

BELVOIR VALE RAMBLERS

APP/Y2430/W/24/3340258

Context

This area is popular for walkers, both local and tourists from elsewhere, due to the Bottesford parish church, Grantham Canal, Denton Reservoir and, most importantly, Belvoir Castle. There is a good network of interconnecting footpaths and bridleways which walkers and riders use to create circular routes. These routes afford long distance open views which include the Belvoir Ridge and Belvoir Castle plus the distinctive Bottesford church spire. Users of these rights of way enjoy the feelings of open space and the presence of wildlife of many different sorts.

Ramblers, as an organisation does not generally object to solar farms; it responds to each on its merits and the mitigations built into the proposed development. This application has 2.5 miles (approximately) of rights of way immediately adjacent to the fields in which panels would be located. In our view, the proposed mitigations are currently insufficient to offset the serious loss of views and the enjoyment of the countryside over a 40 year period. Indeed, Ramblers doubts that any mitigations can successfully offset the negative impact of this solar farm on the ability of users to enjoy and appreciate the character of the landscape.

Some general observations:

1. **Green Lanes** – the proposed width is insufficient to prevent being caught in a corridor. Given the loss of views and open space, the width needs to be at least 8 metres. It is worth noting that existing high hedges often prevent views to the outside of the proposed solar farm; one can only see that which is within the boundary.
2. **Hedges and trees along the fence line** – a very delicate balance needs to be achieved. If hedges / trees are continuous then height becomes an issue. If they are too high then views of the Belvoir escarpment can be lost entirely. (See Viewpoint 01.) Occasional narrow trees can help create a good green space without restricting views.
3. **Permissive path** – this is to be welcomed and it is noted that it appears to be situated in a wide corridor – much wider than the proposed ‘green lane’.
4. **Drainage** – there are some sections of the rights of way that are prone flooding. There should be plans to address this. (See Footpath F90/2 and BOAT F85/b below.)

Further mitigations that should have been put forward

- Increasing width of ‘green lanes’ to a minimum of 8 metres.
- Removing the solar panels in the southeast corner of Field 12.
- Improving the condition of the BOAT.
- Improving drainage where necessary.

Efficiency of solar panels

The efficiency of panels has increased, it appears, since these plans were first submitted. With that in mind, it should be possible, without loss of generating capacity, to remove some panels to increase widths of paths / improve views.

Details pertaining to each right of way and associated fields

Footpath F90/3

Field 8: A tall hedge to the west of the path blocks any views in that direction, panels would block views to the east. A wide 'green lane' would be required.

Footpath F82/3

Field 7: Hedging on the east side of the path prevents views in that direction. Currently, there are open views to the west which will be totally lost because of the panels. The only views are in the direction of travel and, because of the bends in the path, solar panels will be directly in view. A path with a greater width (8m) may alleviate this to some extent.

Field 8: There are some gaps in the hedging which then affords good views of the castle. Maintaining these gaps would be very beneficial.

Footpath F90/2

Field 11: Tall hedging on west side of path obstructs any views in that direction. Views to the east will be lost entirely. This is why there needs to be a greater width dedicated to the proposed 'green lane'. Again, owing to bends, the view ahead can be of solar panels.

Field 11/13: underfoot condition poor – flooding / drainage problems that should be dealt with mitigations to offset the negative effects of the proposal.

Field 13: Removing a triangular section of panels to afford views of the castle are most welcomed.

BOAT F85b/2 - plans indicate that it will be aligned as per the definitive map rather than the currently used track.

The section of this BOAT next to fields 12 and 13 is one of the most sensitive of the entire plan. There are views in all directions with Bottesford spire visible in the distance in one direction and the castle in another. *Similar to Field 13 a small section of the SE corner of Field 12 should be removed.*

The BOAT is in poor condition with deep ruts filled, currently, with water. Some action as a mitigation is called for.

Field 13: Views to west and north lost. Castle and escarpment can be seen to the south.

Field 12: Views to north lost. *There appears to be a new hedge suggested to the south of this path. This might have the effect of blocking views to the south.* Hedging on east side of path means no views to the east. Again, a reason for a greater width of 'green lane'. *Any planting along the fence needs to be restricted in height so as not to lose the view of the escarpment.*

Paul Fenton

Group Footpath Secretary

Vale of Belvoir Ramblers

Membership Number: 3156394