

Dear Sir,

I write as the Member of Parliament for Newark to object to the Great North Road Solar and Biodiversity Park Development Consent Order (Application by Elements Green Trent Ltd).

I want to make clear at the outset that I am not opposed to solar power in principle. I have said publicly that Members of Parliament should support the expansion of rooftop and brownfield solar and work constructively to mitigate the worst impacts of large schemes. However, the scale, siting and cumulative effects of the proposed Great North Road Solar Farm are wholly unacceptable for Newark, for the Trent Valley corridor, and for the central belt of rural Nottinghamshire. The development would cause harm on a scale that far outweighs any claimed benefits.

Since the outset of the proposals, I have met with constituents across the affected area and studied the details of the application. In all of my surveys, constituency visits and public meetings, I have found that the overwhelming majority of residents – and in fact almost everyone I have spoken to – are opposed to this proposal. They are deeply concerned that their villages, farmland, and way of life will be overwhelmed by what is effectively the construction of an industrial energy complex across a historic and sensitive rural landscape.

The proposal is extremely large - in fact, if approved this would be one of the largest solar farms in Europe. The applicant seeks to construct a solar and battery energy storage scheme covering around 2,900 hectares (some 7,000 acres) of agricultural land to the north-west of Newark, with approximately 1,372 hectares used for solar development. It would form a ring of industrial development roughly 6 miles from north to south around the villages of Bathley, Caunton and Norwell, with the eastern section running alongside the A1 near Cromwell and North Muskham. The land affected crosses multiple parish areas and lies very close to numerous villages and individual homes. When viewed in isolation this is already a major and inappropriate scheme, but when considered alongside other nationally significant infrastructure projects, including the One Earth Solar Farm and the Steeple Renewables proposal, the cumulative impact on Newark and rural Nottinghamshire is severe.

The land in question includes extensive tracts of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. National Policy Statement EN-3 is explicit that where solar farms are proposed on agricultural land, poorer quality land should be preferred, and the use of BMV land – Grades 1, 2 and 3a – should be avoided wherever possible. At this scale, the loss of BMV land is inevitable, undermining food security at a time when the importance of protecting domestic food production could not be clearer. Around nine per cent of the Newark constituency's land mass is already at risk from solar farm proposals; Great North Road would be one of the most environmentally damaging.

The environmental impact of this scheme in particular is profoundly concerning. The land sits within the mapped zones of Nottinghamshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) - a statutory strategy under the Environment Act 2021 which identifies the areas of greatest ecological value, sensitivity and restoration priority. Much of the proposed development area overlaps or lies adjacent to:

- areas of ancient woodland
- ancient tree inventory sites
- Local Wildlife Sites including Muskham Wood, Cheveral Wood, Hagleys Plantation, Laxton Wood, Norwell Meadows, Ossington Lake and Besthorpe Gravel Pits
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) including Besthorpe Meadows and Eakring and Maplebeck Meadows
- mapped "areas of particular importance for biodiversity", wetland measures, watercourse measures, and areas the LNRS identifies as having the potential to become priority habitats

The applicant's documents do not reference the LNRS at all, despite its statutory role and clear relevance. This omission is significant. The LNRS partnership – including Nottinghamshire County Council, Natural England, the NFU, local universities and the Environment Agency – is explicit that damaging land-use change, particularly for "energy generation (e.g. solar farms)", must be avoided in sensitive areas. The Great North Road proposal is in direct conflict with the strategy, policies and objectives of the LNRS.

The impact on the historic pattern of settlement and landscape would be profound. Entire villages and individual homes would be encircled by panels, cabling and ancillary infrastructure; their setting permanently altered; and opportunities for natural, organic growth constrained for decades. This part of Nottinghamshire is a rural, historic landscape of rolling farmland, ancient woodlands, medieval field systems and designated wildlife sites. To industrialise it on this scale would be to impose lasting harm on its character and on the amenity of residents.

There are also specific heritage and archaeological concerns. This landscape contains historic farmsteads, medieval settlement patterns, listed buildings and known archaeological sites. The imposition of industrial-scale energy infrastructure risks permanent harm to the setting of heritage assets and the loss of undiscovered archaeology that forms part of the region's history. Constituents rightly fear that a development of this magnitude would damage their historic environment irreparably.

Construction and traffic impacts are another major concern. EN-3 acknowledges that access and traffic during the building of such large schemes can be a significant consideration in rural areas. The local road network through Norwell, Caunton, Maplebeck, Kersall and Laxton is not suited to prolonged volumes of heavy goods vehicles.

Residents are worried about disruption, safety risks, and the transformation of quiet country lanes into continuous construction haul routes. Even if the scheme were acceptable in other respects, robust caps, routing restrictions and independent monitoring would be essential.

The proposal includes a very large battery energy storage system (BESS). Serious fire incidents involving lithium-ion systems have occurred both in the UK and internationally. These demonstrate the real risks of fire, explosion and toxic plumes, and show how difficult such incidents are to suppress once ignited. Constituents have pressed me on this repeatedly, and these concerns must be taken seriously.

There is a further democratic deficit in how this project is perceived.

Residents across Norwell, Ossington, Maplebeck, Laxton, Caunton, Kersall and Sutton-on-Trent feel ignored and powerless as decisions about the future of their villages are taken over their heads. They fear, with justification, that they will be forced to live inside an industrial complex for a generation. Local surveys, parish reports and attendance at public meetings show near-universal opposition to the proposal, and that reflects what I have consistently heard on the ground. Government policy is clear that solar development should prioritise rooftops, brownfield sites, contaminated land and other

industrial surfaces. Newark and the wider region have substantial warehouse and logistics capacity with large commercial roofs that could and should be utilised before sacrificing prime farmland and sensitive habitats. I have consistently made that case locally, and my constituents are right to expect the same logic to apply here.

For all of these reasons, I urge the Examining Authority to accept this representation into the Examination and to give very substantial weight to the loss of BMV agricultural land, the conflict with the Nottinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the cumulative impacts with other energy schemes, the permanent harm to village settings and landscape, the unacceptable construction impacts, the significant biodiversity and habitat risks, and the safety concerns posed by the battery storage system.

On that basis, I ask you to recommend refusal. If, notwithstanding these objections, you are minded to recommend approval, then the only way to protect my constituents would be through stringent and binding requirements. These would need to include independently verified soil surveys to minimise BMV loss; strict protections for LNRS-designated habitats and all Local Wildlife Sites and SSSIs; enforceable construction traffic caps and routing conditions; strong protections against glint, glare and loss of amenity for residents; comprehensive BESS safety and emergency response plans; robust decommissioning and soil restoration obligations; and a meaningful community benefit package proportionate to the scale of the intrusion.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

Member of Parliament for Newark