), located within Muston approximately 370m east of the eastern Site boundary.
 - Muston village cross (Scheduled Monument), 70m east of Mountain Ash Farm and approximately 360m east of the Site boundary.
 - Shifted medieval village earthworks and moat at Easthorpe (Scheduled Monument), located approximately 550m north-west of the northern Site boundary.
 - Belvoir Castle, a Grade I listed building is located approximately 2.3km to the south of the Site. Belvoir Castle is set within a Registered Park and Garden, and conservation area.
 - Within a 1km radius of the Site there are ten listed buildings. Eight of the Listed Buildings are found at Muston, to the east of the Site. Two of these, the Church of St John the Baptist and the Village Cross are Grade II* Listed; the remainder are Grade II Listed. The two other Listed Buildings within 1km of the Site are both Grade II Listed and lie within Easthorpe Conservation Area to the north-west of the Site.
- 2.10 Locally there are Conservation Areas located within Easthorpe (approximately 285m north-west of the Site) and Bottesford (approximately 1.1km northwest of the Site).
- 2.11 An Agricultural Land Classification survey of the Site has been undertaken, 7.3ha of the Site in the north-western corner was graded as Grade 2 with the entire remaining Site area classified as Grade 3b (96.2ha), which does not constitute 'Best and Most Versatile' agricultural land.
- 2.12 Further details of the Application Site including the planning policy context are contained within the Planning Statement which accompanies the submission to Melton Borough Council.

3. DESIGN

3.1 A considerable number of factors have contributed towards the design and layout of the Solar Farm that is proposed in this application. These are now discussed against the various aspects of Design highlighted within former CABE's guidance document regarding the production of Design and Access Statements.

3.2 An important factor in finalising the proposals has been consultation with the community and local stakeholders. This process is summarised in the accompanying Statement of Community Involvement.

Use

3.3 It is proposed that the use of the Application Site will be for the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a ground mounted 49.9MW Solar Farm, comprising solar PV panels and associated infrastructure.

3.4 The solar photovoltaic modules would convert sunlight into electricity. The modules do this by capturing photons, or particles of light, and using their energy to knock electrons free from their bonds, thus allowing them to move again and generate a flow of current. A solar PV module consists of a layer of silicon cells, an anodised aluminium frame, a glass casing, and various wiring to allow current to flow from the silicon cells. Silicon is a non-metal with conductive properties that allows it to absorb and convert sunlight into electricity. When light interacts with a silicon cell, it causes electrons to be set into motion, which initiates a flow of electric current.

3.5 The proposed Solar Farm will result in an additional land use during the temporary 40 year period. Due to the nature of the development, such as the raised panels and separation distance between each row of panels, the land can continue to be grazed by sheep, therefore allowing a dual use for both farming and renewable electricity production to occur in tandem. Due to the temporary and reversible nature of the development the agricultural use will also be retained in the long term. The substation will be required on a permanent basis, as the substation will become part of the local electricity distribution network. Therefore, following the temporary 40 year period, the solar panels and associated equipment will be removed. However, the substation and access to it will be retained on a permanent basis.

3.6 As noted above the Site will be capable of dual use farming during its operational period, with small livestock (such as sheep) able to graze the land between and amongst the panels.

- 3.7 In addition, the minimal physical intrusion of the development itself will mean that the panels can be removed after their 40 year lifetime and the land will revert swiftly to full agricultural use¹. In this respect, the proposed scheme will result in a less permanent impact than most other forms of development, including some alternative methods of renewable energy production.
- 3.8 Due to the land required for such projects, these will generally need to be located outside of urban areas and within the countryside, where the capacity to accommodate such developments exists. At end of the 40 year period the land is not considered 'Brownfield' or Previously Developed Land.
- 3.9 This Design and Access Statement, and the accompanying documents including the Site Selection Report, set out why it is considered that this particular Site is well suited to accommodate the proposed use.

Amount and Fabrication

- 3.10 The extent of the Proposed Development has been refined and finalised having consideration of potential environmental effects. The Proposed Development benefits from landscape and ecological enhancements, including new and in-filled hedgerow planting and a new native tree belt (10m wide) along a section of the eastern boundary softening the edge with Muston. New lengths of hedgerows along footpaths have also been proposed as well as accommodating the routes within a 10m wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor which includes wildflower buffers/margins to benefit a range of wildlife including invertebrates and foraging bats as well as birds and small mammals. Species-rich grassland is proposed on the land beneath and surrounding the panels and creation of a botanically diverse species-rich wildflower grassland outside of the security fence and alongside the retained and proposed on-Site footpaths. Furthermore, provision of bat roost boxes, bird nest boxes, hedgehog nest boxes, insect hotels, Beehives, log piles and amphibian and reptile hibernacula features within the Proposed development would ensure that the resident populations are accommodated, and further species move into the Site.
- 3.11 As part of the proposals, a new permissive footpath would be promoted as a new wildlife walk and would travel past the proposed community orchard, the outdoor classrooms, picnic areas, information and interpretation boards and insect hotel, and

¹ Note: The Substation will remain beyond the 40 year period and will become part of the local electricity network.

then along the disused canal which passes through the southern parcel of the Site. The interpretation and information boards would encourage a better understanding of the Solar Farm and the benefits of renewable energy, and the ecological and landscape enhancements which are proposed across the Site. The construction of log pile seating and picnic areas will provide destination and meeting points that can be used by local groups and school children as an outdoor classroom, which will enable the Solar Farm to become both a formal and informal educational resource.

3.12 As a result of the iterative process, the Proposed Development, although covering a large area of land, is confined to locations where effects have been limited as far as possible and are considered justifiable when considered in the context of the scheme benefits, including to support the UK's renewable energy increase and CO₂ reduction legally binding targets. Consideration of the planning balance which weighs up all material factors associated with the planning application is contained within the accompanying Planning Statement.

3.13 The Proposed Development on the Site will consist primarily of a steel framework to support the panels. In addition, inverter / transformer and deer fencing are proposed with a CCTV system to restrict access and protect the scheme from theft and vandalism, as described below.

3.14 The design principles of the Solar Farm are:

- The solar panels would be laid out in straight arrays from north-south across the field enclosures;
- The Solar Farm will utilise a tracking system that uses an east / west system (90 degrees in the morning and 270 degrees in the evening) with elevation angles of up to +/- 60 degrees which would follow the movements of the sun;
- The maximum top height of the solar panels would be 3.0m;
- The panel framework will be driven into the soil removing the need for deep foundations. Such supporting systems are designed to avoid the use of concrete foundations and are reversible;
- Individual rows are separated by 3.8-7.0m to prevent shading;
- Combiner boxes are located underneath the panels throughout the Site;

- The solar panel modules are made from photovoltaics (PV) which are blue, grey, or black in colour;
- The solar panel module frame would be constructed of anodized aluminium alloy;
- A galvanised steel post mounting system will support the solar array;
- Where string inverters are used, inverter / combiner boxes would be mounted on the framework;
- Where centralised inverters are used, there will be inverters units situated across the Site, as shown on the submitted Site Layout plan;
- Typical minimum distance between edge of panels and perimeter fencing would be 2.0m; and
- Biodiversity would be promoted around the Site through a series of biodiversity enhancement measures.

Inverters and Transformers

3.15 A series of Inverters are proposed through the Site. The Inverters convert direct current (DC) generated by the PV panels into alternating current (AC). Transformers then convert low voltage output from the inverters to high voltage suitable for feeding into the network.

3.16 Typically, the Inverters are housed in prefabricated metal containers, finished in either a grey or green colour. The containerised solution makes their removal at the end of the operational life easier. Each unit measures c. 12.5m x 2.7m x 2.9m. (L x W x H) and would be positioned on a hardcore base on top of blocks (around 500mm from the ground). As such, the total elevation would be up to 3.4m.

Customer Switchgear Unit

3.17 The Proposed Development would include one Customer Switchgear Container, which would receive electricity from the inverter / transformers before transferring it to the DNO building. The Customer Switchgear Units would be prefabricated metal units, finished in either green or grey.

- 3.18 The units would measure c. 12.5m x 2.7m x 2.6m (L x W x H). The unit would be situated on a hardcore base, on top of blocks, at 500mm off ground level. In total, the Customer Switchgear Unit would have a total elevation of up to 3.1m.

DNO Building

- 3.19 The DNO control room and Customer switch room will be located adjacent to the enclosed compound and would typically be housed in a metal unit, in a dark green colour.

Point of Connection

- 3.20 The point of connection is located relatively centrally in the Site. Cabling will run from the inverter stations to the 132kV substation, where the electricity will be run through the transformer to 132kV and exported to the existing pylon linked to the distribution network via a Point of Connection (POC) mast. The POC mast will be located adjacent to the existing pylon tower and will consist of a tower similar in height to the existing pylon towers that traverse the Site. An underground cable will run between the POC mast and the 132kV compound. The 132kV compound will also include a communications and weather station mast up to 5.0m in height.
- 3.21 The insulated DC cables from the solar modules will be routed in channels fixed on the underside of the framework. The DC string cables will run along the entire underside of each row. The electrical cabling from each array will be concealed through shallow trenches linking the modules to the inverter substations and then to the main substation. The cable trench may also carry earthing and communications cables and will be backfilled with fine sands and excavated materials to the original ground level.

Perimeter Fencing and Security

- 3.22 The Solar Farm would be set within agricultural stock proof wire fencing up to 2.0m in height with wooden supporting posts placed at intervals of c. 3.5m. The deer fencing would follow the outer field boundaries containing the solar panels.
- 3.23 In addition to fencing, it is proposed that 3.0m high pole mounted CCTV security cameras would be positioned at intervals along the inside edge of the fencing (between the fence and the arrays), to capture activity within and along the fence line. Badger friendly / small mammal access points will be prescribed at various locations along any fencing to allow the passage of wildlife across the Site.

- 3.24 The 2.0m high perimeter fencing and pole-mounted CCTV system serves an important purpose in protecting the valuable equipment within the Application Site.
- 3.25 The distance between the proposed fencing and existing vegetation would vary across the Site but at its minimum distance this would be circa 5.0m and 10.0m for trees. The buffer area would be used for ecological enhancement measures.

Layout

- 3.26 In proposing the general layout of the development, great consideration was given to the retention of the established field boundaries on Site along with planting of native hedgerows and trees. This will help ensure that the development is well contained both physically and visually. Additionally, new species-rich grassland has been proposed and botanically diverse species-rich wildflower grassland. Only small sections of hedgerow, as shown in the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment prepared by Barton Hyett Associates, are to be removed to facilitate the access tracks within the Site.
- 3.27 As detailed above relatively small ancillary control buildings are required around the Site. The submitted Site Layout drawing outlines the position of these structures within the Site and accompanying drawings set out their dimensions.
- 3.28 A network of internal tracks around the solar parcels will be laid to allow vehicle access to the supporting equipment (mainly inverters and transformers) to allow for maintenance. Access tracks will be kept to a minimum around the Site and will be 4.0m wide and made of crushed aggregate. The layout and extent of the roads is limited to that necessary to provide access and maximise efficiency.
- 3.29 The associated equipment siting has also considered the impact on the appearance of the area and has, where practicable to accommodate the Sites carefully designed electrical layout, been set away from the boundaries of the fields, ensuring that there is separation from the existing vegetation and any sensitive ecological features. The existing and proposed mitigation planting will contribute towards visual screening of the Site.

Scale

- 3.30 The scale of development on Site has been determined by the equipment necessary to efficiently and viably (without Government subsidy) generate renewable energy. All of the plant buildings on Site will be at or below single storey level (i.e.

approximately at or below c.3.0m in height). When viewed from nearby public vantage points, the scale of development will not be overbearing due to its limited height and relatively benign appearance (i.e. lack of movement and external illumination).

- 3.31 Each array of panels within the field will be mounted on a simple metal framework and have a maximum height of no more than 3.0m above existing ground level. The main purpose of the mounting structure is to hold the modules in the required position without undue stress. It is capable of withstanding appropriate environmental stresses for the location, such as wind or snow loading.
- 3.32 The proposed ancillary buildings are designed to be as small as possible while still being capable of undertaking their required electrical function within the Site. Such structures will not be prominent within the surroundings and be smaller than many isolated stores and barns typically found in the countryside environment.

Biodiversity

- 3.33 This planning application is accompanied by an Environmental Enhancement Strategy. The objectives of this strategy are as follows:
- To preserve and enhance the existing landscape features and character of the Site;
 - To reinstate landscape features within the Site, which may have previously been lost through historic farming practices, to strengthen the local landscape character;
 - To implement a range of onsite habitat enhancement and improvements to encourage wildlife and enhance biodiversity;
 - To provide areas of new planting to aid in preserving the visual amenity of local residents and visitors to the surrounding area;
 - To enhance the access and recreational opportunities through the introduction of permissive footpaths and improvements to the existing onsite Public Right of Way footpaths;
 - To introduce interpretation and information boards as educational resources to encourage a better understanding of the Solar Farm and the benefits of

renewable energy, and the ecological and landscape enhancements which are proposed across the Site;

- To create a historic trail with interpretation boards;
- To create log pile seating areas that will act as outdoor classrooms and meeting spaces for groups from the local schools; and
- To contribute to local sustainability initiatives and to improve community facilities within the Site and surrounding area.

3.34 The Environmental Enhancement Strategy sets out a number of biodiversity enhancements throughout the Site. Habitat creation and enhancement measures within the Site include:

- The creation of species-rich grassland on the land beneath and surrounding the panels to replace currently intensively managed arable land of very low biodiversity interest;
- The creation of botanically diverse species-rich wildflower grassland outside of the security fencing, including alongside the retained and proposed onsite footpaths;
- The creation of new native species-rich hedgerows, tree belts and groups including native tree species, are proposed as part of the design;
- The creation of a community orchard that would be populated with local varieties of fruit trees;
- Beehives positioned to benefit from meadow flowers and located away from overhanging trees;
- The inclusion of significant enhancements areas for skylarks and fieldfares;
- Bat roost boxes and bird nest boxes will be installed on suitable trees across the Site;
- Otter holts positioned in secluded locations next to existing watercourses within the Site to provide shelter and a safe refuge to encourage Otters to recolonise and breed;

- Hedgehog nest boxes will be positioned in sheltered and undisturbed locations for breeding and overwintering;
- Insect hotels will be positioned in sheltered undisturbed locations for a range of invertebrates to utilise;
- Log piles and, amphibian and reptile hibernacula features will be positioned close to ponds and hedgerow bases and will provide valuable refuge and overwintering opportunities for a range of species;
- Mammal gates or small gaps at the base of the perimeter fence at suitable locations will be provided to allow wildlife to move into and out of the Site and maintain connectivity with the wider landscape;
- The incorporation of wetland features including pond habitat enhancements; and
- The inclusion of scrapes which would be seasonally wet to provide important feeding areas for breeding wading birds such as Lapwings.

Landscape

- 3.35 The impact upon the local landscape has been given careful consideration in putting forward the proposed scheme. While a scheme of this size will inevitably be visible and have an effect on landscape character as set out in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which forms part of the Environmental Statement (ES) which accompanies the application, the development has been located so to minimise effects as far as possible.
- 3.36 It is considered that the Site lies within an area of relatively flat, agricultural landscape, interspersed with numerous villages and hedgerows set within the Vale of Belvoir. Hedgerow and woodland block vegetation when viewed across a low-lying topography with occasional variations, can combine to limit or expose views towards parts of the Site.
- 3.37 The LVIA confirms the Proposed Development could be successfully accommodated within the existing landscape pattern and could be assimilated into the surrounding landscape without causing any long-term harm to the landscape character, visual amenity, or existing landscape attributes of the area.

- 3.38 The Site Layout and Landscape Strategy plan illustrates that sections of the boundary vegetation will be infilled and strengthened including the planting of native tree species which would restrict any potential views from outside the Site.
- 3.39 Further consideration of the landscape and visual effects is contained in the LVIA, which forms part of the Environmental Statement.

Appearance

- 3.40 Visual effects of the Proposed Development have been assessed in the LVIA. In addition to this existing vegetation, as part of the landscape enhancement proposals for the Site, sections of existing hedgerow are to be strengthened to further restrict and prevent views of the Proposed Development. In the longer term, as a result of the mitigation planting, visual effects would be reduced. As it establishes, the layering effect of the vegetation will successfully integrate the Proposed Development into the landscape, particularly during the initial summer months.
- 3.41 The solar panels themselves have a dark blue face with a matte silver-coloured anodized aluminium frame. The purpose of the panels is to absorb and not reflect light. Modern PV panels benefit from an anti-reflective coating to limit the glint and glare associated with much earlier versions of the technology. The panels are mounted on a steel or aluminium framework that is galvanized and also does not glint or gleam in the light.
- 3.42 The appearance of the Solar Farm and the associated equipment are, in the most part, dictated by their electrical function and purpose.

4. ACCESS

- 4.1 Construction and operational access will be provided via the existing access point on Castle View Road. The access point will link to a network of internal tracks around the Site.
- 4.2 The designated route for all traffic associated with the construction is via the A52. The A52 is a major trunk road which regularly accommodates HGVs.
- 4.3 The components which are required to construct the Solar Farm will arrive on HGVs. The level of traffic during the temporary construction period would equate to approximately 12 two-way movements (based on a six month construction period). The construction route is suitable to accommodate larger vehicle types.
- 4.4 A maximum of up to 50 construction workers are forecast to be onsite during peak times during the construction period. A temporary car parking area will be provided on the Site within the contractor's compound. Parking will therefore be contained within the Site and no parking will occur on the local highway network.
- 4.5 After commissioning, there is anticipated to be around one fortnightly visit to the Site for routine maintenance. These would typically be made by light van or 4x4 type vehicles. Whilst the contractor's compound will have been removed, space will remain within the Site for such a vehicle to turn around to ensure that reversing will not occur onto the local highway network.
- 4.6 A detailed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been prepared to demonstrate how the Site will be accessed during the construction period.
- 4.7 Pedestrian access to the Solar Farm will be restricted for security purposes to prevent theft and vandalism. It is proposed all existing PRoWs will be maintained at all times. When construction plant and machinery are accessing the Site, a banksman will be employed to control both pedestrian movements and traffic control throughout the duration of the construction phase.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The Design and Access arrangements of the Proposed Development have been assessed. It is considered that due to the appearance of the scheme and the natural screening afforded to the Site alongside the landscape and ecological enhancements proposed, the development proposals will not have an unacceptable adverse effect on the visual or amenity value of the wider countryside.
- 5.2 The Site and extent of development have been carefully selected. It is naturally screened and supplemented by additional planting which will result in only limited views of the Site being possible. Landscape considerations are outlined within the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as part of the Environmental Statement.
- 5.3 The equipment forming the development proposals have been selected on the basis of maximising efficiency and productivity, but also to minimise visual effects where possible.
- 5.4 Safe access can be taken into the Site from the public highway off Castle View Road on an existing access and access roads that are already established within the Site. Mitigation measures will be employed to ensure construction traffic is managed appropriately as outlined within the submitted Construction Traffic Management Plan.
- 5.5 Overall, the proposals are appropriate in terms of design and access and the development represents a necessary step towards meeting the UK's legally binding climate change and renewable energy obligations. It is therefore considered that the application before Melton Borough Council is to be supported and Planning Permission granted.