

Comments on Planning Application – RBC Planning Policy

Reference: 24/00161/FUL

Location: Land West of Bradmore Road and North of Wysall Road; Land West of Wysall, Wysall

Proposal: Construction, operation and subsequent decommissioning of a renewable energy park comprising ground mounted Solar PV with co-located battery energy storage system (BESS) at the point of connection, together with associated infrastructure, access, landscaping and cabling.

Date: 01 October 2025

Officer: Emma Fawcett, Planning Policy Officer

The application relates to a proposal for a 49.9MW solar farm on two separate parcels of agricultural land to the west of Wysall with a total area of 100.95 hectares. Battery energy storage system and grid connection infrastructure would be positioned within the southern parcel of land. The northern parcel abuts the Green Belt boundary to the north, but lies outside of the Green Belt

Policy Overview

In line with planning law, planning decisions should be taken in accordance with the Development Plan ('DP'), unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In Rushcliffe the DP consists of the Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy 2014 ('LPP1') and the Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies 2019 ('LPP2'). There are no Neighbourhood Plans covering the application site. Policies within the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') can also be a material consideration where the DP is silent or policies within the DP expressly defer to the NPPF.

The key policies within the DP that are directly relevant to the proposed development are Policies 2 (Climate Change) of the LPP1 and Policies 16 (Renewable Energy) and 22 (Development within the Countryside) of the LPP2. Other DP policies of relevance include:

LPP1

- Policy 1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development)
- Policy 10 (Design and Enhancing Local Identity)
- Policy 11 (Historic Environment)
- Policy 16 (Green Infrastructure, Landscape, Parks and Open Spaces)
- Policy 17 (Biodiversity)

LPP2

- Policy 1 (Development Requirements)
- Policy 17 (Managing Flood Risk)
- Policy 18 (Surface Water Management)

- Policy 19 (Development Affecting Watercourses)
- Policy 28 (Conserving and Enhancing Heritage Assets)
- Policy 29 (Development affecting Archaeological Sites)
- Policy 34 (Green Infrastructure and Open Space Assets)
- Policy 36 (Designated Nature Conservation Sites)
- Policy 37 (Trees and Woodlands)
- Policy 38 (Non-Designated Biodiversity Assets and the Wider Ecological Network)
- Policy 40 (Pollution and Land Contamination)
- Policy 42 (Safeguarding Minerals)

Nottinghamshire Mineral Local Plan 2021

- Policy SP7 (Minerals Safeguarding, Consultation Areas and Associated Minerals Infrastructure)

RBC Solar Farm Guide

The Solar Farm Guide provides broad guidance on the planning policy context for major solar farm developments, the key material planning considerations likely to be relevant and examples of the supporting documents the Council will expect to be submitted for this type of development.

In addition to the DP, other material considerations may also include the National Planning Practice Guidance ('NPPG'). Also, as per paragraph 5 of the NPPF, National Policy Statements ('NPS') are part of the overall framework of national planning policy and as such may also be a material consideration in making decisions on planning applications.

In this regard, it is noted that the capacity of the proposed solar farm would be just below the 50 megawatt threshold for 'utility scale' solar projects (normally considered by the Secretary of State for Energy under the consenting regime for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects). In view of this both NPS EN-1 (March 2023) and NPS EN-3 (March 2023) could be material considerations in respect of this application.

Comments/Observations

The Government has set a legally binding target to bring carbon emissions in the UK to net zero by 2050 and currently expects that solar, together with wind, to be the predominant source of energy generation by this date. In this regard Policy 2(5) of the LPP1 seeks to encourage the development of decentralised renewable energy schemes, including solar projects, where they are compatible with environmental, heritage, landscape and other planning considerations.

Paragraph 163 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should not require the overall need for renewable energy to be demonstrated; and approve planning applications for renewable energy developments if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

This broad approach to increasing the use and supply of green energy production, in appropriate locations is echoed in the NPPG¹. However, the NPPG also cautions that the need to provide renewable energy production should not automatically override environmental protections and the concerns of local communities². In respect of solar developments specifically, the NPPG recognises that large scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes, but acknowledges that the visual impact of a well-planned and well screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively³.

Careful consideration will need to be given to all of the various factors listed in Policy 16 (and the NPPG). The other policies within the DP that are listed above provide amplification to each of these factors. Where reasonable and necessary the use of conditions should be considered to mitigate any potential harms that might be caused. This is likely to be particularly important in respect of ensuring any impact on the existing landscape character can be successfully mitigated throughout the lifetime of the development and also in regard to the decommissioning of the solar equipment/restoration of the land at the end of its proposed 40 year operational lifespan.

The following observations/comments are made in respect of some of the factors listed in Policy 16.

Landscape character

Policy 16(2)(e) of the LPP1 requires that landscape character is protected, conserved and enhanced where appropriate in line with the recommendations of the Greater Nottingham Landscape Character Assessment 2009 ('GNLCA'). The RBC Solar Guide states that when assessing the significance of impacts on landscape character a number of criteria should be considered including:

- a) The sensitivity of the existing landscape, having regard to its condition and strength and
- b) The magnitude of the predicted change to the existing landscape character.

The application site is located within the the Nottinghamshire Wolds Regional Character Area. Appendix 9 of the GNLCA identifies certain Draft Policy Zones ('DPZ') within the Regional Character Areas and identifies the site as being within the DPZ known as the NW01 - Gotham and West Leake Hills and Scarps.

This DPZ is identified as having a strong landscape character which is in good condition and therefore should be conserved. This strength comes from the distinctive series of prominent hills that provide expansive views of low laying farmland and Nottingham. Landscape actions include conserving the distinctive pattern of hills and fields, including the balance of arable (on lower slopes) and pasture farming (on steeper and higher slopes). Careful consideration should be given to whether the introduction of the proposed solar panels would be likely to

¹ NPPG Renewable and low carbon energy (2023) – paragraph 001.

² As above paragraph 003.

³ As above paragraph 013.

change this landscape character. Cumulative impacts should be considered and I note that proposals for a 49.9MW solar farm south of Bunny (22/00303/FUL) have permission. The latter site is situated immediately to the west of the application site.

Paragraph 013 of the NPPG advises, amongst other things, that the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through screening with native hedges should be considered, and in this case hedge planting may contribute towards the landscape strategy of enhancement and restoration. It will be important to assess whether any hedge and tree planting would be sufficient to mitigate any adverse effects on landscape character and the degree to which the screen planting can successfully achieve this mitigation in the short term, as well as throughout the lifetime of the development.

Ecology & Biodiversity

The RBC Solar Farm Guide states that whilst large-scale solar farm developments have the potential to provide biodiversity enhancements that might otherwise not be secured on agricultural land (for example the planting of additional trees and wildflower meadows that can improve conditions for insects and other species), such developments also have the potential to negatively impact existing ecological assets (for example from habitat loss, fragmentation or displacement of species).

It is noted that there are a number of woodland blocks within the site and consideration should be given to the ongoing protection of these trees.

Policy 17 of the LPP1 seeks to protect, restore, expand and enhance areas of biodiversity interest, including areas and networks of priority habitats. Part (1)(b) specifically requires, where possible, improvements to the green infrastructure network for the benefit of biodiversity, including at a landscape scale, through the incorporation of existing habitats and creation of new habitats. Part c) seeks to ensure new development provides biodiversity features where appropriate.

The RBC Solar Farm Guide strongly recommends that applications for large scale solar farm developments seek to achieve at least 10% BNG onsite. A site management plan should include maintenance and stewardship arrangements for the site covering both landscape and ecology matters. This will help to ensure that appropriate management and maintenance arrangements/funding mechanisms are identified at an early stage.

Open Space and recreational uses

It is noted that there is a public right of way (Midshires Way) that goes through part of the site. Policy 16(1)(f) of the LPP2 requires that effects of the proposed development on open space and recreational uses be acceptable. Policy 34(1) of the LPP2 expressly seeks to protect Green Infrastructure (including rights of way) from development which adversely affects its function or its contribution to a wider network, unless the need for the asset is proven to no longer exist and the benefits of the development in that location outweigh the adverse effects on the asset.

Flood Risk

A section of the site is located in Flood Zones 3. Policy 17 of LPP2 is supportive of development proposals that are within areas where a risk of flooding or problems of surface water disposal exist, providing that the Sequential and Exception tests are applied and satisfied in accordance with the NPPF and PPG. It is noted that the Flood Risk Assessment states that a sequential approach to development has been undertaken, with vulnerable infrastructure sited outside Flood Zone 3a, where possible

Given the surface area created by a rows of solar panel arrays clustered together, major solar farm developments have the potential to affect the way surface water runs off a site, particularly where the land was previously an open field, and as such have the potential to increase flood risk. Policy 18 of the LPP2 requires that all development proposals identify opportunities to incorporate a range of deliverable Sustainable Drainage Systems, appropriate to the size and type of development. The choice of drainage systems should comply with the drainage hierarchy within the PPG.

Consideration should be given as to whether the submitted Flood Risk Assessment adequately demonstrates that the Sequential and Exceptions tests have been passed.

Community Engagement

The RBC Solar Farm Guide requires developers to demonstrate that they have undertaken a high standard of public pre-application activity in line with the Council's Statement of Community Engagement. A Statement of Community Involvement has been submitted by the applicant and it will be important to assess whether any community concerns have been adequately addressed.

Cumulative impacts

To assist in the assessment of potential cumulative impacts of the development, a list of solar farm developments over 5ha in size that have been completed; benefit from planning permission; or have been screened for EIA development within the last 12 months has been compiled (see appendix 1).

The NPPG advises that the approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large-scale solar farms is similar to that used to assess the impact of wind turbines⁴ and detailed guidance in this regard is set out in the NPPG. Notwithstanding this the NPPG also acknowledges that in the case of ground-mounted solar panels the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero with effective screening and appropriate land topography.

Other matters

The NPPG highlights that the effect of glint and glare on the landscape, neighbouring uses and aircraft should be considered.

⁴ NPPG Renewable and low carbon energy (2023) - paragraph 013.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of solar farms in RBC over 5Ha.