
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 July 2025

by **Jonathan Bore MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E2530/W/24/3357607

Land at High Dike Road, Londonthorpe, NG32 2DE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Low Carbon Solar Park 38 Limited against the decision of South Kesteven District Council.
 - The application Ref is S23/2199.
 - The development proposed is the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure on land at High Dike Road, Londonthorpe, NG32 2DE in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref S23/2199, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application which is the subject of this appeal was amended before the Council made its decision. The application area was reduced to about 53.8 hectares and the route of a connector cable was removed from the application.
3. The amended application seeks full planning permission for the installation of a solar farm comprising ground mounted solar photovoltaic panels, including mounting systems, inverters, batteries, perimeter fencing, CCTV, internal access tracks, electrical substation and associated infrastructure for a temporary period of 40 years. The final dimensions and layout of the structures have not been fixed at this stage to allow for the selection of specific technologies and the optimisation of the design prior to construction. The proposal has been assessed on the basis of the plans and drawings referred to in Condition 3 attached to this decision, and subject to the controls in condition 6, which represent maximum parameters.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are, firstly the effect of the scheme on the character of the landscape; secondly, the effect on heritage assets, specifically on the setting of Belton House Registered Park and Garden, Bellmount Tower and Londonthorpe Conservation Area; and thirdly, the benefits of the scheme having regard to national and local policy on renewable energy.

Reasons

The effect on the character of the landscape

5. The solar farm would consist of just under 54,000 photovoltaic modules oriented due south and the arrays would be a maximum of 3m at their tallest. There would be two compounds enclosing containerised battery energy storage system units and ancillary equipment.
6. The scheme would take up an area of land on a largely open arable plateau to the west of B6403 High Dyke Road. It would have an impact on the landscape, insofar as it would introduce an extensive area of artificial structures into a pleasant arable scene. However, its main visual impact would be largely confined to the site itself and areas immediately adjacent, and it would not be widely visible. There are no public rights of way running through the site. The strong tree belt to the north would block views of the scheme from that direction, and the hedge along High Dike Road together with proposed new planting at the site entrance would reduce the visual impact of the scheme on views from the road and from the public right of way network to the east. Longer views from the west would be blocked by topography and by Bellmount Plantation.
7. To the south the land is more open and falls away very gently from the site before rising slightly again at Londonthorpe. The scheme might be seen at a distance from some locations in the area of the village, but its impact would be slight. The perceived extent of the panels and the scale of the battery units would be limited by distance, by the plateau-top siting of the scheme, and by the proposed new boundary hedges and supplementary planting, which would provide visual mitigation and new wildlife corridors. Taking these factors into account, the effect on the landscape would be relatively limited even allowing for the combined impact with other approved solar farms in the area.
8. In conclusion, the scheme would change the character of the site and its immediate landscape setting and in consequence there would be a degree of conflict with Local Plan Policies EN1 and DE1, which seek to protect landscape character and to resist proposals that have an adverse effect on the landscape. However, there would be relatively little wider landscape impact even allowing for the cumulative effect of other approved schemes.

The effect on heritage assets

9. Belton House, a Grade I listed building, built 1685-88, and its Registered Park and Garden, also listed Grade I, are situated not far to the west of the appeal site. The Registered Park and Garden draws significance from the historical value of its parkland elements, demonstrating ideals in landscape design from the 17th to the 19th Centuries. Aesthetic value makes a large contribution to the Park's significance. It is owned by the National Trust and attracts large numbers of visitors, so it also draws significance from its communal value.
10. The comprehensive study of the setting of Belton House and Park, which was carried out in 2010 by Atkins on behalf of the Council and the National Trust, has been taken into account in this analysis. The appeal site is not on a key approach to the house and is not in any key identified view towards or away from the house or park. The house and most of the park are at a lower level than the appeal site, in an area of different landscape character, and are much more closely related to

the landscape setting to the west. The appeal scheme would be hidden from this lower area by the scarp slope to the east.

11. Elements of the solar farm might be seen from beyond the scarp at the very north-eastern corner of the registered park and garden, and at the eastern edge of Bellmount Plantation. However, these views, which are essentially out of the back of the park across adjacent arable fields, make only a very minor contribution to the visual quality, integrity and appreciation of the park and its significance as a heritage asset.
12. The scheme would potentially be seen in front of the Plantation in views from High Dike Road. However, it is a distant view and the impact would be limited by the strong hedging along the road and by the proposed planting. The significance of the Registered Park and Garden would not be harmed.
13. Bellmount Tower, built in 1750 and listed Grade II*, was designed to provide a vista towards Belton House, its park and the wider landscape to the west, and in turn to be seen from the house and garden as the focal point at the end of a rising lime avenue. This is evident from the tower's siting on the very edge of the west-facing scarp slope, and the position of its west-facing principal window. In contrast, the tower has only two small roundel windows facing east, and any views towards the appeal site are severely curtailed by the Plantation with its many mature trees. The proposed solar farm would therefore have no material effect on the visual setting of the tower or on its significance as a heritage asset. The potential for ash dieback does not alter this conclusion because most of the woodland consists of sycamore, lime, beech and sweet chestnut, with ash in relatively small pockets.
14. As regards the functional setting of the house, park and garden, historical analysis indicates that the appeal site was under the ownership of the Earl of Brownlow and therefore functionally linked with Belmont House, although it was not within the park itself. However, the landscape in which the appeal site is located has long been separated; there is now no obvious association, and any former functional relationship is not legible.
15. In respect of Londonthorpe Conservation Area, the landscape immediately surrounding this attractive village and its listed buildings is part of their visual and functional setting. However, the solar farm would be some distance from the village, and the scheme's impacts on the Londonthorpe area would be limited, as discussed above in relation to landscape. The proposal would not harm the significance of the conservation area.
16. To conclude on this issue, the proposed solar farm would not harm the setting or significance of Belmont House and consequently would not conflict with Local Plan Policy GR1. It would have a minor effect on the setting of the Registered Park and Garden at its north-eastern edge, but this would not in itself cause harm to its significance. The development would not be unduly prominent from the direction of Londonthorpe and would not harm the significance of its conservation area. Overall, the development would not conflict with Local Plan Policy EN6 which seeks to protect heritage assets and their settings.

The benefits of the scheme having regard to national and local renewable energy policy

17. The proposal benefits from an offer to connect to the local electricity grid. The connection is for 25MW of export capacity and 25MW of import capacity to support

the battery storage. The scheme would generate enough renewable electricity to power over 12,000 homes per year and would notably diminish the amount of local electricity use that is reliant on fossil fuels. The inclusion of battery storage within the scheme would allow a greater amount of energy to be captured and would provide additional stability for the grid. These are very significant benefits. The scheme is fully in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, which states that the planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

18. The scheme would have additional benefits for biodiversity, through the reinstatement of hedgerows, and for the local economy, especially during the construction phase.
19. Policy RE1 of the South Kesteven Local Plan supports proposals for renewable energy generation subject to five criteria.
20. The first criterion relates to agricultural land. The amendment to the scheme prior to determination by the local planning authority reduced the area of best and most versatile agricultural land that would be occupied by the proposal. The proposal would occupy mostly Grade 3b land and would be acceptable in this regard.
21. The second criterion is that the proposal demonstrates the support of local communities. That is clearly not the case here as there have been several representations opposing the scheme. However, the Local Plan is out of alignment with national policy in this respect. The National Planning Policy Framework does not cite local support as a pre-requisite for the approval of solar energy schemes. Rather, as with any other planning application, local views must be taken into account in the balance of considerations.
22. The third criterion seeks details for the transmission of the power produced. The amendment to the application removed the connector, the route of which had been proposed to run through Londonthorpe. But the connector would run underground and, wherever it was routed, its impact would be one of short term disruption, not long term harm, so this matter does not attract significant weight. It is possible that permitted development rights might ultimately be exercised to install the cable, but even if that were not the case, there is no reason why the details of the route could not be satisfactorily resolved later. The absence of a route at this stage does not constitute a strong reason to withhold planning permission.
23. The fourth criterion would require all apparatus to be removed from the site when power production ceases. A condition is attached that would ensure that this requirement was carried out. In addition, the scheme would be for a temporary period of 40 years and would not entail the permanent loss of agricultural land.
24. Finally, the policy requires that the proposal would comply with any other local plan policies and national planning policy. There would be a degree of conflict with Policies EN1 and DE1, as described above, but there would be no conflict with any other Local Plan policy. The scheme would be some considerable distance from the nearest residential properties and would not result in light pollution or noise impact, subject to the conditions attached to this decision. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service have provided advice for mitigating fire risk, and the attached conditions include a requirement to develop a battery safety management plan. The scheme would accord with the development plan as a whole and there would be no conflict with national planning policy.

25. The local objections to the scheme are fully acknowledged but the very significant benefits of the scheme outweigh its landscape impacts, which are relatively localised. They also outweigh any shortfall in meeting all the criteria in Policy RE1. There would be no impact on the significance of any heritage asset.

Conditions

26. In addition to the standard commencement condition and the conditions related to the approved plans, a condition is attached restricting the development to a period of 40 years, to avoid a permanent change to the landscape and agricultural land. Conditions are also attached in respect of electrical noise, to manage any impact on the neighbouring Ministry of Defence site; design details, landscaping and tree protection, to ensure that the scheme does not harm the landscape or the character of the locality; environmental management during operation, lighting details and noise mitigation, to protect residential living conditions and the environment; archaeology, to enhance an understanding of the history of the site; landscape and ecological management as well as ecological mitigation during building works, to protect and enhance biodiversity; and battery safety management., as discussed above. I have made minor changes to the conditions suggested by the parties in the interests of clarity and effectiveness.

Conclusion

27. The scheme would change the character of the site and its immediate landscape setting and in consequence there would be some conflict with Local Plan Policies EN1 and DE1, which seek to protect landscape character and to resist proposals that have an adverse effect on the landscape. However, the scheme would be temporary and would have relatively little wider landscape impact even allowing for the cumulative effect of other approved schemes.
28. The scheme would not harm the setting or significance of Belmont House and would not conflict with Local Plan Policy GR1. It would have a minor effect on the setting of the Registered Park and Garden but only at its north-eastern edge, and it would not cause harm to its significance. The development would not harm the significance of Londonthorpe Conservation Area. Overall, it would not conflict with Local Plan Policy EN6 which seeks to protect heritage assets and their settings.
29. The solar farm would bring very significant benefits by enhancing the amount of renewable energy generation and assisting in the transition to net zero by 2050. In this regard it would be fully in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. There would be additional advantages for biodiversity, through the reinstatement of hedgerows, and for the local economy, especially during the construction phase. The very significant benefits of the scheme outweigh its modest landscape impacts and any shortfall in meeting the letter of all the criteria in Policy RE1.
30. For all the above reasons, the appeal is allowed.

Jonathan Bore

INSPECTOR

Annex

CONDITIONS

1. The development hereby permitted shall be commenced before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
2. Written confirmation of the first electricity export date shall be provided to the local planning authority no later than 20 days following the event. The development hereby permitted shall cease on or before the expiry of a 40 year period from the date of the first export of electricity from the solar farm to the electricity grid network; excluding electricity exported during initial testing and commissioning. The land shall thereafter be restored to its former condition in accordance with a scheme of decommissioning work which shall make provision for the removal of the solar panels and all other associated equipment, and the subsequent restoration of the site. The scheme shall include details of:
 - a) the extent of equipment and foundation removal, and the site restoration to be carried out;
 - b) the management and timing of any works;
 - c) a traffic management plan to address the likely traffic impacts arising during the decommissioning period;
 - d) an environmental management plan to include details of measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife, habitat features and trees on the site;
 - e) the location of any temporary compound and parking areas;
 - f) full details of the removal of the solar arrays, associated buildings and plant, any access tracks and sub-surface cabling and all associated ground restoration, including trench backfilling;
 - g) full details of all other works to the land to all for renewed agricultural production following the removal of structures from the site;
 - h) a programme of implementation.

The scheme of decommissioning work shall be submitted to the local planning authority no later than 39 years from the date of the first export of electricity and shall be implemented as approved.

3. Unless otherwise required by another condition of this permission, the development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans:
 - a) Site location plan drawing no. LCS104-SP-02 Rev 02
 - b) Development Zone Plan drawing no. LCS104-DZ-03 Rev 04.
4. The output of the solar farm shall not exceed 49 MW (AC).
5. No development shall take place until an electrical noise management plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The submitted electrical noise management plan shall contain:
 - a) manufacturer's specifications for infrastructure to be installed at the site, to include any inverters, substations, PV panels, and any associated

- cables, including all interconnecting cables as well as the export cables to the national grid, and connectors;
- b) details of measures designed to prevent electrical noise interference being caused to East 1 WAM Network installation;
- c) a schedule setting out how the development will be operated, maintained and tested throughout its life to ensure that any electrical noise interference on the East 1 WAM Network installation is prevented; and
- d) a protocol through which the site operator can be notified of electrical noise interference issues or observations, the measures that would be taken to investigate, and a description of the approach to resolving/rectifying/mitigated those impacts.

The provisions set out in the approved electrical noise management plan and any modifications/mitigation, as agreed in writing with the local planning authority, shall be maintained for the life of the development.

6. Prior to the commencement of the development, full details of the layout and appearance of the development, including the specification and colours of external materials to be agreed, the solar arrays, inverters, batteries, substation, access tracks, CCTV cameras, fencing, and other associated infrastructure shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The details shall be limited to the extent of the Development Zone Plan DZ-03 rev 04 and not exceed the maximum dimensions shown on drawing nos. SD-01.2 DNO Substation Elevations and Dimensions plan, SD-02.1 Rev 02 Customer Substation Elevations and Dimensions, SD-14 Rev 01 DNO Substation Floor Plan, SD-15 Rev 01 Customer Substation Floor Plan, SD-16 Rev 01 Inverter Floor Plan, TES-HWYLG1118.2kW-0001 Rev B Battery Container, SD-04.1 Rev 02 Security/Stock Fence and CCTV Elevation, SD-06.2 Rev 2 Access Track, SD-32 Rev 04 Gateway Plan, SD-33 Rev 02 20ft Spare parts container, SD-36 Rev 02 O&M Building, SD-39.4 Rev 01 Solar Panel Elevation 3.0m, SD-04 rev 01 Battery Interface Cabinet, SD-06 rev 01 Twin Skid (TX), SD-07 rev 01 PCSK Inverter, SD-40 rev 01 Water Tank.

The development shall be constructed and operated fully in accordance with the approved details.

7. Any application for the detailed design of the scheme shall be accompanied by a further noise assessment based on the proposed layout and shall include details of any necessary noise mitigation measures. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
8. Before any construction work above ground is commenced, a landscaping mitigation plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Details shall be based on the landscape strategy plan drawing no. 8298.ASP5.LSP.F and shall include planting plans, written specifications (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment) and schedules of plants, noting species, plant sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate. All landscaping works shown on the approved landscape mitigation plan shall be carried out in full before the end of the first planting/seeding season following the date when

electrical power is first exported, unless the local planning authority agrees in writing to any variation.

9. Before development is commenced, a written scheme of archaeological investigation and an archaeological mitigation strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The details shall include:
 - a) proposals for a programme of trial trenching which shall be completed and used to inform the mitigation strategy;
 - b) a plan illustrating the location of any archaeological remains on the site;
 - c) areas which are designated for archaeological monitoring and recording;
 - d) proposals to ensure that significant archaeological remains are protected or, if appropriate, set out a programme of further archaeological works to ensure that they are recorded in advance of works on site;
 - e) a programme for the implementation of the archaeological mitigation strategy.

Thereafter, all works on site shall be carried out in accordance with the approved archaeological mitigation strategy.

10. No works on site shall commence until the tree protection measures indicated on the tree protection plan enclosed at Appendix C of the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (Aspect Arboriculture) (November 2023) that relate to the Development Zone Plan approved by condition 3 have been implemented. Thereafter, the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and the approved measures shall be retained until all construction activities have been completed.
11. Before development is commenced, a landscape and ecological management plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority and shall include details of the management and monitoring of the site during the operational period. The approved development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved landscape and ecological management plan.
12. Before development is commenced, a construction environmental management plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority and all works on site shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details of the plan throughout the construction period.
13. All works on site during the construction period shall be carried out in accordance with the recommendations contained within the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Logika) (November 2023), including reasonable avoidance measures for protected species.
14. Before the date of the first export of electricity from the development, an operational environmental management plan relating to any maintenance or repair works of the approved development shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the local planning authority, and the approved plan shall be adhered to through the operational period of the development.
15. Before the date of the first export of electricity from the development, a battery safety management plan relating to safety measures for the battery storage

areas shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority, and the approved plan shall be adhered to through the operational period of the development.

16. Prior to the erection of any external lighting on site, a lighting plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No illumination of the site shall take place other than in accordance with the approved plan.