

Andrew Cullen

From: Cllr T Birch
Sent: 10 March 2026 10:34
To: Andrew Cullen; Rachel Clack
Subject: Solar appeal speech. 10th March

OFFICIAL

Good morning

My name is Cllr Ted Birch. I'm a sitting councillor here at RBC and I sat on the planning committee that made the original decision last June.

Although this application is not in my ward, I've lived in Thorpe in the Glebe, on and off, since 2003, just a short distance from the appeal site. Over the years I've walked these fields, the Midshires Way, and the paths around Bunny Old Wood hundreds, if not thousands, of times. It's an area and a landscape I know very well.

I'd like to focus on three points today: the cumulative scale of development, the character of the landscape, and the impact on the Midshires Way public footpath.

First, cumulative impact.

This proposal cannot realistically be considered in isolation. Immediately next to the appeal site there is already a consented solar farm at Highfields Farm with a capacity of around 42.9 megawatts. The scheme before you would add a further 49.9 megawatts. Together, that brings us close to 100 megawatts of solar development within one continuous landscape area.

Individually, a solar farm may be capable of being absorbed into the countryside. But when two developments of this scale sit directly alongside each other, the effect becomes very different. On the ground, there will be no clear sense of where one project ends and the other begins. What people will experience is a single, massive solar complex extending across multiple agricultural fields.

Instead of a discreet renewable energy installation, the result would be a continuous solar landscape occupying a substantial area of countryside. The cumulative effect is therefore critical, because it changes the character of the area as a whole.

Second, landscape character.

The applicant places emphasis on the fact that the site is not within a nationally designated landscape. But landscapes do not need formal designations to be valued.

This part of the Nottinghamshire Wolds is a working agricultural landscape, but it is also a striking one. The land rises and falls gently, with wide arable fields divided by hedgerows and woodland edges. From the higher ground there are long views across open farmland towards the surrounding villages and woodland. It is quintessential English countryside. It is utterly beautiful.

The Greater Nottingham Landscape Character Assessment recognises this. It identifies the landscape as having a strong character shaped by farmland, woodland blocks and expansive views, and it states that the management strategy for this area is to conserve that character.

Walking the footpaths here, particularly along the Midshires Way, you experience a wide, open rural landscape. It is a landscape defined by agriculture, by openness, and by space.

The proposal would introduce rows of solar panels over three metres high, together with inverter stations, security fencing, access tracks and associated infrastructure across roughly 100 hectares.

That scale of development would inevitably introduce a strong industrial element into what is currently an open agricultural landscape.

While hedgerows and planting are proposed as mitigation, it is also important to remember that hedgerows in this landscape are deciduous. In winter, when the leaves have fallen, the countryside becomes far more visible through the hedgerow network. Anyone who walks here regularly will know how much the landscape opens up at that time of year.

This proposal would effectively change the character of this landscape for two generations. My five-year-old daughter would not experience this countryside as it is today until she is well into middle age. The goes for thousands of young people growing up in the surrounding area. I find this very, very sad.

I consider the potential loss of this landscape to be a tragedy.

Third, the Midshires Way and recreational use.

The Midshires Way runs directly through this landscape and through part of the appeal site. This is not simply a local path between two points; it forms part of a wider recreational network, used by many people from all over south Nottinghamshire and North Leicestershire.

I have walked every route within around a 10 mile radius. In my view, this stretch of the Midshires Way is one of the most popular and beautiful in Nottinghamshire. It is a destination walk; people travel from far and wide to walk it.

A particularly popular circular walk starts in Wysall, crosses these fields, passes through Bunny Old Wood and then returns to the village, often finishing at the Plough pub, drawing valuable footfall for the local village pub.

It is a walk that draws people from nearby villages and further afield because it offers an attractive route through open countryside and woodland. It is beautiful.

At present, walking here gives a real sense of space and openness. The route passes through working farmland with wide views across the surrounding landscape.

Under this proposal, that experience would change fundamentally. Instead of moving through open countryside, walkers would pass between fields lined with solar panels, fencing and associated infrastructure. The effect will be the creation of a long industrial corridor, replacing the once beautiful views of the countryside.

The path itself may remain technically open, but the character and enjoyment of the walk would be very different.

It is also notable that although the application documents acknowledge the presence of these public rights of way, there has been no meaningful assessment of how heavily they are used. No footfall data has been presented, and no attempt whatsoever has been made to understand their importance as destination recreational routes.

Finally, I want to be clear that I recognise the importance of renewable energy and the role it must play in addressing climate change.

However, national planning policy also makes clear that renewable energy must be delivered in appropriate locations and balanced against environmental impacts.

In this case, the scale of the proposal, its cumulative impact alongside the neighbouring solar farm, and the resulting change to the character and experience of this landscape ,particularly for those walking the Midshires Way, would cause clear and lasting harm to this part of the countryside.

For those reasons, I respectfully ask that the appeal be dismissed.

Thank you.

