

5. Landscape & Visual Steeple Renewables Project

November 2025



**FIELDS FOR
FARMING**



Fields For Farming (FFF) considers that the Applicant, in written (Environmental Statement) and verbal (Responses during ISH1) submissions, exhibits several deficiencies and weaknesses that undermine the application particularly in understating impacts on sensitive local receptors, over-relying on optimistic mitigation assumptions and minimising cumulative effects in a landscape already saturated with energy infrastructure. These issues align with common critiques in NSIP examinations, where the Planning Inspectorate has emphasised the need for “robust and defensible” assessments that fully address local sensitivities (**Planning Act 2008, s.104; see also NPS EN-1, para 4.2 on decision-making criteria**).

FFF simply cannot agree that the assessment made by the applicant that there is “no significant effect, no cumulative impact”, and not with their view that in this case moderate is insignificant, moderate should be significant (echoed by Nottinghamshire County Council [Notts CC]).

5.1 Viewpoints & Photo Montages

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a viewpoint as “A place from which the surrounding landscape or scenery can be viewed or observed”. In the main, the locations chosen are not viewpoints, they are simply points along a route chosen not to highlight the views and open landscapes. **Attached are photographs** taken just steps away from the points used by the applicant and they show viewpoints. These were taken by an iPhone 14 Pro by an individual of 170cm in height at eye level and at the centre of the footpath.

The applicant’s photographs are deliberately misleading and don’t give a true reflection of the open, rural and agricultural nature of our landscape. The points chosen are either not representative of the area/route or are not within the red-line of the proposed development. These are not representative and the photographs are deliberately confusing. The applicant did not include a Viewpoint from Retford Road looking towards the River Trent or Sturton Le Steeple, this would clearly show the extent of the development, the open rural landscape and the heritage assets affected. (example Photograph attached).

The applicant took the approach that silence is deemed acceptance with regards to selection of viewpoints. Bassetlaw have not submitted responses and Notts CC have expressed concerns about the selection, and the community was not asked for input at all, surely local knowledge is key in this respect.

Notts CC and FFF both highlighted the limited coverage of residential receptors that can be classed as highly sensitive particularly around the edges of villages. The applicant's "moderate" rating is unacceptable and contradicts **Bassetlaw Local Plan, Policy 46 and Sturton Ward NP, Policy 5**.

Nottinghamshire County Council also expressed concern about professional judgement. Professional judgement does not override local knowledge and in this case professional judgement is flawed.

VP 1A & 1B represent Trent Valley Way – Solar is not proposed in these two fields (these fields are not in the red-line. The site is beyond the farm buildings depicted).

VP 6a, 6b, 12, 13a, 13b, 14b all show West Burton Cooling Towers in the backdrop, and continue to do so through out, these towers will be gone by 2026/2027. By turning 180 degrees and taking photographs would have given a far better reflection of the area being affected by the development and would have shown how open and rural the landscape and views actually are.

VP 14a, 17b, 20b clearly shows the impact the development will have on the landscape views towards North Leverton Windmill and setting of this heritage asset. We challenge that VP 20a deliberately excludes the windmill.

5.2 Hedgerows

It is a known fact that established hedgerows have more environmental value than new hedgerows and newly planted hedgerows have little environmental value in year 1 (with no benefit as opposed to what was claimed by the applicant), and start to add value by year 3, have more significant value after 10 years and long-term benefits after

30 years. The applicant places much reliance on volume of hedgerow planted not the quality of the hedgerow nor the time it takes to mature.

Document: Outline Landscape Ecology Management Plan
Document Reference: EN010163/APP/6.3.7
Paragraph: 2.3

Numerous Public Rights of Way (PROW) and permissive paths intersect the Site and are shown on Figure 6.9 Outline Landscape Mitigation Strategy [EN010163/APP/6.4.6]. The maintenance of these has been considered in relation to their influence on habitat condition, for example greater hedgerow cutting frequencies may be needed adjacent to PROW, but management prescriptions for the PROW have not been specified, as they do not have their own ecological objectives.

It is difficult to determine from the above whether the hedgerows bordering the PROW will be managed or not or indeed in what manner which has an impact on visual assessment outcomes, and how their impact on NBG can be assessed if the management of them is not determined.

The visual and landscape assessments conclude there is no benefit and this a moderate impact in Year 1, and a moderate to minor impact by year 15, this is simply not true where currently there are 1 to 1.5m managed hedgerows interspersed with gateways and hedgerow gaps that will be allowed to grow to 3m, gaps filled and gateways obscured by solar panels.

There is no contingency for underperformance (e.g. drought/climate impacts) **contradicting GLVIA3 standards** and with hedgerow removals during construction quoted at 1,070m this also **contradicts NPS EN-3 (2023), para 2.10.100**.

5.3 Dynamic Landscape

FFF pointed out that the landscape is dynamic, it changes over the seasons not only in terms of visual aspects due to the crops but also sights and smells. The landscape will become a stagnant ocean of solar panels.

The applicant confirmed they intend to plant/allow existing hedgerows to grow either side of Trent Valley Way and other PROWs. These hedges will be allowed to grow to 3m high, and it is not clear how often these hedgerows will be maintained. The applicant claims this will still afford pleasant and open views. This is simply not true, the proposed 15m wide routes with 3m hedges will not feel "open and pleasant" in a rural landscape; they create a confined, engineered corridor that fundamentally changes the character of the Trent Valley Way and public right of way.

5.4 Decommissioning and Long-Term Reversibility

Decommissioning is only briefly addressed (ES Table 6.5, p70: "short term... minor effects"), assuming full restoration but without detailed visuals or soil recovery modelling. This glosses over 40-year operational permanence in a reversible landscape.

There is no ZTV for the decommissioning phase per **GLVIA3 para 5.4** on full lifecycle assessment and the applicant avoids the requirements of the **Planning Act 2008, s104(7)** where Examination decisions must consider "likely significant effects... including ... decommissioning" and **NPS EN-3, para 2.10.96** stating "decommissioning" plans are required to ensure "land can be returned to agriculture"

5.5 Cumulative Impact

The applicant claimed that their assessment was mindful of other schemes in the area (10km radius) listing 13 nearby schemes including 5 solar farms and concluded there was significant impact on the Character and amenity. Estimates of 6 to 8 million solar panels across the Trent Valley at this point see a complete landscape shift from agriculture to energy fundamentally changing the visual landscape and character of the area.

There will be intervisibility between the projects, especially from Littleborough, Fenton and the high points in North Leverton as well as those looking from the Lincolnshire

side of the River Trent towards Cottam and West Burton from A156 and potentially from Lincoln. The applicant has chosen not to include this aspect in its ZTV.

Again, to affirm, the cumulative impact results in the schemes being contrary to Local Plan policies that aim to protect the landscape character of the area. (see Bassetlaw Local Plan 2020-2038, Policy ST49 and Sturton Ward Neighbourhood Plan 2021 – 2037, Policy 2a)

More locally the applicant argues that the quarry has no impact visually so does not warrant inclusion in the assessment, it is 'in the ground' again, this is not wholly true as there is plant and processing equipment and extraction piles up to 10m high as well as security fencing, lighting and more hedgerow screening.

The applicant has accepted that there are multiple schemes within the 10km Zone of Interest yet concludes no conflict.

FFF acknowledge that energy does currently form part of the landscape, but on a much smaller footprint and those facilities are currently being demolished. Cottam has already gone and the changes are immense (see attached photos).

We join Nottinghamshire County Council in having difficulty in understanding how this can be deemed negligible.

5.5 SUMMARY

For the reasons given above, and the responses given by the applicant during ISH1, we did not gain any comfort that the landscape and visual assessments have been undertaken adequately and added to our concerns that the impacts have been understated. Nottinghamshire County Council also echoed these concerns.

The applicant's approach here is reflected across the entire project raising the lack of confidence in the ability of the applicant to deliver such a major project and therefore the application should be declined.















