LDĀDESIGN

Belvoir Solar Farm

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2430/W/24/3340258
LPA Ref: 22/00537/FUL

Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence
August 2024

By LDA Design on behalf of JBM Solar Projects 10 Ltd

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Comment Final

This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2015.

1.0 Qualifications, Experience and Professional Expertise

1.1. Professional Qualifications

1.1.1. My name is Alister Kratt. I am a Fellow of the Landscape Institute and have been in professional practice for approximately 30 years. I am an advisor to the Design Council and Design Commission for Wales and am appointed to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) as design advisor, sitting on the 'Design Group'.

1.1.2. I am a Director of LDA Design and former owner. I sit on the Board of LDA and lead the Infrastructure and Energy sector of our business. As a consultancy we have provided advice on major solar projects since approximately 2010. My team is currently leading on approximately 1 GW of solar power projects in the UK planning system.

1.1.3. I have been an advisor on major renewable energy projects including solar on and offshore wind, nuclear and tidal development. I have been involved in development promotion throughout my career and given evidence at a number of inquiries on Green Belt, protected landscapes, LVIA and design matters.

1.1.4. I was peer reviewer for the NIC's Design Principles and am supporting the NIC on NSIP and NPS policy reform and leading a team on the forward strategy for the National Infrastructure Assessment 2. I was lead author for NICs recently published Detailed Design Principles guidance; lead author for IEMAs guidance on the interaction between design and EIA processes (Delivering Quality Design); and guest editor on the design outcomes publication by IEMA and supported the Landscape Institute in the preparation of its guidance to practitioners on infrastructure design. I am an active member of NIPA (National Infrastructure Planning Association) and led NIPA's response to government consultation on

BNG and spoke at their annual conference on the topic of 'Future Positive' exploring progressing an outcomes-based approach to EIA.

1.1.5. The evidence in this proof of evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal, are consistent with my professional obligations and are my true and professional opinions, irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

2.0 Background to the Appeal

2.1. Application

2.1.1. The application seeks full planning permission for the construction of a solar farm together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure for a temporary period of 40 years ('the Proposed Development'). The application was submitted by JBM Solar Projects 10 Ltd.

2.1.2. The Appeal Site extends to approximately 99.95 hectares and comprises agricultural land. The Appeal Site is located to the immediate south of the A52 which is a strategic trunk road linking the A1 to the A46. Castle View Road partially follows the western Appeal Site boundary. To the south and south-east of the Appeal Site is the disused Grantham Canal. To the east of the Appeal Site is Easthorpe Lane and Woolsthorpe Lane.

2.1.3. The Appeal Site falls entirely within the Melton Borough Council (MBC) administrative area.

2.1.4. The location of the Appeal Site is illustrated on **Figure 1** below.

LEGEND

Site Boundary

Study Area (5km)

Figure 1: Appeal Site Location (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

2.2. Design and Landscape Strategy

2.2.1. The Proposed Development was a result of an iterative and evolutionary design process which is summarised in the Design and Access Statement (ref CD 1.25). This included the production of a Landscape Strategy ('Site Layout and Landscape Strategy / drawing no. P19-2022_10 Rev Q' - ref CD 1.12), which proposed a comprehensive range of landscape mitigation and enhancement measures.

2.2.2. The key mitigation measures embedded into the scheme design include:

- Minimal changes to the existing levels.
- Minimal loss of existing trees or hedgerows.
- Arrangement of solar arrays to fit within existing landscape structure.
- New tree and hedgerow planting across the Appeal Site.
- Mosaic of grassland planting across the Appeal Site.
- Retained existing PRoW within suitable landscape corridors.
- Arrangement of solar arrays to ensure they only adjoin the existing PRoW on one side of the route.
- Creation of a new permissive route.
- Creation of new publicly accessible open space.
- Provision of new signage and interpretation.

2.2.3. Further details of the scheme design are provided in **Section 7.0** of this PoE.

2.2.4. Following the determination of the planning application by MBC and at the time of lodging the Appeal, the Appellant submitted an Amended Landscape Strategy ('Amended Scheme Site Layout and Landscape Strategy / drawing number P19-2022_24 Rev C' – ref CD 2.2), which included a number of minor changes to the scheme design to provide additional landscape mitigation and enhancement

measures. An 'Amended Scheme Clarification Note' (ref CD 2.5) was also submitted to MBC to identify the type and location of the changes proposed.

2.2.5. In preparation and support of the Appeal, a 'Design Evolution Report' (ref CD 10.13) is submitted in support of the Appeal to clearly summarise and document the interactive design process from project inception to Appeal.

2.2.6. As referred to in the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) (ref CD 9.5) MBC does not object to the Appeal being determined on the basis of the amended scheme.

2.3. LDA Design's Involvement

2.3.1. LDA Design was appointed as landscape expert witness for the project in June 2024 in preparation for the Appeal. The incumbent landscape architects - Pegasus - were unable to continue working on the project due to lack of availability to attend the Public Inquiry.

2.3.2. I have fully reviewed all of Pegasus work to date, namely:

Application Documents and Plans

- Site Layout and Landscape Strategy (ref CD 1.12)
- Design and Access Statement (ref CD 1.25)
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (ref CD 1.31.2) and supporting figures – including photomontages - and appendices (ref CD 1.32-1.33)
- Supplementary Environmental Information Note - November 2022 / Appendix 1: Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (ref CD 1.38.1)
- Rebuttals of the Independent Landscape Review in February and March 2023 (ref CD 1.43 - 1.44)

Additional Documents Submitted Post Decision

- Amended Site Layout and Landscape Strategy (ref CD 2.2)
- Indicative Landscape Sections (ref CD 2.3)
- Additional photomontages (ref CD 2.4)
- Amended Scheme Clarification Note (ref CD 2.5)

2.3.3. Following a detailed review of the above documents, I can confirm that I support the findings and recommendations of the Pegasus work. I agree with the overarching conclusion that while there will be some inevitably adverse landscape and visual effects these effects are not considered to be significant and that the Proposed Development can be successfully accommodated within the landscape. There are some minor differences between myself and Pegasus regarding specific sensitivity and magnitude judgements, but no differences in the overall 'level' of effects. My assessment of effects is set out in **Sections 8.0 and 9.0** of this PoE, and my Summary LVIA is presented in **Appendix 3.0**.

2.3.4. As such, two independent and highly experienced Landscape Planning consultants have come to the same judgments regarding likely landscape and visual effects. These conclusions are further collaborated and endorsed by the recommendations of the Case Officer, as set out in the Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1). He concluded 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" (Para 8.3.15);

"…. although there would inevitably be some detrimental impacts, particularly visual, associated with a development of this scale, it is considered that these can be suitably mitigated through an appropriate landscaping scheme" (Para 8.3.98); and

"….. it is considered that the application site, by virtue of the lack of any landscape designations and with no loss of any particular landscape features or elements, would be acceptable for the development of a solar farm and would not result in significant adverse effects upon the rural landscape" (Para 8.4.15)

2.3.5. Further details of the findings of the Planning Committee Report are provided in **Section 3.0** of this PoE.

3.0 Decision Notice and Committee Report

3.1. Decision Notice

3.1.1. The Decision Notice issued by MBC (ref CD 3.3) refused planning permission on four grounds: the first Reason for Refusal (RfR) was on loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land; the second on landscape and visual effects, particularly the cumulative effects of the Proposed Development with other permitted and operational schemes; the third on the amenity of the public utilising rights of way which run through and adjacent to the Appeal Site; and the forth on the unacceptable effect on the setting of the heritage assets in the vicinity of the proposal.

3.1.2. This PoE is concerned with the second and third RfR, which are presented in full below:

1) *This proposal when considered cumulatively with other permitted and operational schemes within 30 square kilometres (49.9MW land east of Jericho Covert; 12.4MW Lodge Farm, Longhedge Lane; 49.9MW Land South of the A1 Foston Bypass; 10MW Land South of The Railway Line & East of Station Road, Elton) would result in an unacceptable cumulative impact on the landscape where swathes of panels would be visible within a vista which could not be adequately mitigated. There would be a disproportionate effect of several sites within a small area, with solar panels covering approximately 10% of the identified area. The proposal is therefore considered to have an unacceptable adverse impact on the Vale of Belvoir's sense of place and local distinctiveness, contrary to policies SS1, EN1 and D1 of the Melton Local Plan, paragraph 174 of the NPPF and Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan Policy 9.*

2) *In the opinion of the local planning authority, the amenity of the public utilising the many rights of way which run through and adjacent to the site would be harmed by the substantial impact and effect of a large-scale solar installation. The ability of residents and visitors to the area using the footpaths to appreciate and enjoy the landscape character would be diminished and adversely impacted by the proposed*

development creating corridor effects limiting appreciation of the wider landscape, which also impacts upon key views as defined within the Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan. The quality of the natural environment is highly valued by residents and visitors to the area, particularly for the long views and openness. The proposal is therefore contrary to Melton Local Plan Policy EN1, Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan Policy 2 (parts 1 & 5) and Policy 9 (4. (a)).

3.2. Planning Committee Report

3.2.1. The Case Officer's Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1) recommended that the Proposed Development should be granted approval subject to conditions.

3.2.2. Within the Planning Committee Report I note the following observations that are of most relevance to landscape and visual matters:

Case Officers Summary of Consultee Comments / Objections

- No objections were received from Natural England - the Governments adviser for the natural environment in England, including landscape and ecology resources.
- No consultation responses / objections are recorded from MBC or Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) specifically in relation to landscape and visual matters.
- No objections were received from LCC on interrelated ecology and arboricultural issues.
- Objections were received from the Bottesford Parish Council due to - in part - impact on landscape character and views.
- Objections were received from the Notts Area Ramblers and Vale of Belvoir Group Ramblers due to the loss of visual amenity to local residents and ramblers.

Case Officers Landscape and Visual Commentary

- The Case Officer concludes that the Proposed Development could be successfully accommodated within the existing landscape pattern (Para 8.3.15)

- Although there would inevitably be some adverse landscape and visual effects, these can be suitably mitigated through an appropriate landscaping scheme (Para 8.3.98)
- There would be no significant effects upon residential amenity from any part of the Proposed Development due to distance from the any residential properties and landscape proposals (Para 8.4.6)
- The short-term construction phase of the Proposed Development would also not result in adverse effects upon residential amenity due to the routing of the construction traffic (Para 8.4.7)
- The most prominent features of the Proposed Development would be the masts and additional pylons associated with the grid connection; however, this type of structure would not be out of context given the presence of existing pylons (Para 8.4.9)
- The Appeal Site is not covered by any landscape designations (Para 8.4.15)
- The Proposed Development would not result in the loss of any particular landscape features or elements (Para 8.4.15)
- The Proposed Development is temporary in nature, with the land able to be fully reinstated to its original condition (Para 8.10.18)
- The effects of the Proposed Development on landscape character and views are outweighed by the benefits of the scheme (Para 10.4)
- No criticism or alternative judgements to that of the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) are referred to in the Planning Committee Report.

Case Officers summary of Independent Assessment

3.2.3. The Case Officer's Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1) does acknowledge that the submitted LVIA has been independently and externally assessed by landscape consultant CEC Environmental and that this resulted in further information being submitted by the Applicant. The issues primarily concerned the issues of the height of hedges; views from the PRoW network; and cumulative effects. Each of

these key issues - as presented in the Planning Committee Report - are summarised below:

Height of Hedges

3.2.4. The landscape currently is characterised by generally well-defined hedgerows that vary in height. It is proposed that existing and proposed hedgerow planting will be managed at a height of up to around 3m, and cut to around 2m every 2 - 3 years (in accordance with good practice for hedgerow maintenance)

3.2.5. The concern raised by the independent landscape consultant is that the hedges may exceed 3 m in between maintenance visits and may in turn look out of place within the landscape. Equally, if the hedgerows are to be cut to 2m periodically this will reduce the effectiveness of mitigation.

3.2.6. The Case Officer concludes that there is significant variety in the landscape in terms of height of hedgerows, trees and woodland; the proposed maintenance regime would maintain an appropriate height for the hedgerows; and 2m hedgerow would still provide effective screening and would minimise landscape and visual effects.

3.2.7. I agree with the conclusions of the Case Officer and consider the appropriateness of the landscape strategy in more detail in **Section 7.0** of this PoE.

PRoW Network

3.2.8. The Appeal Site is in close proximity to a number of PRoW, some of which fall just inside the Appeal Site boundary. It is proposed that all existing routes are retained; PRoW would be set within landscape buffers / green lanes; would be partially screening by existing and proposed hedgerows; and the layout is such that no PRoW is fully enclosed by the Proposed Development, with the solar arrays and

other related infrastructure only ever directly adjoining one side of a PRoW. Further details of the design and nature of these green lanes in provided in **Section 7.0** of this PoE.

3.2.9. The concern raised by the independent landscape consultant was the potential for users of certain footpaths to view the Proposed Development at close range and without any intervening hedgerows to provide screening.

3.2.10. The Case Officer concludes that while there will be some adverse visual effects on users of the PRoW; users of the PRoW would still benefit from views of a predominately open, agricultural landscape; and there would benefits to users of the PRoW arising from ecological enhancements; a new permissive route, new open spaces; and new interpretation / information boards.

3.2.11. I agree with the conclusions of the Case Officer and consider the likely visual effects in more detail in **Section 9.0** of this PoE.

Cumulative Impacts

3.2.12. The original LVIA assessed the Proposed Development in combination with four consented and/or operational solar farms with around 5km of the Appeal Site. It was concluded that due to the distance and extent of intervening features that there would be no cumulative effects.

3.2.13. The concern raised by the independent landscape consultant was regarding the number of developments within the area and whether cumulatively the landscape had the 'capacity' for additional solar development.

3.2.14. The Case Officer concludes that the existing green infrastructure network, combined with intervening topography and built form, reduces views (of the

Proposed Development) significantly across the landscape and therefore would have a negligible cumulative effect (in combination with other solar developments)

3.2.15. I agree with the conclusions of the Case Officer and consider the likely cumulative landscape effects in more detail in Section 8.0 of this PoE, including issues around landscape capacity.

Neighbourhood Plan Important Views

3.2.16. The Case Officer's Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1) also considers the effect on 'important views' identified within the Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan (which I take to mean 'key views' as per the Policy 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan).

3.2.17. Policy 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan states that development proposals should respect these important views and development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the designations will not be supported. View 6 is situated on Easthorpe Lane, Muston looking north westwards across the northern part of the Appeal Site towards Bottesford; and View 5 is situated on the southern edge of Bottesford looking southwards towards the Belvoir Ridge and Belvoir Castle.

3.2.18. The Case Officer concludes that in relation to both these important views, while the Proposed Development will be visible, existing and proposed planting and/or variations in topography would provide a degree of screening and overall, the effect is deemed to be acceptable.

3.2.19. I agree with the conclusions of the Case Officer and consider the likely visual effects in more detail in **Section 9.0** of this PoE.

3.3. Summary and Conclusion

3.3.1. It can be concluded that while the Proposed Development will give rise to some adverse landscape and visual effects, the Case Officer was satisfied that the Proposed Development could be successfully accommodated within the existing landscape; these effects can be suitably mitigated through an appropriate landscaping scheme; and that overall, the various benefits of the Proposed Development outweighed any harm.

3.3.2. While the independent landscape review and assessment did identify some potential concerns, the Case Officer was satisfied that these had be suitably addressed and did not constitute reasons for refusal.

4.0 Background to the Appeal and Structure of Evidence

4.1. Statement of Common Ground

4.1.1. A SoCG (ref CD 9.5) has been entered into between the Appellant and MBC. The key matters not in dispute - in respect of landscape and visual matters - are as follows:

- The scope and methodology of LVIA is in accordance with Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition) (GLVIA3) (ref CD 8.1)
- The Appeal Site is not subject to any landscape designations such as National Parks or National Landscape.
- The Appeal Site is not within the Green Belt.
- The Appeal site is not within a 'valued landscape under paragraph 180(a) of the NPPF.
- The Proposed Development would not result in unacceptable adverse impacts on residential amenity.
- There are no significant trees or hedgerows to be removed to facilitate the Proposed Development.
- The loss of hedgerow can be mitigated by the enhancement of existing / planting of new hedgerows.
- The retained trees and hedgerows can be adequately protected during construction activities to sustain their health and longevity.
- A range of biodiversity and landscape measures are proposed.

4.1.2. Although not specifically referenced in the SoCG, it is agreed that there will be some adverse effects on landscape character and views as a result of the Proposed Development. This is largely an inevitable consequence of development within greenfield sites as a result of changes to land-use, and such effects need to be weighed carefully in the planning balance.

4.1.3. During the preparation of the SoCG queries were raised with MBC on whether they were presenting a case on 'valued landscapes' or 'residential visual amenity'. This issue has since been resolved and MBC have subsequently confirmed that these matters are not in dispute.

4.1.4. For clarity and completeness, I am not aware of any pre-application, post-application or Appeal discussions or documentation with MBC that identifies 'valued landscapes' or 'residential visual amenity' as key issues or concerns.

4.1.5. I do not consider the Proposed Development to fall within a 'valued landscape' under paragraph 180a of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); and the Proposed Development would not give rise to any significant effects on views from residential properties or be of such a scale to meet the thresholds for Residential Visual Amenity Assessment. This position accords with the findings of the Case Officer in the Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1).

4.1.6. Further details regarding landscape value are presented in **Section 8.0** of this PoE; and further details regarding residential visual amenity are presented in **Section 9.0** of this PoE.

4.1.7. The key matters in dispute - in respect of landscape and visual matters - are as follows:

- Whether the Proposed Development would have an unacceptable impact on the landscape character and quality of the area when considered in combination with other developments in the locality.
- Whether the Proposed Development would have an unacceptable visual impact, particularly on the views and visual amenity of the public living in and visiting the area, utilising the public rights of way, lanes and roads.

4.1.8. My PoE seeks to address these specific matters in dispute.

4.2. Scope of Evidence

Design Evolution

4.2.1. As part of my evidence, I have worked closely with JBM Solar Projects 10 Ltd and the project Planners / Heritage Consultant (Pegasus) to fully document the iterative design process undertaken and demonstrate how the design and layout of the Proposed Development has been informed by landscape, visual and heritage context; consultation and engagement with MBC; and the broader opportunities and constraints presented by the Appeal Site. The design evolution and proposed landscape strategy is an important consideration in reaching my judgements around landscape and visual impacts.

4.2.2. The iterative design process is documented in a 'Design Evolution Report' (ref CD10.13) and summarised within **Section 7.0** of this PoE.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

4.2.3. As part of my evidence, I have prepared my own Summary LVIA in accordance with LDA Design's standard, in-house methodology. I note that there is no prescribed methodology for LVIA, with GLVIA3 stating it is the responsibility of the professional to ensure that an appropriate approach is adopted.

4.2.4. This has been used to verify the findings of the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) and identify any differences in judgements, and the LVIA Summary includes Pegasus judgements – alongside my own – for each of the relevant landscape and visual receptors.

4.2.5. I note that the original LVIA considers effects on site fabric and makes judgements regarding sensitivity, magnitude and significance of effects on the individual components of site fabric i.e. topography, land uses / ground cover; and tree and

hedgerows. The LDA Design methodology considers the effects on fabric as part of the overall assessment of landscape character, and any changes to site fabric has informed my judgements in relation to 'site-scale' landscape effects. However, I do agree with the following LVIA conclusions with regard to site fabric –

- Only minor changes to site topography would be required, mainly associated access tracks, foundations, hard standings, earth bunds and fencing etc. and overall, the topography of the Appeal Site will remain largely unchanged.
- While the land-use of the Appeal Site will change as a result of the Proposed Development, new grassland and less intensive management would provide some positive change to land-use.
- The Proposed Development will result in no significant loss of vegetation and new planting will maintain and enhance the hedgerow structure within the landscape.

4.2.6. Overall, the assessment findings are very similar to that of Pegasus, and any minor differences are a result of slight variations in sensitivity / magnitude judgements and/or the application of an alternative methodology, as opposed to fundamental differences in professional judgment.

4.2.7. My Summary LVIA is provided in **Appendix 3** of this PoE and summarised in **Sections 8.0 and 9.0** of this PoE; and the methodology for the preparing the LVIA is provided in **Appendix 4** of this PoE.

Valued Landscape

4.2.8. As part of my evidence, I have considered whether the landscape (within the LVIA study area) and should be defined as a 'valued landscape' under paragraph 180a of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and with reference to Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations' (ref CD 8.3)

4.2.9. My conclusions are that the landscape does not represent a 'valued landscape'. As set out in Section 4.1 'valued landscapes' have not been raised by MBC as an issue; and MBC have confirmed they are not preparing evidence on this matter.

4.2.10. Commentary on 'valued landscapes' is provided in **Section 8.0** of this PoE.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility Study

4.2.11. In support of my own LVIA and this PoE, I have prepared a new 'Zone of Theoretical Visibility' (ZTV) Study of the Proposed Development, based on more refined landform and obstruction data. While the Pegasus ZTV was prepared on sufficiently robust Digital Terrain Model and OS Terrain data (with indicative woodland and building heights added), the LDA ZTV is prepared on LiDAR Digital Surface Model, which includes more accurate woodland and building heights.

4.2.12. This demonstrates that the ZTV is less than that illustrated by the ZTV presented in the original LIVA (Figure 2.1, ref CD 1.31.2) and reinforces judgements made around the likely visual influence of the Proposed Development.

4.2.13. My ZTV is provided as part of the suite of figures presented at **Appendix 1** of this PoE; the extents of the ZTV are summarised in Section 6.0 of this PoE; the ZTV study is used to inform my judgements on landscape and visual effects presented in **Sections 8.0 and 9.0** of this PoE; and the methodology for the preparing the ZTV is provided in **Appendix 6** of this PoE.

Photomontages

4.2.14. In support of my own LVIA and this PoE I have undertaken a 'health check' of the Pegasus photomontages and can confirm these accurately represent the scheme within the landscape / view.

4.2.15. Two additional parameter-based photomontages have also been prepared to demonstrate the relationship between the Proposed Development and other existing and proposed solar developments within the wider landscape. The photomontages are presented in **Appendix 2** of this PoE; I refer to the photomontages when making my judgements on landscape and visual effects, as presented in **Sections 8.0 and 9.0** of this PoE; and the methodology for preparing the photomontages is provided in **Appendix 5** of this PoE.

4.2.16. The visualisations have been prepared in accordance with the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19 'Visual Representation of Development Proposals' (ref CD 8.2)

Appeal Site Visit

4.2.17. In preparing this PoE - and as part of the LVIA process - I have visited the Appeal Site in June 2024.

4.2.18. I will visit the Appeal Site again in advance of the Public Inquiry.

4.3. Structure of Evidence

4.3.1. I have structured my written evidence in the following way:

- **Section 5.0** provides a brief outline of the main planning policy matters of relevance in respect of landscape and visual matters.
- **Section 6.0** provides a description of the Appeal Site and its landscape context to assist the understanding of the main landscape and visual characteristics.
- **Section 7.0** provides a summary of how landscape and visual considerations have shaped the layout / design of the Proposed Development and provides a description of the Amended Landscape Strategy ('Amended Scheme Site Layout and Landscape Strategy / drawing number P19-2022_24 Rev C' – ref CD 2.2)

- **Section 8.0** provides a commentary of the main landscape effects of the Proposed Development with reference to both the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) and my own assessment, including potential cumulative impacts
- **Section 9.0** provides a commentary of the main visual effects of the Proposed Development with reference to both the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) and my own assessment, including effects to Public Rights of Way (PRoW)
- **Section 10.0** provides a summary and my conclusions.

4.3.2. Figures are inserted into the main body of the PoE for ease of reference, and the full suite of figures is provided at **Appendix 1**. The figures comprise:

- **Figure 1:** Appeal Site Location
- **Figure 2:** Key Environmental Designations
- **Figure 3:** Topography, Woodland and Hydrology
- **Figure 4a:** Key Routes and PRoW
- **Figure 4b:** PRoW within Appeal Site and Immediate Context
- **Figure 4c:** PRoW within 10km Study Area
- **Figure 5:** National Character Area
- **Figure 6:** Local Landscape Character Areas
- **Figure 7:** Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Study
- **Figure 8:** Landscape Strategy - Trees and Hedgerows
- **Figure 9:** Landscape Strategy - Grasslands
- **Figure 10:** Landscape Strategy - Routes and Spaces
- **Figure 11:** Illustrative Cross Sections
- **Figure 12:** Viewpoint Locations of Visualisations
- **Figure 13:** Cumulative Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Study
- **Figure 14:** Approximate Locations of Solar Development within 30km Study Area
- **Figure 15:** Cumulative Solar Developments, PRoW and Connecting Routes

4.3.3. The following Appendices form part of the PoE and should be read in conjunction with the main report. The appendices comprise:

- **Appendix 1:** Figures (including ZTV study)
- **Appendix 2:** Visualisations
- **Appendix 3:** Summary LVIA
- **Appendix 4:** LVIA Methodology
- **Appendix 5:** ZTV & Photomontage Methodology

5.0 Planning Policy

5.1.1. Planning matters and planning policy compliance are addressed in detail in the Planning PoE, and I provide only a brief summary relevant to my area of expertise which is not intended to be exhaustive.

5.1.2. Planning policy designations of relevance to landscape and visual context are illustrated in **Figure 2** below, however – as set out in **Section 4.0** – the Appeal Site is not subject to any landscape designations such as National Parks or National Landscape and is not within the Green Belt.

5.1.3. Belvoir Castle Registered Park and Garden is located to the south of the Appeal Site, and potential effects on this asset are dealt with as part of the Heritage PoE. Muston Meadow s National Nature Reserve NNR) / Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located to the south-east of the Appeal Site, however, no significant impacts are anticipated on ecology receptors and ecology issues do not form part of the RfR.

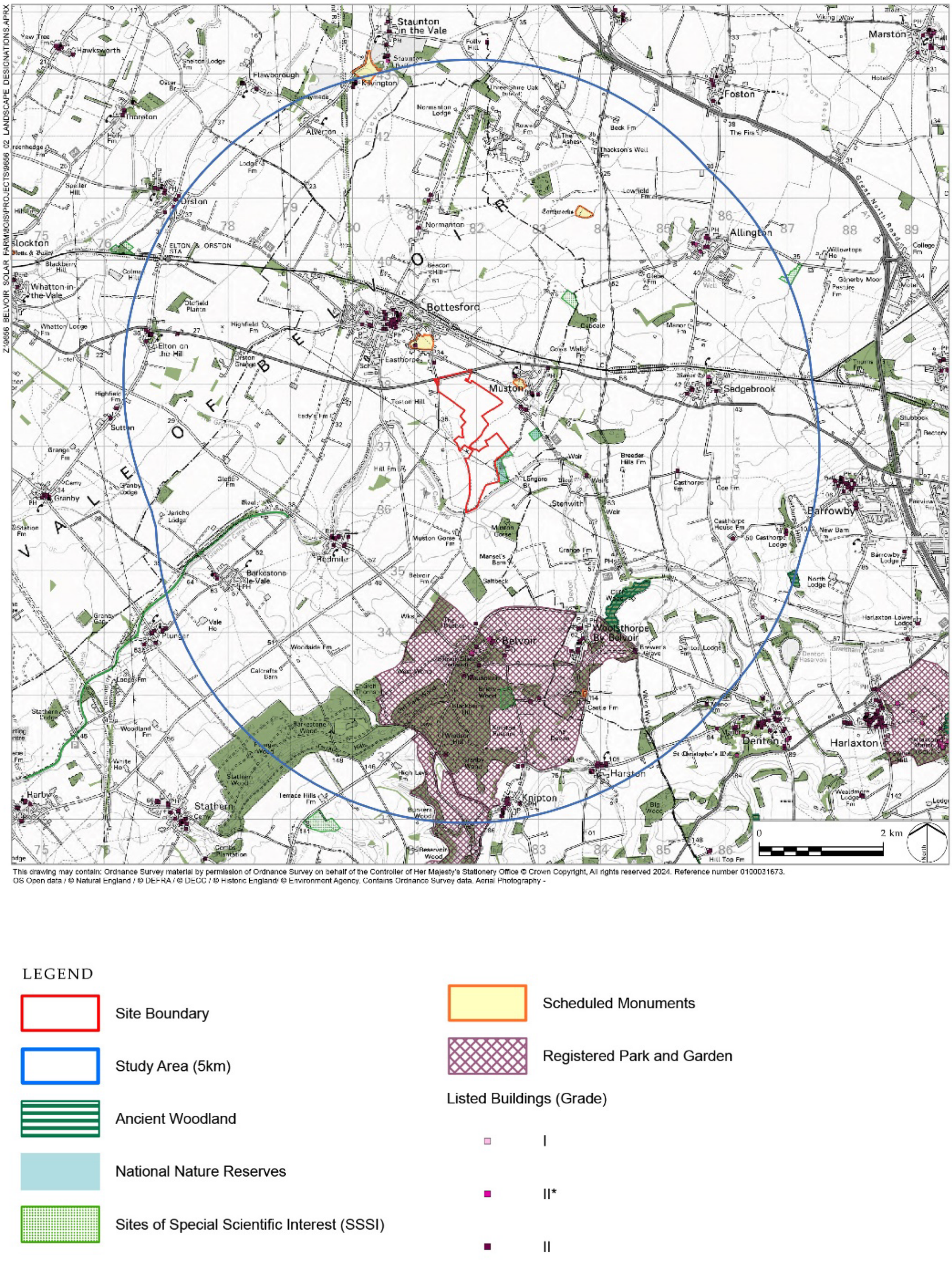


Figure 2: Key Environmental Designations (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

5.2. National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

5.2.1. The NPPF (2023) (ref CD 4.1) makes clear that the purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development (Section 2), and that design (Section 12) and the natural environment (Section 15) are important components of this.

5.2.2. In relation to good design (which I consider in **Section 7.0** of this PoE), paragraph 135 of NPPF states [inter alia]:

"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)"

5.2.3. Paragraph 137 of the NPPF relates to design evolution and assessment of individual proposals and notes:

"Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals…."

5.2.4. Paragraph 163 of the NPPF relates directly to renewable energy and low carbon developments noting at subsection b) that local planning authorities *"should approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable."*

5.2.5. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment is considered in Section 15 of the NPPF. In particular paragraph 180 states:

"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by [inter alia]:

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures"

5.2.6. Paragraph 181 adds:

"Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries."

5.2.7. **Comment:** I consider that the design of the Proposed Development appropriately responds to landscape character and context, and the scheme design is the product of an iterative, environmental led approach. This includes enhancing green infrastructure networks and significant gains for biodiversity. The Appeal Site and its surrounding landscape do not fall within a designated landscape and is not considered to fall within a 'valued' landscape as defined under paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (June 2015, updated August 2023)

5.2.8. This guidance provides the following guidance in relation to larger scale solar development:

"The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.

- *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 (see guidance on landscape assessment) and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;*
- *the potential to mitigate* landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;

The approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large scale solar farms is likely to be the same as assessing the impact of wind turbines. However, in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero."

5.2.9. This guidance also refers to the need to consider local context in considering renewable energy developments:

"Local planning authorities should not rule out otherwise acceptable renewable energy developments through inflexible rules on buffer zones or separation distances. Other than when dealing with set back distances for safety, distance of itself does not necessarily determine whether the impact of a proposal is unacceptable. Distance plays a part, but so does the local context including factors such as topography, the local environment and near-by land uses. This is why it is important to think about in what circumstances proposals are likely to be acceptable and plan on this basis."

5.2.10. **Comment:** I consider that the design of the Proposed Development appropriately responds to visual context and proposes new characteristic / native planting to

provide an appropriate degree of screening. The local topography is particularly important to providing containment.

5.3. Local Planning Policy

5.3.1. The Appeal Site lies within MBC and current local planning policy is set out within the Melton Local Plan 2011-2036 (adopted October 2018); and the Bottesford Neighbourhood Plan (made October 2021).

The Melton Local Plan 2011 – 2036

Policy EN1 – Landscape

5.3.2. Policy EN1 provides the framework to conserve and enhance the character of Melton Boroughs Landscape and Countryside. It states that this will be achieved by ensuring new development is sensitive to landscape setting and where possible, enhances the distinctive qualities of the landscape character areas. EN1 advises that new development needs to respect existing landscape character and features, development that does not have an unacceptable adverse effect upon important landscape features will be supported. Furthermore, EN1 states that it is important that new development does not result in an unacceptable effect towards an areas sense of place and local distinctiveness.

Policy EN3 - The Melton Green Infrastructure Network

5.3.3. Policy EN3 sets out the strategic approach to the delivery, protection and enhancement of green infrastructure that the Borough Council will take to working with partners, in order to deliver new assets where deficits have been identified in the green infrastructure strategy and to enhance the identified primary green infrastructure areas. EN3 advises that new development proposals will be supported where they retain and enhance important green infrastructure elements.

Policy EN6 - Settlement Character

5.3.4. Policy EN6 provides the criteria by which development proposals will be supported where they do not harm open areas. EN6 also sets out that development proposals will be supported where they do not harm individual features of a settlement which contribute towards settlement character. This included non-designated heritage assets.

Policy EN10 - Energy Generation from Renewable and Low Carbon Sources

5.3.5. Policy EN10 deals with renewable and low carbon energy, highlighting those 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.

5.3.6. **Comment:** I consider that the design of the Proposed Development sensitively responds to landscape setting / settlement character and does not have an unacceptable effect upon landscape features. The Proposed Development retains / enhances green infrastructure elements and will make an important contribution to renewable energy generation.

Bottesford Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2020 – 2036

Neighbourhood Planning Policy 1: Sustainable Development and the Village Envelopes

5.3.7. Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Policy 1 sets out that for development to be supported, it must make a positive contribution towards the achievement of sustainable development, highlight the key matters which development proposals will need to address. NP Policy 1 adds however that development in the open countryside will

be restricted to that which is necessary and appropriate in the open countryside in accordance with MBC Policy SS2.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy 2: Protecting the Landscape Character

5.3.8. NP Policy 2 highlights the importance of Key Views, Areas of Separation and the Significant Green Gaps, and the need to respect these in order to protect the distinctive landscape character of the Parish. The Policy requires development proposals to respect important designations and take account of them in designs and layouts. Development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the designations will not be supported.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy 5: Protecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure

5.3.9. NP Policy 5 requires development proposals to protect and where applicable enhance existing green infrastructure assets, as also required by Local Plan Policy EN3.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy 9: Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Technologies

5.3.10. NP Policy 9 provides a framework for delivering or incorporating renewable energy and/or low carbon technologies within the Neighbourhood Plan area. Its states that new development should incorporate sustainable design features to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate against and adapt to climate change.

5.3.11. **Comment:** I consider that the design of the Proposed Development sensitively responds to landscape setting / settlement character. Importantly the Appeal Site is not within any Separation Zone or Significant Green Gap as identified by the Neighbourhood Plan. The Appeal Site does fall within a number of Key Views, which have been appropriately considered as part of the Landscape and Visual Assessment. The Proposed Development retains and enhances green infrastructure

elements, and will make an important contribution to renewable energy generation.

5.4. Summary and Conclusion

5.4.1. I address the design of the Proposed Development in **Section 7.0** of this PoE and potential impacts in **Sections 8.0 and 9.0** of this PoE. This evidence demonstrates that the Proposed Development has been sensitively designed in respect of its landscape, settlement and visual context; and delivers comprehensive package of mitigation measures which positively contributes to green infrastructure.

5.4.2. I believe the Proposed Development is broadly compliant with national and local planning policy in regard to landscape and visual matters.

5.4.3. In respect of effects arising from glint and glare, this is a specialist area of expertise, and a comprehensive technical assessment of glint and glare has been prepared by in support of the Appeal. This issue has been specifically raised by MBC in relation to potential effects on heritage assets, and is addressed as part of the Heritage PoE.

6.0 The Appeal Site and its Landscape & Visual Context

6.1. Introduction

6.1.1. The following section provides a summary description of the Appeal Site and its landscape and visual context, with reference to landscape character areas and viewpoints / visual receptor groups. A full description of the baseline environment is presented in the original LVIA (ref 1.31.2).

6.1.2. For the purposes of the original LVIA, a 5km study area was used to consider potential landscape and visual effects. This study area was based on professional experience and the findings of the supporting ZTV study. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the landscape within which the Appeal Site falls / surrounds the Appeal Site relates to the 5km study area.

6.1.3. Notwithstanding the reference to cumulative landscape effects within a 30km study area (as referred to RfR2) I have found no evidence to indicate that the original 5km study area was considered to be insufficient.

6.2. Land Use, Vegetation, Topography and Hydrology

6.2.1. The Site and surrounding area comprise a predominantly rural, gently undulating landscape, with dispersed villages, hamlets and farmsteads. Roads and pylons are also a feature of the landscape, with the A54 running east - west through the study area (between Nottingham and Grantham) and forming the northern Appeal Site boundary; and pylons running south-east – north-west through the central part of the Appeal Site (broadly between Newark-on-Trent and Grantham).

6.2.2. Fields are generally rectilinear and bound by well-managed hedgerows with intermittent mature hedgerow trees and some small woodland blocks, forming a strong field pattern. Managed woodland and plantations occur further to the

south, generally along the scarp of the Belvoir Castle ridgeline such as Cliff Wood. Belvoir Castle occupies the high ground of the ridgeline ('Belvoir Ridge') and is a notable feature within the surrounding landscape.

6.2.3. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment was prepared in support of the planning application (ref CD 1.30). In relation to the Appeal Site itself a total of 98 trees, 24 groups of trees and 60 hedgerows were surveyed. Of these, one tree was deemed high quality with the remaining trees, groups and hedgerows surveyed as moderate to low quality.

6.2.4. The landform of the Appeal Site is gently undulating, and ranges in level from 40m - 45m AOD. Landform rises in the north and north-east around Bottesford and Muston, with Beacon Hill at local high point at around 60m AOD. Landform also rises toward the south with Belvoir Castle occupying higher ground at c.135m AOD. The effect of the local topography is that the Appeal Site sits with a 'bowl' within the landscape, surrounded by higher ground to the north, east, south and west. The local topography - combined with the hedgerows, hedgerow trees and occasional blocks of woodland - introduce a relatively high level of enclosure at lower elevations. Elevated locations are more open, offering distant and often unrestricted views across the Vale landscape.

6.2.5. A small watercourse, known as Winterbeck, runs broadly north-south along the western boundary of the Appeal site. The disused Grantham Canal meanders through the Vale to the west and along the southern boundary of the Appeal site.

6.2.6. To the east of the Appeal Site lies the Muston Meadows NNR / SSSI, a lowland meadow habitat with tributaries to Winterbeck and the Grantham Canal.

6.2.7. Topography, woodland coverage and hydrological features are presented in **Figure 3** below.

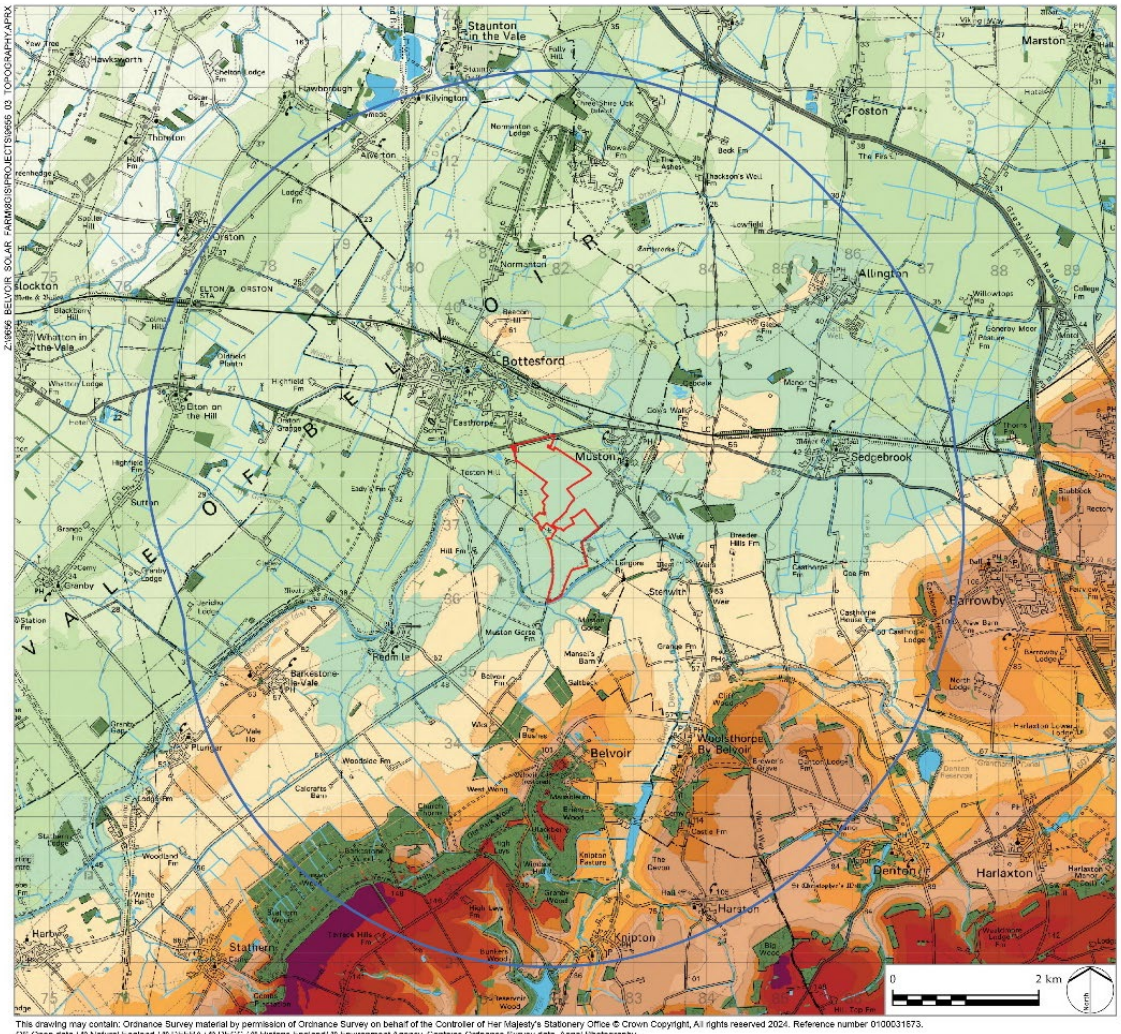


Figure 3: Topography, Woodland and Hydrology (please see Appendix 1 for main figures / full legend)

6.3. Roads and Public Rights of Way

6.3.1. The landscape is bisected by A52 which serves as a bypass route to the larger villages of Bottesford and Easthorpe, and which links the A1 to the A46 (connecting Grantham to Nottingham). This route is a dominant feature within the landscape and falls in close proximity to the northern Appeal Site boundary.

6.3.2. The majority of the roads within the wider area are local and less visually intrusive than the A52, with hedgerow and tree vegetation lining the roads. The Site itself is accessed via an existing agricultural track connecting to Woolsthorpe Lane to the east. Castle View Road is located to the west of the Site and links with Belvoir Road further to the south-west.

6.3.3. A number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) are located within close proximity to the Site and wider area. Footpath F82 runs broadly southwest - northeast between Castle View Road and Grantham Road, Muston. The length of the route is approximately 2km. Once is crosses the Winterbeck, it passes within approximately 80m of the Appeal Site to the east and west, however, remains outside of the Appeal Site. Further north, Footpath F82 runs alongside the Appeal Site - which is to the northwest - for approximately 540m.

6.3.4. Byway Open To All Traffic (BOTAT) F85B also runs broadly southwest - northeast between the Muston Gorse Bridge to Woolthorpe Lane. The length of the route is approximately 2km. Much of the route runs alongside the Appeal Site - which is to the northwest - for approximately 1.4km. Connecting from the BOTAT, Footpaths F89 and F85c cross Muston NNR / SSSI, and passes within close proximity to the Appeal Site.

6.3.5. To the northwest / west of the Appeal Site Footpath F74 extends southeast from Bottesford traversing the A52 and Castle View Road, to link to Footpath F90 and

running south to the Grantham Canal. The length of Footpath F90 is approximately 1.6km. Part of the route runs alongside the Appeal Site - which is to the east - for approximately 1km.

6.3.6. It should be noted while some sections of PRoW are within the Appeal Site boundary, no PRoW directly passes through the Appeal Site or between proposed solar arrays. The Proposed Development / solar arrays typically only ever directly adjoin a PRoW on one side of the route.

6.3.7. To the west of the Appeal Site Bridleway F85A runs broadly parallel to Footpath F90. While the distance between this route and the Appeal Site varies, it is generally separated by an intervening field parcel and associated hedgerow boundaries.

6.3.8. Beyond this immediate context, there are a number of PRoW around the villages of Bottesford to the north; Muston to the east; and Redmile to the south-west.

6.3.9. Further south PRoW are limited on the elevated land close to Belvoir Castle, and include Footpath G11 to the west linking the Castle with Redmile village, and the promoted Jubilee Way (Leicestershire). The Jubilee Way is a 20-mile route between Burrough Hill Country Park in the west to Brewer's Grave about 2.5km to the east of the Castle.

6.3.10. Overall, with the wider landscape (i.e. the 5km study area) there is approximately 126km of PRoW, of which around 3km adjoin or fall within the Appeal Site boundary.

6.3.11. Key routes and PRoW (within the 5km study area) are presented in **Figure 4a** below; and PRoW within the Appeal Site and its immediate context are presented in **Figure 4b** below.

LEGEND

Site Boundary

Study Area (5km)

Primary Road

Secondary Road

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

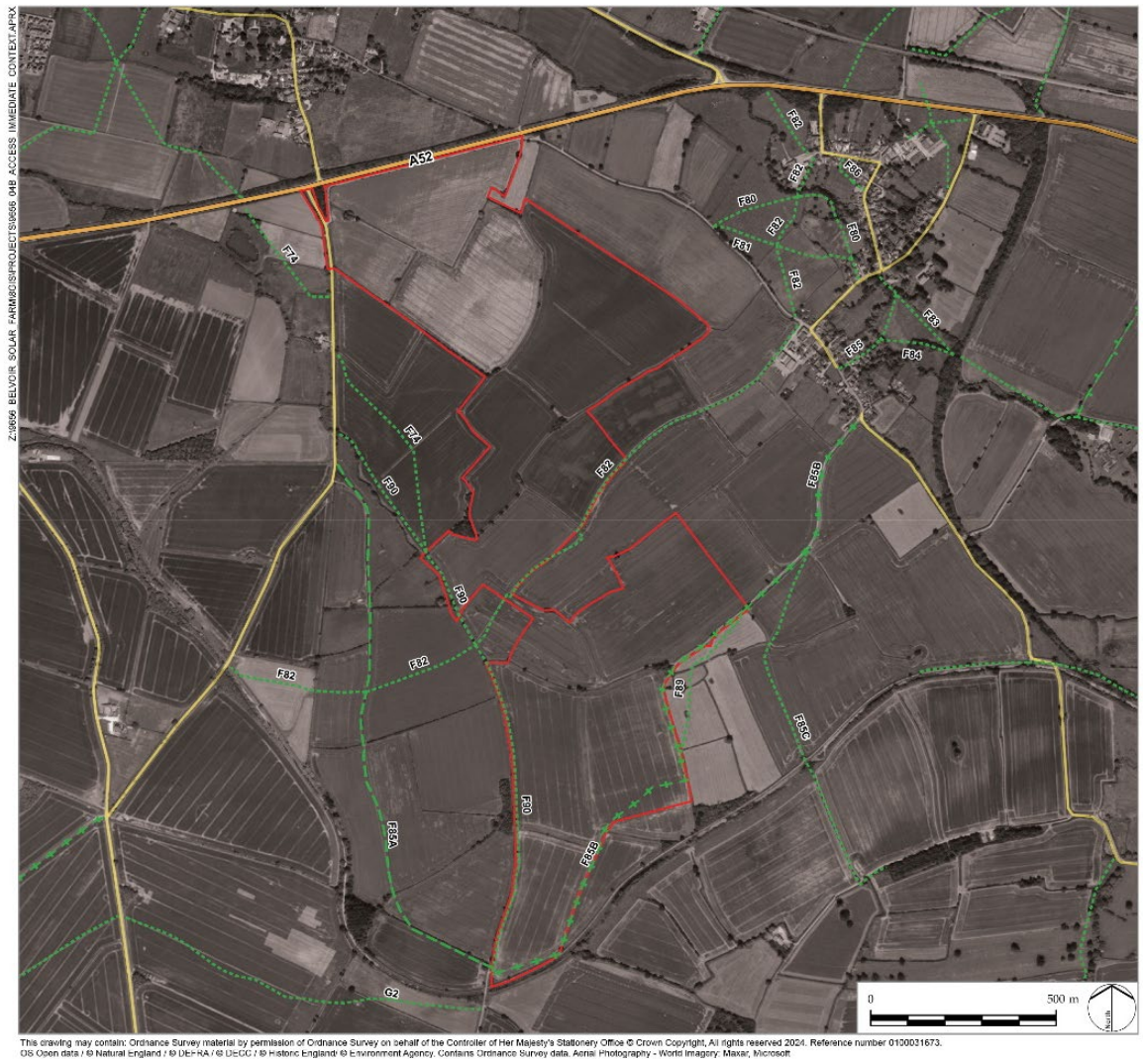
Footpath

Bridleway

Byways open to all traffic

Restricted Byway

Figure 4a: Key routes and PRoW (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)



LEGEND

Site Boundary

Primary Road

Secondary Road

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

Footpath

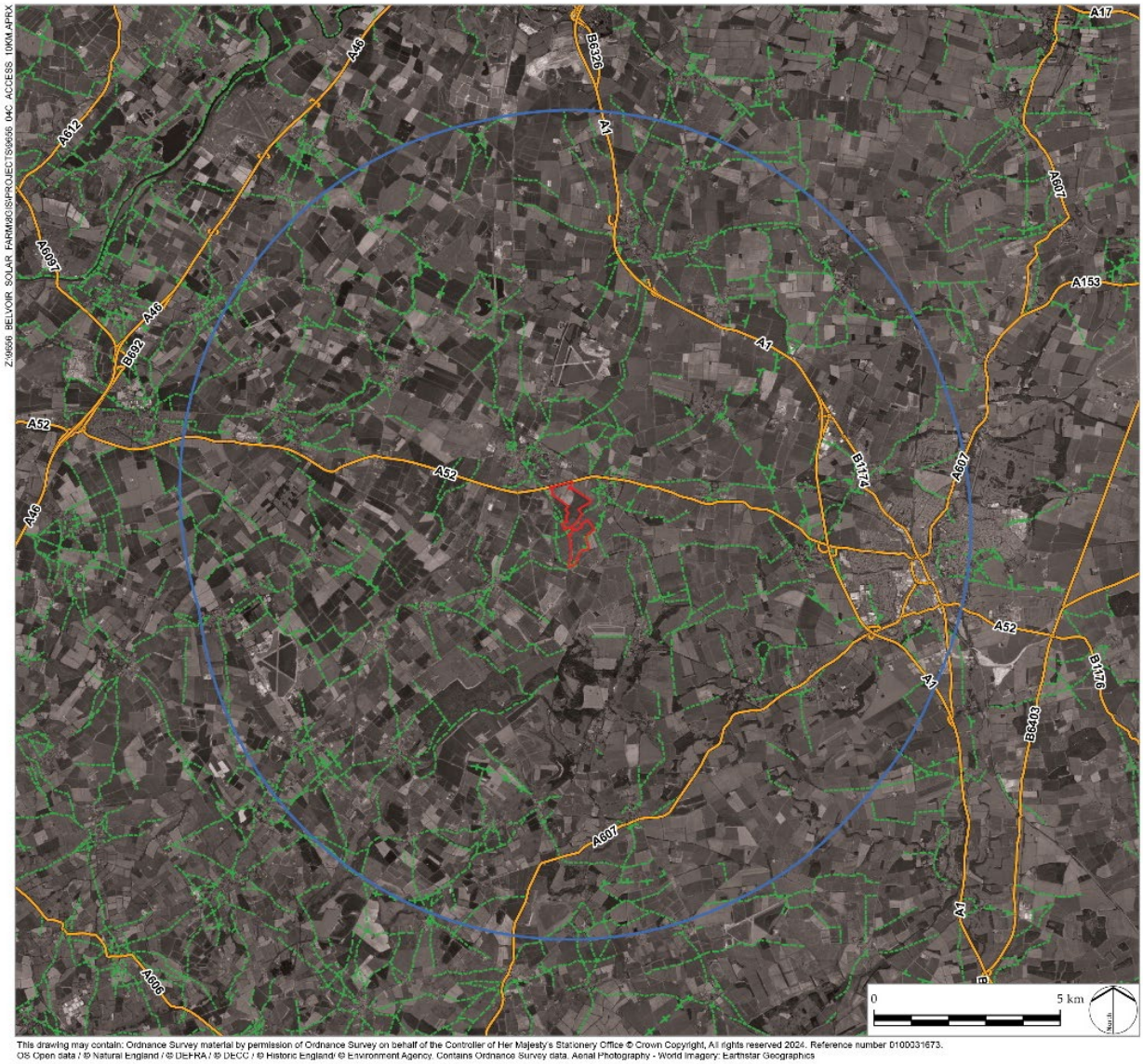
Bridleway

Byways open to all traffic

Restricted Byway

Figure 4b: PRoW within Appeal Site and Immediate Context (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

6.3.12. I have also mapped PRoW within the wider landscape (using a 10 km study area), as shown on **Figure 4c** below. There are clearly 'pockets' of the landscape with less PRoW and some areas with a greater number of routes, however, overall, there is a consistent network of PRoW across the landscape. As such I do not consider the Appeal Site and its local area to be particularly unique or represent a particularly high concentration of PRoW.



LEGEND

Site Boundary

Study Area (10km)

Primary Road

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

Footpath

Bridleway

Byway open to all traffic

Restricted Byway

Figure 4c: PRoW within 10km Study Area (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

6.4. Landscape Character

National Landscape Character

6.4.1. Natural England has identified 159 geographical areas of similar landscape character known as National Character Areas (NCAs). The site and wider area lie entirely within NCA 48 Trent and Belvoir Vales and NCA 74 Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds. Extracts of key characteristics of the Trent and Belvoir Vales NCA (ref CD 8.5), as identified by Natural England, that are relevant to the Appeal Site are:

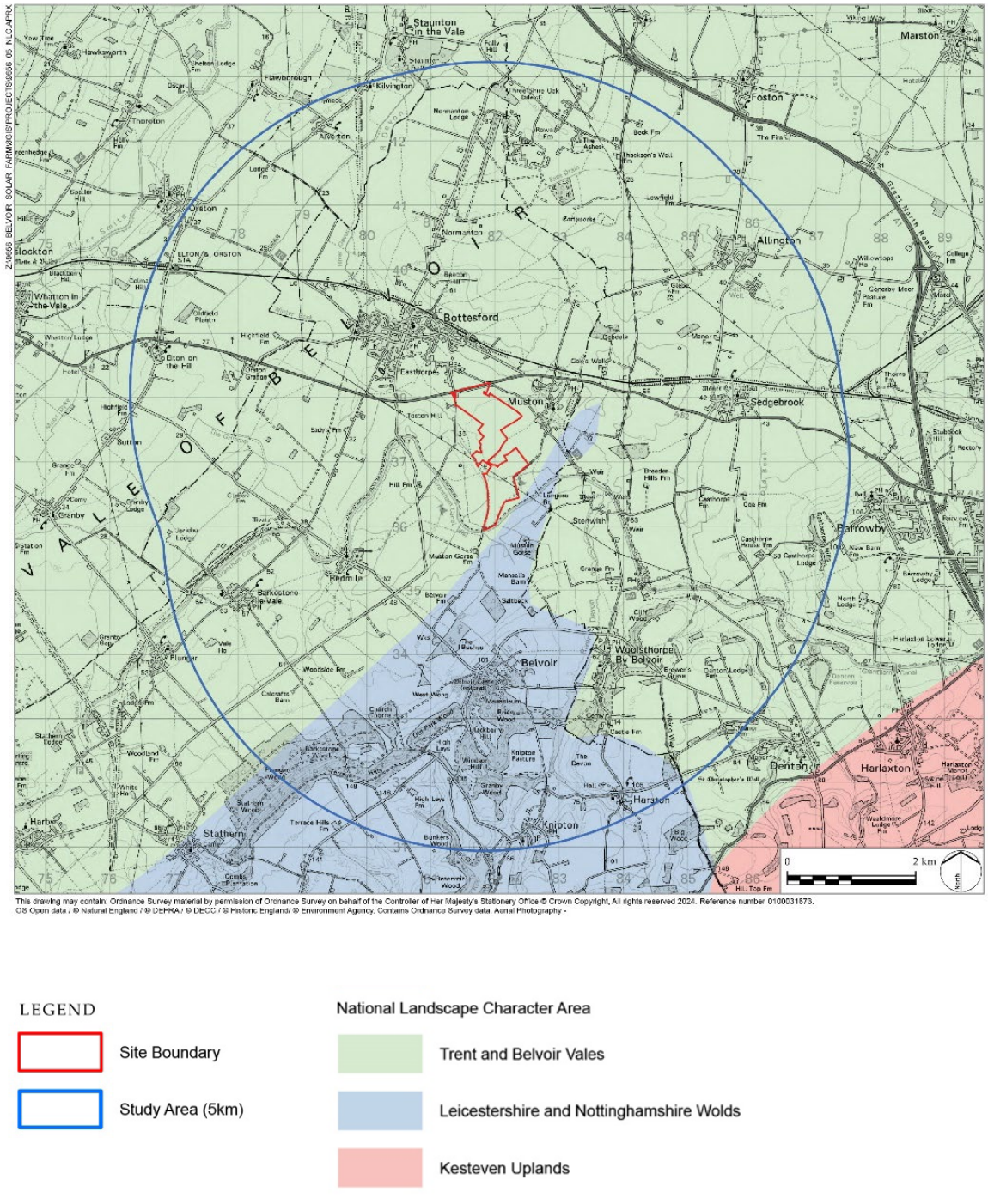
- *"A gently undulating and low-lying landform in the main, with low ridge dividing shallow, broad river valleys, vales and flood plains.*
- *Agriculture is the dominant land use, with most farmland being used for growing cereals, oilseeds and other arable crops…*
- *A regular pattern of medium to large fields enclosed by hawthorn hedgerows, and ditches in low-lying areas, dominates the landscape.*
- *Extensive use of red bricks and pantiles in the 19th century has contributed to the consistent character of traditional architecture within villages and farmsteads across the area…*
- *A predominantly rural and sparsely settled area with small villages and dispersed farms linked by quiet lanes…"*

6.4.2. Extracts of key characteristics of the 74 Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds NCA (ref CD 8.12), as identified by Natural England, that are relevant to the Appeal Site are:

- *"A range of rolling hills, with elevated plateaux, narrow river valleys and distinctive scarp slopes.*
- *Woodland cover is generally sparse, except for some wooded scarps...*
- *Agricultural land use dominates with arable farming on the plateaux tops and pasture on steep sloping valley sides…*

- *Red brick buildings with pantile roofs are widespread and most abundant clustered around churches...*
- *Urban influences include overhead lines..."*

6.4.3. NCAs are presented in **Figure 5** below.



6.4.4. I judge that the Appeal Site and surrounding area broadly align with the key descriptors of the NCAs. Of note is the low-lying landform, agricultural land use, medium fields, red brick architecture found at Muston and other villages around the site and rural villages linked by quiet lanes.

Local Landscape Character

6.4.5. The 'Melton Borough Landscape & Historic Urban Character Assessment Report' (2006) (ref CD 8.6) identifies twenty-one landscape character areas within the Borough.

6.4.6. The Appeal Site falls entirely within the Landscape Character Area (LCA) 'Vale of Belvoir', which covers much of the immediate surrounding landscape, to the north of the village of Bottesford and to the south of the A52, covering parts of the southern and western part of the study area.

6.4.7. LCA 2 Bottesford lies to the north east of the Appeal Site and includes Muston, and to the north of the A52 around Bottesford and Easthorpe. LCA 9 Parkland lies to the south of the Appeal Site and includes Belvoir Caste and its surrounding landscape.

6.4.8. LCA1 Vale of Belvoir is described as:

"An expansive gentle vale landscape with a strong pattern of medium scale rectangular shaped pastoral and arable fields with managed hedgerows and the Grantham canal, punctuated by nucleated villages with prominent church spires."

6.4.9. The distinctive characteristics are defined in the published assessment as:

- *"Expansive vale*

Figure 5: National Character Areas (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

- *String of nucleated villages*
- *Strong rectangular field pattern of mixed farming bounded by hedges*
- *Local stone in houses and churches"*

6.4.10. The Appeal Site sits within the expansive gentle vale landscape and possesses a strong pattern, defined by low, managed hedgerows, surrounding the medium scale arable fields. The nucleated villages of Bottesford and Muston, including their churches are prominent on the skyline of the surrounding landscape. Grantham Canal is present to the west and south.

6.4.11. **LCA2 Bottesford** is described as:

"A nucleated townscape, prominent within the Vale, and nearby villages with surrounding pastures, stream sides and transport routes."

The distinctive characteristics are defined in the published assessment as:

- *"Town prominent in the vale*
- *Dominated by church at centre*
- *Stream running through*
- *Closely associated pasture"*

6.4.12. The Application Site sits at the edge of the nucleated townscape, which sits at the edge of the vale landscape. The A52 is a prominent feature.

6.4.13. **LCA9 Parkland** is described as:

"Historic parkland landscapes with historic houses/castles and a diverse mosaic of ancient, traditional & contemporary agricultural and parkland features and patterns."

6.4.14. The distinctive characteristics are defined in the published assessment as:

- *"Historic buildings*

- *Parkland landscape or remnant parkland*
- *Plantation woodlands*
- *Ornamental tree groups & specimens*
- *Arable on former parkland"*

6.4.15. The historic associations of the Parkland landscape provide strong landscape pattern and features.

6.4.16. The 'Melton Borough Landscape Character Assessment Update' (2011) (ref CD 8.7) provides an update of a number of character areas, but none which are of relevance to the Appeal Site and its context.

6.4.17. The following LCA's are also located within the 5km study area:

- To the east of the Appeal Site – within the administrative area of South Kestven – lie the 'Trent and Belvoir Vale' and 'Harlaxton Bowl' LCA's (as defined by the South Kesteven Landscape Character Assessment (2007) – ref CD 8.11)
- To the west of the Appeal Site – within the administrative areas of Rushcliffe – lies the 'Unwooded Vales' LCA (as defined by the Greater Nottingham Landscape Character Assessment (2009) – ref CD 8.11)
- To the north west of the Appeal Site – within the administrative area of Newark and Sherwood – lies the South Nottinghamshire Farmlands LCA (as defined by the Newark and Sherwood Landscape Character Assessment SPD (2013) – ref CD 8.13)

6.4.18. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) did not consider these LCAs. Based on my own desk and field study – including the ZTV – I conclude that there would be extremely limited intervisibility between the Proposed Development with these character areas, and no discernible change to key characteristics of the landscape. As such, I do not consider these LCAs area further in this PoE. I also note that the Case Officers Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1) and the independent

landscape review undertaken by CES do not refer to any potential effects on these LCAs.

6.4.19. Relevant local landscape character areas are presented in **Figure 6** below.

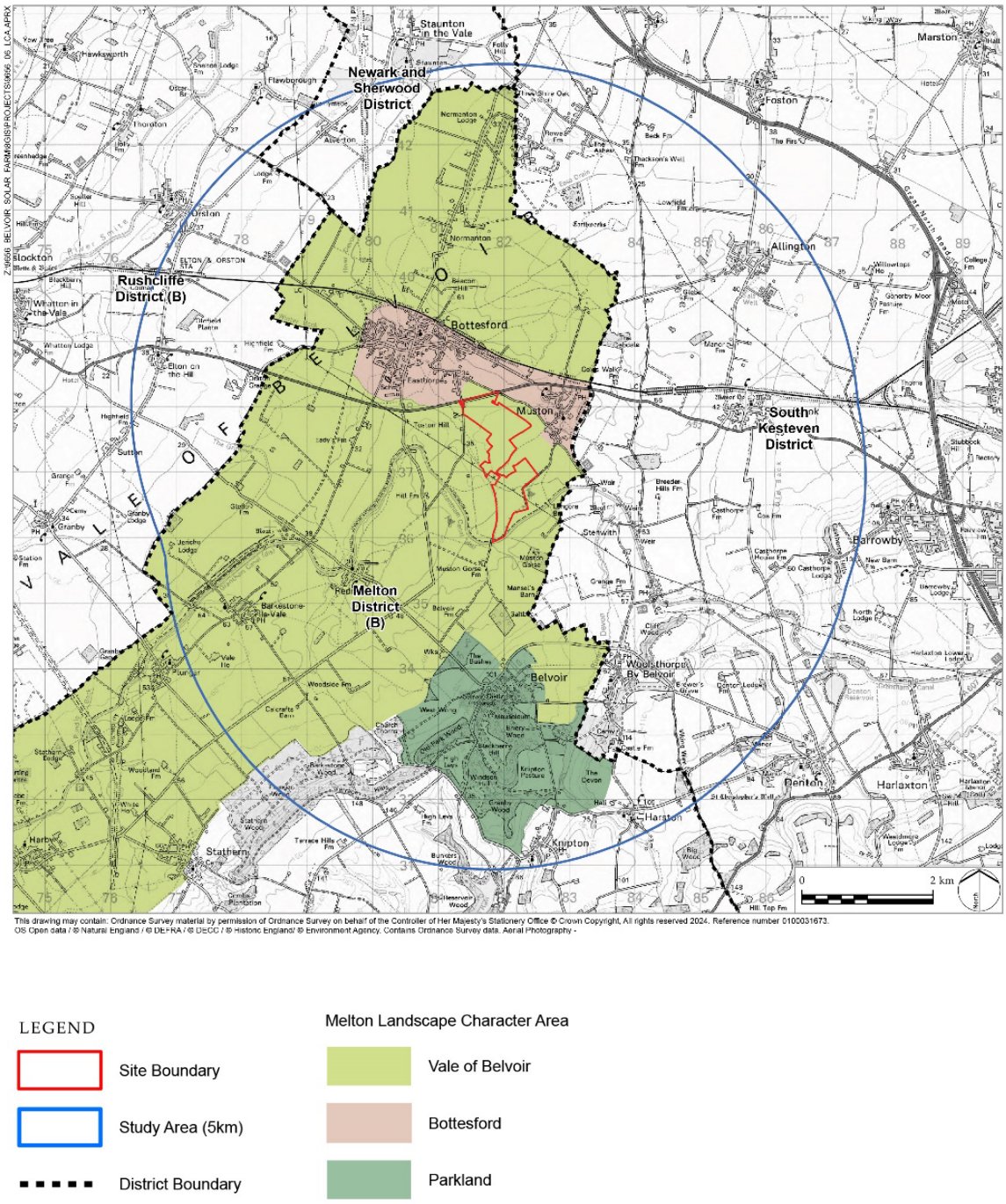


Figure 6: Local Landscape Character Areas (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

6.5. Landscape Capacity & Sensitivity

6.5.1. There are no known published landscape capacity studies for the Melton District; and no known published landscape sensitivity in relation to solar development.

6.5.2. The 'Melton and Rushcliffe Landscape Sensitivity Study: Wind Energy Development' (2014) (ref CD 8.8) examines the sensitivity of the landscape of the two boroughs to wind turbine development at a range of scales. The study was overseen by a steering group of Melton Borough Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council Officers.

6.5.3. In relation to the Vale of Belvoir LCA, the study records that:

"The gently undulating landform and large, wide skylines reduce sensitivity to the principle of wind energy development while the many human scale elements, church spires, attractive rural landscape with traditional vernacular villages and hamlets, and intervisibility with surrounding landscapes including the scarp increase sensitivity (particularly to larger turbines). The area exhibits local variation between the centre of the vale and the more strongly undulating edges to the west and south which affects sensitivity to wind energy of different heights."

6.5.4. It concludes that the landscape would be particularly sensitive to turbines greater than 50m in height and highly sensitive to turbines over 75m, with areas closer to the escarpment of higher sensitivity. The landscape has 'medium' sensitivity to turbine heights of 25 – 50m; and 'low-medium' sensitivity to turbine heights of under 25m.

6.5.5. In relation to advice for wind energy development, the following guidance is provided:

- *The historic villages with distinctive church spires remain as landmark features of the Vale and that turbines do not compete with these in key views.*
- *The tranquil and strongly rural nature of the area is maintained overall.*
- *The attractive views along the winding narrow lanes and towards the small villages and church spires are retained.*
- *The small scale of the pastoral areas, particularly areas associated with villages, is maintained and not dominated by large scale turbines.*
- *Development does not detract from the quality and character of views of the vale as seen from Belvoir Castle.*
- *Development does not adversely affect the special character of conservation areas as recorded in the conservation area appraisals, including the views identified as being important to the special architectural and historic interest of the villages.*
- *Choice of location and size/scale of development does not diminish the perceived scale of Belvoir Castle and the escarpment on which it sits.*

6.5.6. While this guidance does not relate specifically to solar development, it does indicate that renewable energy development – of an appropriate scale - can be accommodated within the vale landscape. I consider the particular guidelines in **Section 8.0** of this PoE in relation to landscape effects.

6.6. Views and Visual Context

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

6.6.1. In order to assist with understanding the potential visibility of the scheme from the surrounding landscape, a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) study was prepared as part of the original LVIA (Figure 2.1, ref CD 1.31.2). This illustrate the geographical area within which views of development would be theoretically possible. The study was based on an 'screened' scenario whereby the existing screening effect of substantive areas of existing vegetation or built features in the

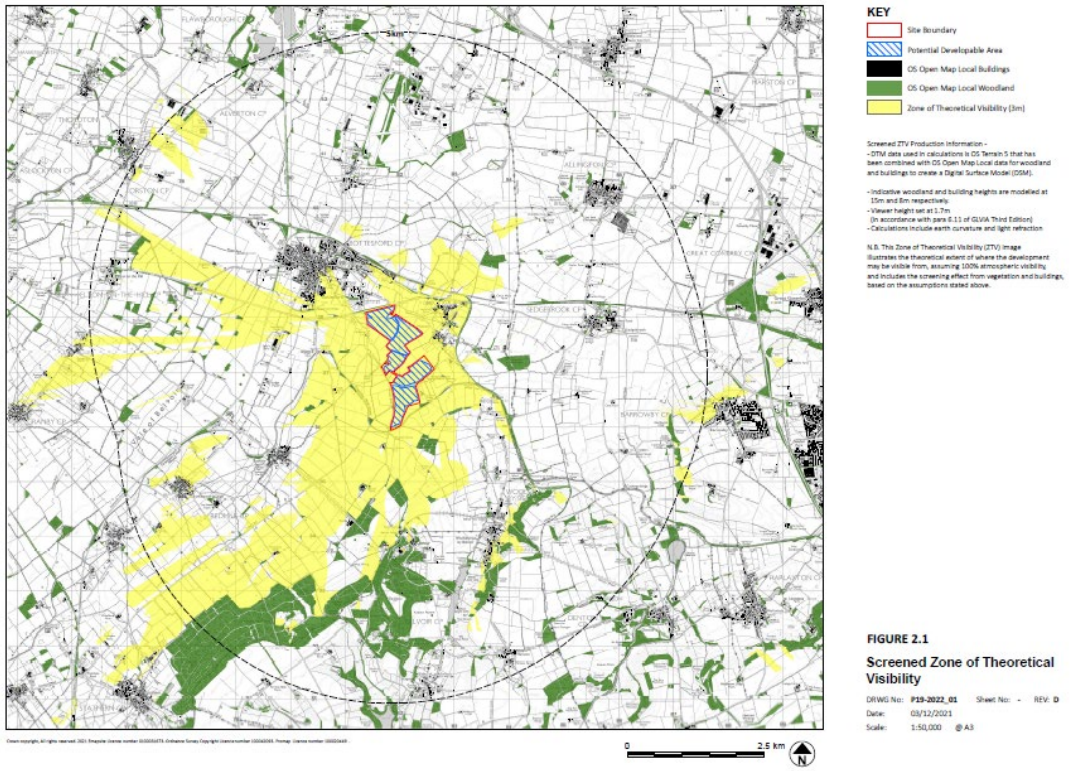
landscape are taken into account (assuming a height of 15m for woodland and 8m for buildings).

6.6.2. The ZTV is modelled based on maximum panel height of 3m above current ground levels based on the full landholdings shown in each site of land whereas the actual land take required for the solar modules will be proportionately smaller.

6.6.3. The ZTV broadly indicates theoretical visibility over a relatively small proportion of the surrounding landscape, covering / extending to the following areas:

- The Appeal Site and it's immediate context.
- Up to around 1km from the Appeal Site to the north, east and west, curtailed by a combination of topography, vegetation and road infrastructure.
- A narrow area of theoretical visibility extending north-west, along the A52, curtailed by small blocks of woodland.
- Up to around 2km to from the Appeal Site to the south, curtailed by larger areas of woodland and the Belvoir ridgeline. Theoretical visibility from Belvoir Castle is shown to be extremely limited.
- A broad area of theoretical visibility extending south-west, along Long Lane, curtailed by topography.

6.6.4. An extract of the ZTV is provided below (but is not contained within the PoE figures included at **Appendix 1** and can be found as part of the original LVIA)



ZTV Study extract from original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2)

6.6.5. In support of my own LVIA and this PoE, I have prepared a new ZTV Study of the Proposed Development, based on alternative landform / obstruction data (which includes more accurate woodland and building heights). This demonstrates that the ZTV is less than that presented in the original LVIA (Figure 2.1, ref CD 1.31.2).

6.6.6. The ZTV is contained up to around 1km from the Appeal Site to the north, east and west, curtailed by a combination of topography, vegetation and road infrastructure; and up to around 2km to from the Appeal Site to the south, curtailed by larger areas of woodland and the Belvoir Ridge. Based on the 5km study area of circa 10,807ha, the theoretical visibility extents to some 1,385ha. This represents around 13% of the entire study area.

6.6.7. The revised ZTV is presented in **Figure 7** below.

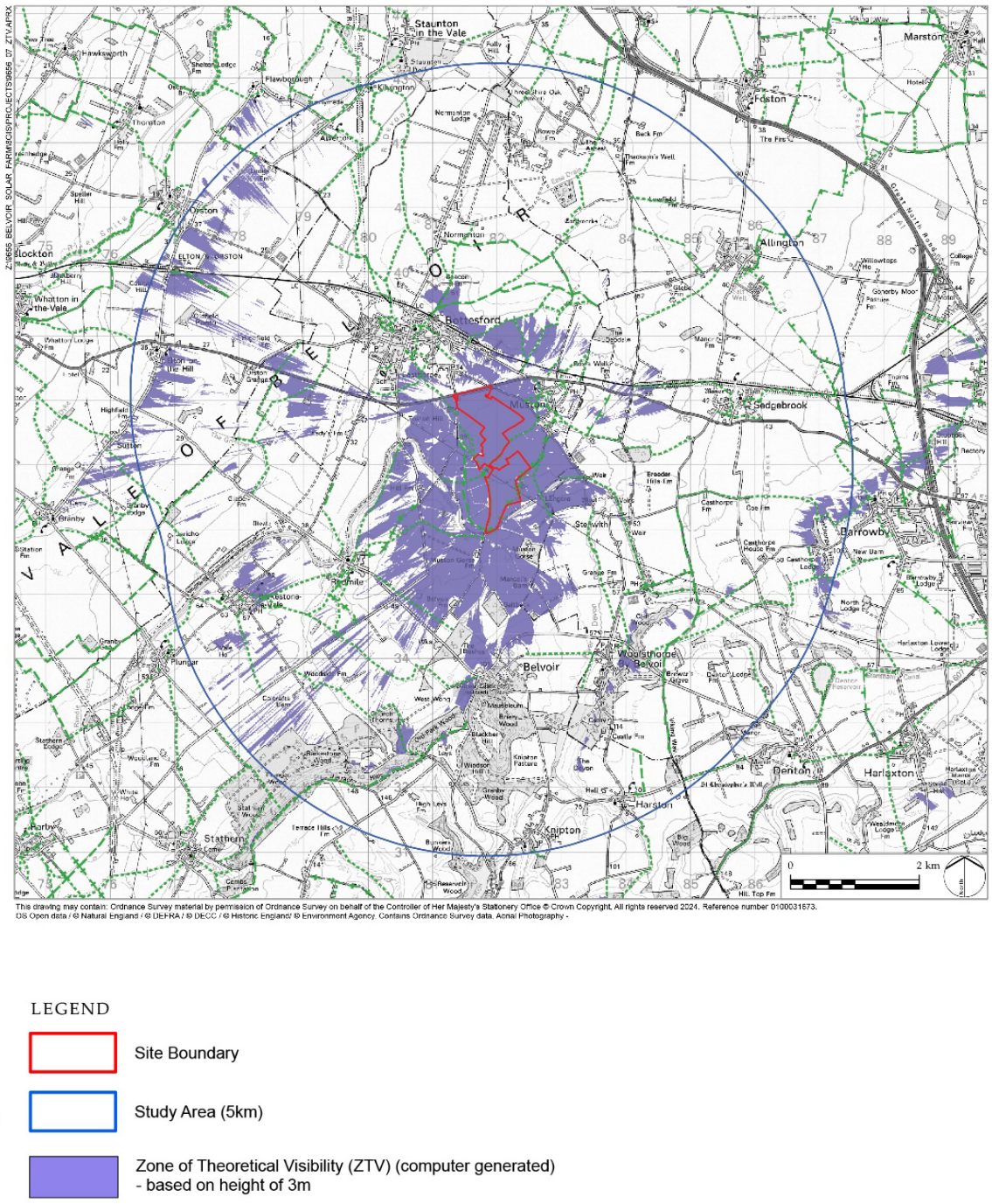


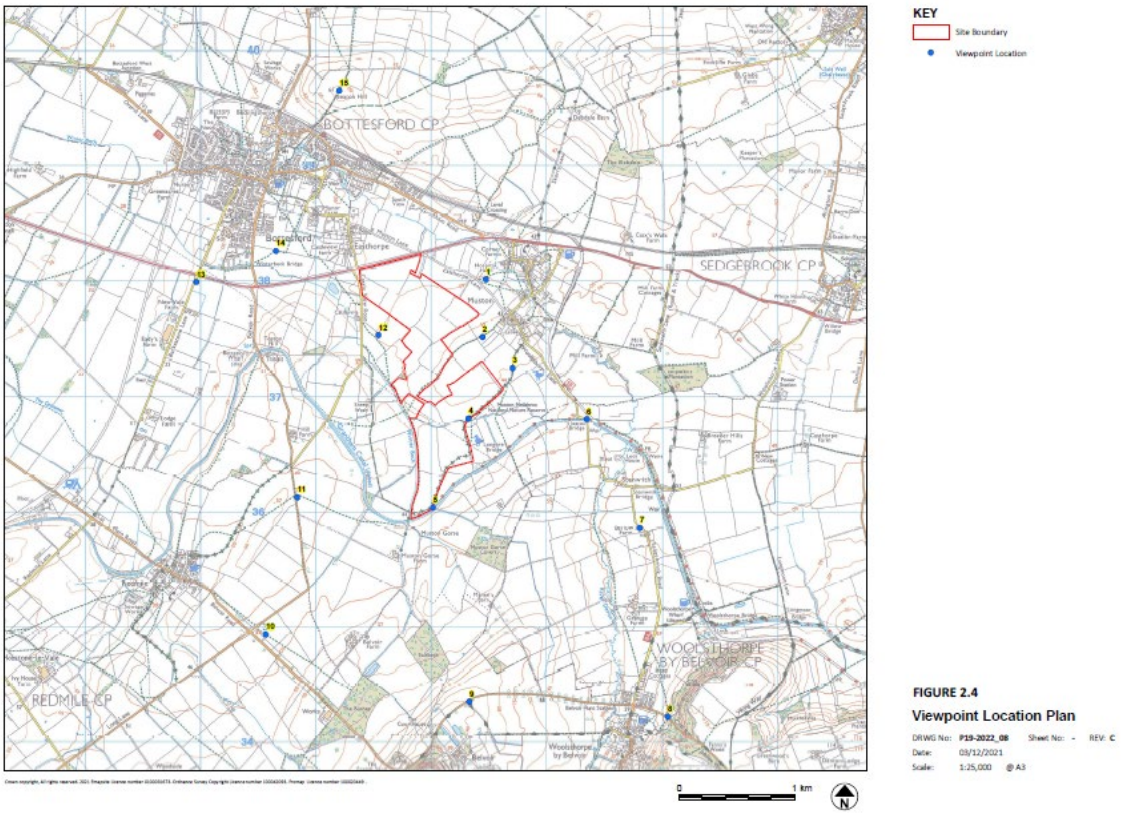
Figure 7: Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Study (please see Appendix 1 for main figures / full legend)

Representative Viewpoints

6.6.8. For the purposes of the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) a series of representative publicly accessible views from the area surrounding the Appeal Site were identified through desk / field studies and consultation. These viewpoint locations were not intended to cover every possible view of the Appeal Site, but rather represent the range of receptor types at varying distances and orientations to the Appeal Site / Proposed Development.

6.6.9. Having reviewed the original LVIA I consider these viewpoints to be appropriate for the basis of the LVIA. As recoded in the LVIA I also note that the viewpoints were agreed with MBC as part of pre-application consultation.

6.6.10. An extract of the Viewpoint Location Plan is provided below (but is not contained within the PoE figures included at **Appendix 1** and can be found as part of the original LVIA – ref CD 1.31.2)



Viewpoint Location Plan extract from original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2)

6.6.11. The description of the viewpoints is as per the original LVIA and are summarised in **Table 1** below for ease of reference. I have added additional detail / commentary where necessary following on from my own desk and field study.

6.6.12. I do note that the new ZTV Study (**Figure 7, Appendix 1**) does indicate no, limited and/or fragmented theoretical visibility from the Viewpoints 7, 8, 10, 13 and 14, which I have subsequently confirmed through field work. The effect on these viewpoints – within the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) – is also considered to be negligible neutral effect throughout operation. These viewpoints have therefore not been taken forward into my own assessment.

Table 1: Viewpoint Location and Descriptions		
ID	**Approx Distance / Direction from Appeal Site**	**Description**
1: From Footpath F80/3 (close to Easthorpe Lane)	275m north east	The field in the view slopes up to Easthorpe Lane, the edge of which is lined by hedgerow and mature trees, seen in the view and a similar height hedgerow on the southern side which is the boundary of the Appeal Site. There is a glimpsed, partial view of the north east fields of the Site, to the right of the view.
2: From Footpath F82/3	175m, north east	Due to a combination of proximity of the Site and low gappy hedgerows within and around the Appeal Site several fields are visible within the north of the Appeal Site. The view is open and long ranging across arable fields with occasional features on the skyline such as St Mary's Church, Bottesford and Beacon Hill to the north.
3: From Byway F85b/4	180m, east	Due to a combination of proximity of the Appeal Site and low gappy hedgerows within and around the Appeal Site several fields are visible within the Appeal Site between gaps in the hedgerows. The view is open and long ranging across arable fields with occasional features on the skyline such as Belvoir Castle which sits elevated on the skyline surrounded by trees to the south.
4: From Byway F85b/2	0km, south-east	There are close range, open views across the south-eastern part of the Appeal Site. To the north, the topography of the Appeal Site rises in the view creating the skyline. Muston is visible on the skyline to the north east. To the south, the topography of the Appeal Site gently falls towards the Grantham Canal. Belvoir Castle is visible to the south. A well-managed hedgerow runs along the Site boundary.

5: From Byway F85b/1	0km, south	There are close range, open and long ranging views across the south-eastern part of the Appeal Site. To the north the Appeal Site sits on a gently rising slope towards Muston. The built-up area of Muston – including the spire of St John's Church - is visible along the skyline. Several pylons cross the landscape. Belvoir Castle is visible to the south.
6: From footpath 18/3, Muston Bridge	775m, east	The view is slightly elevated along Muston Bridge allowing a view across the intervening fields and towards the Appeal Site. The view is relatively open across arable fields, albeit intervening field boundaries combine to largely screen the Appeal Site. Grantham Canal is visible in the foreground. Muston and Bottesford are distinguishable on the skyline.
9: From the Jubilee Way	1.7km, north	From this elevation position along the Belvoir Ridge, there are open, long ranging views across the landscape. The arable fields of the Appeal Site are visible between Bottesford and Muston. The Appeal Site sits relatively low in the vale landscape; higher ground beyond is visible including Beacon Hill, and several vertical features such as pylons and St Mary's church spire, Bottesford. The urban fringe of Grantham is visible in the distance, along with several wind turbines on the horizon.
Viewpoint 11: From footpath G2/3	1km, south-west	There is a relatively clear view across the open vale landscape towards the Appeal Site, albeit intervening field boundaries combine to largely screen the Appeal Site. The built-up area of Muston – including the spire of St John's Church - is visible along the skyline. Several pylons cross the landscape.
Viewpoint 12: From footpath F74/1	185m, north-west	The western fields of the Application Site are visible on the skyline to the north-east and east of the view. The landscape slopes south around the vale, with the topography and intervening vegetation large screening the Appeal Site. Belvoir Castle is visible on the skyline.

Viewpoint 15: From Bridleway F86a/2, Beacon Hill	1.5km, north-west	The view from Beacon Hill is relatively open across the intervening landscape, with a direct view towards Belvoir Castle. There is a partial view of the Appeal Site within the mid-ground of the view, sitting within the vale landscape, albeit views are heavily filtered by intervening vegetation.

Visual Receptor Groups

6.6.13. LDA Design's approach to visual assessment - in order to ensure a proportionate assessment - is typically to 'group' visual receptor together based on similar attributes and relationship to the Appeal Site. This could include a combination of views from public spaces and streets within settlements (or around the houses in areas with isolated dwellings), and the routes and accessible landscape in the surrounding countryside. Further detail is provided in my LVIA methodology presented in **Appendix 4**.

6.6.14. As presented in my own Summary LVIA (**Appendix 3**) and in accordance with the LDA Design methodology (**Appendix 4**) I have grouped visual receptors into the following Visual Receptor Groups (VRGs):

- **VRG1 - Appeal Site and its Immediate Context** - encompassing roads and PRoW in close proximity to the Site. This VRG is represented by Viewpoints 2, 3, 4, 5 and 12.
- **VRG2 -- Woolsthorpe Lane and Muston** - encompassing scattered settlement, roads and PRoW in open countryside to the east of the Appeal Site, primarily focussed along the Woolsthorpe Lane corridor. This VRG is represented by e Viewpoints 1 and 6.
- **VRG3 - Belvoir Ridge** - encompassing scattered settlement, roads and PRoW in in open countryside to the south of the Appeal Site, extending up to the Belvoir ridge line. This VRG is represented by Viewpoint 9.

- **VRG4 - Belvoir Road** - encompassing scattered settlement, roads and PRoW in open countryside to the west of the Appeal Site, primarily focussed along the Belvoir Road corridor. This VRG is represented by Viewpoint 11.
- **VRG5 – Beacon Hill** - encompassing the PRoW on higher ground to the north of the village of Bottesford. This VRG is represented by Viewpoint 15.

7.0 Design and Mitigation

7.1. Components of Design

7.1.1. The Proposed Development comprises the following features:

- Solar arrays – up to 3m in height
- Invertor Stations - at around 3m in height
- Timber post and wire security fences – 2m in height
- Compound – comprising:
  - Customer Switch Room and DNO Control Room - at around 3m in height
  - Transformer and masts – up to 6.7m in height

7.1.2. In my extensive experience of solar projects, all of these are typical types and heights of structures and are common elements of solar developments.

7.1.3. The vast majority of the Proposed Development is relatively low in height and of similar height to the retained, enhanced and new planting. The taller elements are contained within the compound area, which is located within the centre of the Appeal Site, adjacent to an existing pylon / along alignment of the pylon route; and at one of lowest points of Appeal Site, which slopes towards the Winterbeck water course – at around 40m AOD. As such, I consider the compound to be well located and not a prominent feature in the context of existing pylons.

7.2. Design Evolution

7.2.1. Whilst LDA Design have not been involved in the design of the scheme, I have worked closely with JBM and the project Planners / Heritage Consultant (Pegasus) to fully document the iterative design process undertaken and demonstrate how the design and layout of the Proposed Development has been informed by landscape, visual and heritage context; consultation and engagement with MBC;

and the broader opportunities and constraints presented by the Site. The design evolution and proposed landscape strategy is an important consideration in reaching my judgements around landscape and visual impacts.

7.2.2. The iterative design process is set out in the 'Design Evolution Document' (ref CD10.13), and the key 'milestones' in the design of the scheme is summarised below

EIA Screening Scheme 2021 - Potential developable area

- Consideration of 20 potential field parcels.

Pre-application Scheme 2021 - Initial site layout

- Exclusion of 5 field parcels (16 - 20) in response to initial technical and environmental advice, including landscape and visual analysis.

Application Scheme 2022 - Refined site layout

- Exclusion of two additional field parcels (14 and 15) to pull development back from Muston and Easthorpe Lane in response to proximity to Muston and setting of settlement and heritage assets.
- Pulling back solar panels from adjoining PRoW to the east and west of the Appeal Site to minimise visual impact / sense of enclosure.
- Additional trees and hedgerows provided throughout the Appeal Site - including orchard - to enhance amenity, provide additional screening and improve biodiversity.
- Diversification of grassland mosaic and other site wide ecology features.

Post application Schem 2023 - Revised site layout

- A belt of native tree planting added along the eastern boundary (field 9) to provided additional screening from Muston.
- Changes to grassland mix within field 9 10 and 12 to compliment adjacent Muston Meadows NNR / SSSI.

Holborn Scheme 2024 - Appeal scheme layout

- Creation of 'green lanes' along those PRoW just within / directly adjoining the Appeal Site, which would incorporate the retained route; existing and proposed hedgerows and meadow grassland.
- Additional tress added to hedgerows to compliment landscape character and provide additional screening.
- Extent of solar panels reduce by 2.2ha to the south and orchard areas moved further east (Field 13) to allow for more open views to Belvoir Castle.
- Area proposed as accessible open space with picnic area and interpretation.

7.3. Landscape Strategy

7.3.1. The Amended Landscape Strategy ('Amended Scheme Site Layout and Landscape Strategy / drawing number P19-2022_24 Rev C' – ref CD 2.2) is presented as a stand-alone figure that is submitted as part of the Appeal. For the purposes of the PoE, the Landscape Strategy is summarised below by key themes and illustrated by a series of thematic plans.

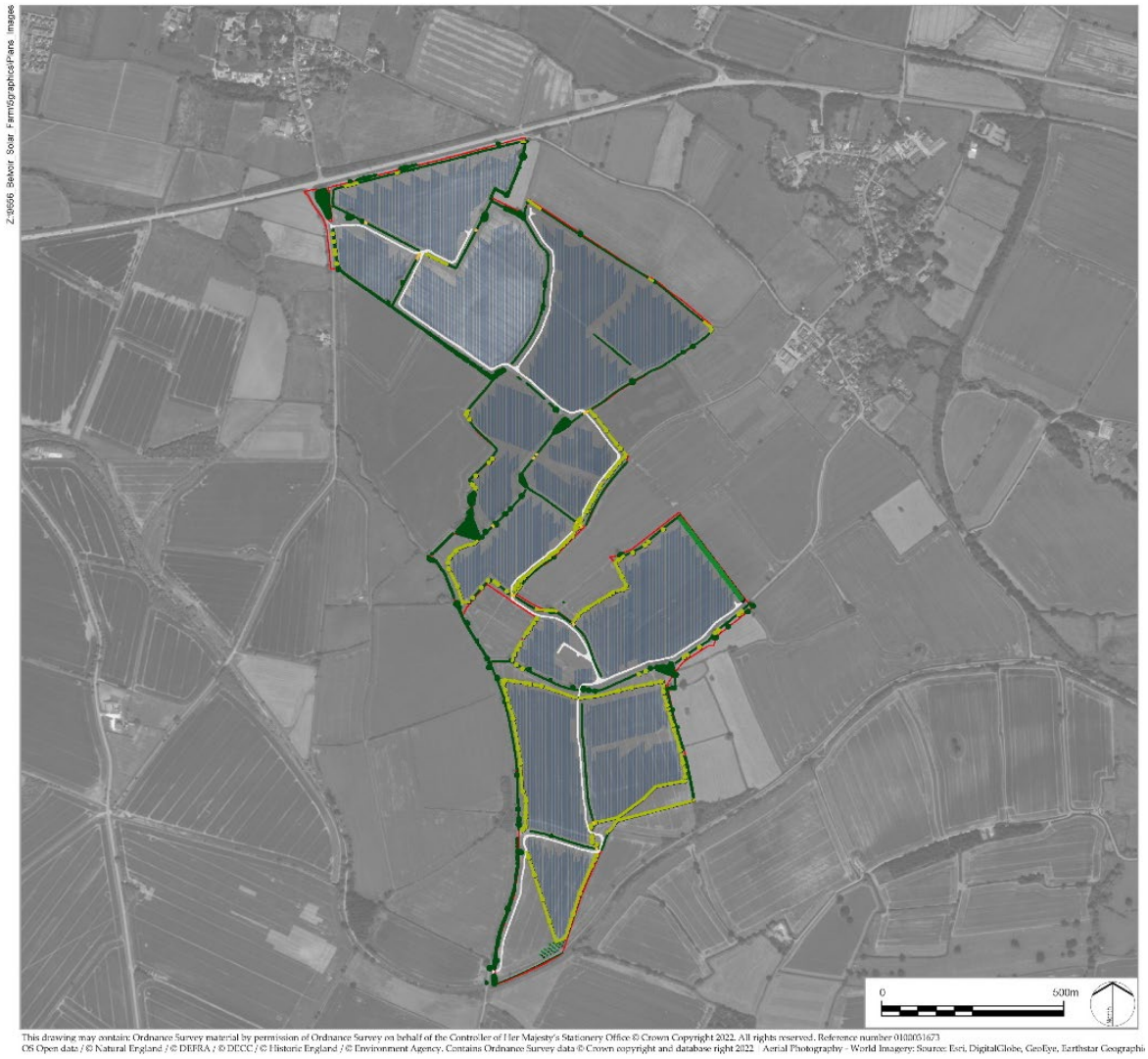
Trees and Hedgerows

- All existing trees and small woodland blocks will be retained.
- All existing hedgerows will be retained, with the exception of small gaps to facilitate access and removal of a newly planted / unestablished hedgerow which is located close to the proposed substation (Field Parcel 10). Existing hedgerows will be maintained up to a maximum of 3.0m high and enhanced with infill planting where necessary to fill gaps, with planting selected to match existing hedgerow species.
- Approximately 3,800m of new hedgerow will be planted throughout the Appeal Site, providing additional enclosure and screening of the Proposed Development. The new hedgerows will typically connect to existing hedgerows to provide continuous landscape and habitat features. New

hedgerows will also be maintained up to a maximum of 3.0m high and will match existing hedgerow species.

- Existing and new hedgerows will be planted with hedgerow trees, which are characteristic of landscape and will be provide additional filtering of views. It is anticipated that over 130 no. new trees will be planted across the Appeal Site.
- A 10m wide native tree and shrub belt is proposed along part of the eastern Appeal Site boundary (Field Parcel 9) in order to provide additional containment / screening from the edge of Muston. It is anticipated that – in discussion with the Pegasus landscape team – that this will be managed to height of approximately 12m (subject to more detailed landscape management information which will be secured by condition).
- A small orchard is proposed to the south of the Appeal Site (Field Parcel 13), along the Grantham Canal, as part of a larger community space. This will include circa 20 no. orchard trees that will provide amenity, landscape and habitat benefits.

7.3.2. Existing and proposed tree and hedgerow planting is shown on **Figure 8** below.



LEGEND

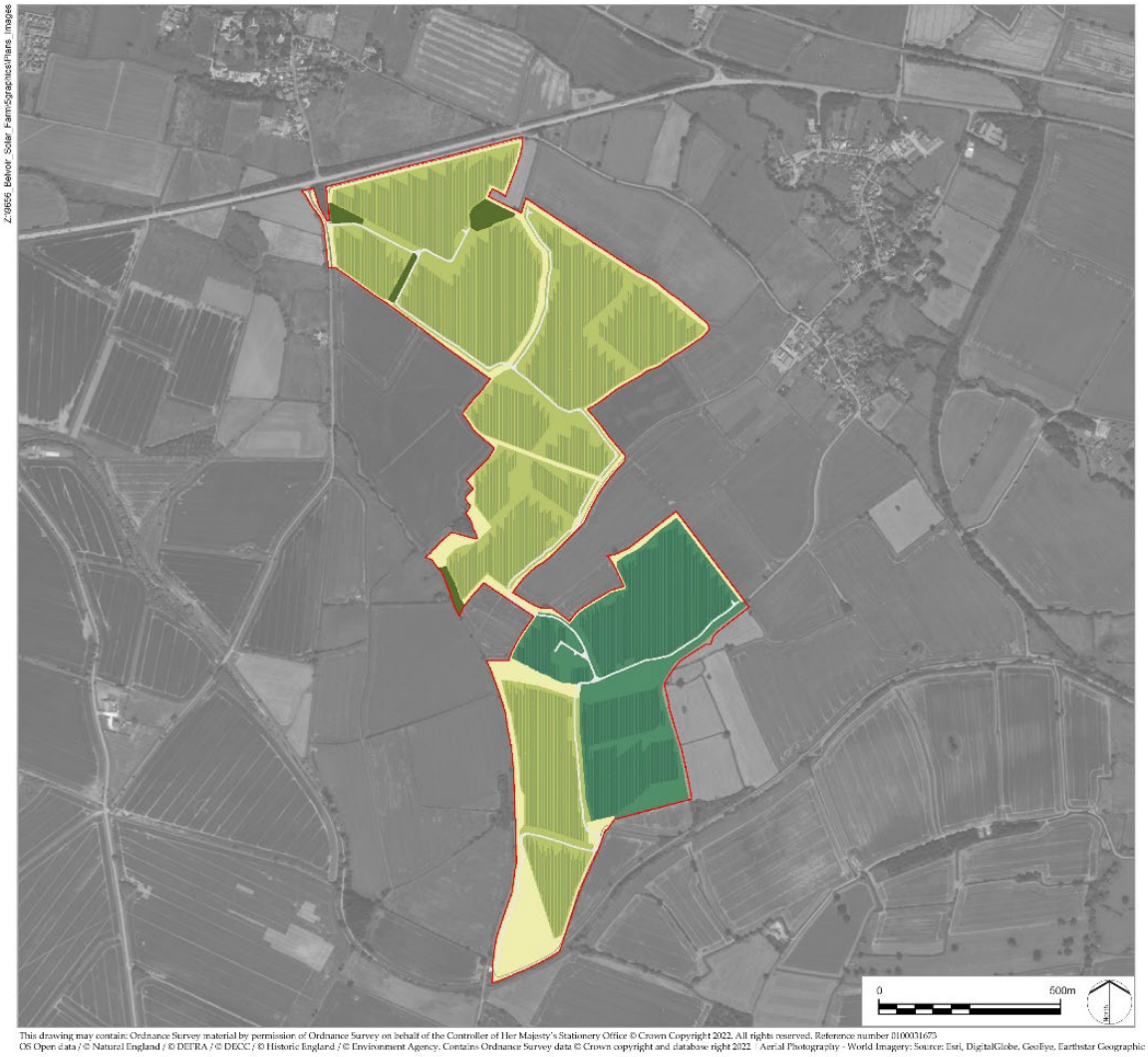
- Site boundary
- Existing vegetation retained as existing
- Existing hedgerows to be removed
- Existing hedgerow retained and infill planted where necessary
- Proposed New Hedgerow Planting
- Proposed Native Tree Buffer Planting
- Proposed Orchard Tree Planting
- Proposed Native Tree Planting

Figure 8: Landscape Strategy: Trees and Hedgerows (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

Fields and Grassland

- All existing intensively managed arable land will be established as a mosaic of grassland habitat, including neutral grassland (circa 59ha); wildflower field margins (circa 2ha); tussocky grassland (circa 23ha); and meadow grassland (circa 23ha), all of which will provide amenity and biodiversity benefits.
- The type and distribution of grassland has been carefully selected to maximise habitat connectivity, with wildflower / tussocky grassland typically alongside field margins and hedgerow boundaries.
- Appropriate grassland species will also be selected for Field 9,10 and 12 in order to create a complimentary habitat adjacent to the Muston Meadows NNR / SSSI.

7.3.3. Proposed grassland planting is shown on **Figure 9** below.



LEGEND

- Site boundary
- Grazing Seed Mix to Panel Compounds
- Meadow Seed Mix to Field Margins
- Tussocky Grass Mix
- Grassland adjacent to Muston Meadows SSSI / NNR

Figure 9: Landscape Strategy: Grasslands (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

Routes and Spaces

- All existing PRoW would be retained along their existing alignments with no diversions or stopping up.
- The layout and design of the Proposed Development is such that existing PRoW typically extend along - or just inside the Appeal Site boundary, and only ever directly adjoin the Proposed Development on one side of the route.
- All existing PRoW would be offset from the Proposed Development by a around 10m and would be set within a series of 'green lanes'. These would typically be 10m in width and which would incorporate the footpaths routes, existing and new hedgerows and meadow grassland, although some green lanes will be much wider. The green lanes help ensure the PRoW do not feel enclosed and allows for continued views from the routes and across the surrounding landscape. Illustrative cross sections of green lanes are presented below.
- A new permissive footpath route is proposed, extending to some 500m east-west across the Appeal Site and linking with the existing PRoW along the eastern and southern boundaries.
- In addition to the green lanes themselves, over 8ha areas of publicly accessible open space will be created, providing opportunities for recreation and interpretation. The spaces have been carefully located where they are easily accessible from existing PRoW; provide an additional offset from the PRoW to the solar arrays; and relate well to existing landscape features, such as the Grantham Canal or views toward Belvoir Castle.
- The open spaces will include picnic areas and information broads at key locations. A fruit orchard and education area are also proposed that can be used by the local community.
- The principal area of open space to the south of the Appeal Site adjacent to the Grantham Canal. This has been created to reduce the length of which PRoW FP90 adjoins the Proposed Development; to provide views and interpretation of Belvoir Castle; and that benefits from proximity and setting of the canal.

7.3.4. Proposed routes and open spaces are shown on **Figure 10** below.

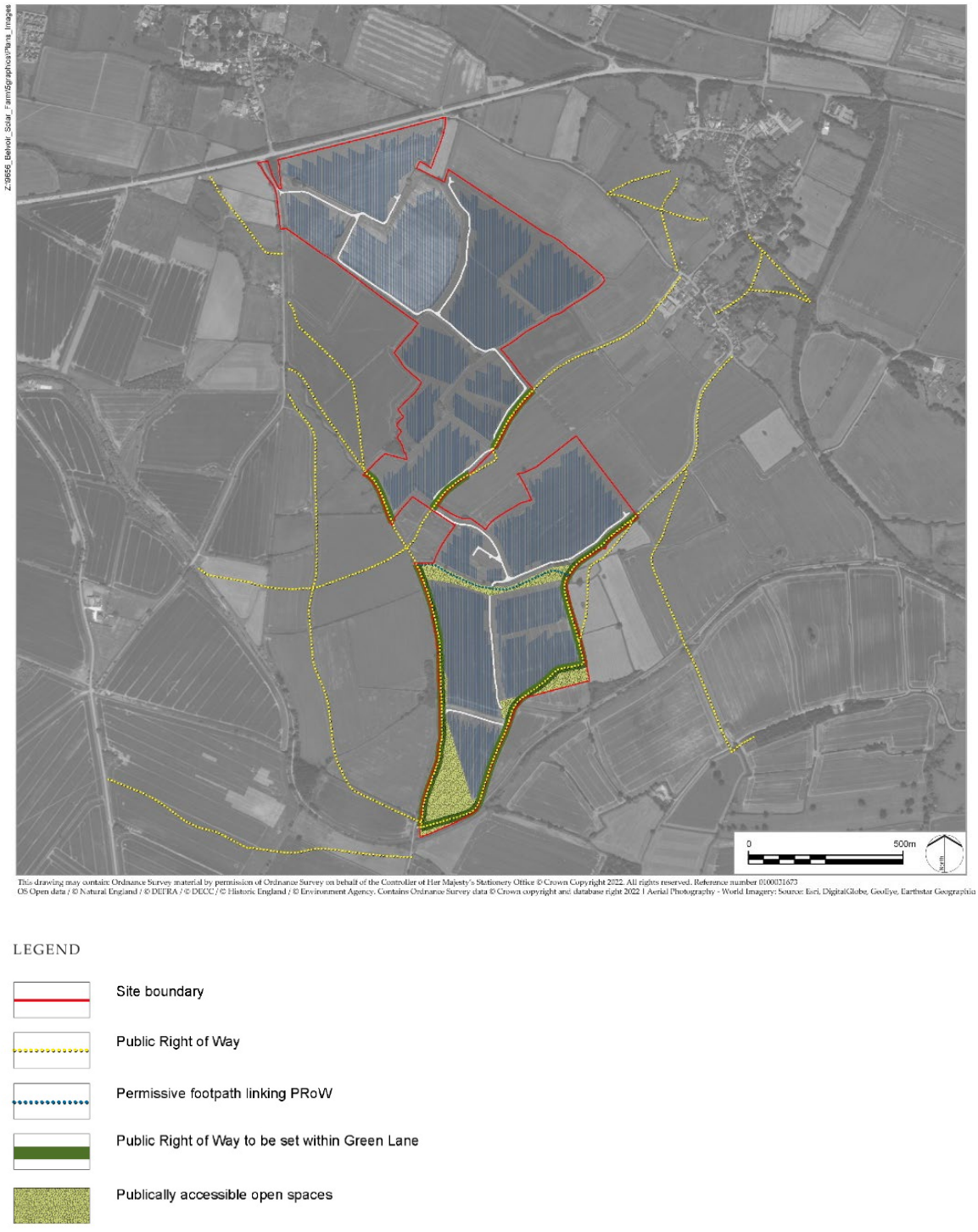


Figure 10: Landscape Strategy: Routes and Spaces (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

Illustrative Cross Sections

7.3.5. Pegasus have prepared a series of indicative cross sections to illustrate the landscape strategy and show how routes and spaces have been incorporated into the layout (ref CD 2.3).

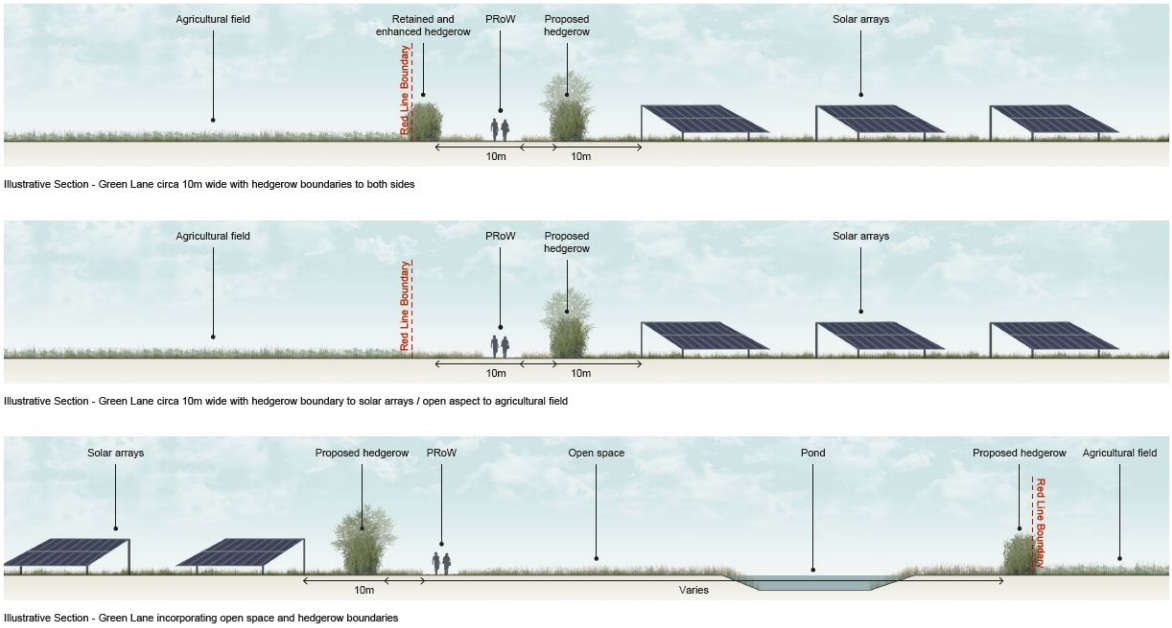
7.3.6. Section A-AA illustrates the large scale of the proposed community space within the southern extent of the Appeal Site, which will include wildflower grassland, orchard, picnic area and interpretation boards.

7.3.7. Section B-BB illustrates the substantial width of the proposed open space / permissive route running east west across the Appeal Site, and the use of existing and proposed hedgerows to provide a degree of separation / screening from the solar arrays.

7.3.8. My additional cross sections - at **Figure 11** - below show the 'typical' arrangement and design of the green lanes. The green lanes can be broadly classified as three types:

- Those that are around 10m wide, comprising wildflower grassland and defined by a new hedgerow to the Proposed Development edge retained / enhanced hedgerow to the countryside edge.
- Those that are around 10m wide, comprising wildflower grassland and defined by a new hedgerow to the Proposed Development but with an open countryside edge.
- Those that are wider than 10m / incorporating areas of open space (in excess of 50m wide in places), comprising tussocky grassland and defined by a combination of new and/or retained hedgerows

7.3.9. This variety in design ensures users have a varied experience, and I judge that all green lanes are sufficiently wide not to overly enclose or contain the existing footpath routes.



Landscape Management

Figure 11: Illustrative Cross Sections (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

7.3.10. The managed heights of the existing and new hedgerows (i.e. 3m) has been previously identified as a concern raised by the independent landscape consultant, as detailed in **Section 3.0** of my PoE, the concern being 3m high hedges are not characteristic of the landscape and would enclose views.

7.3.11. The Case Officer concludes (in the Planning Committee Report – ref CD 3.1) that there is significant variety in the landscape in terms of height of hedgerows, trees and woodland; the proposed maintenance regime would maintain the characteristic of low-level hedgerows for the majority of the time; and 2m hedgerow (immediately following any maintenance) would still provide effective screening and would minimise landscape and visual effects.

7.3.12. I agree with the conclusions of the Case Officer and consider the proposed height of hedgerow planting to be entirely appropriate within the local landscape character and context. Whilst I do recognise that planting may make landscape character and views more enclosed, I do not believe suitably aligned, specified and managed hedgerows - that will integrate with the exiting hedgerow network - are harmful in landscape and visual terms.

7.3.13. The Pegasus landscape team have previously provided further evidence / rebuttals in response to the independent landscape consultants comments on hedgerow height. The full response can be found in 'Rebuttal of Belvoir Solar Farm Independent Landscape Review - February 2023' (ref CD 1.43) and 'Rebuttal of Belvoir Solar Farm Independent Landscape Review - March 2023' (ref CD 1.44)

7.3.14. The rebuttals highlighted that:

- There are numerous examples of where hedgerows exceed in 2m in height throughout the Vale landscape and there is no published evidence which indicates hedgerows are consistently or typically 2m high.
- The height of hedgerows can reasonably be expected to change throughout the year, based on weather / seasonal conditions and the landowner's management regime.
- There is currently no form of control over the hedgerow heights within the Appeal Site and it is entirely at the landowner's discretion as how to low or high the hedgerows are.
- Given the average observer height would be 1.7m (in accordance with published landscape literature and average heights for men and women as set out in GLVIA3) even 2m high hedgerows will provide a degree of screening of the Proposed Development.
- As described above in relation to 'routes and spaces' the layout of the Proposed Development allows for a landscape buffer along the PRoW that adjoin the Site, reducing the degree and perception of enclosure and allowing

users to still experience views of the wider open vale landscape. This includes around a 10m buffer from the PRoW to the nearest solar array; and around a 10m wide 'green lane' within which the route runs.

7.3.15. The Pegasus 'Rebuttal of Belvoir Solar Farm Independent Landscape Review - February 2023' (ref CD 1.43) in includes a series of Google Earth Street Views 1-17 at Appendix 3. These views clearly demonstrate that from at least 17 points close to the site and within the Vale of Belvoir landscape, there are hedgerows higher than 2m.

7.3.16. The photographs included below, taken on my Appeal Site visit in June 2024, also illustrate some of the 'higher' and variety of hedgerows in and around the Appeal Site.

Photographs of the variety of hedgerows within and around the Appeal Site (June 2024)

7.3.17. JBM Solar Projects 10 Ltd are committed to the appropriate long-term management and legacy of the landscape, and - should the Appeal be allowed - would welcome the opportunity to work with MBC to develop the proposed landscape management strategy in more detail. Furthermore, the proposed planning conditions commit to the preparation and agreement of a suitable Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP). As such I find it entirely reasonable that the precise details of the landscape management regime can be agreed at a future time and should not prejudice this Appeal.

7.3.18. The independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) also stated that the landscape strategy will not effectively reduce / mitigate visual effects in the long term from certain locations, including the PRoW along the boundaries of the Appeal Site. It is also noted that the long-term visual effects are 'under reported' given that the hedgerows will typically cut to 2m and will be under 3m high for the proportion of the time.

7.3.19. Accordingly, I have considered these points when undertaking my own LVIA and have made judgements based on 'worst case' 2m high hedgerows. My judgements regarding likely landscape and visual effects are set out in **Sections 8.0 and 9.0** of this PoE and my Summary LVIA findings are presented in **Appendix 3**.

7.4. Benefits and Legacy

7.4.1. Notwithstanding my judgements that the Proposed Development will result in some adverse landscape and visual effects, I consider that the Proposed Development - incorporating the Landscape Strategy as outlined above - will deliver a number of long-term environmental and community benefits.

7.4.2. While the benefits and legacy of the landscape strategy are not a matter of agreement within the SoCG (ref CD 9.5), equally MBC have not identified this as a

matter in dispute, and have agreed that *"…. a range of biodiversity and landscape measures are proposed"*.

7.4.3. The core benefits - in respect of landscape and visual matters – are summarised below.

7.4.4. **Retention and enhancement of landscape fabric:** The retention of existing landscape features and substantial new planting throughout the Proposed Development would positively contribute to the structure of the landscape and network of green infrastructure. While 'Melton Borough Landscape & Historic Urban Character Assessment Report' (2006) (ref CD 8.6) does not identify specific landscape management objectives, *"…. strong rectangular field pattern of mixed farming bounded by hedges"* is a defining characteristic.

7.4.5. **Rest to farmland and biodiversity net gain:** The Proposed Development would benefit the natural environment on the Appeal Site itself by allowing soil that has long been intensively farmed to rest and rejuvenate under grass for 40 years, and by bringing about a significant net gain (around 144%) in biodiversity on the Appeal Site. This includes new hedgerows; new trees; and a new mosaic of neutral, meadow and tussock grassland. All of these features contribute to strengthening the wider green infrastructure network.

7.4.6. **New accessible routes and open spaces:** The Proposed Development would benefit users of the local PRoW network by - through the new permissive route - creating a more extensive footpath network and improving east-west connectivity across the landscape. While views from the existing, retained PRoW that run along - or just inside - the Appeal Site Development would change as a result of the Proposed Development, the integrity of these routes would be protected by a series of wide 'green lanes' which would incorporate the footpaths routes, existing and new hedgerows and meadow grassland. The newly created open space will

also further enhance and increase opportunities for recreation, interpretation sand education.

7.4.7. **Long term legacy:** as the Proposed Development is temporary in nature, hedgerow and tree planting proposed as part of the landscape strategy would leave a permanent positive landscape legacy of the Proposed Development upon decommissioning. The Appeal Site could be returned to arable farmland which will have been rested for circa 40 years, and with the added benefit of an enhanced landscape structure and improved public access.

7.5. Appropriateness in the Landscape

7.5.1. Clearly solar arrays and associated infrastructure are new built forms within the landscape and views, but I consider that change - resulting from a development of this nature - is not inherently harmful or unacceptable. Indeed, as the Case Officer concludes in the Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1) - in relation visual effects - *"…. seeing the* development *in itself is not harmful"* (Para 8.2.28)

7.5.2. In this regard, I make the following observations, based on extensive professional experience of planning, design and assessment of solar development:

7.5.3. **Energy infrastructure in the countryside should not be seen as an alien feature or an exception.** If we are to achieve Net Zero - as legislation requires us to - a cultural shift in perceptions will be needed but this should be properly founded on good design and promoting the correct sites. This includes locations such as the Appeal Site where solar development can work within existing field parcels and benefit from topography – with a low lying, gently undulating site and containment afforded by more pronounced topography in the surrounding landscape.

7.5.4. The inherent nature of solar development allows it to 'tread lightly' within the landscape, respecting existing features and fabric. It also provides the opportunity for significant landscape character and biodiversity benefits at the landscape scale, resting and repairing landscapes that have been degraded due to modern agricultural practices. Renewable solar developments are also a temporary form of development that is fully reversible with the almost unique ability to leave the landscape in a better condition than when it first arrived.

7.5.5. Solar panels are not solid objects and are low lying (up to approximately 3m high) and as such are capable of being integrated into the landscape. I acknowledge the character and larger scale of ancillary infrastructure, but in most cases, these are also relatively small scale structures and capable of being sensitively designed.

8.0 Landscape Effects

8.1. Introduction

8.1.1. The impacts on landscape character are assessed within the original LVIA (ref 1.31.2); I broadly agree with the judgements made; and I have seen no specific comments or criticism from MBC regarding the actual judgements on landscape effects.

8.1.2. It is noted that the independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) did conclude that the significance of the effect of the Proposed Development on landscape character has been 'downplayed'. While no comparative or alternative assessment has been provided, in Section 3.2 'Review of the assessment of effects on landscape character' of the Independent Landscape Review by CEC Environment (ref CD 7.19) reference is made to different levels of sensitivity and magnitude. I refer back to these judgements where necessary when summarising my own assessment in this Section of my PoE.

8.1.3. RfR 2 is concerned with the effect on landscape character of the Proposed Development when considered 'cumulatively' other permitted and operational schemes. It is therefore necessary to consider the landscape effects of the Proposed Development itself, in order to make ensuing judgements regarding broader landscape capacity issues.

8.1.4. It should be noted that I have not specifically considered construction effects given that these are short-term, and no concerns have been raised regarding the effect of construction activity on landscape character.

8.1.5. I do note that the key concerns arising from the independent landscape consultant relate to the appropriateness of 3m high hedgerows; and over reliance on the

landscape strategy / mitigation to reduce visual effects. I have addressed the issue regarding hedgerow height in **Section 7.0** of my evidence; and I come on address visual effects in **Section 9.0**. However, my judgements regarding landscape effects are based on an assumed 'worst case' of 2m high hedgerows at year 15.

8.2. Landscape Value and Sensitivity

Landscape Value

8.2.1. The Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 'TGN 02-21 Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations' (2021) (ref CD 8.3) sets out a range of factors that can be considered when identifying 'landscape value'. The factors are not presented in order of importance and are not intended to be exhaustive. Landscape value, along with susceptibility, is one of two components of landscape sensitivity. TGN 02-21 notes that:

"It would be expected that a 'valued landscape' would demonstrate the presence of a number of indicators of landscape value, as set out in Table 1 [of TGN 02/21], although it is possible for one indicator to be of such importance (e.g. rarity, association or perceptual aspects) that the landscape is judged to be a 'valued landscape' even if other indicators are not present. The identification of landscape value needs to be applied proportionately ensuring that identification of 'valued landscape' is not over used."

8.2.2. While the Vale of Belvoir landscape has clear associations with Belvoir Castle, and the Castle itself is a landmark feature which provides scenic / perceptual qualities, I find no other indicators that would suggest the landscape is of any greater value than typical countryside. Specifically in relation to Belvoir Castle, the Heritage PoE demonstrates that the Appeal Site makes a limited contribution to its overall heritage significance; and that views of the Castle from within the surrounding landscape are incidental rather designed views.

8.2.3. On this basis I judge that the landscape as a whole does not represent a 'valued landscape' under paragraph 180a of the National Planning Policy Framework. As set out in **Section 4.0** of this PoE, MBC agree that the Appeal site is not within a 'valued landscape' under paragraph 180(a) of the NPPF / this is not a matter in dispute.

8.2.4. In relation to the 'value' attributed to specific landscape character areas, I judge (in accordance with my LVIA methodology in **Appendix 4**) that LCA1 Vale of Belvoir and LCA2 Bottesford to be no more of Community Value – 'everyday' landscapes which are appreciated by the local community and have some distinctive features, but have little or no wider recognition of their value. However, I do find LCA9 Parkland to be of greater value, comprising the Registered Park and Garden / Belvoir Castle and with clear documentary evidence and site observations that indicate this as being more valued than the surrounding area.

8.2.5. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) makes similar judgement with the LCA1 Vale of Belvoir and LCA2 Bottesford being of 'medium' value and LCA9 Parkland being of 'high' value.

8.2.6. Conversely the independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) finds the value of LCA1 Vale of Belvoir to be medium / high to high, on the basis of the strong landscape structure; well used network of PRoW; a relationship to Belvoir Ridge and Belvoir Castle. While I agree with these are important attributes of the landscape, in my professional experience and informed by TGN 02-21, I do not consider these features alone make LCA1 Vale of Belvoir to be a particularly 'high' value landscape, and features such as 'strong landscape structure' and 'well-used network of PRoW' are typical attributes of many landscapes.

Landscape Sensitivity

8.2.7. The original LVIA (ref 1.31.2) defines the sensitivity of the local landscape character areas as follows:

- **LCA1 Vale of Belvoir:** The quality and condition of the landscape is good and considered to be of medium value. The 'Vale of Belvoir' is of medium susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a medium sensitivity overall.
- **LCA2 Bottesford:** The quality and condition of the landscape is good and considered to be of medium value. The 'Bottesford' is of medium susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a medium sensitivity overall.
- **LCA9 Parkland:** The quality and condition of the landscape is very good and considered to be of high value. The 'Parkland' is of high susceptibility to the Proposed Development. This results in a high sensitivity overall.

8.2.8. As presented in my own Summary LVIA (**Appendix 3**); in accordance with the LDA Design methodology (**Appendix 4**); and informed by my assessment of landscape value, I broadly concur with the sensitivity judgements.

8.2.9. My judgements on sensitivity are summarised below:

- **LCA1 Vale of Belvoir:** community value; medium-high susceptibility to the Proposed Development; and of medium sensitivity overall.
- **LCA2 Bottesford:** community value; medium susceptibility to the Proposed Development; and of medium sensitivity overall.
- **LCA9 Parkland:** local / district value; medium susceptibility to the Proposed Development; and of medium sensitivity overall.

8.2.10. I find that the susceptibility of LCA1 Vale of Belvoir is slightly higher than judged in the original LVIA (ref 1.31.2) due to the location of the Proposed Development within this character area and changes resulting from alterations to land-use. However, this still results in 'medium' sensitivity overall.

8.2.11. The independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) also finds the susceptibility of LCA1 Vale of Belvoir to be medium, however, when combined with a high landscape value, this result in medium to medium / high sensitivity.

8.2.12. I find that the susceptibility of LCA9 Parkland is slightly lower than judged in the original LVIA (ref 1.31.2) on the basis that this character areas has a greater ability to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences. This is partly informed by the design of the Proposed Development – including the embedded landscape strategy – and the ability to successfully integrate the scheme into the wider landscape without discernible changes to the characteristics of LCA9 Parkland.

8.2.13. As illustrated by the new ZTV study (**Figure 7, Appendix 1**), there is extremely limited theoretical invisibility with LCA9 Parkland; the original visualisation from Viewpoint 9, on the edge of LCA9 Parkland (see Appendix 2.5 of the original LVIA – ref 1.31.2) show the Proposed Development would not be high visible from this location and there would be little discernible change to the appearance and character of the surrounding vale landscape. This is reinforced by the visualisations prepared from the grounds of Belvoir Castle (Heritage Viewpoints 8 and 9; see Appendix 3.1 of the original Heritage Assessment) which also show there would remain little discernible change to landscape character.

8.3. Duration of Effect

8.3.1. Duration of effect is assessed for all landscape and visual receptors and identifies the time period over which the change to the receptor as a result of the development would arise. Duration, along with judgements regarding scale and extent, combine to form judgements regarding magnitude. The process for this is fully explained within my LVIA methodology included in **Appendix 4** of this PoE.

8.3.2. Duration is classified as follows:

- Short term – the change is expected to be in place for 0-2 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe.
- Medium term - the change is expected to be in place for 2-10 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe.
- Long term - the change is expected to be in place for 10-25 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe.
- Permanent - the change is expected to be permanent and there is no intention for it to be reversed.

8.3.3. In relation to renewable solar farm and battery storage development, the operational lifespan is commonly for up to 40 years upon which all of the development is fully reversible and can be removed and the land returned to its original use. However, while this represents a 'non-permanent' change, in line with the above methodology, a permanent duration is used to define the effects of the Proposed Development (for both landscape character and visual receptors) between the proposed planting maturing (by Year 15) and in advance of decommissioning. Medium to long-term is used to describe the period post construction (from Year 1) and up to Year 15, when planting is not yet fully mature.

8.4. Visualisations

8.4.1. I refer to the various visualisations as necessary when describing and assessing the landscape and visual effects. **Table 2** below summaries the visualisations that have been prepared during the life-time of this application, and the locations of these various viewpoints are shown on **Figure 12** below.

8.4.2. I note that MBC have not requested any visualisations as part of the landscape and visual assessment, with requests made for visualisations specifically in relation to

heritage matters only. It would have been entirely reasonable and appropriate for MBC to request further visualisations to illustrate landscape and/or visual effects if they felt necessary.

Table 2: Schedule of Visualisations Prepared

Visualisations	Date	Comment
LVIA Viewpoints 6 and 9. Included as part of the original ES / LVIA (ref CD 1.33.6)	March 2020	Prepared to illustrate views across the vale landscape.
Heritage Viewpoints 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13. Included as part of the original ES / Heritage Assessment (ref CD 1.33.7)	July 2021	Prepared to consider potential impacts on built historic environment.
Viewpoints 1 - 6 (please note these are not the same as the LVIA Viewpoints referred to in the ES) Submitted separately to MBC post application (ref CD 2.4)	December 2023	Prepared to illustrate the effectiveness of revised layout and landscape strategy (Field 13) in views towards Belvoir Castle
LVIA Viewpoints 9 and 15 Included within this PoE in **Appendix 2**	July 2024	Parameter-based visualisations prepared to illustrate the effect of cumulative developments within the 5km study area.

Figure 12: Approximate Location of Viewpoint / Visualisations

8.5. Effects on Landscape Character

LCA1 Vale of Belvoir

8.5.1. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will be **Moderate Adverse** effects on LCA1 Vale of Belvoir at Year 1 due to direct changes to the land-use of the Appeal Site and introduction of new structures into the landscape. The effects will reduce to **Minor Adverse** at Year 15 as the proposed planting matures.

8.5.2. Unlike the LDA Design LVIA methodology (**Appendix 4**), no specific distinction is made regarding the scale and extent of these changes within LCA1 (with scale, extent and duration all combining to inform judgements on magnitude).

Site Scale Effects on LCA1

8.5.3. I judge that there will be large scale, permanent effects on the localised area of the landscape character of the Appeal Site itself and its immediate context. This is a result of the change of land use and introduction of new structures / infrastructure. This would result in a high-medium magnitude of effect and **Moderate Adverse / Not Significant** effect.

8.5.4. While the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial overall, retaining the existing field pattern and bringing about various enhancements to landscape fabric, there would be no changes between Year 1 and Year 15 given the fundamental change to the character of the Appeal Site.

8.5.5. 'Site-scale' effects are illustrated by the following visualisations prepared post-submission (ref CD 2.4)

- Post submission Viewpoint 1
- Post submission Viewpoint 2

- Post submission Viewpoint 5
- Post submission Viewpoint 6

And the following visualisations included in Appendix 3.1 of the original Heritage Assessment (ref CD 1.33.7)

- Heritage Viewpoint 6B
- Heritage Viewpoint 7A – 7C
- Heritage Viewpoint 13A – 13B
- Heritage Viewpoint 10
- Heritage Viewpoint 12

8.5.6. The extracts from **Post Submission Viewpoint 2** (Existing, Year 1 and 15) below illustrate the change in land use / character in and around the Appeal Site, in relatively close proximity to the solar arrays. In this particular view, while the Proposed Development will represent a clear change to existing fabric and character of the Appeal Site, the design is such that there will remain views of Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle across the landscape.

Extracts from Post Submission Viewpoint 2 (Existing, Year 1 and 15)

8.5.7. The extracts from **Heritage Viewpoint 7C** (Existing, Year 1 and Year 15) below illustrate the change in land use / character in and around the Appeal Site, within around 150m of the solar arrays. In this particular view, the Proposed Development sits well below the Belvoir Ridge; does not interrupt views of Belvoir Castle; maintains the open aspect across the wider landscape; and is not a particularly prominent feature.

Extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 7C (Existing, Year 1 and Year 15)

Effects on LCA1 surrounding the Appeal Site and up to an area of around 1km

8.5.8. I judge that there will medium scale, medium to long-term effects within the localised area of the landscape surrounding the Appeal Site and up to an area of around 1km (before the proposed planting matures). Within this area, the Proposed Development will remain visible and will change of pattern of land-use, however, the distinctive character of the expansive vale with a strong defined field pattern will prevail. Furthermore, existing / proposed landscape features and the undulating terrain begin to restrict intervisibility. This would result in a medium magnitude of effect and **Moderate Adverse / Not Significant** effect at Year 1.

8.5.9. By Year 15, the permanent effects would reduce to a medium-small scale within the localised area, with the proposed planting (including infill to existing hedgerows, and new tree and hedgerow planting) strengthening landscape structure and fabric; and further reducing inversibility with Proposed Development from the surrounding landscape. Even at 2m high, I judge that the proposed hedgerows – in combination with proposed trees; existing (and sometimes) taller vegetation outside of the Appeal Site; and the undulating topography – all come together to provide an appropriate degree of containment and screening. This would result in medium-low magnitude of effect and **Moderate-Slight Adverse / Not Significant** effect at Year 15.

8.5.10. Effects within around 1km of the Appeal Site are illustrated by the following visualisations:

- LVIA Viewpoint 6 (Appendix 2.5 of the original LVIA)
- Heritage Viewpoint 2 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment)
- Heritage Viewpoint 5 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment):

8.5.11. The extracts from **LVIA Viewpoint 6** (Existing and Year 1) below illustrate the change in land use / character surrounding the Appeal Site. In this particular view, the Proposed Development is almost indiscernible within the view (despite the slightly elevated bridge location) and maintains the open aspect across the wider landscape. I have not included an extract from the 'Year 5' photomontage given the proposed planting makes no discernible difference to the landscape context / degree of visibility from this location. For ease of reference, the approximate location of the Proposed Development in the visualisation is highlighted by the orange box.

Extract from LVIA Viewpoint 6 (Existing and Year 1)

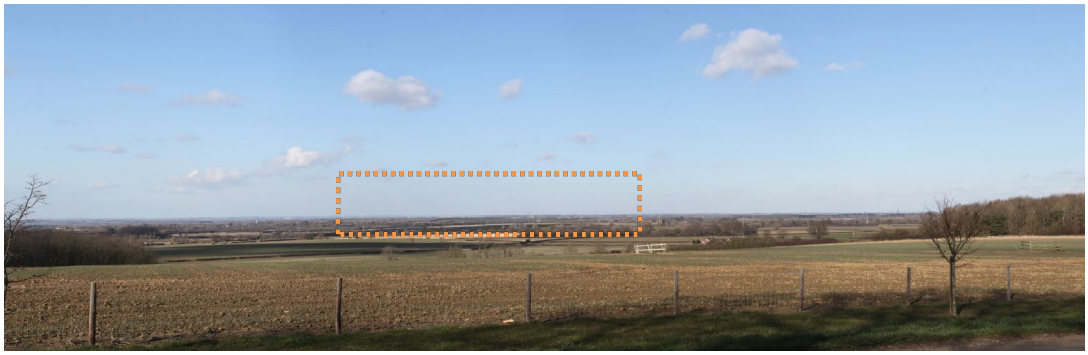
Effects of LCA1 beyond 1km from the Appeal Site

8.5.12. I judge that there will be negligible scale effects beyond 1km from the Appeal Site / within the study area and continuing to decrease with distance. There would be limited intervisibility with the Proposed Development and little discernible change to landscape character and key characteristics. This would result in a **Minimal Neutral / Not Significant** effect. While the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial overall, there would be no changes between Year 1 and Year 15 given the lack of intervisibility.

8.5.13. Effects beyond around 1km of the Appeal Site are illustrated by the following visualisations:

- LVIA Viewpoint 9 (Appendix 2.5 of the original LVIA)
- Heritage Viewpoint 8 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment)
- Heritage Viewpoint 9 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment):
- Appeal Viewpoint 9 (Appendix 2 of this PoE)
- Appeal Viewpoint 15 (Appendix 2 of this PoE)

8.5.14. The extract from LVIA Viewpoint 9 (Existing and Year 1) below illustrates the limited change in land use / character within the wider landscape. In this particular view, the Proposed Development is barely discernible and maintains the open aspect across the wider landscape. I have not included an extract from the 'Year 15' photomontage given the proposed planting makes no discernible difference to the landscape / visual context from this particular location. For ease of reference, the approximate location of the Proposed Development in the visualisation is highlighted by the orange box.



Extracts from Appeal Viewpoint 9 (Existing and Year 1)

Conclusion

8.5.15. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant landscape effects on LCA1 Belvoir Vale.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of the original LVIA.
- Adverse effects will largely be contained within 1km of the Appeal Site.

8.5.16. With reference to the guidance provided within the 'Melton and Rushcliffe Landscape Sensitivity Study: Wind Energy Development' (2014) (ref CD 8.8). I conclude the following:

- The historic villages with distinctive church spires will remain as landmark features within the Vale.
- The rural nature of the Vale will be maintained / prevail overall.
- The smaller scale pastoral areas associated with the villages will be maintained.
- The Proposed Development will not detract from the quality and character of views of the Vale as seen from Belvoir Castle – please refer to my visual evidence in **Section 9.0** for further detail on changes in views from Belvoir Caste.
- The Proposed Development will not detract from the special character of conservation areas and historic interest of the villages – please refer to the Heritage PoE for further detail on effects on the setting of heritage assets.
- The size and scale of the Proposed Development – which is low lying and with the solar arrays not exceeding 3m in height - will not diminish the perceived scale / prominence of Belvoir Castle and the escarpment on which it sits.

8.5.17. The independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) states that there will be a high magnitude of effect – and when combined with a medium to medium / high sensitivity, the effect will be significant overall. However, no methodology or matrix is provided to ascertain how overall assessment judgements are calibrated or what constitutes a 'significant' effect. There is also no reference how issues such as extent and duration of effect (as defined by GLVIA3) have informed judgements around magnitude. I therefore treat these conclusions with caution and consider that they do not provide a sufficiently robust alternative to the findings of the Pegasus and LDA Design assessments.

LCA2 Bottesford

8.5.18. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will be **Moderate Adverse** effects on LCA2 Bottesford at Year 1; reducing to **Minor Adverse** at Year 15 due to the potential to alter the pattern of nucleated townscape within the vale landscape.

Effects on LCA2 within around 500m of the Appeal Site

8.5.19. I judge that there will be medium scale, medium to long-term effects on a limited area of landscape character of LCA2 Bottesford within around 500m from the Appeal Site (before planting mature).

8.5.20. These effects would primary be experienced on the south-west fringes of Muston, where there would be intervisibility with the Proposed Development and changes to the setting of the village. There would be little change to the settlement fringe of Bottesford itself, which is separated from the Appeal Site by intervening A52 and associated vegetation, with little intervisibility. This would result in a medium magnitude of effect and **Moderate Adverse / Not Significant** effect at Year 1.

8.5.21. By Year 15, the permanent effects would reduce to a small scale over the limited area, with the proposed planting (in particular the proposed belt of native tree planting added along the eastern boundary of Field 9) strengthening landscape structure and fabric; further reducing inversibility with Proposed Development from the fringe of Muston; and ensuring that there remains the sense of a largely open, expansive countryside beyond the village. This would result in low magnitude of effect and **Slight Adverse / Not Significant** effect Year 15.

8.5.22. Effects within around 500m of the Appeal Site – on the edge of the Bottesford LCA - are illustrated by the following visualisations:

- Heritage Viewpoint 2 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment)
- Heritage Viewpoint 5 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment)

8.5.23. The extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 2 (Existing, Year 1 and Year 15) illustrate the limited change in land use / character within the wider landscape. In this particular

view, the enhanced hedgerow planting will provide some enclosure along the roadside, however, will be consistent with the existing pattern of established hedgerows (of varying heights) along lanes and will maintain the rural character of the countryside.

Extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 2 (Existing, Year 1 and Year 15)

Effects on LCA2 beyond 500m of the Appeal Site

8.5.24. I judge that there will be negligible scale effects beyond 0.5km form the Appeal Site. There would be extremely limited intervisibility with the Proposed Development, in part as a consequence of the built-up settlement areas themselves - and little discernible change to landscape character and key characteristics. This would result in more than a negligible magnitude of effect and **Minimal Neutral Not Significant** effect overall. While the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial overall, there would be no changes between Year 1 and Year 15 given the lack of intervisibility.

Conclusion

8.5.25. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant landscape effects on LCA2 Bottesford.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of Pegasus.
- Adverse effects will largely be contained within 0.5km of the Appeal Site.

LCA9 Parkland

8.5.26. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will be **Negligible Neutral** effects on LCA9 Parkland and Year 1 Year 15 due to there being little discernible change to the vale landscape beyond the parkland.

Effects on LCA9

8.5.27. I judge that there will be negligible scale effect on the landscape character of LCA2 Parkland. There would be little to no intervisibility with the Proposed Development from the majority of this LCA; if visible, it would be perceived at distance and not a prominent or easily distinguishable feature within the landscape; would be perceived in the context of other infrastructure and settlement

in the landscape; including pylons running across the site and more distant wind turbines; and would not alter any of the distinctive characteristics of the parkland and/or its relationship with the value landscape. This would result in a negligible magnitude of effect and **Minimal Neutral** effect overall. While the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial overall, there would be no changes between Year 1 and Year 15 given the lack of intervisibility.

8.5.28. Effects within LCA9 Parkland are illustrated by the following visualisations:

- LVIA Viewpoint 9 (Appendix 2.5 of the original LVIA)
- Heritage Viewpoint 8 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment)
- Heritage Viewpoint 9 (Appendix 3.1 of the original Cultural Heritage Assessment):
- Appeal Viewpoint 9 (**Appendix 2** of this PoE)

8.5.29. The extract from Heritage Viewpoint 9 (Existing and Year 1) below illustrates the limited change in land use / character within the wider landscape. In this particular view, the Proposed Development is barely discernible and maintains the open aspect across the wider landscape. I have not included an extract from the 'Year 15' photomontage given the proposed planting makes no discernible difference to the landscape / visual context from this particular location. For ease of reference, the approximate location of the Proposed Development in the visualisation is highlighted by the orange box.

Extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 9 (Existing and Year 1)

Conclusion

8.5.30. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant or adverse landscape effects on LCA3 Parkland.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of Pegasus.

8.6. Cumulative Effects on Landscape Character

8.6.1. RfR 2 is concerned with the effect on landscape character of the Proposed Development when considered 'cumulatively' with other permitted and operational schemes. I consider cumulative effects in relation to the 5km study area and more broadly in relation to a 30km study area.

5km Study Area

8.6.2. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) consider the cumulative effect of the Proposed Development in combination with the following other solar developments within the 5km Study area:

- 10MW Solar Farm, Land South of the Railway Line & East of Station Road, Elton. Constructed and operational. Approximately 4.5km north-west of Appeal Site.
- 12.4 MW Solar Farm, Lodge Farm, Longhedge Lane. Constructed and operational. Approximately 4.5km north-west from the Appeal Site.
- 49.9MW Solar Farm, Land South of the A1 (Foston- By-Pass). Granted permission subject to conditions 1st March 2021. Approximately 4.9km north-east from the Appeal Site.
- 49.9MW Solar Farm, Land East of Jericho Covert, Jericho Lane. Validated 15th October 2020, still pending decision. Approximately 3.8km west of the Appeal Site.

8.6.3. Overall, it was judged that due to relative distance, extent of intervening features and lack of intervisibility between the various schemes, no significant cumulative landscape and visual effects would arise.

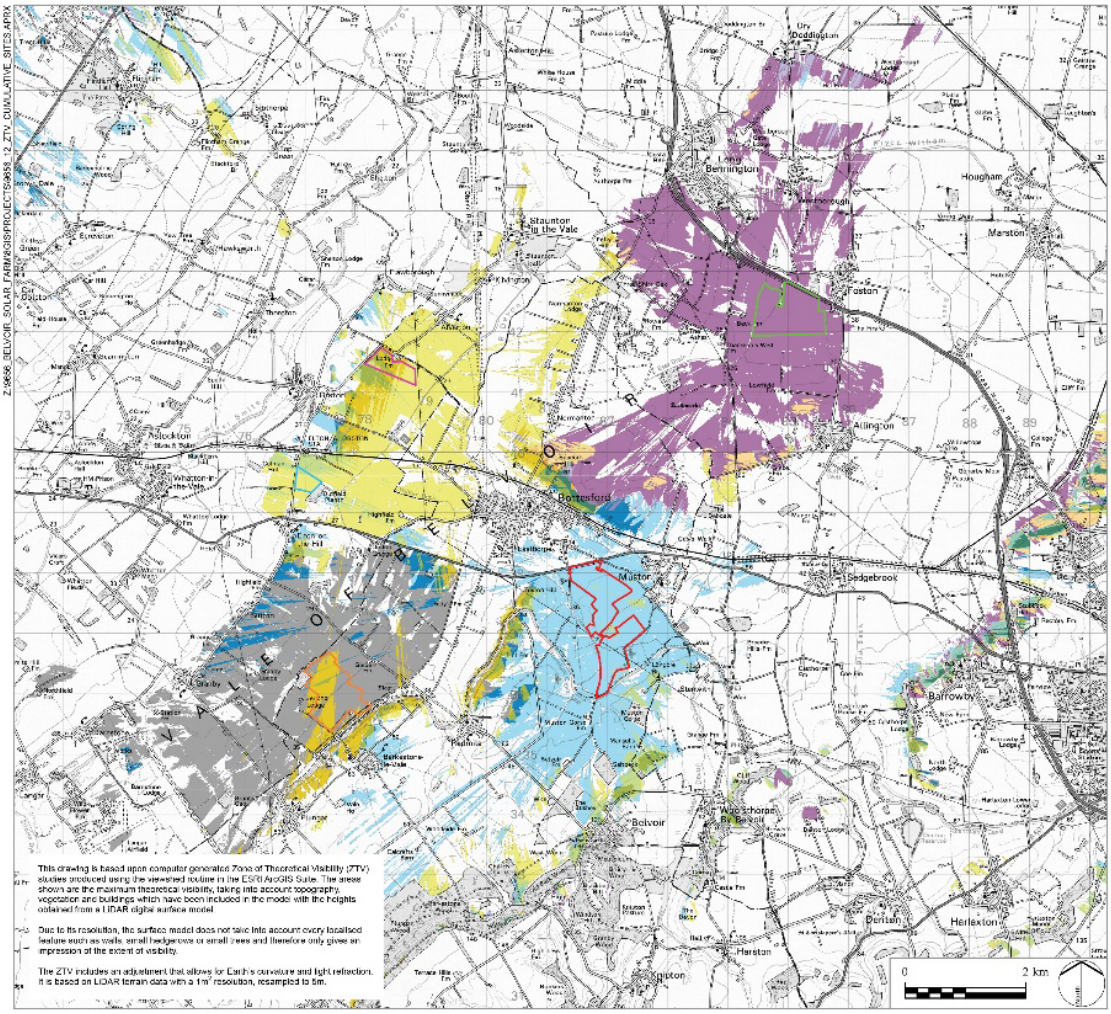
8.6.4. It is important to note that given the above schemes are either constructed or consented, I would normally treat these as being part of the baseline environment, and as such it becomes a matter of judgement – for MBC – as to whether an additional solar scheme (i.e. the Proposed Development) can be successfully accommodated within the landscape without altering its prevailing character / key characteristics.

8.6.5. As set out in the preceding Section, I judge any adverse landscape effects of the Proposed Development to be contained within around 1km of the Appeal Site. Through my own desk and field study I also concur with the findings of the

original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) that there would be relatively limited intervisibility with any of the other solar developments, and would go on to conclude that would remain large swathes of predominately open countryside between these solar developments, such that the key characteristics of the broader landscape – i.e. an expansive vale landscape, with strong field pattern and interspersed with nucleated settlement and area of parkland – will prevail. Solar development will remain a relatively minor component of the landscape, in much the same way major roads; railway lines and pylon routes are all features of the Vale landscape.

8.6.6. I have prepared a cumulative ZTV study and additional parameter based photomontages to help illustrate my judgments. As shown by the cumulative ZTV (**Figure 11; Appendix 1**), each scheme has a relatively 'contained' zone of theoretical visibility, with very little 'overlap' occurring. The area of overlap is principally around Beacon Hill, where you could reasonably expect to view the various solar developments in combination given this an elevated location that is central to all five schemes – I refer to this in more detail below.

8.6.7. The ZTV study also shows that there will remain expansive areas of countryside between the various solar developments – where no or only one solar development is visible - with a minimum distance of some 4km between developments. The cumulative ZTV is shown on **Figure 13** below.



LEGEND

- Site Boundary
- Elton Solar: 10MW Solar Farm, Land South of The Railway Line and East of Station Road, Elton, Nottinghamshire (Planning Ref: 14/01739/FUL Rushcliffe Borough Council). Constructed and operational.
- Lodge Farm Solar: 12.4MW Solar Farm, Lodge Farm, Longhedge Lane, Orston (Planning Ref: 13/01609/FUL Rushcliffe Borough Council). Constructed and operational.
- By-Pass Farm Solar: 49.9MW Solar Farm, Land South of the A1 (Foston Bypass), Foston, Grantham (Planning Ref: S20/1433 South Kesteven Council). Granted permission subject to conditions 1st March 2021.
- Green Farm Solar: 49.9MW Solar Farm, Land East of Jericho Covert, Jericho Lane, Barkestone Le Vale (Planning Ref: 20/01182/FUL Melton Borough Council). Validated 15th October 2020, still pending decision.

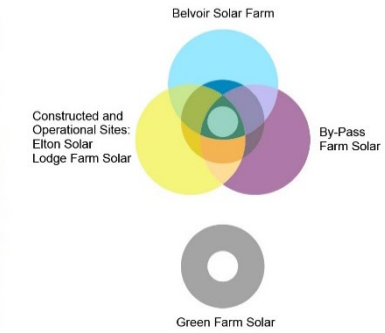


Figure 13: Cumulative ZTV (please see Appendix 1 for main figures)

8.6.8. I have also prepared cumulative visualisations from two viewpoints (**Appendix 2**). These are Viewpoints 9: From the Jubilee Way and 15: From Bridleway F86a/2, Beacon Hill. Both of these locations are elevated vantage points in the local landscape, and are included in the small number of locations where the cumulative ZTV indicates 'overlap' of theoretical visibility. Viewpoint 15 in particular is from a location that is central to all five of the solar developments within the 5km study area.

8.6.9. It should be noted that these photomontages are presented as 360 degree panoramas in order to illustrate the entire view north, east, south and west and the various features within the surrounding landscape.

8.6.10. As can be seen from these photomontages:

Viewpoint 9:

- Proposed Development (under consideration) will be visible in the landscape but not a prominent feature within the view; partly screened by existing and proposed vegetation; seen at a distance of some 1.6 km; and perceived in the context of other infrastructure and settlement in the distance.
- Green Farm Solar (permitted but not yet constructed) will be visible, but an indiscernible feature within the landscape; partly screened by intervening vegetation; and sitting well below the distant horizon line.
- By-Pass Farm Solar (permitted but not yet constructed) is screened by intervening vegetation and/or topography.
- Elton Solar (operational) is screened by intervening vegetation and/or topography
- Lodge Farm Solar (operational) is visible in the landscape but is not a prominent feature within the view; largely screened by existing and proposed vegetation; seen at a distance of some 7.6km

- Overall, while a number of solar developments are visible from this location, none are prominent features in view; all sit well below the sky line; and they do not erode the open, agricultural character of the vale.

Viewpoint 15

- Proposed Development (under consideration) is a visible feature within the landscape albeit partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation; seen at a distance of some 1.5km; and does not interrupt views towards Belvoir Ridge and Belvoir Castle beyond.
- Green Farm Solar (permitted but not yet constructed) is visible, but not a prominent feature in view; largely screened by intervening vegetation; and sitting well below the distant horizon line.
- By-Pass Farm Solar is obscured by foreground vegetation but may become more visible, subject to the exact location of the view.
- Elton Solar (operational) is visible, but not a prominent feature in view; largely screened by intervening vegetation; and sitting well below the distant horizon line.
- Lodge Farm Solar (operational) is visible in the landscape; is partly screened by intervening vegetation; and sitting well below the distant horizon line.
- Overall, while a number of solar developments are visible from this location, none are prominent features in view; all sit well below the sky line; they do not erode the open character of the vale; and they do disrupt the relationship between the vale and the Belvoir Ridge.

8.6.11. I have also calculated the 'area' of solar development within the 5km study area. The study area represents around 10,807ha. Within this area, solar development – including the Proposed Development itself – represents around 236ha, or around 2% of the study area. Built up areas are estimated to be around 321ha, or around 3% of the study area. The remaining 10,250ha or 95% of the study area could arguably be described as 'countryside'.

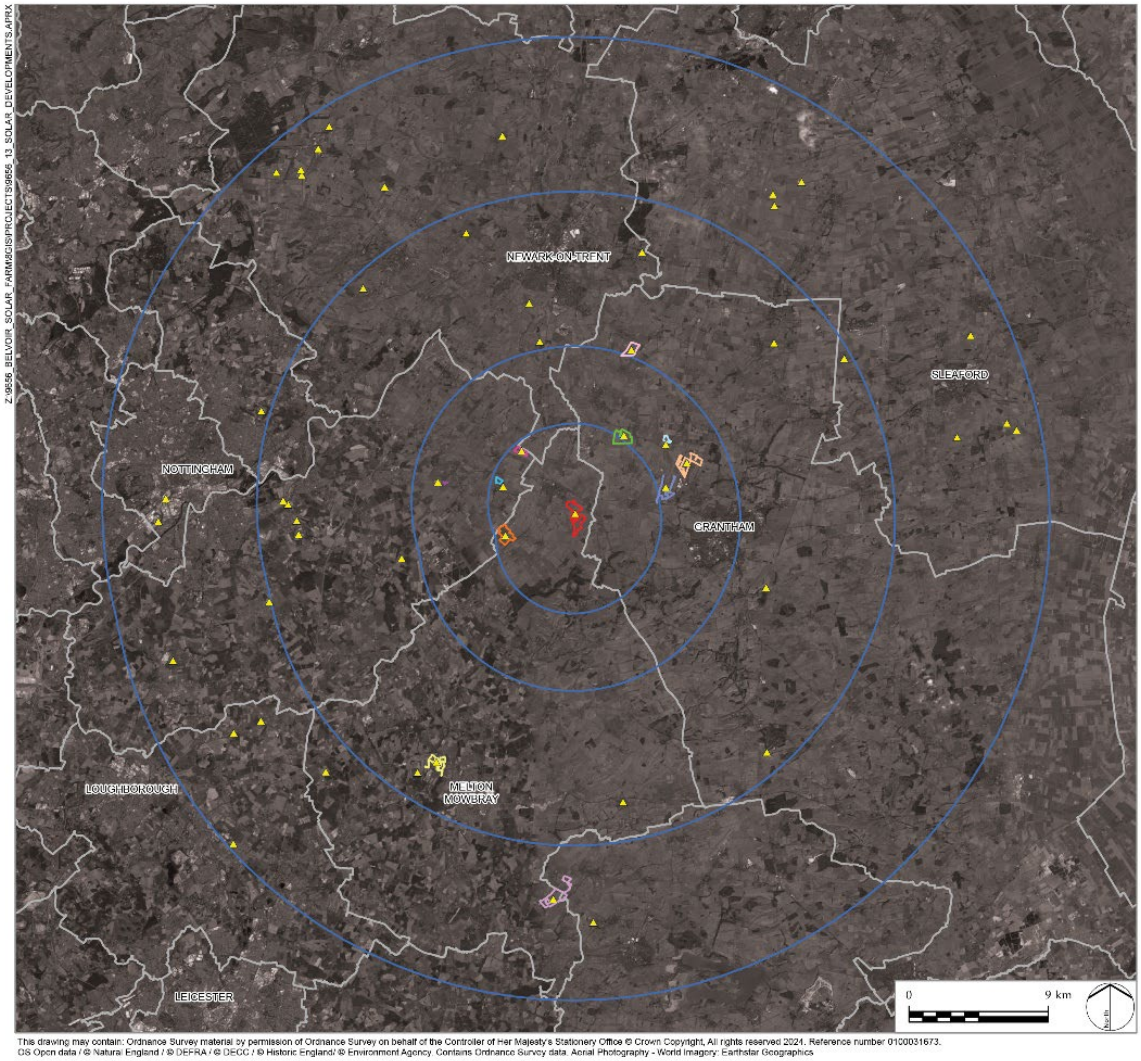
8.6.12. On the basis that the Proposed Development itself does not result in a significant effect on landscape character; has relatively limited visual influence; the cumulative solar developments share little invisibility with each other; and that solar development will represent a very small proportion of the wider landscape, I conclude that there will be no significant cumulative effects within the 5km study area and that the landscape has the capacity to accommodate the Proposed Development.

30km Study Area

8.6.13. RfR 2 does specifically refer to the cumulative effect of solar development within a 30km distance from the Appeal Site. Given that I find there to be no significant cumulative effects within the 5km study area, I do not judge there to be any be any significant cumulative effects within a greater distance. There of course may be unacceptable cumulative effects resulting from other schemes in combination, but this would not be a result of the Proposed Development itself and would need to be judged in relation to the determination of the relevant planning applications.

8.6.14. However, I have prepared a plan of solar development within a 30km study area to understand the broad distribution (however, please note that this plan is not necessarily exhaustive, and it intended to show the broad distribution of schemes rather an in-depth review of all planning applications). Solar developments within 10km of the Appel Site have been mapped using the relevant site boundary; and solar developments beyond this have been indicated by a symbol.

8.6.15. The location of solar development within a 30km study area are shown on **Figure 14** below.



LEGEND

- Site Boundary
- Study Areas (5km, 10km, 20km, 30km)
- District Boundary
- Solar Schemes (Operational, Under Construction, Awaiting Construction)

Figure 14: Approximate Locations of Solar Development within 30km Study Area (please see Appendix 1 for main figures / full legend)

8.6.16. My professional opinion is that it is extremely difficult to make valid judgements around cumulative effects at this scale, given the context and conditions for each solar development will be different, and – as described in **Section 7.0** of my PoE – energy infrastructure in the countryside should be founded on good design and promoting the right sites in the correct places. However, I would make the broad observations:

- Despite some clustering of solar developments around built-up areas of Nottingham and Grantham, solar developments are well spaced throughout the wider landscape.
- Beyond the 5km study – and excluding the urban fringe of Grantham – there few other solar developments within a 10km study area.
- I have calculated that within the 10km study area, solar development makes up around 1% of the total area (with built up areas at around 5% and the remaining 94% as countryside)
- Melton Borough itself has few solar developments within its administrative area, which would suggest the authority is making a relatively limited contribution to renewable energy generation.

Conclusion

8.6.17. Based on the evidence presented in this Section of my PoE, I conclude that the Proposed Development would not have an unacceptable harmful effect on the landscape character and quality of the area when considered in combination with other developments in the locality.

8.6.18. By Year 15 there will be some 'moderate' adverse landscape effects for the Appeal Site itself and its immediate context, and these need to be appropriately weighed in the planning balance.

9.0 Visual Effects

9.1. Introduction

9.1.1. The impacts on views are assessed within the original LVIA (ref 1.31.2); I broadly agree with the judgements made; and I have seen no specific comments or criticism from MBC regarding the actual judgements on visual effects.

9.1.2. It is noted that the independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) did raise concerns that while significant visual effects will be experienced from a number of PROW around the Appeal Site, visual effects are considered to not be significant at Year 15 due to the existing and proposed boundary hedgerows being managed to a height of 3m. If hedgerow were to be cut and/or maintained at 2m, the independent landscape consultant concludes that significant adverse visual effects would be experienced at Year 15. This is in refence to Viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 12. These viewpoints all within **VRG1 - Appeal Site and its Immediate Context** for the purposes of my assessment.

9.1.3. The independent landscape consultant goes on to say that *"the view of the wider rural 'Vale' landscape will be removed from over 2km of public rights of way (PROW) which link directly to the village of Muston, by both 3m high solar panels or newly planted hedges to be maintained at 3m. These PROW will become passageways, altering the recreational experience on these routes for the most sensitive of viewers"*. I disagree with this conclusion, and explore this further when summarising my own assessment in this Section of this PoE.

9.1.4. The independent landscape consultant also find that the visual effects form Belvoir Ridge / Jubilee Way (Viewpoint 9) and Beacon Hill (Viewpoint 15) have been underplayed and that the visual effects of the Proposed Development – at Year 15 – will remain significant. Again, I disagree with this conclusion, and I refer back to

these judgements where necessary when summarising my own assessment in this Section of this PoE.

9.1.5. As highlighted in relation to landscape effects in **Section 8.0** of my PoE, I do note that the independent landscape consultant does not provide a comparative or alternative assessment of effects. This leads me to conclude that – notwithstanding effects on the PRoW within the immediate vicinity of the Site and those views from the Belvoir Ridge / Jubilee Way (Viewpoint 9) and Beacon Hill (Viewpoint 15) – all other judgements regarding visual effects are broadly accepted.

9.1.6. It should be noted that – as recorded in relation to landscape effects - I have not specifically considered construction effects given that these are short-term, and no concerns have been raised regarding the effect of construction activity on views. I have also assumed that the effects of the operational Proposed Development are either middle to long-term; and/or permanent.

9.1.7. I have also not specifically considered effects on private residences. As noted by the Case Officer in the Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1), there would be no significant effects upon residential amenity from any part of the Proposed Development due to distance from the any residential properties and landscape proposals (Para 8.4.6). In addition:

- MBC have advised - during preparation of the SoCG - that they are not presenting a case on 'residential visual amenity', and this is not a matter is dispute.
- I am not aware of any pre-application, post-application or Appeal discussions or documentation with MBC that identifies 'residential visual amenity' as issues or concerns.
- There are no residential properties directly adjoining the Appeal Site.

9.1.8. Overall, I consider that the effects resulting from the proposed development would fall below the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold referred to in LI TGN 02/2019 (ref CD 8.4) as visual effects "*of such nature and / or magnitude that it potentially affects 'living conditions' or Residential Amenity*". The guidance note further indicates that "*It is not uncommon for significant adverse effects on views and visual amenity to be experienced by people at their place of residence as a result of introducing a new development into the landscape. In itself this does not necessarily cause particular planning concern".*

9.1.9. I do note that the key concerns arising from the independent landscape consultant relate to the appropriateness of 3m high hedgerows; and over reliance on the landscape strategy / mitigation to reduce visual effects. I have addressed the issue regarding hedgerow height in **Section 7.0** of my evidence and my judgements regarding visual effects are based on an assumed 2m high hedgerows at year 15.

9.2. Visualisations

9.2.1. The independent landscape consultant references the visualisations prepared as part of the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) from Muston Bridge (Viewpoints 6) and Belvoir Ridge / Jubilee Way (Viewpoint 9) and highlights that is would have been beneficial to have a visual representation from PRoW F85b/1 (Viewpoint 5). To the best of my knowledge, a visualisation from Viewpoint 5 was not subsequently requested by the Case Officer.

9.2.2. I note that 4 no. additional visualisations have been prepared post application and submitted to MBC in advance of the Decision (ref CD 3.3). While these new visuals / locations are not from the Viewpoints identified within the original LVIA, they are broadly in the location of Viewpoint 5, and were prepared to illustrate the

effectiveness of revised layout and landscape strategy in views towards Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle.

9.2.3. I refer to the various visualisations as necessary when describing and assessing the visual effects. **Table 1** (in **Section 8.0**) summarises the visualisations that have been prepared during the life-time of this application, and the location of these various viewpoints is shown on **Figure 13** (see **Section 8.0** and **Appendix 1**)

9.3. Visual Receptor Value and Sensitivity

9.3.1. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) found that for the majority of viewpoints sensitivity was considered to be 'high' based on a medium value (views being rural in nature but not within a designated landscape) and high susceptibility (including people engaged in recreational activities in the countryside)

9.3.2. I have seen no criticism or comments regarding the judgements made in relation to the sensitivity of the representative viewpoints and assume these are broadly accepted by MBC.

9.3.3. As presented in my own Summary LVIA (**Appendix 3**) and in accordance with the LDA Design methodology (**Appendix 4**) I typically judge the sensitivity of the identified VRGs to be high-medium, based on a combination of high susceptibility and community value - given that there is no evidence to suggest that these VRGs contain any features or characteristics that would elevate the value of the view above that of 'ordinary' countryside. High-medium sensitivity VRGs typically comprise people in locations where they are likely to pause to appreciate the view, such as from local waypoints such as benches or at key views to / from local landmarks; visitors to local attractions, heritage assets or public parks where views are an important contributor to the experience; and people using public rights of way and accessible open space.

9.3.4. I only find one of the VRGS to be of 'high' sensitivity. In accordance with the LDA Design methodology this classification is typically attributed to visitors to valued viewpoints or routes which people might visit purely to experience the view, e.g. promoted or well-known viewpoints, routes from which views that form part of the special qualities of a designated landscape can be well appreciated; key designed views; and panoramic viewpoints marked on maps. VRG3: Belvoir Ridge contains sections of the Jubilee Way Long Distance Route; offers panoramic views from Cliff Road; and contains Belvoir Castle as an important feature within the landscape, and my professional judgement is that of higher sensitivity than the other identified VRGS.

9.4. Effects on Visual Receptor Groups

VRG1 - Appeal Site and its Immediate Context

9.4.1. VRG1 encompasses roads and PRoW in close proximity to the Appeal Site. This VRG is represented by representative viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 12.

9.4.2. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will generally be **Major Adverse** effects on the Viewpoints that make up VRG1 at Year 1 due to relatively close range, uninterpreted views of new structures into the landscape. The effects will generally reduce to **Moderate Adverse** at Year 15 as the proposed planting matures.

9.4.3. Unlike the LDA Design LVIA methodology (**Appendix 4**), no specific distinction is made regarding the scale and extent of these changes within VRG1 (with scale, extent and duration all combining to inform judgements on magnitude).

9.4.4. I judge that there will generally be large scale, medium to long-term effects on the views from local roads and PRoW within the localised area of the Appeal Site and

its immediate context as a result of the introduction of new structures into the landscape and some curtailing of views – across the countryside – from those PRoW that adjoin the Appeal Site boundary (before planting matures). This would result in a high magnitude of effect and Major-Moderate Adverse / Significant effect at Year 1.

9.4.5. I agree with the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) that the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial overall, with 2m high hedgerows partly (but not fully) screening the Proposed Development and bringing about associated visual amenity benefits resulting from enhanced existing and new trees, hedgerows and grassland planting. I accept that new hedgerows will enclose views to a certain degree, but based on my professional experience; field work; and the visualisations prepared post submission (to illustrate the effectiveness of revised layout and landscape strategy (Field 13) in views towards Belvoir Castle) leads me to conclude that:

- The nature of views along PRoW within the vale landscape vary considerably, with some much open views but some already 'enclosed' by vegetation (some of which is taller than 2m) and the undulating topography. More 'enclosed' views are therefore not necessarily uncharacteristic of the network of PRoW.
- The view of users of PRoW will not solely be focused toward any adjacent development, hedgerow or other enclosing feature – there will often be alternative views along the alignment of route itself or in other directions.
- The proposed 'green lanes' - which would incorporate the footpaths routes, existing and new hedgerows and meadow grassland – will help ensure the PRoW do not feel excessively enclosed.
- In many locations these green lanes will still allow for views over the adjoining hedgerows and solar panels, maintaining a sense of openness and – in places – views towards the Belvoir Castle / Belvoir Ridge.
- None of the PRoW will adjoin the Appeal Site / Proposed Development for the entirely of their length. The maximum length of PRoW adjoining the Proposed

Development is circa 2km in length, which represents around a around a 20 minute walking time.

- The layout is such that no footpath is fully enclosed by the Proposed Development, with the Proposed Development only ever directly adjoining one side of a PRoW.
- While not directly mitigating for visual effects, the Proposed Development does include a new permissive footpath route and accessible open spaces which will further enhance and increase opportunities for recreation, interpretation and education.
- Specifically, the reduction in the extent of solar panels within Field 13 - retaining views towards the Belvoir ridge and creating associated open space and interpretation – is considered to be a very positive aspect of the design evolution.

9.4.6. As such, I find that the permanent effects will generally reduce to a medium scale at Year 15 over the localised area, albeit this scale of effect remains higher than that defined in the original LVIA, which was generally low by Year 15. This would result in a medium magnitude of effect and **Moderate Adverse / Not Significant** effect overall at Year 15. My professional opinion is that this moderate effect – whilst not significant – remains at the 'higher end' of the moderate range.

9.4.7. There are various visualisations which demonstrate the lack of enclosure along these routes and opportunities for views across the wider Vale landscape, namely:

- Post submission viewpoints 1 and 2 – solar rays visible at relatively close range (in Field 12), beyond the proposed hedgerows. Subject to the direction of the view, Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle remains visible in the distance.
- Post submission viewpoints 5 and 6 – view entirely of the proposed open space (in Field 13), with meadow grassland in the foreground and uninterrupted views of Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle.
- Heritage Viewpoint 6B – foreground view of retained agricultural field; solar arrays in the mid-ground partially screened by retained / enhanced hedgerows

and sitting well below the skyline; and uninterrupted views of St Mary's Church, Bottesford.

- Heritage Viewpoint 7A – foreground view of solar arrays (in Field 7), but sitting below the sky line; and uninterrupted views of the spire of St Mary's Church, Bottesford. Visualisation clearly shows the design of the 'green lanes' and the space created along the PRoW.
- Heritage Viewpoint 7B – no views of solar arrays, with the eastern edge of the PRoW abutting retained agricultural land (Field 16)
- Heritage Viewpoint 7C - foreground views of retained agricultural (Field 18) abutting the south edge of the PRoW; mid ground views of solar arrays (in Fields 9 and 10), partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation and sitting well below the sky line; and uninterrupted views of Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle.
- Heritage Viewpoint 13A – foreground views of retained agricultural land (Field 20); mid ground views of solar arrays (in Field 8), partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation and sitting below the sky line; and uninterrupted views of the spire of St Mary's Church, Bottesford.
- Heritage Viewpoint 13B - foreground views of retained agricultural land (Field 20); mid ground views of solar arrays (in Field 11), partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation and sitting well below the sky line; and uninterrupted views of Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle.

9.4.8. The extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 13B (Existing, Year 1 and Year 15) illustrate the change in view from the PRoW in close proximity to the Appeal Site. In this particular view, the Proposed Development sits well below the Belvoir Ridge; does not interrupt views of Belvoir Castle; and maintains the open aspect across the wider landscape.

Extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 13B (Existing, Year 1 and Year 15)

9.4.9. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant visual effects on VRG1.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of Pegasus.

9.4.10. The independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) states that there will remain significant visual effects at Year 15, but does not provide any specific

judgements, methodology or matrix as to how this position is reached. I therefore treat this conclusion with caution and consider that it does not provide a sufficiently robust alternative to the findings of the Pegasus and LDA Design assessments.

9.4.11. I disagree with the conclusions of the independent landscape consultant that the Proposed Development will 'remove' the view of the wider Vale and that these PRoW will become 'passageways'. The layout of the Proposed Development, including the incorporation of green lanes will ensure that the PRoW are not overly enclosed. There will remain views across the vale, either over and above the solar panels; in breaks in the Proposed Development; in opposite directions from the Proposed Development itself; and from those sections of PRoW that do not adjoin or are in close proximity to the Appeal Site.

9.4.12. The vast majority of the visualisations prepared in relation to the project – save the those that are immediately next to solar arrays or an existing / proposed hedgerows – show that even is relatively close proximity to the solar arrays, there will remain views of the wider Vale.

VRG2 - Woolsthorpe Lane and Muston

9.4.13. This VGR encompasses Muston, other scattered settlement, roads and PRoW in open countryside to the north-east / east of the Appeal Site, primarily focussed along the Woolsthorpe Lane corridor. This VRG is represented by Viewpoints 1 and 6.

9.4.14. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will generally be **Moderate Adverse** effects on the Viewpoints that make up VRG2 at Year 1. The completed Proposed Development would be very visible, albeit in the mid ground of the views; partially screened by existing vegetation; and it not braking above the

distant skyline. The effects will generally reduce to no more than a **Moderate-negligible Adverse** at Year 15 as the proposed planting matures.

9.4.15. I judge that there will generally be medium scale, medium to long-term effects on the views from local roads and PRoW within the limited area on the fringes of the village (before planting matures) due to the introduction of new structures into the landscape and change to the composition of the view, albeit the Proposed Development will still be seen at some distance; will not break the skyline; and will not obscure views across the wider countryside. This would result in a medium magnitude of effect and **Moderate Adverse / Not Significant** effect at Year 1.

9.4.16. I agree with the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) that the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial, with new hedgerows planting helping to 'gap' existing field boundaries along the north-eastern edge of the Appeal Site, and with new tree planting providing further filtering of views. As such, I find that the permanent effects will generally reduce to a small scale at Year 15 across a limited area. This would result in a low-negligible magnitude of effect and **Slight Adverse / Not Significant** effect at Year 15.

9.4.17. There are various visualisations which demonstrate the lack of enclosure along these routes and opportunities for views across the wider Vale landscape, namely:

- Heritage Viewpoint 2 – foreground views of retained agricultural land (Fields 14 and 15) abutting the south edge of Easthorpe Lane; mid ground views of solar arrays (in Field 4), partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation; visible on the sky line but not prominent feature in view; and Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle visible in the distance, above and between arrays.
- Heritage Viewpoint 5 – foreground views of retained agricultural land (Field 15) abutting the south-western edge of Easthorpe Lane; mid to distant

glimpsed views of solar arrays (in Field 4), partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation; and little discernible change to overall visual context.

- LVIA Viewpoint 6 – foreground views of retained agricultural land to the west of Woolsthorpe Road; mid to distant views of solar arrays (in Field 9), partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation; visible on the sky line but not prominent feature in view; and little discernible change to overall visual context.

9.4.18. The extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 9 (Existing and Year 1) below illustrate the limited change in land use / character within the wider landscape. In this particular view, the Proposed Development is barely discernible and maintains the open aspect across the wider landscape. I have not included an extract from the 'Year 15' photomontage given the proposed planting makes no discernible difference to the landscape / visual context from this location. For ease of reference, the approximate location of the Proposed Development in the view is highlighted by the orange box.

Extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 9 (Existing and Year 1)

9.4.19. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant visual effects on VRG2.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of Pegasus.

VRG3 - Belvoir Ridge

9.4.20. This VRG encompasses scattered settlement, roads and PRoW in in open countryside to the south of the Appeal Site, extending up to the Belvoir ridge line. This VRG is represented by viewpoint 9.

9.4.21. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will be a **Moderate Adverse** on Viewpoint 9. There would be partial, glimpsed long distance views of the completed Proposed Development beyond intervening vegetation and landform. The elevated nature of the view is such that are panoramic views across the wider landscape, such that the Proposed Development is not perceived to be as expansive in the view. The effects will reduce to **Moderate Adverse / Negligible Neutral** at Year 15 as the proposed planting matures.

9.4.22. I judge that there will be small-negligible scale, permanent effects on the views from within a limited area along the edge of ridgeline. The Proposed Development will not be a prominent feature in the view; will still be seen at some distance; will not break the skyline; will not obscure views across the wider countryside; will be seen in context of more distant wind turbine and industrial land-uses along the A1 corridor; and will have no discernible effect on the overall composition of the view. This would result in low-negligible magnitude of effect (which is slightly lower than that defined in the original LVIA), and **Slight Adverse / Not Significant** effect at Year 1.

9.4.23. I agree with the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) that the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial overall, with new planting further filtering views, however, I

do not find – from this location – that the planting (whether this is 2m in height or grown out to 3m) will not discernibly change the degree of the Proposed Development that is visible or the nature of the view. As such, I find that the scale of effects will remain **Slight Adverse / Not Significant** at Year 15.

9.4.24. There are various visualisations which demonstrate the limited visual impact from the Belvoir Ridge. LVIA Viewpoint 9; Heritage Viewpoint 8 and Heritage Viewpoint 9 all illustrate the expansive, open views of the surrounding value landscape from the ridge; that the Proposed Development not a prominent feature in view; is partially screened by vegetation / landform and is very well integrated into the landscape; and with very little discernible change to overall visual context.

9.4.25. The extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 8 (Existing and Year 1) below illustrate the limited change in land use / character within the wider landscape. In this particular view, the Proposed Development is barely discernible and maintains the open aspect across the wider landscape. I have not included an extract from the 'Year 15' photomontage given the proposed planting makes no discernible difference to the landscape / visual context from this particular location. For ease of reference, the approximate location of the Proposed Development in the view is highlighted by the orange box.

Extracts from Heritage Viewpoint 8 (Existing and Year 1)

9.4.26. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant visual effects on VRG5.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of Pegasus.

9.4.27. The independent landscape consultant (CEC Environmental) states that the Proposed Development will be clearly visible from the Jubilee Way (viewpoint 9) and there will be a medium-high magnitude of change and significant visual effect at Year 15, but does not provide any specific judgements, methodology or matrix as to how this position is reached. I therefore treat this conclusion with caution and consider that it does not provide a sufficiently robust alternative to the findings of the Pegasus and LDA Design assessments.

9.4.28. I disagree with the conclusions of the independent landscape consultant that the Proposed Development will be 'clearly visible' and a focus of the view. This does not calibrate with the new ZTV study; field work; or the various visualisations prepared.

VRG4 - Belvoir Road

9.4.29. This VGR encompasses scattered settlement, roads and PRoW in open countryside to the west of the Appeal Site, primarily focussed along the Belvoir Road corridor. This VRG is represented by viewpoint 11.

9.4.30. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will be a **Moderate Adverse** effect on Viewpoint 11. There would be partial, glimpsed long distance views of the completed Proposed Development beyond intervening vegetation and landform. The effects will reduce to **Moderate Adverse / Negligible Neutral** at Year 15 as the proposed planting matures.

9.4.31. I judge that there will be medium-small scale, medium to long-term effects on the views from local roads and PRoW within a localised area along this road corridor (before planting matures) due to the introduction of new structures into the landscape and change to the composition of the view, albeit the Proposed Development will still be seen at some distance; will not break the skyline; and will not obscure views across the wider countryside. The Proposed Development will be partially screened by small, intervening woodland copses in the landscape. This would result in a medium-low magnitude of effect and **Slight Adverse / Not Significant** effect at Year 1.

9.4.32. I agree with the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) that the proposed Landscape Strategy would be beneficial overall, with new planting further filtering views. As such, I find that the scale of effects will generally reduce to a small scale at Year 15.

Small scale, permanent effects across a limited area would result in a low-negligible magnitude of effect and **Slight-Minimal Adverse / Not Significant** effect overall at Year 15.

9.4.33. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant visual effects on VRG4.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of Pegasus.

VRG5 – Beacon Hill

9.4.34. This VRG encompasses the PRoW on higher ground to the north of the village of Bottesford. This VRG is represented by representative viewpoint 15.

9.4.35. The original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) concludes there will be a **Moderate Adverse** on Viewpoint 10. There would be partial, glimpsed long distance views of the completed Proposed Development beyond intervening vegetation and landform. The elevated nature of the view is such that are panoramic views across the wider landscape, such that the Proposed Development is not perceived to be as expansive in the view. The Proposed Development will also fit within the 'bowl' created by surrounding, higher ground with views south of Belvoir ridge uninterrupted. The effects will reduce to **Moderate Adverse / Negligible Neutral** at Year 15 as the proposed planting matures.

9.4.36. I judge that there will small-negligible scale, permanent effects on the views within the limited area of Beacon Hill due to the introduction of new structures into the landscape, albeit the Proposed Development will still be seen at some distance; will not break the skyline; will not obscure views across the wider countryside or Belvoir ridge; and will have little effect on the overall composition of the view. This would result in a low-negligible magnitude of effect and **Slight-Minimal Adverse** effect overall at Year 1.

9.4.37. I agree with the original LVIA (ref CD 1.31.2) that the proposed landscape strategy would be beneficial overall, with new planting further filtering views, however, I do not find – from this location – that the planting (whether this is 2m in height or grown out to 3m) will discernibly change the degree of the Proposed Development that is visible or the nature of the view. As such, I find that the scale of effects will remain **Slight-Minimal Adverse** at Year 15.

9.4.38. My new parameter-based visualisation from LVIA viewpoint 15 (see **Appendix 2.0**) illustrates that the Proposed Development will not be a prominent feature in the landscape, with open views across the Vale – and of the Belvoir Ridge / Belvoir Castle – retained. For ease of reference, the approximate location of the Proposed Development in the view is highlighted by the orange box.

Extract from Appeal Viewpoint 9 (Parameter-based)

9.4.39. Based on this assessment I conclude that:

- There will be no significant visual effects on VRG5.
- My judgements broadly correlate with those of Pegasus.

Cumulative Visual Effects

9.4.40. The Decision Notice (ref CD 3.3) does not refer to the cumulative effect on views, and as such this is not considered to be a reason for refusal. It is noted that the independent landscape consultant identified the potential for sequential cumulative effects resulting in different solar developments in combination, with particular reference to views from Beacon Hill (viewpoint 15) and views from Belvoir Castle car parks.

9.4.41. In relation to Beacon Hill, my summary of landscape effects does acknowledge that the Proposed Development, Green Hill, Elton Solar and Long Farm Solar will all be visible from this location, however, in different directions; partially screened by intervening vegetation; sitting well below the distant horizon line; and representing relatively small components of the view. I fully accept that this will result in a degree of cumulative effect – with a number of solar developments visible – however, I do not consider this to be significant, with the view remaining that of a predominately open, agricultural landscape and with little discernible change to visual context.

9.4.42. In relation to Belvoir Castle car parks, I note that the ZTV study (**Figure 7, Appendix 1.0**) show extremely limited theoretical visibility from within and around the castle car parks, due to the screening effect of surrounding trees and woodland, and this has been confirmed by field study. As such, there is considered to be no potential for cumulative visual effects from the Proposed Development and any other solar development from this location.

9.4.43. There will of course be opportunities for walkers, cyclists and motorists to take in routes that pass more than one solar development, and **Figure 14** below shows the solar developments within the 5km study area in the context of the PRoW. However, as set out in relation to the landscape cumulative effects, I find that there

remain expansive areas of countryside between the various solar developments, with a minimum distance of 4km between developments. I also note that there are relatively few PRoW surrounding the other solar developments.

9.4.44. **Figure 15** below also depicts relatively direct walking routes between the Proposed Development and various other solar developments. While these routes do not necessarily represent the shortest possible connection, this shows there is at least a 5.7km walking distance / around an hour walking time between the Appeal Site and surrounding solar developments.

- Approximate walking distance between Appeal Site and Green Farm Solar: 5.4km
- Approximate walking distance between Appeal Site and Lodge Farm Solar: 5.7km
- Approximate walking distance between Appeal Site and Elton Solar: 6.2km
- Approximate walking distance between Appeal Site and By-pass Solar: 6.6km

Figure 15: Cumulative Solar Developments, PRoW and Connecting Routes (please see Appendix 1 for main figures / full legend)

Conclusion

9.4.45. Based on the evidence presented in this Section of my PoE, I conclude that the Proposed Development would not have an unacceptable effect on the views and visual amenity on the public living in and visiting the area, utilising the public rights of way, lanes and roads.

9.4.46. By Year 15 there will be some 'moderate' 'adverse visual effects for those receptors in close proximity to the Site and this needs to be appropriately weighed in the planning balance.

10.0 Summary and Conclusions

10.1.1. My name is Alister Kratt. I am a Fellow of the Landscape Institute and have been in professional practice for approximately 30 years. I am an advisor to the Design Council and Design Commission for Wales and am appointed to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) as design advisor, sitting on the 'Design Group'.

10.1.2. I am a Director of LDA Design and former owner. I sit on the Board of LDA and lead the Infrastructure and Energy sector of our business. As a consultancy we have provided advice on major solar projects since approximately 2010. My team is currently leading on approximately 1 GW of solar power projects in the UK planning system.

10.1.3. LDA Design was appointed as landscape expert witness for the project in June 2024 in preparation for the Appeal. The incumbent landscape architects - Pegasus - were unable to continue working on the project due to lack of availability to attend the Public Inquiry.

10.1.4. I support the finding and recommendations of the Pegasus work, and agree with the overarching conclusion that while there will be some inevitably adverse landscape and visual effects; these effects are not considered to be significant; and that the Proposed Development can be successfully accommodated within the landscape. There are some minor differences between myself and Pegasus regarding specific sensitivity and magnitude judgements, but no differences in the overall 'level' of effects.

10.1.5. As such, two independent and highly experienced Landscape Planning consultants have come to the same judgments regarding likely landscape and visual effects. These conclusions are further collaborated and endorsed by the recommendations of the Case Officer, as set out in the Planning Committee Report (ref CD 3.1), who

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"* (Para 8.3.15)

10.1.6. Based on the evidence presented in this ection of my PoE, I conclude that the Proposed Development will give rise to some 'moderate' adverse landscape effects for the Appeal Site itself and its immediate context, however, these effects are generally contained to within around 1km of the Appeal Site and will not be widespread. The proposed planting (including infill to existing hedgerows, and new tree and hedgerow planting) – once mature - will strengthen landscape structure and fabric; and further reduce inversibility with Proposed Development from the surrounding landscape. Even at 2m high, the proposed hedgerows – in combination with proposed trees; existing (and sometimes) taller vegetation outside of the Appeal Site; and the undulating topography – all come together to provide an appropriate degree of containment and screening

10.1.7. I also conclude that the Proposed Development would not have a significant effect on the landscape character of the area when considered in combination with other solar developments in the locality. The Proposed Development itself does not result in a significant effect on landscape character; has relatively limited visual influence; the cumulative solar developments share little invisibility and cannot be readily seen in combination; and solar development will represent a very small proportion of the wider landscape.

10.1.8. Overall, I conclude that the Proposed Development would not have an unacceptable effect on the landscape character of the area.

10.1.9. Based on the evidence presented in this Section of my PoE, I conclude that the Proposed Development will give rise to some 'moderate' adverse visuals effects for

those receptors in close proximity to the Site, and I accept that the retained, enhanced and new hedgerows will not fully screen development and will enclose views to a certain degree, but my professional experience; field work; and the visual representations prepared leads me to conclude that:

- The nature of views along PRoW within the vale landscape vary considerably, with some much open views but some already 'enclosed' by vegetation (some of which is taller than 2m) and the undulating topography. More 'enclosed' views are therefore not necessarily uncharacteristic of the network of PRoW.
- The view of users of PRoW will not solely be focused toward any adjacent development, hedgerow or other enclosing feature – there will often be alternative views along the alignment of route itself or in other directions.
- The proposed 'green lanes' - which would incorporate the footpaths routes, existing and new hedgerows and meadow grassland – will help ensure the PRoW do not feel excessively enclosed
- In many locations these green lanes will still allow for views over the adjoining hedgerows and solar panels, maintaining a sense of openness and – in places – views towards the Belvoir ridge.
- None of the PRoW will adjoin the Appeal Site / Proposed Development for the entirely of their length. The maximum length of PRoW adjoining the Proposed Development is circa 2km in length, which represents around a 20 minute walking time.
- The layout is such that no footpath is fully enclosed by the Proposed Development, with the Proposed Development only ever directly adjoining one side of a PRoW.
- While not directly mitigating for visual effects, the Proposed Development does include a new permissive footpath route and accessible open spaces which will further enhance and increase opportunities for recreation, interpretation and education.
- Specifically, the reduction in the extent of solar panels within Field 13 - retaining views towards the Belvoir ridge and creating associated open space

and interpretation – is considered to be a very positive aspect of the design evolution.

10.1.10. I disagree with the conclusions of the independent landscape consultant that the Proposed Development will 'remove' the view of the wider Vale and that these PRoW will become 'passageways'. The layout of the Proposed Development, including the incorporation of 'green lanes' will ensure that the PRoW are not overly enclosed. There will remain views across the vale, either over and above the solar panels; in breaks in the Proposed Development; in opposite directions from the Proposed Development itself; and from those sections of PRoW that do not adjoin or are in close proximity to the Appeal Site.

10.1.11. The vast majority of the visualisations prepared in relation to the project – save the those that are immediately next to solar arrays or an existing / proposed hedgerow – show that even is relatively close proximity to the solar arrays, there will remain views of the wider Vale.

10.1.12. Overall, the Proposed Development will not have an unacceptable effect on the views and visual amenity on the public living in and visiting the area who are utilising the public rights of way, lanes and roads.

10.1.13. Notwithstanding my judgements that the Proposed Development will result in some adverse landscape and visual effects, I consider that the Proposed Development - incorporating the landscape strategy as outlined above - will deliver a number of long-term environmental and community benefits. The core benefits - in respect of landscape and visual matters – are summarised below.

10.1.14. **Retention and enhancement of landscape fabric:** The retention of existing landscape features and substantial new planting throughout the Proposed

Development would positively contribute to the structure of the landscape and network of green infrastructure.

10.1.15. **Rest to farmland and biodiversity net gain:** The Proposed Development would benefit the natural environment on the Appeal Site itself by allowing soil that has long been intensively farmed to rest and rejuvenate under grass for 40 years, and by bringing about a significant net gain (around a 144%) in biodiversity on the Appeal Site.

10.1.16. **New accessible routes and open spaces:** The Proposed Development would benefit users of the local PRoW network by - through the new permissive route - creating a more extensive footpath network and improving east-west connectivity across the landscape. open space will also further enhance and increase opportunities for recreation, interpretation sand education.

10.1.17. **Long term legacy:** as the Proposed Development is temporary in nature, hedgerow and tree planting proposed as part of the landscape strategy would leave a permanent positive landscape legacy of the Proposed Development upon decommissioning.

10.1.18. I also believe that change - resulting from a development of this nature - is not inherently harmful or unacceptable. If we are to achieve Net Zero - as legislation requires us to – a cultural shift in perceptions will be needed but this should be properly founded on good design and promoting the correct sites. This includes locations such as the Appeal Site where solar development can work within existing field parcels and benefit from topography – with a low lying, gently undulating site and containment afforded by more pronounced topography in the surrounding landscape.

10.1.19. The evidence presented in this PoE clearly demonstrates that the Proposed Development is one of good design and leads me to conclude this is an appropriate site for solar development, with an acceptable range of landscape and visual effects arising.

End