

# Landscape Summary Proof of Evidence

**Land East of Hawksworth and Northwest of Thoroton, Shelton Road, Thoroton**

**On behalf of Renewable Energy Systems (RES) Ltd**

Date: 14th May 2024 | Pegasus Ref: P24-0105

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## Document Management.

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# 1. Summary and Conclusions

## Introduction

- 1.1. I am instructed on behalf of Renewable Energy Systems (RES) Limited to present evidence relating to landscape and visual issues in respect of the scheme for which planning permission is sought for the construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure. This statement should be read in conjunction with the planning proof of evidence prepared by Nigel Cussen (CD7.10). The proposed scheme was a full application submitted to Rushcliffe Borough Council reference 22/O2241/FUL. Having visited the site and surrounding area and having reviewed all the relevant documentation pertaining to this scheme, I have drawn the following conclusions which are set out in the proceeding paragraphs. The structure of this section of my proof reflects the key points which are articulated in the Inspector's CMC and decision notice dated 30 March 2023 (CD2.2). It also responds to the Statement of Case prepared by the Council and Rule 6 Party.

## Scale, Location, Layout and Appearance

- 1.2. With regard to scale, the proposal seeks to deliver a solar farm to contribute towards the renewable energy targets in light of the climate emergency. The quantum of development that is anticipated would extend over several fields, however, there would be no opportunity to appreciate the entire scale of this scheme from any one location given the existing lowland vale topography together with mature tree cover, extensive woodlands, tree belts, and hedges in the intervening landscape would mean that there would be very limited opportunity to appreciate the scale of the scheme.

## Effect on Landscape Elements

- 1.3. The proposed solar farm would have a negligible adverse effect on topography. In terms of trees with the additional planting, there would be a moderate beneficial effect and with regard to hedges moderate beneficial effect. There would be a moderate (adverse) effect with regard to land cover with the introduction of the solar farm superimposed over grazed pasture. However, I consider that there would be some beneficial effects with regard to landscape elements that would form the green infrastructure of the site as part of the solar farm.

## Effect on Land Cover

- 1.4. Land cover is a specific term which refers to the way in which the land is managed. The site is currently managed for arable use. Alternating between pasture and arable is not a matter subject to planning. The scheme would require the host fields to be managed as pasture for the duration of a project but would be grazed and would benefit the fields from a soil/agronomy perspective.
- 1.5. Furthermore, the introduction of meadows would bring about material ecological enhancements. The local published Landscape Character Assessment advocates the



management of pasture which is precisely what this scheme would seek to achieve. It is accepted that solar panels would be suspended above the grass swards. The introduction of the solar farm would have a moderate (adverse) degree of effect with regard to land cover associated with the site, given the arable land is converted to pasture with panels. This also acknowledges that the openness of the field parcels within the site would also be inevitably reduced with the solar farm in place, but the character of the landscape beyond the immediate boundaries of the site would remain unchanged with the scheme in place and that would apply to the vast majority of the Landscape Character Area. Only a fraction of the local character area would physically change in terms of its defining character. This is an inevitable consequence of delivering renewable energy infrastructure.

## **Effect on the Visual Amenity of the Area**

- 1.6. With regard to visual amenity, of particular note from my perspective is that this is an extensive solar scheme across a number of fields yet given the level and gently undulating nature of the lowland vale topography, combined with the field and hedgerow network and scattered woodlands, the actual visual envelope and the degree to which this scheme would be seen from the surrounding area would be very limited.
- 1.7. There are a few public rights of way in the locality and some paths in the immediate vicinity and as such, there would be some opportunity to observe the scheme. Energy infrastructure is an integral part of the local landscape, with large-scale pylons located on the site frequently punctuating the skyline in views observed on the site and the locality. The scheme's effect upon the visual amenity of the area would be limited in degree and very localised in extent.
- 1.8. The visual effects would be very limited given the scale of the proposal. Policies require careful integration through existing landscape features and new planting to mitigate adverse effects to acceptable levels. No policy in the Development Plan specifies absolutely no visibility whatsoever. I consider that setting such a high bar would be impossible to achieve.
- 1.9. In overall terms, the visual effects of the proposed solar farm would be very limited due to its substantial visual containment as a result of a combination of topography and surrounding hedges and woodlands. Where seen only small elements of the scheme would be observed and it would not be possible to appreciate the totality of the scheme from any one viewpoint location.

## **Effect on Landscape Character**

- 1.10. In terms of landscape character associated with the site, this is defined by the combination of various landscape elements principally topography, land cover, hedgerows, tree cover and the configuration of the fields themselves, the field pattern is sometimes referred to as the "grain" of the landscape. With the exception of some small areas of development (such as the substation and inverters which would require some small loss of agricultural land), these landscape elements would be retained and remain as part of the landscape whilst the scheme is in place. Hedge removal would be minimal. It is accepted that where the panels would be located the continued agricultural use would be in the form of grazing rather than arable use.
- 1.11. The hedgerows would be reinforced with further hedgerow planting and the tree cover resource associated with the site would also be reinforced with some additional tree planting.



Some of the hedgerows would be managed such that they would be maintained at a slightly higher level than is currently the case, 3–4m in height.

- 1.12. The trees over the project lifetime, both those existing and those introduced as part of the landscape proposals would all continue to grow developing larger canopies apart from those trees that are already fully mature. This growth over a 40-year period which is a significant period of time for both hedgerow and tree growth would result in reinforcing the defining positive characteristics of the site, with regard to these features. Furthermore, the increased vegetation growth would create a stronger sense of physical and visual containment associated with the site. This change would reduce visual effects that would come about over the project timescale.
- 1.13. Upon completion of the decommissioning phase, built infrastructure would be removed both above and below ground across the entirety of the site except for the substation and access track. The management and growth of the hedgerows and trees across the site could continue to remain as part of the landscape post-decommissioning phase and would leave a positive legacy in terms of landscape character given that trees and hedgerows contribute to the landscape character locally.
- 1.14. Beyond the boundaries of the site, the landscape character of the area would remain unchanged. With the proposed scheme in place, the character of the fields within the site would change as they would now accommodate solar arrays, but the underlying character of the fields would still be there and would fully return with the decommissioning of the solar farm in the longer term. However, it is proposed that as an integral part of the scheme, new hedgerows and tree planting would be introduced, and wildflower meadows created with arable land converted to pasture as advocated in the landscape character documents. All of these elements could remain after decommissioning as a positive legacy of the scheme and bring about enhancement to the landscape character in the long term.
- 1.15. The proposed scheme involves solar arrays and some associated infrastructure located in several fields which are managed for arable use. However, depending on farm management and maintenance and crop rotation, these fields could revert to pasture for a fallow period without any recourse to planning and similarly, grazed as pasture, again without any recourse to planning, such is the minor consequence of such a change of use in farming circumstances terms. It is intended that whilst the solar arrays would be installed and operational, the fields would continue to function as fields and accommodate grazing stock, and sheep for farming for the duration of the lifetime of the project. The site would continue to have an agricultural use.
- 1.16. Most of the existing landscape elements, vegetation, trees, and hedges could continue to remain and be reinforced post-decommissioning stage. Therefore, the character of the fields would remain accepting that they would also accommodate a solar farm, a renewable energy generating installation and as such, would change the current existing character of those particular fields. Beyond the confines of the red line site boundary, there would be no change to the physical fabric of the landscape character of the area.
- 1.17. In overall terms, I consider that there would be a minor (adverse) effect upon the landscape character of the site itself up to its boundaries. No off-site works are required to enable this scheme to be implemented other than the cable connection. Beyond the site, the physical character of the surrounding landscape would remain and prevail unchanged with the proposed solar farm in place.



## Cumulative Effects

- 1.18. Whilst referred to within the Reason for Refusal, the only reference to cumulative effects within the OR is in the summary of consultee responses where the Planning Policy Officer for Rushcliffe Borough Council is noted as providing comments which are understood to have included cumulative impacts. There is no other mention of cumulative schemes within the OR (CD2.1).
- 1.19. The application LVA in paragraph 6.88 states that no developments requiring cumulative assessment were identified in this instance. A review of the Renewable Energy Planning Database and online mapping has confirmed that there are no renewable energy proposals which warrant consideration for cumulative assessment, acknowledging that those which are operational are considered as part of the landscape and visual baseline. Operational solar farms; Lodge Farm and Elton Solar Farm are located approximately 2.2km to the east south-east and 3.1km to the south south-east respectively. The Grange Solar Farm is located approximately 4.8km to the north of the site near the settlement of Cotham.
- 1.20. As a result, I consider that that there would be no cumulative landscape and visual effects arising as part of the proposals.

## Conclusions

For the reasons stated above in this section of my proof, it is my professional opinion that on landscape and visual grounds, there are no substantive reasons for refusing planning permission for the proposed solar farm located on land east of Hawksworth and north-west of Thoroton, Shelton Road, Thoroton.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)  
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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