

From: [REDACTED] on behalf of [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Muston Solar appeal to the Planning Inspectorate

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your email, which has been added to the file and will be taken into account by the Inspector.

We note your request to speak at the inquiry – you are welcome to attend the inquiry and can speak at the Inspector’s discretion. I would recommend you attend the opening session at 10.00 on 10th September.

Kind regards

Helen (for Alison)

Helen Skinner | Inquiries & Major Casework Team Leader

The Planning Inspectorate

Major Casework, Third Floor, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6PN

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From: Steve Whitby [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, May 10, 2024 2:10 PM

To: Bell, Alison [REDACTED]

Subject: Muston Solar appeal to the Planning Inspectorate

You don't often get email from [REDACTED]. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hi Alison,

Please see below my interested party statement.

As well as living in Muston overlooking the proposed site I am also a member of the SAVE group of Vale of Belvoir residents and I’ve made a significant contribution towards our objections. I would welcome the opportunity to speak at the hearing should interested parties be given the opportunity.

Do I need to do anything further at this stage to ensure my statement is added to all other relevant documents?

Thank you for your assistance.

Kind regards,

Steve Whitby

British farming has been widely reported as being in crisis. We contend now is not the time to remove such large tracts of arable farmland from food production and this is supported by the NFU and DEFRA who have reminded local authorities when considering solar applications to “Stay away from farmland”. Whilst Peacock farm does not have huge areas of BMV land it has nevertheless produced above average crop yields virtually every year, over more than 50 years through 5 family generations. The UK is now less than 65% self sufficient in food production and we are increasingly having to rely on food imports which will be made worse if farm land is allowed to be used for large scale solar. If given the go ahead the calculated loss of yield over the 40 year life of the scheme would amount to 26500 tonnes of wheat, 6000 tonnes of beans and 5000 tonnes of oil seed rape.

We have put forward more appropriate sites such as Normanton airfield which have been

ignored highlighting that JBM have not considered brownfield alternatives.

Melton Borough Council have already approved a 50MW site at Barkestone less than two miles away and that site offers far less impact upon the environment than would the Muston site. Should the Muston site be approved its proximity to Barkestone is so close it would create a very significant cumulative negative impact upon the surrounding area. For this very reason we suggest Barkestone with its minimal impact is a far less intrusive location than Muston would be and as such Muston should be refused.

The site was largely designed on a desktop in Ireland and due to lack of knowledge of the location, the design and site selection takes no account that Belvoir castle and the surrounding area is the premier tourist destination for the entire Melton Borough and is now regarded as the jewel in the crown of the Vale of Belvoir drawing in tourists from across the UK and Europe. Only recently we have had conversations on the proposed site with tourists from the Netherlands and Germany.

We wish to challenge a number of statements and claims made by JBM.

At a site visit we asked Mr McAllister why their site proposal could not be moved further from the village and he stated it would be impossible to reduce the overall coverage as it would affect scheme viability. However, following discussions with residents and the parish council they did eventually agree to remove 7.5 acres but in the wrong location. The additional 2 hectares removed within the appeal document does not improve the site layout nor does it move the site further from the village. We believe the site could have been reduced much further and could be moved much further away from the village. Despite the concerns raised by village residents and by the Parish Council little consideration has been given by JBM to just how close to the village and specifically properties on Woolsthorpe Lane the site would be. In our view the council planners have failed in their duty to ensure adequate consideration was given to all affected parties. Indeed, they appear to have failed to challenge any one single aspect of the submitted plans.

From the outset JBM insisted the site must comprise 3 meter high tracking panels in order to deliver 50MW. The site at Barkestone less than 2 miles away with very similar topography has also been designed to produce 50MW. However at Barkestone fixed low level panels standing at about 1.2 meters are to be used to deliver the same claimed 50MW. Low level panels are far less obtrusive and can more easily be screened and would have a far lower impact upon heritage assets and the surrounding area. How is it that virtually every site across the UK comprises fixed low level panels as with Barkestone and yet JBM suggest fixed would not work at Muston?

Within the appeal submission photos 2, 5 and 6 show low level fixed panels that do not represent 3 meter high tracking panels thereby creating a false image.

Proposals for screening will prove ineffective as demonstrated by the photo attached to my original objection. In fact JBM have stated hedge rows will be cut to low levels but will be allowed to grow to three meters and this further demonstrates deciduous hedging for much of the year will provide little positive screening impact especially during autumn, winter and much of spring. By JBM's own admission additional planting will take 15 years to become effective. The amendments subject of the appeal do nothing to address the poor screening proposals within their original scheme.

JBM claim a solar development will result in lower levels of soil compacting. This cannot possibly be the case as it is due to regular plowing and planting that reduces compaction. Soil compaction could well cause flooding if farming does not continue. Crop spraying prevents the margins close to the Muston SSSI from pernicious invasion of ragwort and various thistle which would be devastating to our rare orchids within the adjacent SSSI. Without spraying there will be no control over the margins abutting the SSSI.

JBM have attempted to suggest that soil quality across the site is poor. However, the Belvoir estate charge Peacock farm rent based upon high quality soil. Whatever the quality, crop yields have been consistently high and above average.

The site is home to a wide variety of red listed birds details of which have been posted on the Belvoir estate's own website but JBM have downplayed the impact the site would have. This spring has already seen a significant number of ground nesting skylarks across the site. Buzzards and red kite soar over the site every day.

The impact of 40 large shipping containers across the site and the industrial compound will be incapable of effective screening and will be visible from all points around the site and from points at and below the grade 1 listed castle.

The proposed site remains far too close to properties on Woolsthorpe Lane and little effort has been made to move the site further from the village. In fact the proposal will dwarf Muston and will be at least 4 times the size of the village envelope and will be as close as 275 meters at its nearest point. Noise pollution from inverters can be as high as 60 decibels and with the site being so close to the village the noise carried on prevailing southerly winds could be damaging to mental health. This issue has not been addressed.

The revised submission states a 6 month build time. At a site visit Mr McAllister of JBM told residents the build would take over a year. At the very least JBM have been disingenuous and appear to have deliberately played down the time scales so as to demonstrate minimal disruption to village residents, especially the noise from pile driving and dust that would be carried towards the village on the prevailing winds.

Construction access via Castle View Road and the associated dangers of the blind S shaped junction with the A52 have been ignored.

JBM have downplayed the impact of the site and of fencing and security cameras upon users of the bye way and permitted footpaths. The castle and surrounding area, including the nearby SSSI at Muston Meadows and Grantham heritage canal are the premier tourist destinations within the entire Melton Borough. JBM have also down played Natural England's assessment the site would have upon heritage assets. Natural England qualify their assessment to mean the site will cause significant harm to heritage assets. JBM even admit to long term permanent archeological damage.

We wish to challenge JBM's claims of power production and emissions reduction. JBM state the site will generate enough electricity to power 15,000 homes and will remove 858,280 tonnes of CO2 from the atmosphere. When questioned at a site visit Mr McAllister admitted the site will produce no power whatsoever during the the dark winter months from typically between 4.00pm and 7.30am when demand is at its highest and any electricity that might be generated cannot be stored as there will be no battery storage. So why hasn't JBM stated what might more accurately be produced rather than focusing upon what appear to be very attractive headline figures? The answer lies in the TV documentary Solar Panels are they really worth it? Aired on Channel 5 on the 2nd of April 2024. The presenter interviewed Mark Futyan who is the ceo of Anesco the operators of Owls Hatch solar development near Herne Bay. This is the third largest development in the country covering 212 acres of fixed low level panels being a 50MW site. He stated that on a good day the site could generate 50MW enough to power 50,000 homes. However, he went on to say it's not clear blue skies and summer all the time, the average is a lowly tenth of that figure, just 5MW. Developers seem to make very bold statements which just don't hold water in order to obtain planning approval.

Owls Hatch is similar in size to that proposed in Muston. Therefore, although JBM state Muston will produce 50MW the average is likely to be just one tenth i.e. 5MW which would only power 1500 homes. Using the same averaging as Owls hatch the site at Muston would only reduce

carbon emissions by 85,820 tonnes over 40 years not the 858,280 tonnes claimed. Reduction in farmland given over to solar will result in an increase in greater levels of food imports which in turn will increase CO2 emissions from transportation - shipping, air freight and road transport further reducing the suggested benefit claims JBM make over CO2 reduction. Why has JBM not been completely open about the inefficiency of solar? Is this because they know such inefficiencies would adversely affect such large scale applications on highly productive farmland? Why did the planning officers fail to challenge JBM's claims?

You are therefore being asked to agree to replacing highly efficient food production with inefficient solar, all within what is regarded as the most beautiful part of the Vale of Belvoir. So beautiful the area MP Alicia Kearns supports ANOB accreditation. Increasingly more solar farm applications on farmland are being refused. An application by Aurora Power was rejected by Durham County Council who stated it was an "Overwhelming encroachment upon open countryside". They also stated the proximity of the plan was too close to residential properties, the fire risk was too great, wildlife would be adversely affected as would agriculture and food production. All of which applies to the site at Muston.

I obtained sunshine data from the Met Office for this area which I included within my original objection. The data shows the number of sunshine hours for this area over a 30 year period. Over winter periods spanning 30 years the met office confirms the average daily sunshine rate is just 2.56 hours, nowhere near sufficient to generate any meaningful degree of electricity when consumer demand is at its highest. Yes, solar panels do work during cloudy overcast days but down to between 10.2% and 20% efficiency. Solar panels also degrade over time by around 20% after 20 years further contributing to their inefficiency. To further demonstrate how our winters are evolving into prolonged wetter periods lacking sunshine i recorded exact sunshine data between the 1st of October 2021 to 31st March 2022, during peak period demand. The average daily rate was just 2.082 hours. The met office have confirmed the winter 23/24 has been the wettest on record.

It is unfortunate the planning officers at MBC chose not to challenge any of the claims that JBM make especially over how fixed low level panels can work at Barkestone but not at Muston less than two miles away which would be far less obtrusive.

In 2021 we had a telephone conversation with the planning officer handling the Muston application at the time and he confirmed he had no prior experience of dealing with such large solar developments or indeed any solar developments. The planning officers were required to consider whether the proposal would make any meaningful contribution to meeting the UK's greenhouse gas emissions targets. JBM failed to produce any supporting evidence to back their claims. Based upon the significant lack of hard facts supporting their claims this was a significant failure on the part of the planning department. The planning officers were also required as part of their assessment criteria to determine whether or not there would be significant environmental benefits. In failing to produce supporting evidence of JBM's claims and based upon the inefficiency factors evidenced herein there cannot possibly be any significant environmental benefits over and above those already provided by the location.

In an effort to find hard evidence that solar developments actually do work efficiently contrary to the available evidence and that they could justify removal of large tracts of high yielding farmland i approached the largest UK solar operators requesting details of actual power produced against statements made at the planning stage. Those developments approached were:

Basingstoke solar

Wroughton Public Power Solutions

West Raynham Solar / Trina Power (Former RAF site a much better location than farmland)

Bradenstoke Solar on part of RAF Lyneham

Owls Hatch

Not one responded, not surprising given the admissions of Anesco in the TV documentary.

The time has now arrived to stop these plans proposed by developers to site inefficient industrial solar on highly productive farmland in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Sent from my iPad