**‘Planning application 22/00537/FUL**

**APP/Y2430/W/24/3340258**

**Dear Inspector**

I am writing to object to this application as both a resident in the Vale of Belvoir for more than 50 years and as a retired university lecturer who has maintained an interest in global issues such as climate change, energy supplies and sustainable food security.

**Climate change, national food security and resources**

Since Melton Borough Council refused this application, ongoing reports have confirmed global concerns about climate change and the negative impact on world food resources.

These reports have confirmed the vital need to retain the United Kingdom’s usable arable land to maintain, and even increase, the nation’s food security. This is in the context of

severe rainfall and flooding rendering some areas of land in the UK less capable of producing viable arable crops than before.

Please see, for example:

**Document 1** UK Health Security Agency *Health Effects of Climate Change (HECC) in the UK: 2023 report*

Chapter 9 Climate change and food supply

**Document 2** Department of Environment, Food,and Rural Affairs *National Statistics Agricultural Land Use in the United Kingdom at 1st June 2023 (Updated 14th December 2023*

***Document 3***Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit *Estimated decline in headline self-sufficiency due to the projected reduction in arable crop output in 2024 May 2024*

Whilst the land relevant to this application is not all graded as ‘Best and Most Versatile’ I am confident that your enquiry will confirm that it regularly, and successfully, grows the important crops of wheat along with barley, oats, oil seed rape and beans.

These are recognised as staple crops for our food production and food security. Their production must be maintained.

Only approximately 40% of land farmed in the UK is classified as arable. That is, being capable of growing crops for food production. So the question must be asked ‘why place solar panels on this arable land?

The applicant states that if solar panels are placed on this arable land then it will be possible to graze sheep on it. So, again a question must be asked ‘rather than lose this arable land, why not put solar panels on existing, suitably located Grade 4 or 5 pastureland where sheep may safely graze.?’

*The House of Commons Library Research Briefing’ Planning for Solar Farms’ (*12th February 2024 p.33*)* refers to an estimate that **1/3rd of Grade 4 land would be suitable for solar panels**.

Thus I trust that you will agree that this arrangement would result in no loss of arable food production but would also produce the required energy gain through solar panels – a far better national solution than that proposed by the applicant.

I trust further that you will also agree that although the application maintains that the loss of land for arable production is a relatively short period, 40 years is, in reality, a long period. It can be understood, generationally, as representing the loss of arable food production for half a person’s expected life span.

In conclusion to this section, I ask you to please note the following Summary within the very recent report from the **Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit**, **9th May 2024.**

*Estimated decline in headline self-sufficiency for UK food production due to the projected reduction in arable crop output in 2024 Analysis using Defra data and previous ECIU analysis to estimate the impact of the wet winter on the UK food production supply ratio measured by volume Summary This winter has been unprecedentedly wet, coming at the end of the wettest 18 months in the UK since records began in 1836. This has had a significant impact on farmers’ cropping plans, with wet weather preventing the drilling of crops in autumn and spring. Previous ECIU analysis1 estimated that the total output for wheat, barley, oats and oilseed rape would decline by up to a fifth, compared to 2023, or around 4m tonnes. This new analysis estimates what this reduction in output could mean for headline self-sufficiency. We estimate that, compared to the five year average between 2018 and 2022 – the last year for which comprehensive data exists across all farming sectors – this decline in output could reduce headline self-sufficiency across all UK farming sectors from 86% to 78%, when measured by volume. For wheat, the decline is greatest, from 92% to 68% this year. The ratio is relatively stable for barley and oats due to anticipated higher rates of spring planting, but we estimate a steep decline for oilseed rape down to historically low levels, from 75% self-sufficient, to 40% this year. This steep decline in a single year is not expected to persist, assuming conditions are more benign next year.* ***But it is indicative of the impact that climate change may have on UK food production and self-sufficiency, due to the increased likelihood of the extreme weather we have seen this winter.*** (Emphasis added)

**The wider environmental context of the application**

When you visit the applicant’s site you will see that it is contained within an area that boasts four very significant features – the Grade 1 listed Belvoir Castle, the Grade 1 listed St Mary’s church, the historic SSI Grantham Canal and the SSI Muston Meadows. The hamlet of Muston itself is a place of beauty and tranquillity.

Singularly and collectively, these contribute to the features that constitute the very essence of this part of the Vale of Belvoir - features that will only be diminished if this Appeal is allowed.

For the applicant to maintain that the planting of high screening hedges will protect, rather than adversely affect, the views and vistas within this area is a claim that cannot be accepted. The proposed hedges, high enough to hide the solar panels, will block the lovely open views across the fields – views that are so appreciated by local residents and the many visitors to the area. Inevitably the proposal will result in considerable damage to the traditional rural aspects. This damage will most certainly not be offset by the applicant’s minimal mitigating offerings.

**Conclusion**

I can only ask that you appreciate and accept these concerns, in whole or in part, that I have expressed in the two sections above.

For centuries this area has been known as the ***Vale of Belvoir***. If granted approval, this application for a solar farm in this location would, very simply, make an unnecessary damaging transition towards it becoming the ***Vale of Malvoir***.

**I ask you, on the grounds stated in the two sections above, to conclude that the energy benefits of the proposed solar farm do not outweigh the loss of productive arable agricultural land and the negative impact on the wider rural environment and historic setting.**

**Please reject this Appeal.**

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13.05.24.