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Further comments from West Leake Parish Meeting- 13th February 2023

22/00319/FUL- Solar Farm

The Parish Meeting confirms its objection to the above application in line with its response made on 1st April 2022. In addition, it makes the following points having considered the recent minor alterations to the scheme.

The latest alterations are minimal in relation to the dramatic impact the scheme will have on the character of this important landscape. The scheme will in no way protect, conserve and enhance the landscape character of the area and will be contrary to Part 2 of the Rushcliffe Local Plan Policy 16. A reminder that in the Greater Nottingham Landscape Character Assessment this area of land is picked out having "strong character which is in good condition and should be conserved".

The removal of part of field 15 is minor in relation to the whole scale of development. Less than 10%.

The application still fails to show "very special circumstances" for this industrial development within the Green Belt. One of the main purposes of the Green Belt is to safeguard the countryside. An industrial development covering over 135 acres is not safeguarding this important area of open countryside. The nature of the site, made up of 16 hedged agricultural fields, will be lost amongst the solar panels, fences and buildings. The openness and purpose of the Green Belt will be lost.

The applicant's Green Belt Assessment states that the development of this land is "not long-term loss of greenfield or Green Belt as the development is entirely reversible". This is extremely misleading. For instance, it will mean that a young child currently enjoying this open countryside could be in its 40s or 50s before it can appreciate this area in the same way again. A person in their 50s may never see this area undeveloped again.

Consideration has not been given to the possible loss of areas of woodland on the south of the site due to clear-felling. These woods are commercially managed and the likelihood is that, over the next 40 years, areas of mature trees will be clear-felled and so exposing the solar farm to views from the south. With the farm sitting on top of the hills and facing south this industrial development will be clearly visible when the trees are removed. The woodlands are not under the control of the applicant and so they will have no influence on such works. Any new planting will take many years to screen the huge expanse of solar panels.

The development will still be clearly visible from the numerous bridleways and footpaths surrounding and going through the proposed development. In particular, the heavily used Midshires Way. The mitigation proposed is still not good enough to lessen the impact on the many users. Other proposed schemes, for instance, 22/00303/FUL, at Costock, have no footpaths or bridleways running through them and have received very little public objection.

It is felt that the habitat surveys were carried out in February 2021 and thus are 2 years old and could be considered to be out of date.

Within the applicants Green Belt assessment, they point out that there are no other suitable locations close to their proposed point of connection to the grid, which is not also in the Green Belt. What the applicant fails to point out is that the overhead power line, to which they are proposing to make a connection to, runs for a further near 10km to Willoughby on the Wolds. All of the land between the application site and Willoughby on the Wolds is outside the Green Belt. Therefore,

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there are clearly other more suitable sites. Applications 22/00303/FUL and 23/00204/SCREIA are 2 such sites outside the Green Belt.

The recent temporary closure of the bridleway (BW1) to the south of the application site is due to, we believe, subsidence caused by the historical underground mining operations of British Gypsum. Indeed, there are a number of large sink holes on land to the south of the application site. Has the suitability of the application land, for development on top of the mine workings, been assessed?