

Response to ISH 1 with specific reference to North Leverton Windmill.

North Leverton Windmill Trust AND Fields for Farming

The proposed solar farm development is seen to harm the setting and significance of the windmill, a Grade II* listed heritage asset of national importance.

1. Impact on the Setting of a Heritage Asset
2. Inadequate Assessment
3. Balancing Public Benefit and Harm

1. Impact on the Setting of a Heritage Asset (EN-1 and EN-3)

Both National Policy Statements (NPPSs) require that the impact on the setting of heritage assets, particularly those of high significance like the Grade II* listed windmill, must be assessed and considerable weight given to its conservation and harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, including harm from the development affecting its setting, requires clear justification.

NPPF Glossary defines the setting of a heritage assets as “The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral (NPPF, Annex 2: Glossary).

The windmill's significance is tied to its historical context as a functioning windmill in a rural setting. The visual presence of the large-scale solar array would alter this setting, diluting or detracting from the heritage asset's historic character and appearance, even if views are not direct or are partially mitigated by vegetation.

Historic Context - The windmill was built in 1813 by a group of local farmers to grind their corn. The original Subscription Agreement held by the Mills Achieve show over 60 farmers (from Leverton, Sturton, Fenton and Wheatley) subscribed to use the windmill). It also states “.....*for the purpose of considering and determining upon the best means of erecting a Mill for the grinding of corn not only for the use of such persons so subscribing and signing and sealing these presents but also for the benefit of such industrious poor persons as the Committee to be hereinafter appointed*”. Its very existence is tied to the surrounding agricultural land and community. The open fields reflect its original, historic, and ongoing purpose.

Operational Aspect - The windmill uses wind power to grind locally grown wheat into flour. The surrounding fields are the source of the raw material, creating a direct physical and functional link between the land and the building. The wheat used for wholemeal and white flour is still grown locally and from the fields affected by this development.

Aesthetic and Character - Visitors describe the location as "beautiful" and "very rural," feeling like "going back 100 years". The open, agricultural nature of the majority of the landscape provides an authentic and largely unaltered backdrop that allows people to appreciate the windmill in its intended context.

Visual Amenity and Views - The open fields allow for clear, unobstructed views of the windmill as a prominent landmark from many roads, public rights of way and bridleways. The hedges

along these routes are currently maintained and cut on a regular basis which afford views towards the windmill. There are many field gateways which allow uninterrupted views. This visual connection is a key part of the public's enjoyment and appreciation of the Grade II* listed building's setting.

The applicant argued that the setting only relates to the Windmill, its cottage, yard and Mill Lane and that its immediate setting only comprised the field to the North which is not part of the scheme. This is clearly not the case; the above demonstrates that the historic and current association is with the wider fields and community not just the one the applicant referred to.

The applicant has not given clear convincing justification to meet the high bar set by NPPF for harm to this designated heritage asset which is visited by thousands of people.

2. Inadequate Assessment

Historic England's 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' was referred to by the applicant. This document further supports our arguments that the applicant has failed to assess the windmill correctly.

"Where the significance of a heritage asset has been compromised in the past by unsympathetic development affecting its setting, to accord with NPPF policies consideration still needs to be given to whether additional change will further detract from, or can enhance, the significance of the asset. Negative change could include severing the last link between an asset and its original setting; positive change could include the restoration of a building's original designed landscape or the removal of structures impairing key views of it (see also paragraph 40 for screening of intrusive developments)."

2.1. Understanding and Significance

The applicant argued that views from Trent Valley Way, and indeed, any public right of way are only important if they contribute to the understanding of the significance of that asset and that although the windmill can be seen from a number of areas, it's an incidental view of that windmill.

2.1.1. Trent Valley Way

I would suggest that the Trent Valley (and thus the Trent Valley Way) does contribute to the significance of the Windmill.

Integrated into the Route - The path is not just near the windmill, it is a specific, waymarked spur designed to lead walkers to this point of interest. This inclusion in a recognized heritage route highlights the windmill as a key cultural feature of the wider Trent Valley landscape.

Historical and Cultural Context - The Trent Valley Way is designed to connect heritage sites and communities, telling the story of the river's impact on the area's business, industry, and culture. By linking to the path, the windmill is placed within this broader historical narrative of the region's industrial and agricultural past.

Visitor Experience - The path provides a specific, established way for visitors to access and experience the windmill in its rural context. Walkers following the path can

appreciate the open fields and surrounding landscape that were integral to the windmill's original purpose and ongoing operation.

Promoting Awareness - The inclusion in a walking route promoted by heritage and wildlife trusts increases awareness and public appreciation of the windmill's unique character as the only windmill in the UK that has never stopped working.

Any development that negatively affects the views or the character of the walk along this spur will harm the public's ability to understand the windmill's significance in the manner intended by the Trent Valley Way's creators.

2.1.2. Rural Road and Public Spaces

Various other viewpoints in the surrounding area also contribute to the understanding of the windmill.

North Leverton with Habbleshthorpe Circular - This trail is specifically designed for exploring the area around the village of North Leverton with Habbleshthorpe . It offers multiple perspectives of the windmill, showcasing its place within the historic farming landscape that supports it. Any disruption to the visual character of this route would degrade the visitor's ability to appreciate the windmill's rural setting.

Other local paths - Countless other footpaths weave through the local countryside. As seen in the applicant's own Residential Visual Amenity Assessment, properties and footpaths are located within 500m of the proposed development. While the applicant claims the impact would be "minor," the cumulative impact of this industrial infrastructure on these existing rural walks is a significant point.

Retford Road - The road leading directly to the windmill from Retford offers the most immediate and close-up views. The journey along this rural road is part of the experience of visiting the heritage asset, and any large-scale industrial development nearby would fundamentally change this approach.

Surrounding Villages: - The windmill is a visible landmark from neighbouring villages such as Sturton le Steeple, South Wheatley, Littleborough and Habbleshthorpe, even from the Lincolnshire side of the River Trent. Long-distance, clear views from these areas help define the windmill's role as a regional landmark, a focal point in countryside views, and an emblem of the area's rural heritage.

Significance to Understanding the Windmill - The collective significance of these views, in addition to the Trent Valley Way, is that they also

Provide Historic Context - The wide, open, and predominantly agricultural landscape is not accidental, it is the historic context that gave birth to and sustains the working windmill. Views from various points help tell this story.

Allow for Appreciation of Scale - The lack of industrial development close to the windmill allows visitors to appreciate its scale against a natural rural backdrop, rather than being visually compromised.

Support Rural Amenity - Public footpaths and views across the countryside are a core part of the local amenity. Harm to these views is harm to the public's reasonable enjoyment of the rural setting of the historic landmark.

Any development that would industrialise the landscape visible from these viewpoints would, according to heritage planning principles, harm the public's understanding of the windmill's significance by damaging its setting

2.2. Primary Function and height

Much of the applicant's assessment and arguments put forward are based on the windmill's primary function of milling of flour. No consideration has been given to ancillary past and present functions that contribute to its significance. These were mentioned yesterday in our OFH1 submission and include :

Educational Resource: - an important educational site for schools and the general public, teaching about function, history, design, and purpose of windmills and England's industrial past. A dedicated Visitor Centre with interactive displays and historical documents supports this function.

Community Hub - The windmill is a focal point for the local community, hosting events, family fun days, and special open days (e.g., vintage tractor displays, outdoor theatre). The site is available for anyone to use with permission.

Tourism and Visitor Economy - The windmill attracts thousands of visitors and is a key feature of local heritage and walking trails. It contributes to the local visitor economy by drawing tourists to the area.

Commercial Activity - The windmill runs a shop, selling flour ground on-site, local products, and souvenirs. This provides a direct commercial link to its historic function and generates vital funds for its preservation and maintenance.

Charitable Function - Managed by a registered charity, activities are focused on the preservation, protection and maintenance of the windmill for public benefit and the advancement of education.

Communication – The windmill sails were and continue to be a method of communication with the wider community as described in the OFH1. The sails turning denotes the windmill is open, set at a St Andrew's cross means the miller is away, and set at St George's cross (or just passed) denotes a death.

The argument that windows are purely for light and not for views should not be accepted when assessing the impact on the public heritage value of the windmill and its historical landscape. Failing to assess the impact on secondary and ancillary function, which are all linked to the windmill's setting, rural character and sustainability, is a major omission, as harm to these activities will harm the overall public benefit provided by this unique heritage asset.

The applicant argued that there will be ample places to view the windmill, its setting and landscape, however we fail to see how this will be possible with 3m high solar panels from Year 1 and/or 3m mitigation screening at Year 15 looking towards the windmill from within the proposed development area, and a backdrop of solar panels when looking from Retford

Road and other vantage points towards the Windmill. The proposed mitigation are both well above the height of the average person and, knowing these roads and footpaths very well, we fail to comprehend where these ample views will be. (Referring to EN010163-000085-6.3.6 Appendix 6.2 Photomontages Part 2 - Winter.pdf. and specifically, Viewpoint 12 as an example of the impact of solar panels and screening.

The argument that views of the windmill do not matter is contrary to established UK planning law and policy, which highly values the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment for public enjoyment.

2.3. Cumulative Impact:

The cumulative visual impact of a renewable energy project could significantly affect the windmill's setting and the ability to appreciate its value.

The addition of a large solar farm contributes to the cumulative industrialisation of the local area, which could be argued to push the setting of the windmill past a tipping point where its historic significance is fundamentally compromised.

The applicant has failed to consider the combined effect of this project with other nearby actual and potential developments. They must be included and considered when assessing the overall impact on the windmill's setting. With this development being by far the largest in terms of footprint and proximity, we argue that this should elevate the 'minor impact' to a more significant one.

When assessing any application for development which may affect the setting of a heritage asset, authorities should consider the implications of cumulative change. They should also consider the fact that developments which materially detract from the asset's significance may also damage its economic viability now, or in the future, thereby threatening its on-going preservation and sustainability.

3. Balancing Public Benefit and Harm

The NPPF states that even "less than substantial harm" to a designated heritage asset must be weighed against the public benefits of a proposal. We challenge the applicant's claim that the effect is "not significant".

The scale of the landscape harm to the windmill's setting is unacceptable and not adequately mitigated by the proposed benefits, creating a policy conflict.

The windmill sits within a very rural, historic landscape setting – characterised by open fields, lack of modern development and a strong visual connection to its historical purpose. It is built on higher ground for efficiency hence it is exposed and thus affords long uninterrupted sightlines across the landscape.

The historic setting is generally free from large modern structures and extensive housing developments (the presence of the power station has already been noted but its footprint is small in comparison and is being demolished), preserving the original visual and historical context.

The applicant's argument that views from the windmill's windows are irrelevant would be seen as ignoring a key aspect of its historic and communal value.

Historic England's The Setting of Heritage Assets was referred to by the applicant. This document further supports our arguments that the harm this project causes outweighs public benefit with regard to economic benefit. ".....However, the economic viability of a heritage asset can be reduced if the contribution made by its setting is diminished by badly designed or insensitively located development.

Generic benefits like renewable energy and a community fund are insufficient to override damage and harm to a nationally significant, irreplaceable heritage asset.

4. Conclusions

The applicant has failed to accurately describe the windmill's importance and fully assess the impact on the tourism value and historic setting of the mill. The applicant's Environmental Statement (ES) acknowledges potential for a "moderate adverse effect" from some viewpoints, but assesses the overall impact as low.

In its Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for the Steeple Renewables Project, Steeples Renewables concluded that the impact on the Windmill and its setting would be "negligible" or result in a "minor adverse effect which is not significant" relying on distance, existing screening, topography and the context of the power stations.

Simply put, as far as North Leverton Windmill is concerned, impacts are significant and adverse.

4.1. Distance as a Mitigating Factor

The assessment relies heavily on the physical offset between the proposed solar panels and the windmill.

<https://nsip-documents.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/published-documents/EN010163-000055-Fig%202.1%20Indicative%20Site%20Layout.pdf>

page 5 indicated the nearest panels will be approximately 300m from the windmill and shows the expanse of panels (180 degrees).

4.2. Intervening Vegetation and Topography

The LVIA concluded that existing field boundary vegetation, mature garden hedging, and the general topography of the land would serve to "notably reduce potential views," especially from ground level. They argue this natural screening limits the visibility of the solar farm infrastructure. The Examining Authority has already undertaken an unaccompanied site visit and walked/driven the area so is aware that this simply is not true and the trust has offered an accompanied site visit so the Inspectors can see the views from the windmill tower. The applicant did not request access to the windmill for the assessment as they have only considered primary function which is not correct.

4.3. Context of Existing Industrial Landscape

The assessment places the proposed solar array within the existing context of the wider area, which already includes the large-scale West Burton Power Station and associated power lines/pylons. The argument being that the windmill's setting is already somewhat industrialised, making the additional impact of a solar farm "barely perceptible". However, the Examining Authority and the applicant are aware that the most industrial element (West Burton A Power

Station) is already in the process of being demolished. The applicant has indicated that over 800,000 solar panels will be used, claiming it to be “barely perceptible”. This is simply not true.

4.4. Sensitivity Rating

In Chapter 13 assessment for traffic impacts, "listed buildings" and "tourist attractions" were given a "Low" sensitivity rating. While this specific rating was for transport, it indicates a general approach to how different receptors' sensitivity to the project was assessed and indicates inconsistency within the assessments and shows disregard for our heritage.

View towards the windmill were not considered in the LVIA which is incomprehensible given the high significance of this asset. No approach was made by the applicant to the trust to consult with us to identify all potential concerns and local factors that should have influenced sensitivity ratings.

4.5. Professional Judgement

The applicant's assessment uses professional judgement to determine the magnitude and significance of impacts, concluding that, the effects would be "non-significant". Nottinghamshire County Council commented that they usually expect 'moderate' to be 'significant' and also expressed concern for an overuse of professional judgement which is not justified in the evidence. In addition, [REDACTED], Nottinghamshire's County Council Historic Building Conservation Team did not agree with the applicant's assessment and findings.

4.6. Policy Conflict

EN-1

Paragraph 5.8.9 - The greater the negative impact on the significance of the designated heritage asset, the greater the benefits that will be needed to justify approval.

Paragraph 5.8.10: - The applicant's environmental statement should include a description of the significance of the heritage assets affected by the proposed development and the contribution of their setting to that significance.

EN-3

Paragraph 165: In the context of renewable energy, this paragraph requires plans to "design policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative impacts.

Paragraph 174: This general policy states that "Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by... recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside". This is the overarching principle that mandates the consideration of countryside character.

NPPF

The project conflicts with two of the three overriding objectives of NPPF in terms of social and environmental objective.

We argue that the presumption in favour of sustainable development should not apply because the introduction states

- the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area [which includes designated heritage assets]; or
- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

Paragraph 199 - local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including development affecting the asset's setting). They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal.

Paragraph 200 - Emphasizes that "Great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be)". This is a key principle in this debate.

Paragraph 202 - This is the central policy for weighing harm where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing optimum viable use.

Paragraph 206 - Deals with the cumulative impact, stating that the cumulative effects of multiple developments on the historic environment should be considered.

This project should be rejected on the grounds of disregard of the Windmill, effects on its setting and views, cumulative impact and the harm to our developing tourism industry which all contribute significantly to the economic growth of this area.

The applicant stated that there would be ample views, when walking anywhere within the proposed development site. The solar panels are 3m high with mitigation screening eventually growing to a similar height. These are both well above the height of the average person, we fail to comprehend where these ample views be.

North Leverton Windmill Trust
Fields for Farming Community Objection Group