

## **Statement by East Leake Parish Council**

### **In the matter of 22/00319/FUL- Solar Farm**

East Leake Parish Council ('ELPC') **objects** to the application. Having previously returned neutral comments, it was apparent to ELPC at its Planning Committee meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2023 that the potential benefits of the development do not clearly outweigh the resulting harm.

Reasons for ELPC's objection include but are not limited to the following:

#### **Very Special Circumstances**

The National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 151 states:

'When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed.'

The proposed development is situated entirely within the Green Belt and as such is presumed inappropriate. The developer has failed to demonstrate very special circumstances. It is clear the creation of a solar farm alone does not warrant the loss of substantial Green Belt land, particularly in light of the British Energy Security Strategy's focus on offshore wind farming.

#### **Public opinion**

Since previous consultation, a number of additional East Leake residents have commented, on the Planning Portal and elsewhere, that the loss of amenity would be detrimental. Despite the removal of Field 16 and part of Field 15, the solar farm would still be widely visible along popular local walking paths and bridleways.

Open green spaces are vital to the wellbeing of residents and additional screening of solar farm materials would destroy the openness of the Green Belt amenity.

#### **Flawed research**

We are concerned that the application paperwork is not reflective of reality. For instance, desk research has been carried out rather than site visits which is wholly inappropriate. The

benefits of the development also appear to be highly exaggerated, as research suggests solar farms run at an average of 11.2% of stated capacity.

We have also been made aware that residents attempting to put forward any negative opinion to agents of the developer who were undertaking 'community research' in East Leake were dismissed and refused participation. We also understand the positive responses were in relation to the concept of renewable energy rather than the specific development in questions. As such, the results of community research cannot be relied upon.

## **Safety concerns**

In light of the Police response to the proposals, we are concerned that there are two potential outcomes:

1. The insecure development will be targeted by thieves and place local residents in potential danger
2. The deer fencing will be replaced by the tall fencing suggested for security, having a detrimental effect on wildlife and visual amenity. If this were to transpire, we would expect visual assessments to be updated and to be further consulted as a result of the substantial change

## **Food security**

The turmoil created by the recent invasion of Ukraine has made obvious the need for food security as well as energy security. We understand the land of the proposed development is classed as 3b – capable of producing moderate yields of a range of crops. We believe it vital to retain this land for agricultural use rather than convert the land to a solar farm which could be placed on non-agricultural land.

We note suggestions that sheep could graze among the solar panels. However, it is our understanding there is no shortage of land suitable to graze sheep and so this does not mitigate the loss of agricultural land.

## **Cumulative effect**

We are concerned that the cumulative effect of this development appears to have been dismissed purely on consideration of the proposed solar farms within the area. The substantial loss of Green Belt should be considered as an accumulation to all proposed and permitted developments in the area.