

Melton Borough Council
Parkside Station Approach
Burton Street
Melton Mowbray
Leicestershire
LE13 1GH

Your Ref 22/00537/FUL

Our Ref CRTR-PLAN-2022-36029

Tuesday 7 June 2022

Dear Mr Elliott

Proposal: Full Planning Application for the Construction of a Solar Farm together with all Associated Work, Equipment and Necessary Infrastructure

Location: Fields OS 6700, 6722 and 5200, Muston Lane, Easthorpe

Waterway: Grantham Canal

Thank you for your consultation.

We are the charity who look after and bring to life 2000 miles of canals & rivers. Our waterways contribute to the health and wellbeing of local communities and economies, creating attractive and connected places to live, work, volunteer and spend leisure time. These historic, natural and cultural assets form part of the strategic and local green-blue infrastructure network, linking urban and rural communities as well as habitats. By caring for our waterways and promoting their use we believe we can improve the wellbeing of our nation. The Trust is a statutory consultee in the Development Management process.

Based on the information available our substantive response (as required by the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)) is the following advice:

The application site is located to the north of the Grantham Canal and the southern end of the site extends close to the canal by Muston Gorse Bridge (Br. 57). The nearest solar panels appear to be located about 30- 40m north of the canal and the area adjacent to the canal to the east of the bridge is proposed to be laid out as a 'community orchard'.

The Trust owns and manages the Grantham Canal, which is currently disused, but through the Grantham Canal Partnership, the Trust is supportive of aspirations to return the canal to navigable status in the future. The canal is a valuable wildlife habitat and recreational resource and sustains a range of wildlife, contributing positively to the biodiversity value of the locality. It is designated as a County Wildlife Site (CWS) and west of Redmile, the canal is also designated as a SSSI as it contains some of the best areas of open water and associated habitats in Leicestershire and is representative of slow river vegetation communities in central and eastern England. The canal SSSI supports a diverse range of flora including rare water plants, along with many species of breeding birds and water insects.

The proposed development does not appear likely to have any direct impact upon the canal structure, although it is likely to be visible in places from the canal and towpath. It is therefore disappointing that although the Landscape and Visual Impact assessment includes two viewpoints (5 and 6) from locations at or near to the canal, it does not appear to have specifically considered or assessed the potential visual impact of the development on users of the towpath.

Canal & River Trust

Fradley Junction, Alrewas, Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire DE13 7DN

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We note that the Environmental Enhancement Strategy and the Site Layout and Landscape Strategy drawing indicate that existing and new hedgerows around the site boundaries will be maintained at about 3m in height, which should help to reduce the visibility of the solar panels from the canal in closer views. However, given the size of the site, it appears likely that the development will still be visible in longer views from the canal, and it is therefore important to consider how and where additional tree and hedgerow planting around the site boundaries could assist in reducing or breaking up the likely visual impact of the development. We ask that submission of a detailed landscape planting scheme is secured via a planning condition and further ask that this scheme is informed by an updated Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment which considers the likely visual impact on users of the canal.

The Environmental Enhancement Strategy sets out various proposals including provision of a canalside community orchard, which offers an opportunity to enhance the biodiversity value of the canal corridor as a wildlife habitat and support its status as a County Wildlife Site. Planting in this location will also help to ensure that closer views of the site from the canal in the vicinity of Muston Gorse Bridge would be much more limited and we suggest that the detailed design and layout of this area should explicitly aim to screen views of the solar panels as well complement the canal CWS. We ask that submission of a detailed landscaping scheme for this area is secured via a planning condition.

The Strategy also advocates establishing a new permissive footpath to provide a wildlife walk which can link with other existing paths in the vicinity. We suggest that directional signage and interpretation boards should be provided which include reference to the adjacent Grantham Canal and give directions to and information about the canal and towpath. Again, provision of this could be secured via planning conditions. Any new or altered access onto the towpath would require the prior consent of the Trust as landowner, and the applicant/developer should contact the Trust's Estates Team if they wish to discuss any such proposals.

Should planning permission be granted we request that the following **informative** is appended to the decision notice:

Any access to or works affecting the adjacent Grantham Canal and towpath (including the creation or alteration of accesses onto the towpath) will require the prior consent of the Canal & River Trust. The applicant/developer should contact the Trust's Estates Team direct to discuss any such proposals. Please contact Steve Robinson, Estates Surveyor, at steve.robinson@canalrivertrust.org.uk or on 07710 175114 for further advice in the first instance.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any queries you may have.

Yours sincerely,

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Area Planner

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<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/specialist-teams/planning-and-design>

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