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

PLANNING STATEMENT

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

ON BEHALF OF JBM SOLAR PROJECTS 10 LTD.

Pegasus Group

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1. INTRODUCTION

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

Proposed Development

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.

1.4 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. 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.

Screening Opinion

1.5 A Screening Opinion request was submitted to Melton Borough Council in January 2021. The Screening Opinion adopted (Reference: 21/00080/EIA) by Melton Borough Council on 11th May 2021 confirmed that the Proposed Development was considered against the selection criteria in Schedule 3a 'Industrial installations for the production of electricity' of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning Environmental Impact Regulations 2017 (as amended).

1.6 The Screening Opinion concluded that under Regulation 5 of the 2017 Regulations, the proposal constituted EIA development and would need to be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Pre-Application Advice

1.7 Pre-application discussions for the Application Site were first held with Melton Borough Council in November 2019 and a pre-application response (Reference: 19/01312/ENQMG) was issued on 25th January 2020.

1.8 The Pre-application response concluded that the Application Site lies within a countryside location within the historic landscape surrounding Belvoir Castle and that the principle of renewable energy is supported in principle subject to it meeting certain criteria.

1.9 Subsequent discussions were held with the Council and a site walkover was carried out by Officers in August 2020. Following receipt of the initial pre-application advice a further pre-application advice request based on amended proposals was made on 15th April 2021, this included a cover letter, Heritage Statement and associated plans. In response informal views from Melton Borough Officers were provided on 15th July 2021.

1.10 Pre-application discussions have also been held separately with Historic England (Reference: PA01126125) and a pre-application response was issued on 13th January 2021. This response set out Historic England's views on the significance of the heritage assets and the contribution of their settings. It also included Historic England's position on the likely impact and resulting levels of harm to significance. Their response provided recommendations for amendments and further assessment tailored to the specifics of the Solar Farm proposals.

1.11 Taking into account Historic England's feedback further assessment and revisions were carried out to the proposed Site Layout including removing the northern field from the scheme. Extended pre-application advice was issued from Historic England on 14th June 2021 and 7th October 2021 (Reference: PA01126125), which noted the photomontages provided useful clarity on the impact of the proposals and helped identify areas where further information would be beneficial. Historic England strongly welcomed the changes to the scheme in the northeast of the site, which they noted reduced the impact in this area.

1.12 Following this additional feedback (7th October 2021, Reference: PA01126125), further revisions have subsequently been incorporated to the Site Layout and Landscape Strategy to address Historic England's comments. These amendments include additional planting of trees to soften views, setback of solar panels from

public rights of way (PRoW's) as well as the inclusion of heritage information and interpretation boards.

1.13 As part of this planning application an Environmental Statement including Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Heritage Statement, Geophysical Survey Report, Flood Risk Assessment, Ecological Assessment, Glint and Glare Study, Noise Assessment and Agricultural Resources have been prepared which incorporate amendments following the pre-application process. For further information regarding the iterative design process please see the accompanying Design and Access Statement (DAS).

Planning Application Documents

1.14 The planning application submission comprises the following:

- Application Form and Notices;
- Planning Drawings, including Site Location Plan, Site Layout and equipment elevations;
- Planning Statement;
- Design and Access Statement (DAS);
- Statement of Community Involvement (SCI);
- Site Selection Report;
- Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES);
- Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP);
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment;
- Environmental Statement (ES);
- Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary;
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA);
- Heritage Statement and Geophysical Survey Report;
- Flood Risk Assessment;
- Ecological Impact Assessment;
- Glint and Glare Study;
- Noise Assessment; and
- Agricultural Land Classification Report.

1.15 This Statement takes the following form:

- **Section 2** provides a description of the Application Site and its immediate surrounding context;
- **Section 3** describes the various elements of the Proposed Development;
- **Section 4** summarises planning policy and guidance relevant to the consideration of the planning application for the Proposed Development;
- **Section 5** outlines the key benefits that would be experienced from the Proposed Development being granted planning permission and becoming operational;
- **Section 6** undertakes consideration of the effects of the development against planning policy requirements and considers the planning balance; and
- **Section 7** provides a summary and conclusion of the 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, 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.

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 (SSSI) 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 (PRoW) 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 northwest 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.

Planning History

2.12 There is no relevant planning history for the site.

3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 This application seeks Planning Permission for the construction of a Solar Farm with a capacity of 49.9MW for a temporary period of 40 years from the date of the first exportation of electricity from the site, with the exception of the DNO substation, which will remain on site permanently.

3.2 The Proposed Development is the result of an iterative design process which is summarised in the accompanying Design and Access Statement (DAS).

Solar Arrays and Supporting Equipment

3.3 The Solar Farm would consist of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels placed on metal arrays arranged in rows, allowing for boundary landscaping, perimeter fencing and access. The arrays would utilise a tracking system that uses a north-south system (90 degrees in the morning and 270 degrees in the evening) with elevation angles of up to +/- 60 degrees.

3.4 Each row will be mounted on a simple metal framework which will be driven into the soil removing the need for deep foundations. The mounting system comprises of two separate elements; upright galvanised steel posts which are screwed or pushed into the ground and an aluminium support frame which is bolted together. The system requires no concrete foundations and is designed to be reversible leaving no trace when removed.

3.5 The arrays are spaced to avoid any shadowing effects from one panel to another with topography dictating exact row spacing. The panels will be laid out in north-south rows with a space of around 3.8-7m between each row.

3.6 Plant and other equipment to support the generation of electricity is located around the Site, adjacent to internal tracks to ensure suitable access for maintenance purposes. Access tracks will be kept to a minimum around the Site and will be 4.0m wide and made of crushed aggregate. The supporting equipment includes inverter stations positioned around the Site.

Point of Connection

3.7 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 the 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.

3.8 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 CCTV

3.9 It is proposed that a 2.0m high security deer fencing with wooden poles will be installed around the edge of the site to protect the solar panels from theft or vandalism. Badger friendly/small mammal access points will be prescribed at various locations along the fencing to allow the passage of wildlife across the site.

3.10 In addition to fencing, it is proposed that 3.0m high pole mounted CCTV security cameras will be provided inside the site and will monitor the integrity of the fence.

Access

3.11 Access to the Site is proposed via the existing access point on Castle View Road. This access will serve the entire Site and will be connected to a network of internal roads within the Site.

3.12 The existing field access at the southern end of the site will be retained for access by the landowner or a tenant only, to allow for a farming use to continue on Site.

3.13 Several Public Rights of Way (PRoW) cross the site. It is proposed Footpaths F82/3, F90/2 and byways F85b/1 and F85b/2 which run through and around the Site would be retained on their current alignment and set within a 10m wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor.

Landscaping

3.14 The layout of the Proposed Development has been designed to ensure that there is minimal works to existing trees and hedgerows within the site. The trees surveyed

have informed the overall layout of the Proposed Development, which has been carefully designed to avoid impacts on arboricultural features. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA), prepared as part of this planning application, confirms that there are no significant individual trees to be removed to facilitate the Proposed Development.

3.15 Where required, gaps in hedgerows will be repaired with appropriate native hedgerow species supplemented with native tree planting to reflect local landscape character.

3.16 The landscape treatment for the Proposed Development is intended to mitigate potential visual effects. The Proposed Development would seek to retain and enhance existing landscape elements to further integrate the proposals into the surrounding landscape.

3.17 The AIA concludes that the proposed hedgerow removal has been kept to a minimum, with the exception of the newly planted and unestablished hedgerow H61, and the arboricultural impact of these removals across the site as a whole will remain low. The AIA also noted the loss of hedgerow can be readily mitigated by replanting and enhancement of existing hedgerows as demonstrated within the submitted Landscape Strategy. The retained trees and hedgerows can be adequately protected during construction activities to sustain their health and longevity.

3.18 Additionally, a range of biodiversity and landscape enhancements measures are proposed, as detailed on the Landscape Strategy and within the Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES) and the Ecological Assessment, which are submitted as part of this planning application.

Construction and Operation

3.19 Construction is expected to take place over approximately six to nine months, based on the construction of similar developments. There will be a temporary construction compound in place during the construction period.

3.20 The DNO and applicant substations will be in an enclosed compound area within the site.

3.21 Once installed, the Solar Farm would require infrequent visits for the purposes of maintenance or cleaning of the site. Such work typically requires around 1 visit per month. The facility would be unmanned, being remotely operated and monitored.

Decommissioning

3.22 At the end of the 40 year operational lifespan of the Solar Farm, the Site would be restored back to full agricultural use with all equipment and below ground connections removed (with the exception of the DNO substation). However, the landscape enhancement measures would remain, providing long-term benefits to the local landscape character of the area. It is envisaged that the decommissioning of the Solar Farm would take approximately six to nine months.

4. PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

4.1 This section of the Planning Statement identifies the national and local planning policy and guidance pertinent to the Application Site and development proposal. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that all planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 The Melton Borough Council Development Plan is made up of the following documents:

- Melton Local Plan 2011-2036 (adopted October 2018); and
- Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan (made October 2021).

4.3 Other material planning considerations include national legislation, policy and guidance, comprising:

- National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021);
- National Planning Practice Guidance (first published March 2014);
- EN-1: Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (July 2011);
- EN-3: National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (July 2011);
- Paris Agreement of the United Framework Convention on Climate Change (December 2015);
- Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019;
- Energy White Paper (December 2020);
- The Carbon Budget Order (June 2021);
- Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener (October 2021); and
- COP26.

4.4 This Section identifies the key relevant planning matters contained within the Development Plan and other material planning considerations pertinent to the determination of the planning application.

Climate Action Plan

4.5 At a local level, a climate change emergency was declared by Melton Borough Council on 17th July 2019 whereby the Council resolved to set up a Climate Change Policy Development Group to develop an action plan for how the Council will work towards ensuring its operations become carbon neutral by 2030 and further promote a cutting of emissions within the wider Borough of Melton.

Development Plan

4.6 The Melton Borough Development Plan comprises the adopted Local Plan 2011-2036, which has replaced the saved policies of the 1999 Melton Local Plan.

Melton Borough Local Plan 2011-2036 (October 2018)

4.7 The Melton Borough Local Plan 2011-2036 was adopted 10th October 2018. The Local Plan sets out the overall development strategy, key policies and sites for broad locations for delivering housing, economic growth, infrastructure and environmental protection. The Local Plan relates to the whole Borough.

4.8 The strategic objectives of the Local Plan are presented through 25 action points, the following objectives are pertinent to the development proposal:

> **"Objective 5 - Help regenerate the rural economy…**
>
> **Objective 7 - Create a mixed economy with increased knowledge-based jobs and wages…**
>
> **Objective 13 - Promote sustainable communities...**
>
> **Objective 23 - Prepare for, limit, and adapt to climate change and promote low carbon development.**
>
> **Objective 24 - Minimise the use of energy and promote forms of renewable energy generation in appropriate locations..."**

4.9 A review of the Local Plan Policies Map confirms that the site is not subject to any specific planning designations and falls outside of the adopted Settlement Boundary.

4.10 In paragraph 7.16.7 it is recognised that the **"Local Plan needs to ensure that the use and development of land will contribute to climate change mitigation and that new developments should be designed to be energy efficient and to maximise the generation of renewable and low carbon energy."**

4.11 Policy EN10 refers to **'Energy Generation from Renewable and Low Carbon Sources'** and sets out the main issues that are likely to be relevant when reviewing the merits of a renewable or low carbon energy generation scheme against any potential adverse impacts. Policy EN10 confirms:

> **"Renewable and low carbon energy proposals appropriate for Melton, including biomass power generation, combined heat and power (CHP), hydro, wind, solar and micro generation systems, will be supported and considered in the context of sustainable development and climate change.**
>
> **Proposals for renewable and low carbon energy technology, associated infrastructure and integration of renewable and low carbon technology on existing or proposed structures will be assessed both individually and cumulatively on their merits taking account of the following factors;**
>
> **1. Siting, so as to gain maximum effect from wind/solar/water sources;**
>
> **2. The surrounding landscape, townscape and heritage assets;**
>
> **3. Residential and visual amenity;**
>
> **4. Noise impacts;**
>
> **5. Odour impacts;**
>
> **6. Designated nature conservation, geo-diversity or biodiversity considerations, including potential impact on ancient woodland and veteran trees;**
>
> **7. Ecology;**
>
> **8. Aircraft movements and associated activities, including effects on radar, communications and navigational systems;**
>
> **9. Electromagnetic transmissions;**
>
> **10. High quality agricultural land;**
>
> **11. Access for construction, maintenance and de-commissioning;**
>
> **12. Not creating demand for bio-energy fuels known to result in net carbon emissions through production methods, transport requirements and/or loss of carbon sinks;**
>
> **13. General safety in terms of highways, power lines, icing, visual distraction; and**
>
> **14. Transport movements for importation of biomass fuel. In the case of proposals for wind energy development involving one or more wind turbines, planning permission will only be granted if:**
>
> **15. A bond is in place to cover de-commissioning; and**

> **16. The development site is in an area identified as being suitable for wind turbine development in a Neighbourhood Plan; or**
>
> **17. The development site is in an area identified as being of low or low-moderate sensitivity to wind turbine development in the Melton and Rushcliffe Landscape Sensitivity Study 2014. These areas and acceptable turbine requirements are set out in the table below. The landscape character units are indicated on the Policies Map; and**
>
> **18. Following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing."**

4.12 The amplification to the policy, at paragraph 7.20.4 of the Local Plan, states:

> **"To meet the national requirements for renewable energy production it is likely that, subject to funding availability, there will be continued demand for large scale renewable energy proposals in the Borough, with different types of renewable energy technology having differing impacts".**

4.13 Through the provision of a number of technical reports, this planning application has demonstrated that there are no significant adverse impacts in terms of landscape and visual impacts, impact on the local highway network, impacts on ecological designations, the significance of heritage assets, or on residential amenity. On this basis, it is clear that the Proposed Development should be supported in line with Policy EN10.

4.14 In addition, the following Local Plan policies are also considered to be relevant to the Proposed Development:

4.15 **Policy SS1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development)** sets out the Council's presumption in favour of sustainable development and confirms that:

> **"When considering development proposals, the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework…"**

4.16 Furthermore, Policy SS1 confirms that planning applications which accord with the policies contained within the Local Plan will be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.17 This Planning Statement has demonstrated that the Proposed Development is in broad compliance with the Development Plan. As such, in accordance with Policy SS1, the Proposed Development should be approved.

4.18 **Policy EN1 (Landscape)** requires proposals to respect and enhance the existing landscape character and features as well as to ensure new development is sensitive to its landscape setting. As such proposals will be supported where there will be no adverse impact upon:

> **"1. Distinctive topography;**
>
> **2. Important trees, hedges and other vegetation features;**
>
> **3. Important ponds, watercourses & other water areas;**
>
> **4. Important views, approaches and settings."**

4.19 In addition, the policy notes new developments will be supported where they:

> **"5. Do not have an unacceptable adverse effect upon an area's sense of place and local distinctiveness; and**
>
> **6. Do not have an unacceptable adverse effect upon areas of tranquillity, including those benefiting from dark skies, unless proposals can demonstrate how it is intended to contribute towards minimizing light pollution."**

4.20 In support of this planning application, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared as part of the Environmental Statement. The LVIA concludes that 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.

4.21 In addition, opportunities to enhance the local distinctiveness, character and biodiversity of the area have been introduced as part of the proposed mitigation measures and are outlined within the Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES) which accompanies the application. These measures include 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. The proposal includes new lengths of hedgerows along footpaths and these routes have been accommodated 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 the creation of a botanically diverse species-rich wildflower grassland is proposed outside of the security fence and alongside the retained and proposed footpaths within the Site. Ponds and water courses on Site will be enhanced with new habitat creation including proposed tussocky grassland. 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 will allow further species to move into the Site.

4.22 As part of the proposals, the PRoW network will be improved and extended, and a new permissive footpath is proposed as a new wildlife walk which would travel past the proposed community orchard, the outdoor classrooms, picnic areas, information and interpretation boards and insect hotel, and 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, as well as 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.

4.23 In addition, external lighting is not proposed as part of the Proposed Development, with the exception of small emergency lighting during the operational phase of the Site located above the doorway of the onsite substation control building, this is to ensure safe adequate Health and Safety measures for those working in this area at night, if required. Therefore, the Proposed Development is in accordance with Policy EN1.

4.24 **Policy EN2 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)** is a criteria-based policy that seeks to achieve net gains for nature and requires protection and enhancement of biodiversity, ecological networks and geological conservation interests throughout the Borough. Policy EN2 states:

> **"The Borough Council will seek to achieve net gains for nature and proactively seek habitat creation as part of new development proposals. It will protect and enhance biodiversity, ecological networks and geological conservation interests throughout the Borough and beyond its boundaries, by supporting proposals which:**
>
> **A) protect, extend or strengthen the Borough's most ecologically sensitive areas, including the River Wreake Valley; 100 Chapter 7: Melton Borough's Environment Melton Local Plan, October 2018**
>
> **B) contribute to the provision of coherent wildlife networks;**
>
> **C) create new habitat;**

> **D) re-naturalise rivers and streams wherever possible through the removal of hard engineered structures such as reinforced banks, weirs and culverts;**
>
> **E) promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats as listed in the UK Priority Habitat Species List and Leicestershire Local Biodiversity Action Plan; and**
>
> **F) promote the use of fencing which incorporates holes for wildlife; provided they do not harm:**
>
> **G) existing, potential or proposed internationally important sites, such as Rutland Water Special Protection Area/Ramsar either individually or cumulatively in association with other plans or projects;**
>
> **H) nationally important sites;**
>
> **I) Local Wildlife Sites (including candidate and potential), Local Geological Sites, including ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, hedgerows and existing corridors such as disused railways, that allow movement of wildlife between sites;**
>
> **J) river corridors;**
>
> **K) biodiversity and geo-diversity designations identified in a Neighbourhood Plan; and**
>
> **L) priority habitats & species identified in the UK Priority Habitat Species List and Local Biodiversity Action Plans and the Melton Biodiversity and Geodiversity Study, unless it can be demonstrated that there is no alternative site available and there are clear and convincing benefits of the development that clearly outweigh the nature conservation or scientific interest of the site. In this case, adequate mitigation measures or, exceptionally, compensatory measures will be required at a level equivalent to the biodiversity value of the habitat lost. Such proposals must be accompanied by ecological surveys and an assessment of the impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity..."**

4.25 As part of this planning application, an Ecological Impact Assessment has been prepared as part of the Environmental Statement, demonstrating compliance with Policy EN2. The Ecological Assessment concludes that with the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures in place, the Proposed Development is not considered to have any residual significant effects on any statutory or non-statutory site designated for nature conservation, nor on habitats or protected and notable species.

4.26 A Biodiversity Impact (Net Gain) Assessment has been undertaken for the Proposed Development, which details the Scheme results in large net gains of +173.38% for area derived biodiversity based units and net gains of +15.78% for linear biodiversity based units, this is well over the 10% net gain outlined in the Environment Act 2021. Habitats will be delivered and managed over the lifetime of the Proposed

Development (at least 30 years) in accordance with the submitted Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP). The Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment confirms this net gain can be achieved through the proposed landscape planting and habitat creation as set out in the Landscape Strategy, along with long term management as part of the BMP. Further enhancements that cannot be quantified through the Natural England Net Gain Assessment Metric include new bat and bird boxes, refuge features, hibernacula and wetland enhancements. In accordance with Policy EN2 the Proposed Development provides habitat creation and networks across the Site including Badger friendly / small mammal access points prescribed at various locations along any fencing to allow the passage of wildlife across the Site. In addition, as demonstrated in the Ecological Assessment a significant biodiversity net gain will result as part of the Proposed Development which should be afforded positive weight in the planning balance. For further information please see the accompanying Ecological Impact Assessment contained within the Environmental Statement and the Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES).

4.27 **Policy EN3 (The Melton Green Infrastructure Network)** seeks to protect and enhance green infrastructure, including primary green infrastructure areas such as the Grantham Canal. New development proposals will be supported where they retain and enhance important green infrastructure elements.

4.28 An Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES) accompanies the planning application which highlights the green infrastructure enhancement measures proposed in the vicinity of the disused Grantham Canal. The proposed enhancements include a canalside community orchard located within the southern end of the Site as well as a new permissive footpath which 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 then along the disused canal.

4.29 **Policy EN8 (Climate Change)** requires all new development proposals to demonstrate consideration to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This includes consideration of sustainable design and construction, provision of green infrastructure, flood risk, providing opportunities for sustainable modes of transports and further states:

> **"…Provision of renewable and/or low carbon energy production, including decentralised energy and/or heat networks in accordance with Policy EN10 – energy generation from renewable sources…"**

4.30 This Proposed Development through the provision of a renewable energy scheme on the Site accords with support under Policy EN8. In regard to provision of green infrastructure the Proposed Development benefits from landscape and ecological enhancements, including new and in-filled hedgerow planting in particular along footpaths and a new native tree belt (10m wide) along a section of the eastern boundary. In addition, the footpath routes including a new proposed permissive footpath, have been incorporated within a 10m wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor which includes wildflower buffers/margins to benefit pedestrians, cyclists and promote sustainable transport.

4.31 Moreover, a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) accompanies the planning application as part of the Environmental Statement which confirms that using the site for solar power generation has the potential to provide betterment to the existing land use in terms of surface water runoff rates and downstream flood risk.

4.32 Furthermore, as raised above through the provision of a number of technical reports, this planning application has demonstrated that there are no significant adverse impacts as outlined by Policy EN10. On this basis, it is clear that the Proposed Development should be supported in line with Policy EN8 and EN10.

4.33 **Policy EN9 (Ensuring Energy Efficient and Low Carbon Development)** considers sustainable construction methods and requires major development to submit a design and access statement demonstrating the influence of reducing carbon emissions. A number of criteria are set out, the most relevant of which includes:

> **"…5. How developments (dwellings and non-dwellings) have considered on-site renewable, low carbon or de-centralised energy provision, including connection to existing networks, where feasible, in accordance with Policy EN10…"**

4.34 In accordance with Policy EN9, a Design and Access Statement along with a number of supporting documents has been prepared as part of this application.

4.35 **Policy EN11 (Minimising the Risk of Flooding)** confirms a sequential approach to flood risk should be adopted with the aim of locating development on land with the lowest risk of flooding (Zone 1 and outside of surface water flood risk). Exception tests will be applied for development proposals within flood zones 2, 3a and 3b. This policy also states all planning applications within flood zones 2 and 3, or which exceed one hectare requires a flood risk assessment.

4.36 Policy EN11 also stipulates that residual risk will need to be considered for development proposals located adjacent to Grantham Canal in the event of overtopping and/or breaches of the embankment.

4.37 A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been prepared as part of this planning application and concludes that the proposal is considered to accord with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with residual risk to the Site fully mitigated, and as such considered low risk. The Proposed Development will not add any significant areas of impermeable surfacing. Surface water runoff will drain partially to ground, as existing, and overland flows collected via new swale systems to slow run-off and improve water quality. The FRA also confirms using the site for solar power generation therefore has the potential to provide betterment to the existing land use in terms of surface water runoff rates and downstream flood risk. As such, the Proposed Development is compliant with Policy EN11.

4.38 **Policy EN12 (Sustainable Drainage Systems)** requires major developments to demonstrate a surface water drainage strategy and surface water management through appropriate SuDS techniques.

4.39 As detailed above a surface water drainage strategy is proposed for the Application Site incorporating swales. The Environmental Statement (ES) also confirms the consequence of the development, with the mitigation measures incorporated to reduce silt and debris mobilisation during the construction and until the vegetation has established, will be to deliver improved conditions in the receiving watercourses, and improved conditions for the designated sites. The proposed swales and/or filter trenches adjacent to internal access roads on site will slow surface water flows and improve water quality on site. The ES also notes the completed Solar Farm will become a haven for wildlife and enhance biodiversity in the area and downstream, as has been demonstrated on other solar farms delivering major beneficial improvements. The Flood Risk Assessment confirms that the proposed use has the potential to provide betterment to the existing land use in terms of downstream flood risk as well as surface water runoff rates. A Flood Risk Assessment and supporting information has been submitted as part of this application which demonstrates compliance with Policy EN12.

4.40 **Policy EN13 (Heritage Assets)** requires protection and enhancement of Heritage Assets. Proposed developments should avoid harm to the significance of historic sites, buildings or areas, including their setting.

4.41 In support of this application, a Heritage Statement has been prepared, considering both archaeology and built heritage (settings). In terms of designated heritage assets, the Statement confirms an appropriate and proportionate level of settings assessment has been undertaken for all designated heritage assets within a minimum 1km radius of the Site and for selective heritage assets beyond this study area. The Statement concludes that overall, the majority of heritage assets will not be harmed directly or indirectly via development within this setting. Any harm will arise through the visual encroachment only of solar panels on views towards Belvoir Castle; the spire of St John the Baptist Church and the spire of St Mary's Church at Bottesford. Any harm might only be perceived as less than substantial and as the lowermost end of the scale.

4.42 The Heritage Statement further details that the Landscaping Strategy proposes enhanced field boundary planting which will mitigate the impact of the proposals largely screening the panels from views with the church. The Landscaping Strategy also provides the opportunity to interpret the heritage through interpretation boards, which will be located along a proposed historic trail within and adjacent to the Application Site. The proposed permissive footpaths linking to the Public Rights of Way would create a circular walk, with the interpretation and information boards located at strategically placed locations. The interpretation and information boards would encourage a better understanding of the Solar Farm and the opportunity to interpret the heritage as well as the benefits of renewable energy, and the ecological and landscape enhancements which are proposed across the Site. These mitigation measures have been proposed following a collaborative approach and extended pre-application discussions with Historic England throughout 2021. For further information please see the accompanying Heritage Statement and Environmental Statement.

4.43 **Policy IN2 (Transport, Accessibility and Parking)** outlines new development should:

> **"…1. Be located where travel can be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes maximised;**
>
> **2. Minimise additional travel demand through the use of measures such as travel planning, safe and convenient public transport, dedicated walking and cycling links and cycle storage/parking links and integration with existing infrastructure;**
>
> **3. Seek to generate or support the level of demand required to improve, introduce or maintain public transport services, such as rail and bus services;**

4. Do not unacceptably impact on the safety and movement of traffic on the highway network or that any such impacts can be mitigated through appropriate improvements;

5. Support the enhancement of existing or proposed transport interchanges such as the railway stations at Melton Mowbray and Bottesford;

6. Provide appropriate and effective parking provision and servicing arrangements."

4.44 A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been prepared as part of this planning application, demonstrating compliance with Policy IN2. In particular, the CTMP notes that 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. It is therefore considered that development traffic will not have a detrimental impact on the safety or operation of the local or strategic highway network.

4.45 In addition, the Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES) which accompanies the planning application, outlines that the existing footpaths which cross the southern parcel of the Site have been accommodated within the development on their current alignments. The footpaths would be contained within substantial 'Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridors' and set within wildflower grassland. Interpretation and information boards would be provided, and a new hedgerow located alongside one side of the footpath would over time aid in screening views of the largest area of panels. The green infrastructure enhancement corridor would be approximately 10m wide, to avoid creating a tunnel effect to ensure users do not feel crowded or overwhelmed by the proposals and to ensure some degree of rural character is retained.

4.46 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 then along the disused canal which passes through the southern parcel of the Site. It is the intention that there would be a gradual and sensitive approach to the management of existing vegetation to respect the existing wildlife whilst allowing users to safely travel along the wildlife walk.

4.47 **Policy D1 (Raising the Standard of Design)** sets out the requirement for all developments to achieve high quality design. A number of design criteria are set out, the most relevant of which include:

> **"..a) Siting and layout must be sympathetic to the character of the area;**
>
> **b) New development should meet basic urban design principles outlined in this plan;**
>
> **...**
>
> **d) Amenity of neighbours and neighbouring properties should not be compromised;**
>
> **...**
>
> **h) Existing trees and hedges should be utilised, together with new landscaping, to negate the effects of development;**
>
> **i) Proposals include appropriate, safe connection to the existing highway network;**
>
> **...**
>
> **k) Makes adequate provision for car parking; and**
>
> **l) Development should be managed so as to control disruption caused by construction for reasons of safeguarding and improving health well-being for all."**

4.48 A Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared as part of this application and through the DAS, Site Layout and Landscape Strategy, and a number of other supporting documents such as the Heritage Statement, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), and the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA), compliance with Policy D1 has been demonstrated.

Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan (October 2021)

4.49 The Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan was designated (November 2013) and has undergone a Regulation 14 and 16 consultation (July to September 2020 and December 2020 to January 2021). Following a referendum the Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan was 'made' part of Melton Borough Council's Development Plan on 14th October 2021. Minor modifications were carried to the Neighbourhood Plan in agreement with Melton Borough Council and Bottesford Parish Council and these changes were approved by the Parish Council 25th of November 2021.

4.50 A review of the Policies Maps contained within the Neighbourhood Plan confirms that the site is not subject to any designations and is outside of the adopted Settlement Boundary.

4.51 Paragraph 23 of the Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan notes that "**Bottesford Parish Council recognize the importance of minimizing the impact of climate**

change and within the scope of land use planning a range of policies in the Bottesford Parish Neighbourhood Plan seeks to assist MBC achieve this objective".

4.52 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 9 (Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Technologies)** requires new development to incorporate sustainable design features to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate against and adapt to climate change. In particular, NPP9 also goes on to state:

> **"...4. Development that delivers renewable energy will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it;**
>
> **a) does not have an unacceptably adverse impact on the amenity of residents and visitors (including: noise, vibration, views and vistas, shadow flicker, water pollution, odour, air quality, emissions, sensitivity and character of landscape); and**
>
> **b) does not have a significant adverse effect on any designated site (including SSSI, regionally or locally important geological sites, sites of ecological value, Local Green Spaces, Significant Green Gaps); and**
>
> **c) does not result in an unacceptably adverse effect on protected species, including migration routes and sites of biodiversity value; and**
>
> **d) does not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification; and**
>
> **e) transmission lines should be located below ground wherever possible to reduce the impact on the open countryside..."**

4.53 The provision of a renewable energy scheme on the site accords with support under Policy NPP9. This planning application is supported by a series of technical assessments which consider the above factors in detail and has demonstrated that there are no significant adverse impacts in terms of landscape and visual impacts, impact on the local highway network, impacts on ecological designations, the significance of heritage assets, agricultural land, or on residential amenity. A summary of the technical assessments prepared to support this planning application has been provided within Chapter 6 of this Planning Statement.

4.54 The following Neighbourhood Plan policies are also considered to be relevant to the Proposed Development:

4.55 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 1 (Sustainable Development and the Village Envelopes)** confirms development will be supported where a positive contribution is made towards the achievement of sustainable development through:

> **"...a) safeguarding the integrity function and character of the landscape and maintaining a sense of openness and separation between the settlements; and**
>
> **b) being of a scale, density, layout and design that is compatible with the local, rural character, appearance and amenity of that part of Bottesford Parish in which it is located; and**
>
> **c) conserving heritage assets including the settings of the conservation areas and list of buildings in accordance with National and Borough policy; and**
>
> **d) conserving or enhancing biodiversity; and**
>
> **e) maximising water efficiency; and**
>
> **f) using sustainable construction materials and methods..."**

4.56 Compliance with the requirements of Policy NPP1 have been demonstrated through a number of supporting reports submitted with this application, including the Design and Access Statement, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Heritage Statement, Glint and Glare Study, Construction Traffic Management Plan, Ecological Impact Assessment and Noise Assessment.

4.57 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 2 (Protecting the Landscape Character)** outlines support for development which respects the important designations and takes account of landscape character of the Parish including the key views, significant green gaps and areas of separation. A number of design criteria are set out, the most relevant of which include:

> **"1. The Key Views, (see Maps 9a and 9b) the Areas Of Separation (see Figure 2) and the Significant Green Gaps (see Map 7a, 7b and 7c) contribute to the distinctive landscape character of the Parish. Development proposals should respect these important designations and take account of them in their designs and layouts. Development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the designations will not be supported.**
>
> **...**
>
> **4. As appropriate to the scale, nature and location, development proposals should take account of the cultural sensitivity and historical link and viewpoint between St Mary's Church from Belvoir Castle. Where it is both necessary and practicable to do so, the layout and design of the proposed development should safeguard the existing viewpoint.**

> **5. The quality and accessibility of the natural environment in Bottesford Parish is highly valued by local residents. As appropriate to the scale, nature and location development proposals across Bottesford Parish should demonstrate that they are sympathetic to the landscape setting as defined in the Bottesford Parish Design Code 2020 and Table 5.**
>
> **6. Any required mitigation planting and boundary treatment should include native species.**
>
> **7. Development in Bottesford Village should present a soft boundary to the open countryside (native hedges, low fences and native trees) to minimise the impact of development on the landscape character. This means that where the site boundary extends to more than 5 metres schemes should include low fences, hedges and native trees and should avoid 2 metre high close board fences."**

4.58 As demonstrated through the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), submitted as part of the Environmental Statement, 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.

4.59 The Proposed Development has incorporated mitigation measures to reduce impact upon viewpoints and cultural sensitivity towards the identified heritage assets within Bottesford and Belvoir Castle. The Heritage Statement prepared as part of this planning application concludes that overall the majority of heritage assets will not be harmed directly or indirectly via development within this setting. Any harm will arise through the visual encroachment only of solar panels on views towards Belvoir Castle; the spire of St John the Baptist Church and the spire of St Mary's Church at Bottesford. Any harm might only be perceived as less than substantial and as the lowermost end of the scale.

4.60 Mitigation measures and enhancements proposed include 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 retain long distance views towards heritage assets. In addition, the Site Layout and Landscape Strategy demonstrates proposed planting of native trees, native hedgerows, orchard tree planting as well as proposed interpretation boards situated along the proposed historic trail and new permissive path. Furthermore, as detailed within the technical plans submitted the maximum top

height of the solar panels would be 3.0m and the Solar Farm would be set within agricultural stock proof wire fencing no more than 2.0m in height.

4.61 As detailed within the Environmental Enhancement Strategy and raised above, there would be substantial enhancements to the existing landscape framework of the site, which would strengthen the local landscape character and be beneficial from an ecological perspective, whilst preserving the visual amenity of local residents and visitors. As such, the Proposed Development accords with Policy NPP2.

4.62 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 3 (Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity)** requires development proposals to conserve and enhance biodiversity value in the neighbourhood area. Policy NPP3 goes onto list a number of enhancement measures and the requirement for mature trees and hedgerows identified as significant to the character of the village should be protected and retained, where this is not possible trees should be replaced at a ratio of 2:1.

4.63 NPP3 also outlines development should avoid being located on the highest quality agricultural land. An Agricultural Land Classification survey of the Site has been undertaken, the Report confirms that the majority of the site comprises Grade 3b (96.2 ha) (Moderate Quality) Agricultural Land, with a small area in the north-western corner Grade 2 (7.3 ha). It is therefore acknowledged that the vast majority of the Site does not form Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.

4.64 The Proposed Development is in accordance with Policy NPP3. As demonstrated in the Ecological Impact Assessment, the Proposed Development will protect and enhance biodiversity, and the Arboricultural Impact Assessment confirms that there are no individual trees to be removed to facilitate the Proposed Development. A Biodiversity Impact (Net Gain) Assessment has been undertaken for the Proposed Development, which details the Scheme results in large net gains of +173.38% for area derived biodiversity based units and net gains of +15.78% for linear biodiversity based units. The Site Layout and Landscape Strategy Plan demonstrates how existing landscape features will be preserved and enhanced as part of the Application Site, as well as detailing the proposed enhancement measures which includes new and in-filled hedgerow planting, a new native tree belt (10m wide) along a section of the eastern boundary, significant grassland and wildflower planting as well as creation of a canalside community orchard that would be populated with local varieties of fruit trees. Areas of ponds/scrapes with tussocky grass/wildflower planting, hibernaculum, log pile, insect hotels are proposed throughout the Site as well as bat and bird boxes, and Sky lark nesting areas. The Proposed Development will also

implement new lengths of hedgerow along footpaths, the routes will be accommodated within a 10m wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor which includes wildflower buffers/margins.

4.65 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 5 (Protecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure)** requires proposals to protect and enhance existing green infrastructure assets, with green infrastructure enhancements in accordance with Local Plan Policy EN3.

4.66 Where possible, the Proposed Development retains and enhances existing landscape features, particularly the hedgerow field boundaries and promotes the use of traditional field hedges and diversity of native hedgerow species. An Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES) has been prepared as part of the planning application, which highlights the green infrastructure enhancement measures proposed as part of the Proposed Development. The EES confirms that the development of the Belvoir Solar Farm and the implementation of the landscape and ecological enhancements proposed will result in a range of environmental benefits to the Site and its surroundings, as well as social and educational benefits to the local community. In particular, footpaths F82/3, F90/2 and byways F85b/1 and F85b/2 which run through and around the Site would be retained on their current alignment and set within a 10m wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor, which includes wildflower buffers/margins. A new permissive path will also link from footpath F90/2 to link up with bridleway F85b/2 creating a looped walk with new connections to the existing public right of way (PRoW) network.

4.67 The planting proposals would enhance and reinforce the landscape structure across the Site, which in turn would be beneficial in terms of strengthening the local landscape character in line with the guidelines for the 'Vale of Belvoir' landscape character area.

4.68 Through the accompanying suite of technical assessments appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures have been proposed in accordance with Policies EN3 and NPP5.

4.69 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 6 (Reducing the Risk of Flooding)** outlines that development either in flood zone 2 and 3 or which exceeds 0.25 hectares requires a flood risk assessment and designed to Environment Agency standards.

4.70 A Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared as part of the planning application incorporating a surface water drainage strategy which concludes that the proposal is considered to accord with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with residual risk to the site fully mitigated, and as such considered low risk. The FRA also confirms using the site for solar power generation therefore has the potential to provide betterment to the existing land use in terms of surface water runoff rates and downstream flood risk.

4.71 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 7 (Improving Connectivity)** is a criteria-based policy focusing on non-vehicular routes, in particular requiring proposals to protect or enhance the network of footpaths and rights of way.

4.72 As outlined in this Planning Statement, the existing PRoW's will be retained and unaffected by the Proposed Development and will be enhanced through proposed planting. The footpaths would be contained within substantial Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridors (approximately 10m wide) and set within wildflower grassland. Interpretation and information boards would be provided, and a new hedgerow located alongside one side of the footpath would over time aid in screening views of the largest area of panels. As part of the proposals, a new permissive footpath would be promoted as a new wildlife walk and would travel past new canalside recreational facilities including the proposed community orchard, the outdoor classrooms, picnic areas, beehives, information and interpretation boards and insect hotel, and then along the disused canal which passes through the southern parcel of the Site. This ensures compliance with Policy NPP7.

4.73 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 8 (Ensuring High Quality Design)** sets out the design principles to reinforce the character of the area. Proposals will be supported if they demonstrate a high design quality, respond to the local character, demonstrate sensitive positioning, landscaping, scale, density and mass that is sympathetic to the character of the immediate locality and provides safe access, parking and servicing arrangements.

4.74 The Design and Access Statement and accompanying plans submitted as part of this application demonstrates compliance with Policy NPP8.

4.75 **Neighbourhood Plan Policy 12 (Protecting Heritage Assets)** details locally valued non-designated heritage assets and stipulates:

> **"...2. The effect of a proposal on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset, including their setting, will be**

> **taken into consideration when determining planning applications. Applications that are considered to cause substantial harm to a non-designated heritage asset will require a clear and convincing justification..."**

4.76 A Heritage Statement has been prepared as part of this application, considering both archaeology and built heritage. In terms of designated heritage assets, the Statement confirms an appropriate and proportionate level of settings assessment has been undertaken for all designated heritage assets within a minimum 1km radius of the site and for selective heritage assets beyond this study area. The Statement concludes that overall, the majority of heritage assets will not be harmed directly or indirectly via development within this setting. Any harm will arise through the visual encroachment only of solar panels on views towards Belvoir Castle; the spire of St John the Baptist Church and the spire of St Mary's Church at Bottesford. Any harm might only be perceived as less than substantial and as the lowermost end of the scale.

4.77 The Heritage Statement further details that the Landscaping Strategy proposes enhanced field boundary planting which will mitigate the impact of the proposals largely screening the panels from views with the church. The Landscaping Strategy also provides opportunity to interpret the heritage through interpretation boards, which will be located along a proposed historic trail within and adjacent to the Application Site. The proposed permissive footpaths would create a circular walk, with interpretation and information boards located at strategically placed locations. The interpretation and information boards would encourage a better understanding of the Solar Farm and heritage as well as the benefits of renewable energy, and the ecological and landscape enhancements which are proposed across the Site. These mitigation measures have been proposed following a collaborative approach and extended pre-application discussions with Historic England throughout 2021. For further information please see the accompanying Heritage Statement and Environmental Statement. A summary of the technical assessments prepared to support this planning application has been provided within Chapter 6 of this Planning Statement.

Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (July 2021)

4.78 The updated NPPF was published in July 2021 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to achieve sustainable development.

4.79 Paragraph 2 states that the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions and also emphasises that planning **"decisions must also reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements."**

4.80 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF describes that the **"purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development"**. Paragraph 10 explains that to ensure that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, that:

> **"…at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development…"**

4.81 The NPPF sets out the Government's economic, environmental, and social planning policies for England. Paragraph 8 states that these roles are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. Therefore, to achieve sustainable development, the NPPF recognises that economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

4.82 The revised NPPF continues to recognise that the planning system is plan-led and that therefore Local Plans, incorporating Neighbourhood Plans where relevant, are the starting point for the determination of any planning application.

4.83 Paragraph 11 sets out how policy in the NPPF pursues sustainable development through both plan-making and decision taking. Paragraph 11 states that for decision-taking this means (unless material considerations indicate otherwise):

> **"…c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or**
>
> **d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:**
>
> **i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or**
>
> **ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."**

4.84 Paragraph 152 of the NPPF states that the planning system should support transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and should support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

4.85 Paragraph 155 sets out the means in which Local Planning Authorities should seek to maximise the use and supply of renewable energy. Meanwhile, Paragraph 158 identifies:

> **"When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:**
>
> **a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and**
>
> **b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas."**

4.86 Paragraph 158 confirms that applicants are not required to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and that local planning authorities (LPAs) should recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. LPAs are directed to **"approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable"**.

4.87 The NPPF considers effects on a range of matters, which outline the approaches to be adopted by LPAs in considering applications. The guidance contained within the NPPF is therefore supportive of proposals for the generation of renewable electricity in principle and proposals which seek to tackle climate change.

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (first published March 2014)

4.88 The Government's web based NPPG went live on 6th March 2014 and contains guidance on the planning system and has been subject to updating periodically. The web-based guidance should be read alongside the NPPF and is a material consideration in the consideration of planning applications.

4.89 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy forms one of the chapters in the NPPG. Paragraph 013 (ID: 5-013-20150327) is entitled "**What are the particular planning considerations that relate to large scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms?"** and sets out the following particular factors for consideration:

- **"encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and**

non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;

- **where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.**
- **that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;**
- **the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;**
- **the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;**
- **the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;**
- **great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large-scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large-scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;**
- **the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;**
- **the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect."**

4.90 This planning application is located on greenfield land and is supported by an Agricultural Land Classification Report which confirms that the majority of the site comprises Grade 3b (96.2 ha) (Moderate Quality) Agricultural Land, with a small area in the north-western corner Grade 2 (7.3 ha). It is therefore acknowledged that the vast majority of the site does not form Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land. The proposed solar arrays and associated equipment (excluding the substation) will be temporary structures which will be on the Site for 40 years and once the equipment is removed the Site will be restored. The Site Layout demonstrates the security measures including CCTV and fencing which have been incorporated into the design. In addition, this planning application is supported by a series of technical

assessments which consider the above factors in detail. A summary of the technical assessments prepared to support this planning application has been provided within Chapter 6 of this Planning Statement.

Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) (July 2011)

4.91 The NPPF does not contain specific policies for nationally significant infrastructure projects which are determined in accordance with the decision-making framework in the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) and relevant National Policy Statements (NPS) for major infrastructure. Paragraph 5 of the NPPF explains that **"National policy statements form part of the overall framework of national planning policy, and may be a material consideration in preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications."**

4.92 EN-1 was published in July 2011 to set out national policy for energy infrastructure in the UK. EN-1 sets out how the energy sector can help deliver the Government's climate change objectives by clearly setting out the need for new low carbon energy infrastructure to contribute to climate change mitigation.

4.93 Paragraph 3.4.1 sets out the UK commitments to sourcing 15% of energy from renewable sources by 2020. To hit this target, and to largely decarbonise the power sector by 2030, EN-1 (paragraph 3.4.5) states that:

> **"It is necessary to bring forward new renewable electricity generating projects as soon as possible. The need for new renewable energy electricity generation projects is therefore urgent."**

4.94 A consultation was recently undertaken (6th September 2021 – 29th November 2021) with regards to reviewing and updating the energy National Policy Statements (NPS). The updated NPS would ensure that decisions on major energy infrastructure reflect the current legislative framework and strategic policy approach and ensure that the planning policy framework can support the infrastructure required for the transition to net zero.

4.95 A Draft of NPS EN-1 was published on 6th September 2021. It is noted that within this Statement it specifically considers the implications of meeting net zero at Section 2.3 (NPS EN-1, page 16) and explains that the government's objectives for the energy system are to ensure our supply of energy always remains secure, reliable, affordable and consistent with meeting our target to cut Green House Gas emissions to net zero by 2050. It states at paragraph 2.3.2 that:

> **"This will require a step change in the decarbonisation of our energy system."**

4.96 It further notes that the sources of energy we use will need to change, as fossil fuels still accounted for just over 79% of our energy supply in 2019. It continues "**we will need to dramatically increase the volume of energy supplied from low carbon sources and reduce the amount provided by fossil fuels**" (page 17, paragraph 2.3.4).

4.97 Subsequently, this Statement reinforces the messages from the plethora of recent government announcements that there is a need to substantially increase low carbon energy generation beyond current rates of deployment. The Proposed Development would make a meaningful and material contribution towards achieving this objective.

4.98 Indeed, the NPS continues to explain the "**urgent need for new generating capacity**" (page 28, paragraph 3.3.20), that wind and solar are the lowest cost ways of generating electricity, and that the government's "… **analysis shows that a secure, reliable, affordable, net zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar**" (paragraph 3.3.21).

National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (July 2011)

4.99 EN-3 was also published in July 2011 and sets out the national policy for renewable energy projects. EN-3 should be read in conjunction with EN-1. Similar to EN-1, EN-3 sets out the importance of renewable energy in achieving the Government's ambitious targets for renewable energy generation, highlighting that a **"significant increase in generation from large-scale renewable energy infrastructure is necessary to meet the 15% renewable energy target"**.

4.100 A draft of NPS EN-3 was also published in September 2021. This emphasises the government's commitment to sustained growth in solar capacity to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions. It is noted that the government affirms at paragraph 2.47.1 that:

> **"Solar farms are one of the most established renewable electricity technologies in the UK and the cheapest form of electricity generation worldwide. Solar farms can be built quickly and, coupled with consistent reductions in the cost of materials and improvements in the efficiency of panels, large-scale solar is now viable in some cases to deploy subsidy-free and at little to no extra cost to the consumer. The government has committed to sustained growth in solar capacity to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions. As such solar is a key**

part of the government's strategy for low-cost decarbonisation of the energy sector."

4.101 It is also of note that draft NPS EN-3 references at paragraph 2.48.13 that whilst ground mounted Solar PV projects should utilise preferable agricultural land preferably of lower classification where possible that **"land type should not be a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the site location"**.

4.102 Paragraph 2.48.15 elaborates that **"development of ground mounted solar arrays is not prohibited on sites of agricultural land classified 1, 2, 3a, or designated for their natural beauty, or recognised for ecological or archaeological importance**" but that the impacts of such are expected to be considered. The planning application submission and subsequent addendums are therefore consistent with this policy consideration.

International and National Legislation

Paris Agreement of the United Framework Convention on Climate Change (December 2015)

4.103 The NPPF (2021) states at paragraph 2 that planning decisions must also reflect relevant international obligations. One relevant international obligation is the Paris Agreement of the United Framework Convention on Climate Change, 12th December 2015, which introduced National Determined Contributions ("NDCs") - national climate plans that include commitments to increasing renewable energy provision, such as solar[1].

4.104 National and International legislation sets targets for reduction of carbon emissions and increasing renewable energy generation.

4.105 The **European Union Renewable Energy Sources Directive (2009/28/EC)**[2] was published in April 2009. A key principle of this document is the inclusion of a binding agreement which commits member states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels. The legally binding obligation for the United Kingdom was set at 15% of final energy consumed to be from renewable sources by 2020.

[1] UNFCC, *Paris Agreement*, Article 3, 2015.
[2] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009L0028&from=EN

4.106 This target has been further updated under the **European Union 2030 Energy and Climate Change Framework**[3] which builds on the 2020 climate and energy package and was adopted by European Leaders in October 2014. The 2030 framework sets three key targets for the year 2030:

- At least 40% cuts in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels;
- At least 32% share for renewable energy; and
- At least 32.5% improvement in energy efficiency.

Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019

4.107 On 12th June 2019 the Government laid the draft Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 to amend the Climate Change Act 2008 by introducing a target for at least a 100% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (compared to 1990 levels) in the UK by 2050. This is otherwise known as a net zero target. The order amends the 2050 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target in the Climate Change Act from at least 80% to at least 100%, thereby constituting a legally binding commitment to end the UK's contribution to climate change.

4.108 The Order came into force on 27th June 2019.

Energy White Paper (December 2020)

4.109 The Government published the Energy White Paper in December 2020. The Energy White Paper provides further clarity on the Prime Minister's '10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution' and puts in place a strategy for the wider energy system which:

- **"Transforms energy, building a cleaner, greener future for our country, our people and our planet."**
- **"Supports a green recovery, growing our economy, supporting thousands of green jobs across the country in new green industries and leveraging new green export opportunities."**
- **"Creates a fair deal for consumers, protecting the fuel poor, providing opportunities to save money on bills, giving us warmer, more comfortable homes and balancing investment against bill impacts."**

4.110 It is also noted that the Ten Point Plan included an aim to double the quantity of renewables, including solar, procured through the government's Contracts for Difference ('CfD') scheme – the main mechanism for supporting low-carbon

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030_en

electricity generation. This demonstrates further mounting pressure at the national level to hasten the switch to sustainable energy.

4.111 Within the foreword of the Energy White Paper the Minister stated:

> **"The UK has set a world–leading net zero target, the first major economy to do so, but simply setting the target is not enough – we need to achieve it. Failing to act will result in natural catastrophes and changing weather patterns, as well as significant economic damage, supply chain disruption and displacement of populations."**

4.112 And later in the foreword it is detailed that:

> **"The way we produce and use energy is therefore at the heart of this. Our success will rest on a decisive shift away from fossil fuels to using clean energy for heat and industrial processes, as much as for electricity generation."**

4.113 The White Paper recognises the progress made to increase deployment of renewables and sees the expansion of renewable technologies as a key contributor to achieving an affordable clean electricity system by 2050. At page 45 the White Paper states:

> **"Onshore wind and solar will be key building blocks of the future generation mix, along with offshore wind. We will need sustained growth in the capacity of these sectors in the next decade to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions in all demand scenarios."**

The Carbon Budget Order (June 2021)

4.114 Following the Prime Minister's speech on 19th April 2021 the UK Government announced new targets to be enshrined into law, to slash emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels. This will set the world's most ambitious climate change target into law and in line with the recommendation from the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC), the sixth Carbon Budget will limit the volume of greenhouse gases emitted over a 5-year period from 2033 to 2037.

> **"The Carbon Budget will ensure Britain remains on track to end its contribution to climate change while remaining consistent with the Paris Agreement temperature goal to limit global warming to well below 2°C and pursue efforts towards 1.5°C."**[4]

4.115 The UK was the first country to enter legally binding long-term carbon budgets into legislation, first introduced through the 2008 Climate Change Act. Subsequently, 5

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-enshrines-new-target-in-law-to-slash-emissions-by-78-by-2035 published on 20 April 2021.

carbon budgets have been put into law to eliminate the UK's contribution to climate change by 2050 and target net zero emissions.

4.116 The UK Government's sixth carbon budget came into force on 24th June 2021 as per The Carbon Budget Order 2021. The figures contained within the sixth carbon budget are in line with the level advised by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), the independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008. Implementation of the sixth carbon budget requires a reduction of UK greenhouse gas emissions of 78% by 2035 relative to 1990, a 63% reduction from 2019.

4.117 The CCC advise that the rapid role out of renewable electricity generation will form a key part of achieving this carbon budget[5].

4.118 It is clear that for the UK to meet the ambitious target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 78% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2035, a presumption in favour of increasing the number and output of low carbon energy sources, such as solar farms, is entirely appropriate and necessary.

Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener (October 2021)

4.119 In 2020 the Prime Minister set out the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. On 19th October 2021 the Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener policy paper was published which builds upon that 10 Point Plan in regard to the UK carbon budgets, 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution and net zero target by 2050. The Net Zero Strategy is proposed to be submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the UK's second Long-Term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission Development Strategy under the Paris Agreement.

4.120 Inside the Strategy the Chapters focus on reducing emissions across the economy (Chapter 3) and supporting the transition across the economy (Chapter 4). Within which Section 3i references 'Power' and delivering a decarbonised power system by 2035. Several key commitments are listed for Power the first stating to:

> **"Take action so that by 2035, all our electricity will come from low carbon sources, subject to security of supply, bringing forward the government's commitment to a fully decarbonised power system by 15 years…"**

4.121 The Strategy confirms at Section 3i paragraph 11 that:

[5] Progress in reducing emissions, 2021 Report to Parliament June 2021 (Climate Change Committee).

> **"...the Energy White Paper's fundamental approach remains unchanged. A low-cost, net zero consistent electricity system is most likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar generation, whether in 2035 or 2050."**

4.122 The Strategy affirms that we need to continue to drive rapid deployment of renewables so we can reach substantially greater capacity beyond 2030 (Chapter 3i, paragraph 35, page 103). The deployment of renewables is further indicated within Section 3i paragraph 36, which states:

> **"CB6** [Sixth Carbon Budget set into law June 2021] **also requires a sustained increase to the deployment of land-based renewables such as locally supported onshore wind and solar in the 2020s and beyond."**

4.123 Given the size of the challenge, the government states "**we will need to consider how low carbon energy infrastructure can be deployed at an unprecedented scale and pace sympathetically alongside the interests of our communities and consistent with our obligations to a sustainable environment, both land-based and marine**" (Chapter 3i, paragraph 32, page 102). It is our opinion that, if consented, the Proposed Development will contribute to the deployment of low carbon energy infrastructure in the immediate future and therefore contributing to the scale and pace of deployment that is needed, whilst also being sympathetic to both the interests of the community and the sustainability of the environment in this location.

4.124 The social considerations in regard to the impact of low carbon generation such as solar farms upon electricity prices are also noted at paragraphs 87 and 88 (Technical Annex, page 337). Paragraph 87 confirms:

> **"...Gas will continue to play a role in setting the electricity price for some years to come but, over time, will do so less frequently, as more and more low carbon generation (such as wind and solar) connect to the electricity system - consistent with the commitment to a fully decarbonised power system by 2035. This will help put downward pressured on wholesale electricity prices."**

4.125 Having regard to the above, the application proposals for Land within Belvoir Estate will make an appreciable contribution to meeting these new proposed Climate Change targets, which are above those set out within the amended Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019. It is clear that in order for the UK to meet the ambitious target of net zero, a presumption in favour of increasing the

number and output of low carbon energy sources, such as solar farms, is entirely appropriate and necessary.

COP26

4.126 The COP26 summit brought parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

4.127 COP26 concluded on the 13th November 2021 with every party (almost 200 countries) agreeing to the Glasgow Climate Pact, to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degree Celsius.

5. BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

5.1 This Section sets out the benefits which would result from the Proposed Development, considering both the wider benefits and specific benefits of the scheme, including to the local community.

5.2 The development will have an export capacity of 49.9MW. A Solar Farm of this size will therefore generate a significant amount of electricity from renewable sources, and this will mean a reduction of approximately 30,000 tonnes[6] of CO_2 emissions annually (approximately 1,200,000 tonnes over the operational lifespan of 40 years). This represents a significant contribution to the legally binding national and international requirement and associated targets to increase renewable energy generation and reduce CO_2 emissions, as outlined in this Statement. For context, the Solar Farm can meet the energy needs of approximately 19,000 homes in the Borough. The generation of this level of renewable energy therefore represents a substantial benefit if planning permission were to be granted.

5.3 This scheme also represents a significant financial investment of approximately £30 million into the local area and nearly £7.6 million of business rates over the 40 year lifecycle of the Solar Farm.

5.4 The Proposed development would also benefit the local economy through the creation of up to approximately 80 new jobs during the construction period, which is expected to be around 6 to 9 months, both direct jobs on-site and indirect/induced roles in the wider economy.

5.5 The Proposed Development would also incorporate a community benefit project such as 50kWp rooftop solar PV installed on community buildings.

5.6 Where possible, the Proposed Development retains and enhances existing landscape features, particularly the hedgerow field boundaries and promotes the use of traditional field hedges and diversity of native hedgerow species. This planning application demonstrates an overall biodiversity net gain of +173.38% for area derived biodiversity based units and net gains of +15.78% for linear biodiversity based units. This significant ecological and landscape enhancement is a benefit to be afforded significant weight in favour of granting planning permission.

[6] Annual CO2 offset based on an estimated saving of 400g of CO2 per kWh generated.

5.7 Further environmental benefits include new proposed planting across the Site, creation of a community orchard, beehives, suitable skylarks nesting areas, bat roost boxes, bird nest boxes, otter holts, hedgehog nest boxes, insect hotels, log piles and amphibian and reptile hibernacula features. Whilst mammal gates or small gaps at the base of the perimeter fence would allow wildlife to move into and out of the Site and maintain connectivity with the wider landscape. Plus, planting and management of landscape features is proposed to provide landscape enhancements.

5.8 The Proposed Development also features significant opportunities to restore the landscape features of the Site previously lost or degraded through historic agricultural practices. Reinforcing field boundaries would enhance and reinforce the landscape structure across the Site, which in turn would be beneficial in terms of strengthening the local landscape character in line with the guidelines for the 'Vale of Belvoir' landscape character type.

5.9 In terms of Agricultural Land Classification the majority of the Site is not BMV land with only 7.05% of the land surveyed being Grade 2. Agricultural practices can continue to take place on the land once the solar panels are operational, which is a further diversification for the farm holding. The project would result in a temporary, fully reversible, moderate beneficial impact to the soil resource which due to the nature of the development can be fully reversed by the removal of the panels at the end of the 40 year operational lifespan of the solar farm.

5.10 Flood and drainage betterment will also be provided as a result of the development, the assessment carried out as part of the planning application has identified that if the mitigation and enhancement strategies are implemented there will be negligible adverse through to moderate beneficial residual significant effects in respect of flood risk and drainage that would arise from operation of the development.

5.11 As part of the proposals, the provision of permissive access routes within the southern parcel would connect to the existing Public Rights of Way on the Site, which in turn increases recreational opportunities locally. The proposed permissive footpaths would create a circular walk, with interpretation and information boards at strategically placed locations, such as near the battery storage stations and outdoor classroom seating areas. In addition, a historic trail will be created through the Site which provides opportunity to interpret the heritage through interpretation boards. Footpaths F82/3, F90/2 and byways F85b/1 and F85b/2 which run through and around the Site would be retained on their current alignment and set within a 10m

wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor, which includes wildflower buffers/margins.

5.12 A series of permanent interpretation and information boards will be set up along the footpaths within the Site and will provide educational benefits to the local communities and visitors. The interpretation and information boards would encourage a better understanding of the Solar Farm and the benefits of renewable energy, along with the ecological and landscape enhancements which are proposed across the Site.

5.13 Furthermore, as an educational benefit the Solar Farm is intended to become an educational resource both for school children and the wider community. 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, that will enable the Solar Farm to become both a formal and informal educational resource. The proposed seating will be set within areas of wildflower meadow to create an attractive environment for the visitors and located adjacent to the existing and permissive footpaths.

5.14 For further information regarding benefits of the scheme please see the accompanying Environmental Enhancement Strategy (EES).

6. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

6.1 This Section considers the merits of the proposal in the context of the Social, Economic and Environmental benefits of the development.

Social, Economic and Local Community Benefits

6.2 The previous Section sets out the benefits of the scheme. In summary, these are:

- Increased renewable energy generation, equivalent to provide electricity to approximately 19,000 homes, and assistance towards reducing CO_2 emissions saving 30,000 tonnes of CO_2 per annum;
- Economic benefits associated with investment and jobs on-site during peak times of the construction period;
- Appropriate biodiversity and landscape enhancement measures via increased boundary planting, species-rich grassland and significant habitat creation;
- Large biodiversity net gains of +173.38% for area derived biodiversity based units and net gains of +15.78% for linear biodiversity based units. The provision of skylark enhancement areas, bat roost boxes, bird nest boxes, hedgehog nest boxes, insect hotels, log piles and amphibian and reptile hibernacula features would ensure that the resident populations are accommodated, and further species move into the site;
- Green infrastructure benefits including accommodating existing PRoWs within a 10m wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor, provision of new permissive paths, heritage trail as well as canalside recreational facilities including a community orchard, picnic area and beehives;
- Flood and drainage betterment will also be provided as a consequence of the development through the mitigation measures; and
- Educational benefit through the creation of outdoor classroom log pile seating and picnic areas, as well as interpretation and information boards.

6.3 The local economic investment and community benefits of the proposed scheme gains support from Policy SS1 (Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development) due to the improved economic and social conditions in the area as outlined above.

6.4 The above outcomes associated with the scheme progressing, and associated Local Plan support, are considered to cumulatively represent very substantial benefits.

These are material considerations which weigh greatly in favour of planning permission being granted.

6.5 Additionally, Policy EN10 supports renewable and low carbon energy generation, provided that any adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily.

6.6 Planning permission should therefore be granted unless adverse effects of the development outweigh these beneficial impacts. Consideration of the environmental impacts is provided below in order to make this judgement.

Environmental Impacts

Landscape and Visual Effects

6.7 As part of the Environmental Statement which accompanies this planning application, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared by Pegasus Group. The LVIA confirms 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. This effect has been used to positively inform the design of a proposed solar development, particularly where there are existing blocks of woodland, and the topography is more consistently flat within the Belvoir Vale.

6.8 The LVIA details that the Proposed Development would have limited harm on the existing positive landscape elements associated with the Application Site. The existing landform of the Application Site would remain largely unchanged except possibly at a localised level during the construction and decommissioning period.

6.9 The LVIA notes the actual area that the Proposed Development would be visible from is considerably smaller than that identified by the SZTV. The visual assessment shows that visibility would be restricted by a combination of the landform, distance from the Application Site and the enclosure provided by intervening vegetation surrounding the Application Site.

6.10 The assessment of viewpoints and associated receptors (including high and medium sensitivity receptors) concludes that the Proposed Development will cause limited long-term effects. Effects would be predominantly limited to less than 1km of the Application Site with the visual effects on completion being mostly limited to

footpaths within and around the edges of the Site, with direct views of the Proposed Development.

6.11 The LVIA notes the Proposed Development will seek to incorporate a number of mitigation principles. Mitigation measures that have been incorporated into the layout of the Proposed Development as 'embedded mitigation' as part of the iterative design process. Generally, the Proposed Development will seek to retain and enhance existing landscape elements that make a positive contribution to the local landscape character and will incorporate opportunities to enhance the landscape features of the Application Site. The mitigation measures therefore seek to achieve the following overall objectives:

- To retain and enhance existing landscape elements, particularly the hedgerow field boundaries and field structure;
- Promote the use of traditional field hedges and diversity of native hedgerow species; and
- To minimise any unnecessary overshadowing of the solar panels.

6.12 The following measures have been incorporated into the Landscape Strategy:

- Proposing a new native tree belt (10m wide) along a section of the eastern boundary softening the edge with Muston.
- Implementing new lengths of hedgerow along footpaths and accommodating the routes within a 10m wide Green Infrastructure Enhancement Corridor which includes wildflower buffers/margins.
- Reinforcing and enhancing the retained hedgerows across the Site to strengthen the landscape framework and local landscape character.
- Enclosing the open field boundaries with new lengths of native hedgerow.
- Planting a species-rich grassland on the land beneath and surrounding the panels and creating a botanically diverse species-rich wildflower grassland outside of the security fence and alongside the retained and proposed on-Site footpaths.
- An area of complimentary species diverse meadowland is proposed adjacent to Muston Meadows SSSI/NNR at the eastern edge of the Site.
- An area of complimentary species diverse grassland habitat adjacent to Muston Meadows SSSI/NNR in the southeast corner of the Site.
- Areas of ponds/scrapes with tussocky grass/wildflower planting, hibernaculum, log pile, insect hotels are proposed throughout the Site.
- A permissive path will link from footpath F90/2 to link up with bridleway F85b/2 creating a looped walk.
- Bat and bird boxes, and Sky lark nesting areas are proposed throughout the Site.
- Dotted tree planting to soften views of heritage assets such as Belvoir Castle and local church spires.
- Interpretation boards are proposed within the south of the site.
- Beehives are located in the southeast corner of the site.
- Outdoor classrooms and picnic areas will be located at the southwest and northeast corners of the looped walk.
- A canalside community orchard is located within the southern end of the Site.

6.13 In conclusion, the LVIA demonstrates that 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.

Ecology

6.14 As part of the Environmental Statement an Ecological Impact Assessment has been prepared by Avian Ecology, to accompany this planning application. The Assessment sets out the results of the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey, Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) Assessment, Great Crested Newt Environmental-DNA (e-DNA) Survey, Breeding Bird Surveys and Wintering Bird Surveys undertaken in 2019 and 2020. The results are summarised as follows:

- During the Wintering Bird Surveys, no primary 'target' species (defined typically as waterfowl or other species using large open fields in winter that may be displaced due to the Proposed Development) were recorded within the Application Site. The Wintering Bird Surveys, desk study and evaluation suggest that although they are present in the wider area, the Application Site and surrounding fields are used by very low numbers of any target species and do not provide an important foraging or roosting resource for non-breeding waterfowl.
- A Breeding Bird Survey Report was undertaken, which notes the numbers of birds using the Application Site for breeding was generally considered low, usually with four or fewer territories, however numbers of skylark Alauda arvensis and yellowhammer Emberiza citrinella were considered moderate, with seven and 11 territories, respectively. The notable Species breeding assemblage (which included dunnock Prunella modularis, reed bunting Emberiza schoeniclus, linnet Linaria cannabina and yellowhammer) was typically associated with vegetation along field boundary habitats such as hedgerows. Ground nesting species consisted of quail Citurnix coturnix, grey partridge Perdix perdix and skylark.
- In regard to bats, three trees within the Application Site were noted as having suitable bat roosting features, two of which were assigned moderate bat roosting potential (BRP) in line with the criteria set out in the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines and one of which was assigned high BRP. All other trees within the Application Site were assigned negligible or low BRP. No structures were located within the Application Site. Linear features within

and around the Site such as hedgerows, dry and wet and ditches are considered to offer the most favourable habitats for foraging / commuting bats as do the ponds (and surrounding habitats) and woodland belts areas present within and immediately adjacent to the Site and present in the wider area.

- A Badger Survey has been undertaken and the results are available in the submitted Confidential Badger Report.
- No records of otter within 2km of the Application Site in the last 10 years were returned by LERC and no records of water vole Arvicola amphibius within 2km of the Application Site within the last 10 years were returned by LERC.
- There are no known populations of hazel dormouse Muscardinus avellanarius exist within Leicestershire, or the neighbouring counties of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, and therefore they are considered unlikely to be present within the Application Site, particularly given the absence of large, well connected woodland blocks in the wider landscape.
- Several brown hare Lepus europaeus were observed using the Application Site during the field surveys. In addition, it is considered likely that European hedgehog Erinaceus europaeus may also utilise hedgerows and boundary features within the Application Site.
- In relation to amphibians a Great Crested Newt Presence or Absence (eDNA) Survey Report was undertaken including surveys in June 2020. There are four ponds within the Application Site, however at the time of survey, only P2 was wet. The three ponds located towards the north of the Application Site had clearly been dry for some time. P2 returned a negative result, indicating likely absence of the species within this waterbody.
- Furthermore, no records of reptile within 2km of the Application Site within the last 10 years were returned by LERC, no records of notable invertebrate species within 2km of the Application Site were returned by LERC and no watercourses were considered suitable to support white clawed crayfish Austropotamobius pallipes were located within the Application Site.

6.15 The Proposed Development will secure a Biodiversity Net Gain of +173.38% for area derived biodiversity based units and net gains of +15.78% for linear biodiversity based units. As confirmed by the recent Solar Farm appeal decision for Land north of Halloughton, Inspector Baird determined at paragraph 59 that:

> **"Whilst BNG will be a requirement of the Environment Act 2021, the minimum requirement is currently set at 10%. Thus, even acknowledging that the assessment starts from a low base in terms of the ecological value of the site, a gain of some 73%, is substantial and a benefit that attracts significant weight."[7]**

6.16 The Assessment confirms this net gain can be achieved through the proposed landscape planting and habitat creation as set out in the Landscape Strategy, along with long term management as part of the BMP. Further enhancements that cannot be quantified through the Natural England Net Gain Assessment Metric include new bat and bird boxes, refuge features, hibernacula and wetland enhancements.

6.17 The Report notes the project design includes a range of inherent, embedded, elements which avoid or reduce the potential for adverse ecological impacts, including siting the solar array layout and compounds within low value arable habitats, and establishing protective buffers around ponds, retained hedgerows and trees. Embedded mitigation measures have been implemented during the iterative design process. The potential for adverse effects during the construction phase will also be controlled through standard good construction and environmental working practices.

6.18 The Assessment details biodiversity protection measures have been included through consideration at the design phase. In summary these comprise:

- Avoidance of higher value habitats and retention of such habitats where they occur on-site such as hedgerows, ditches ponds and trees;
- Retaining and protecting on-site ponds to maintain aquatic habitat for amphibians;
- Maintaining suitable buffers around designated sites and habitats likely to be used by protected species;
- Controlling run-off during construction and operation of the Proposed Development in line with legislative requirements and current good practice guidance to prevent possible indirect pollution effects on habitats (including waterbodies) and associated species;
- Landscape proposals for the Proposed Development have been designed to provide an overall biodiversity gain; in line with BS 42020 – A Code of Practice for Biodiversity in Planning and Development. Landscape proposals ensure that there is no net loss of habitats of ecological value. Habitat creation and

[7] Land north of Halloughton (Appeal Ref: APP/B3030/W/21/3279533), appeal allowed 18th February 2022.

management will be undertaken well over the 10% net gain provided for in the Environment Act 2021 will be delivered and managed over the lifetime of the Proposed Development (at least 30 years) in accordance with the submitted Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP);

- Hedgerows and trees will be retained and protected during construction and operation in-line with BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction; and
- There will be no additional light spill into adjacent habitats maintaining dark corridors along hedgerow and woodland edges. Any lighting design will be in line with Bat Conservation Trust/Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance.

6.19 Additional wildlife habitat will be created within suitable habitats throughout the Application Site, these consist of:

- A minimum of five bird boxes erected on mature trees located within the fields and hedgerows within the Site;
- A minimum of ten bat roost boxes mounted on mature trees located within the fields and hedgerows;
- Creation of refugia (log piles) and hibernacula suitable for amphibians, reptiles and other species; and
- Creation of 'insect hotels'.

6.20 The Ecological Impact Assessment concludes with the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures in place, the Proposed Development is not considered to have any residual significant effects on any statutory or non-statutory site designated for nature conservation, nor on habitats or protected and notable species.

Heritage

6.21 As part of the Environmental Statement a Heritage Statement has been prepared by Pegasus Group, to support this planning application.

Archaeology

6.22 The Statement notes cropmarks and geophysical survey anomalies indicate the buried remains of a ring ditch, a pit alignment, and three sub-rectangular enclosures

in the north-western part of the site. The morphology of these features is consistent with Iron Age and/or Romano-British settlement activity.

6.23 Such remains would be of some heritage significance as derived from their archaeological interest and are likely to constitute non-designated heritage assets. They are not considered to be of a significance commensurate with a designated heritage asset (i.e., a Scheduled Monument).

6.24 The geophysical survey has also detected buried evidence of historic agricultural activity, namely plough furrows and ditches and former field boundaries. Such remains typically would be of insufficient significance to constitute heritage assets.

6.25 The Statement confirms based on currently available information, there is no indication of the presence within the site of above - or below - ground heritage remains of a significance that would pose an overriding constraint to the development of the site.

Built Heritage (Settings)

6.26 The Heritage Statement confirms an appropriate and proportionate level of settings assessment has been undertaken for all designated heritage assets within a minimum 1km radius of the site and for selective heritage assets beyond this study area.

6.27 The NPPF states that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation and the more important the asset the greater the weight should be.

6.28 The Statement notes the most important heritage assets or those of the highest significance assessed include the Grade I Listed Belvoir Castle; the Grade II* Church of St John the Baptist at Muston; Grade II* Church of St Mary at Bottesford; the Grade II* Listed and Scheduled village cross at Muston; the Scheduled earthwork remains at Muston, and the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden at Belvoir Castle. Heritage assets of lesser significance assessed include the Grade II Listed Peacock Farmhouse, Belvoir Castle Conservation Area and Easthorpe Conservation Area.

6.29 The Proposed Development will result in a change to their setting but will not be seen in views from Belvoir Castle (other, than from the roof which is not considered to be a vantage point that contributes to the significance of the building); from the Church of St John the Baptist at Muston; the Church of St Mary at Bottesford; from the

Scheduled and Listed village cross at Muston; and from the Scheduled moated grange site.

6.30 There will be potential to see the development from parts of the Registered Park and Garden and the Belvoir Conservation Area, but the development will be in the far distance in any view and will not be harmful to their significance.

6.31 The development will be seen in views towards the Castle; the Park and Garden; the Church of St Mary; the Belvoir Conservation Area; and in peripheral views of the Church of St John the Baptist; and Peacock Farmhouse from within the site and from the north of the site. However, the layout of the solar panels and proposed landscaping ensures that views towards the Castle and the Park and Garden will be preserved as one moves along the public footpath. Whilst from the north of the site the low height of the proposed development and the elevated position of the heritage assets themselves will ensure that views of them will not be lost in their entirety. This is also true for the churches which due to their height ensures that they will remain visible above all surrounding structures and trees, and not totally screened from site by either the panels or hedgerows. With regards to Peacock Farmhouse the intervening fields and screening between the site and the farmhouse limit the inversibility between the building and the site.

6.32 The intervening fields and road and general topography and contours between the site and the Scheduled Monument and Listed village cross at Muston, and the Scheduled moated grange site ensures that the proposals will not be visible in views towards or from this heritage assets. The omission of solar panels from fields closest to Easthorpe Lane and the proposed landscaping strategy will further ensure that the proposals are not visible in views and minimise visual encroachment of the proposals in views along Easthorpe Lane towards the Church spires.

6.33 The site is severed from the Easthorpe Conservation Area and its setting by the A52 road. This significant physical and visual barrier between the Conservation Area and the Site ensures that the Site does not form part of the setting of the Conservation Area.

6.34 The Heritage Statement further details the landscape is not a designated heritage asset but does provide the context and setting of the heritage assets examined in this assessment. Whilst the landscape is largely formed by fields it is an evolving landscape and not a fully agricultural landscape, with several infrastructure features within it, and is a landscape that allows for numerous views of the heritage assets,

especially Belvoir Castle and the spire of St Mary's Church at Bottesford. The Site is one small area of a much larger landscape and any impact on the heritage interest of the landscape can only be assessed on the impact the proposals will have on the significance of the heritage assets within it via any change to their setting.

6.35 The Proposed Development includes mitigation by design through the omission of several fields from development to the west of Easthorpe Lane and to the south of the footpath F82. The Landscape Strategy seeks to preserve and enhance existing field boundaries and introduces new planting to screen the Proposed Development in views of heritage assets. The Proposed Development allows for interpretation of the historic environment to be provided at publicly accessible points. The Landscaping Strategy also provides the opportunity to interpret the heritage through interpretation boards, which will be located along a proposed historic trail within and adjacent to the Application Site.

6.36 The Heritage Assessment concludes that overall the majority of heritage assets will not be harmed directly or indirectly via development within this setting. Any harm will arise through the visual encroachment only of solar panels on views towards Belvoir Castle; the spire of St John the Baptist Church and the spire of St Mary's Church at Bottesford. Any harm might only be perceived as less than substantial and as the lowermost end of the scale.

Transport and Public Rights of Way

6.37 A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been prepared by Pegasus Group, to accompany this planning application. The CTMP sets out how any potential transport impacts of construction and operation will be managed and mitigated.

6.38 Construction and operational access will be provided via the existing access track off Castle View Road.

6.39 In terms of mitigation for the construction period, temporary signage will be erected in the vicinity of the Site. Delivery vehicles seeking to access and egress the site could also be assisted by the use of banksmen, should it be considered necessary by local highway officers.

6.40 Regarding construction traffic routing, 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. From the A52, vehicles will access Castle View Road, from which the site is accessed.

6.41 It is anticipated that there could be approximately 1750 two-way movements by large vehicles associated with the site, (i.e. 875 arrivals and 875 departures) over the six month period. There will also be construction workers arriving at the site first thing in the morning and departing in the evening, although the numbers involved are forecast to be relatively low on a day-to-day basis and minibuses will be provided for general operatives. The level of traffic during the temporary construction period would equate to approximately 12 two-way movements (based on a six to month construction period). The construction route is suitable to accommodate larger vehicle types. The CTMP concludes that development traffic will not have a detrimental impact on the safety or operation of the local or strategic highway network.

6.42 Once operational, the CTMP confirms 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 adjacent access track.

6.43 With regards to the PRoW's, the CTMP confirms all existing PRoWs identified 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.

Flooding and Drainage

6.44 This planning application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) prepared by Pegasus Group. The FRA includes a surface water drainage strategy.

6.45 The FRA details that the site is entirely greenfield with existing watercourses located to the west and southern parts of the site as well as existing ditches throughout the development area. The FRA confirms that the site is located within Flood Zone 1, with a small area of Flood Zone 3 to the far west of the site adjacent to the existing Winter Beck watercourse.

6.46 The FRA confirms that the proposed development will not add any significant areas of impermeable surfacing. Surface water runoff will drain partially to ground, as existing, and overland flows collected via new swale systems to slow run-off and improve water quality.

6.47 The Sustainable Urban Drainage Strategy proposes to allow the site to drain as close as naturally possible to the existing situation with run-off intercepted by a series of shallow swales / filter trenches adjacent to the proposed new internal access roads and swales located at the low parts of the site to collect and slow surface water run-off prior to discharging to the existing watercourses previously named.

6.48 The FRA confirms using the site for solar power generation therefore has the potential to provide betterment to the existing land use in terms of surface water runoff rates and downstream flood risk.

6.49 The FRA confirms that the Proposed Development is considered to accord with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with residual risk to the site fully mitigated, and as such considered low risk.

Agricultural land

6.50 An Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Report has been prepared by Amet Property, as part of the Environmental Statement. The Report confirms that the majority of the site comprises Grade 3b (96.2 ha) (Moderate Quality) Agricultural Land, with a small area in the north-western corner Grade 2 (7.3 ha) Agricultural Land.

6.51 It is therefore acknowledged that the vast majority of the site does not form Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.

6.52 It should be noted that the ALC survey covered a wider area of 161 hectares, which following revisions to the scheme the Site area was reduced to 103.5ha.

6.53 Notwithstanding this, Policy NPP3 and NPP9 of the Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan (made October 2021), forming part of the Development Plan, is clear that development should avoid being located on the highest quality agricultural land and not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land in grades 1, 2 and 3a. In this case, a very small amount of the Site is Grade 2, comprising Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land. The clear and compelling evidence for the use of a small area of Grade 2 agricultural land is that the Proposed Development will assist in achieving local, national and international climate change targets.

Glint and Glare

6.54 A Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare Study has been undertaken by Pager Power, to accompany this planning application. The Study has assessed the possible impact

upon surrounding road users and dwellings in accordance with industry best practice. In addition, impacts towards surrounding aviation activity and railway infrastructure have been considered at a high level.

6.55 The Study concludes that significant impacts are not predicted for the Proposed Development subject to enhanced/maintained screening at relevant sections of the Site perimeter. The development team has confirmed that the updated Site Layout and Planting Proposals incorporates all of the necessary mitigation screening recommended. On this basis, no significant glint and glare impacts are predicted following the provision of this mitigation.

6.56 The Study also confirms overall significant impacts on aviation activity are not predicted and based on the range, screening and relative position of the development to the railway line, significant impacts on railway infrastructure are not predicted.

Arboriculture

6.57 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) including Tree Survey & Constraints Plan as well as Tree Retention, Removal & Protection Plans, has been prepared to accompany this planning application by Barton Hyett Associates. The Assessment confirms that a total of 98 trees, 24 groups of trees and 60 hedgerows were surveyed.

6.58 The Assessment highlights that none of the trees are subject to a Tree Preservation Order, nor is the site located within a Conservation Area. There are no Ancient Woodlands within the Proposed Development.

6.59 The trees surveyed have informed the overall layout of the Proposed Development, which has been carefully designed to avoid impacts on arboricultural features. The AIA highlighted that there are no significant individual trees to be removed to facilitate the proposed development. The proposed development has been designed to avoid rooting areas of trees within the Site.

6.60 Hedgerow removals are limited to sectional removals to allow for the construction of perimeter fencing and an access track.

6.61 As such, the Assessment confirms the proposed hedgerow removal has been kept to a minimum, with the exception of the newly planted and unestablished hedgerow H61, and the arboricultural impact of these removals across the site as a whole will remain low. The loss of hedgerow can be readily mitigated by replanting and

enhancement of existing hedgerows as demonstrated within the submitted Landscape Plan. The retained trees and hedgerows can be adequately protected during construction activities to sustain their health and longevity.

6.62 The Landscape Strategy proposes to plant 1.48km of new native species rich hedgerow. Habitat creation principally involves the sowing of grassland, of which 76.46ha will be lightly grazed pasture and 24.12ha will be species rich meadow. Therefore, the Scheme results in large net gains of +173.38% for area based units and net gains of +15.78% for linear based units.

Noise Assessment

6.63 As part of the Environmental Statement which accompanies this planning application, a Noise Assessment has been undertaken by LFAcoustics, to identify potential impacts associated with the operation of the Proposed Development. The Assessment has considered the proposed layout and equipment to be installed and operated on the site.

6.64 The Noise Assessment details that no adverse noise impacts have been identified during the construction of the Proposed Development. Appropriate control measures would be adopted during the construction to ensure noise levels associated with the construction operations were minimised.

6.65 Noise levels associated with the operation of the Proposed Development have been calculated and assessed on the basis of the proposed equipment. The calculations and assessment concluded that there would be no adverse noise impacts at surrounding noise-sensitive receptors.

6.66 Further, no cumulative noise impacts have been identified as a result of the operation of the Proposed Development and no additional noise mitigation measures have been identified.

6.67 The Noise Assessment concludes with appropriate control measures adopted during the construction, potential noise impacts and effects would be minimised and would ensure that no adverse noise impacts at the surrounding noise sensitive receptors.

National Policies

6.68 There is significant support for the principle of renewable energy developments in the NPPF. Paragraph 152 is clear that the planning system should support transition to a low carbon future and specifically renewable and low carbon energy and

associated infrastructure. Granting planning permission for the proposed Solar Farm would comply with these requirements and demonstrate support for such schemes.

6.69 The NPPF also directs that planning applications for renewable development should be approved if impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. As outlined above, the assessments of environmental effects have been shown to be limited and would also accord with the provisions of national policy and the NPPG where these specifically refer to environmental effects. The proposal is therefore in compliance with national policy.

Planning Balance

6.70 To summarise, the above planning assessment has demonstrated the following:

- This planning application is in broad compliance with the Development Plan and national planning policy and guidance. Policy compliance strongly supports planning permission being granted;
- The development and operation of the Solar Farm would give rise to a wide range of environmental and economic benefits which amount to a very substantial weight in favour of planning permission being granted;
- The impacts associated with the development at this location are potentially limited, and the proposal is in compliance with relevant issue specific planning policies in the Development Plan, so do not weigh against the development.

6.71 In consideration of compliance with the Development Plan and other planning policy requirements, the significant benefits associated with the Proposed Development and limited adverse effects, it is clear that this development is, on balance, acceptable in planning terms.

6.72 The Proposed Development has been shown to achieve the main objectives of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic) without causing undue detriment to any of these matters. The presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF therefore applies here. As the NPPF at paragraph 14 directs, in such circumstances and where the application complies with the Development Plan, the application should be approved without delay.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 10 Ltd ("The Applicant") to support a full planning application for a Solar Farm together with associated equipment and infrastructure on land within the Belvoir Estate, Grantham, NG32 1PE.

7.2 The Proposed Development would involve the installation and operation of a renewable energy generating station comprising ground mounted photovoltaic solar arrays together with switchgear container, inverter/transformer units, DNO Substation, Site access, internal access tracks, security measures, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements within the Application Site. The development will have capacity of 49.9MW.

7.3 The development supports the UK Government's intention to move to a low carbon economy, which represents a substantial benefit.

7.4 The Development Plan for the area relevant to this application comprises the adopted Melton Local Plan 2011-2036 (adopted October 2018) and Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan (made October 2021).

7.5 The impacts of the proposal have been shown to be acceptable and, where necessary mitigation measures have been set out to reduce potential impacts of the Proposed Development.

7.6 The significant benefits associated with this proposal provide a valuable contribution towards meeting the challenging obligations of the Government regarding renewable energy generation, and also in the form of economic investment and ecological and landscape enhancements, are factors which weigh heavily in favour of this development.

7.7 This Statement therefore demonstrates that, upon considering the following matters, this proposal, on balance falls well within the scope of acceptability:

- Broad compliance with the Development Plan and National Planning Policy guidance;
- The significant benefits associated with the scheme; and
- The relatively benign impacts associated with the development.

7.8 Accordingly, this proposal represents sustainable development and, as such, this planning application should be approved without delay.

APPENDIX 1

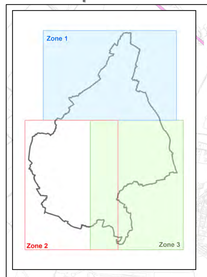
Local Plan Adopted Policies Map

Zone 1. Melton North

Adoption Policies Map - Melton Local Plan (2011-2036)

Melton Borough Council

Indicative scale (A0): 1:20,000



ZONE 1

Key

- Melton Borough Boundary
- Railway Track
- A Road
- B Road
- Key Employment Sites
- Conservation Area
- Listed Building
- Area of Separation
- Local Green Space
- Registered Parks & Gardens
- Scheduled Monument
- National Nature Reserve
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Ancient Woodland
- Local Geological Site
- Local Wildlife Site
- Candidate/Potential Local Wildlife Site
- Leicestershire Round Footpath
- PROW
- Flood Zone 3b
- Flood Zone 3
- Flood Zone 2

Bottesford & Easthorpe
Muston
Redmile
Plungar
Harby
Stathern
Hose
Long Clawson
Eaton
Knipton
Harston
Croxton Kerrial
A52
A607

Bottesford & Easthorpe

Key

- Melton Borough Boundary
- Housing Allocation
- Reserve Site
- Enhancement Area
- Non-residential
- Railway Track
- Leicestershire Round Footpath
- Public Right of Way
- Listed Building
- Key Employment Sites
- Conservation Area
- Area of Separation
- Local Green Space
- Registered Parks & Gardens
- Scheduled Monument
- National Nature Reserve
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Ancient Woodland
- Local Geological Site
- Local Wildlife Site
- Candidate/Potential Local Wildlife Site
- Flood Zone 3b
- Flood Zone 3
- Flood Zone 2

Adoption Policies Map - Melton Local Plan (2011-2036)

Inset Maps

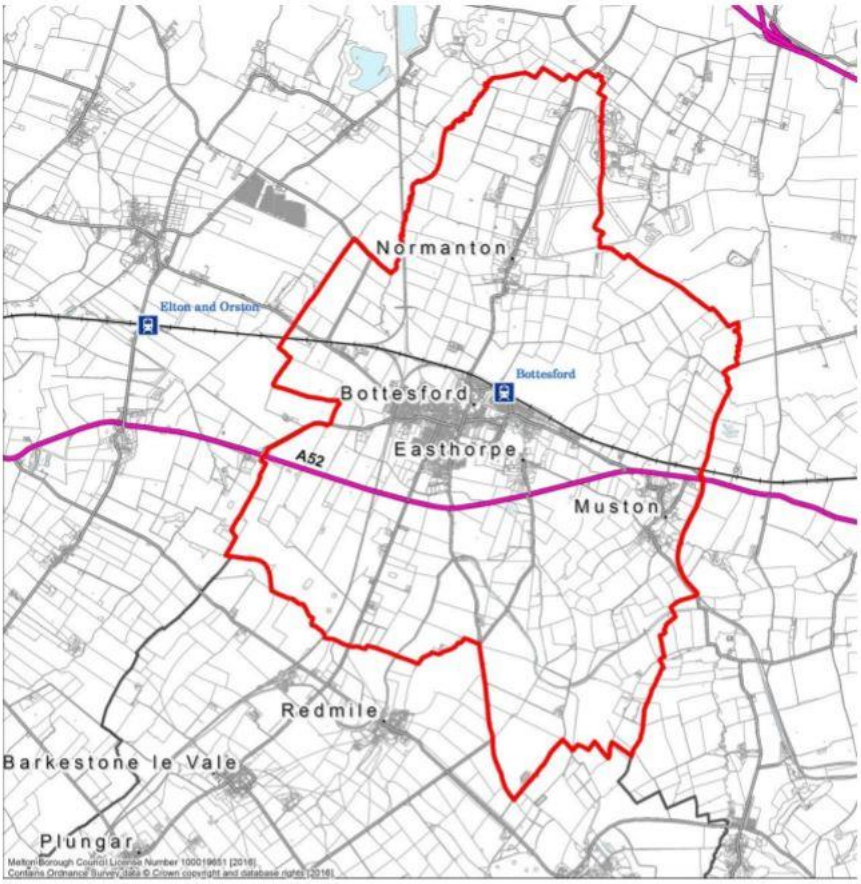
Scale (A3):

1:7,500

APPENDIX 2

Neighbourhood Plan Area

Map 1 Bottesford Parish Neighbourhood Plan Area



Source: Melton Borough Council