

APP/Y2430/W/24/3340258 - Fields OS 6700 6722 And 5200,
Muston Lane, Easthorpe



Presentation to HM Inspector 10 September 2024

What I hope I am doing in this brief presentation is providing a succinct recapitulation of the main arguments that the SAVE organisation has been presenting in a series of documents written since July 2022. I hope I am reminding you of what you have already read. My colleague Steve Whitby will follow this presentation of the headline arguments with more detail.

We have consistently argued the case that the *harms* resulting from the proposal outweigh the *benefits*, if the equation is properly balanced and the quantities inserted into each side of it are veridical and accurate. At root, the reason for this is that the installation is *inappropriately sited*.

Heritage and Environment

The site is one of only 4 areas of countryside in the county of Leicestershire to reach 'national' level in character. There must therefore be a high barrier erected in the way of any scheme

whose p-f effect is to degrade it. It is directly proximate to a SSSI hosting unique orchids and endangered fauna. It abuts a heritage canal built in the 1790s and providing a home for water species. Several species of red-listed birds nest here, most notably the ground-nesting skylarks. The prospect across the site connects two Grade 1 listed monuments in Belvoir Castle and St. Mary's Church, Bottesford: a prospect noted in and protected by a succession of local and borough plans. There is no possible iteration of this industrialising scheme that will *not* compromise the landscape character for local walkers and visitors to the area. JBM's proposals on hedgerow management will not work, for reasons clearly pointed out by Bob Bayman on behalf of the Parish Council.

There is only **one single factor** disposed in favour of this site, and this is its accessibility to the grid, a commercial and not any other kind of advantage. Arguments are made on the basis of this factor, and the legal simplicity of the land ownership, that this site has to be chosen, and the scheme has to be operated for 40 years: but that is an argument deriving from private enterprise profit. Furthermore, it is an argument that cannot be inspected because the figures that underlie it are not anywhere open to inspection. What profit margins are written into the scheme and who banks the profits are not transparent. The damage done to the countryside is, however, all too transparent.

One consultee on this scheme, Cornwall Environmental Consultants, has pointed out that the cumulative impact profile of the area is worsening and is now critical. It could be concluded of the area, if this project comes to fruition, that:

solar farms were now a key characteristic of this landscape, and this landscape could be described as a landscape with solar farms where:

- solar farms now influence the character of the local landscape
- The 5 separate developments now form a high density cluster of solar farms in the 5km study area which is the greatest density of solar farms in the wider landscape.

Local MP Alicia Kearns has made this point for the counties of Lincs and Leics as a whole.

JBM 'Mitigations' and Proposed Benefits

SAVE emphasises the point that the *harms v benefits* equation is not properly weighted if NO value is attributed to the current

agricultural land use. If the production of above-average crop yields, reflected in the rent price, is to be dismissed because the land is graded 3b (implication being that it is worthless therefore), the calculation cannot be properly done.

Neither can the calculation be properly done if the advantages accruing from the proposal are overstated. The benefits to the local economy of c£40 million have been claimed but not explained. Local jobs are said to result from this proposal, but I have personally spoken to the workers engaged in the adjacent Barkestone site and we agreed that Scotland was indeed a good country to live in. They were Scottish.

Statements are made, sometimes in figures, about the environmental benefits of the scheme and its advantages to drainage and flood risk. Should the solar farm be built and should flooding in the area worsen (it is already very bad), who will be held to account and what will then be done about it?

SAVE has presented figures in previous documents that challenge the stated outputs of the scheme and will do so again this afternoon. We have shown that either this scheme will produce in excess of 49.9MW and is therefore an NSIP; or it is wholly inefficient compared to other less land-hungry schemes. We have noted ever since our initial acquaintance with this proposal that similar proposals, producing exactly the same outputs irrespective of weather patterns and terrain, but involving radically different acreages of land and radically different equipment, are being considered all over England. Even the mitigations proposed have a family resemblance and look like boilerplate. SAVE has done its own research on hours of sunlight, which has disposed us towards considerable scepticism in respect of energy outputs. My colleague will discuss all these points in more detail.

SAVE has consistently argued that the mitigations presented and reiterated by JBM are either **unwanted, impractical or do not mitigate** the site problems. Genuine mitigations would have included pushing the site further south and west of the village envelope, decreasing its area and using solar panels similarly sized as other schemes in the immediate vicinity. Hedgerow

management cannot and will not mitigate the visual damage to views and landscape character. Creation of signposted walks where once walkers could roam freely is itself a kind of pollution. Plans to manage educational facilities, orchards and wildflower meadows over a 40-year period are received with appropriate scepticism by SAVE.

SAVE understands the benefits of a multi-stranded energy strategy but it does not believe that the case for a vast ground-mounted installation in this area is convincing. The local community does not want it.