Planning Statement (inc. Green Belt Assessment)

Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park

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Contents

Revision Record					
Rev	Description	Date	Author	Checked	Approved
0	Draft	07/12/22	SL	JL	SL
1	Revised Draft	15/12/22	SL	SL	
2	Final	18/01/23	SL	SL	SL
3	Final	31/01/23	SL	SL	SL

1. Introduction

Purpose of Statement

1.1 This Planning Statement (inc. Green Belt Assessment) has been prepared by ELG Planning to support a full planning application for a solar array, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated infrastructure on land to the south west of Ruddington Village, Nottinghamshire.

1.2 The application is supported by a range of supporting reports, an Environmental Statement and information dealing with the technical matters arising from the proposals.

Structure of Statement

1.3 This statement is structured as follows:

Section 2 analyses the context of the site.

Section 3 sets out the relevant planning policy context.

Section 4 describes the development proposals.

Section 5 assesses the key planning issues relating to the proposed development, including in the context of the adopted development plan and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as well as any other material considerations.

Section 6 draws conclusions on the overall findings of the statement

2. Site Context

Local Context

2.1 The application site is located on an area of land to the south of Ruddington in Rushcliffe Borough as shown on Figure 1 below.

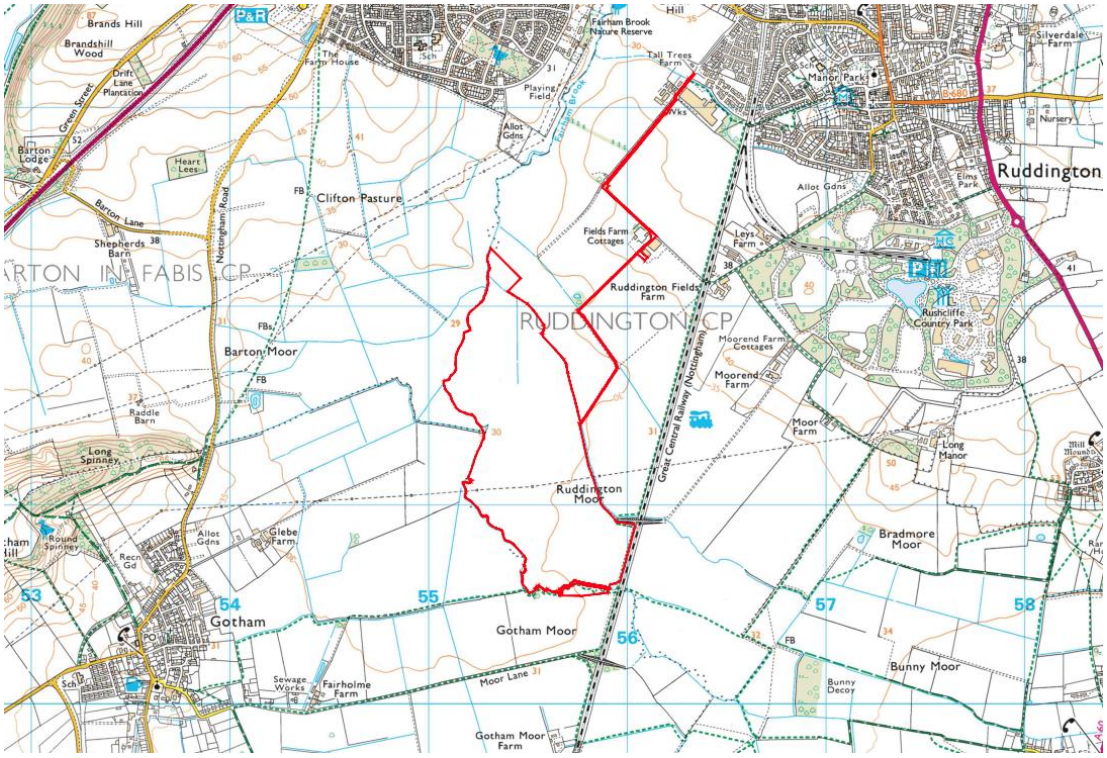

Figure 1: Site Location Plan

2.2 The settlement of Ruddington is 1.4km northeast, Clifton is 0.7km to the north, and Gotham is 1.6 km southwest. There are no dwellings, within 500m of the boundary of the proposed energy park. The closest dwellings to the proposal are within approximately 1.0km of the array boundary. The application site extends to approximately 82 hectares and is predominately in agricultural use.

Designations & Constraints

2.3 There are no statutory historic or environmental designations within the application site itself but there are a number of designated heritage assets and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the wider study area. The site is located within the Green Belt.

Planning History

2.4 The development proposals were subject to an EIA screening request in January 2022.

21/02736/SCREIA- SCREENING OPINION - Environmental Impact Assessment for a potential solar farm and battery energy storage project, known as the Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park. No screening opinion issued so the request was withdrawn.

2.5 However informal discussions took place with Rushcliffe Borough Council and the applicant volunteered an EIA and identified that it would focus on Landscape and Visual Impact, as well as Ecology. This approach was informally agreed by Rushcliffe Borough Council in April 2022.

2.6 The application site is not subject to any other relevant planning history.

3. Development Proposals

3.1 The proposals include the development of:

- an array of ground-mounted solar panels and ancillary infrastructure including inverters (mounted behind the panels), transformer units, access tracks, security fencing and infrared cameras, electrical and communications infrastructure
- a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) including battery units mounted in containers, power conversion and transformer units, switchgear containers, access tracks, security fencing and infrared cameras
- Site electrical infrastructure comprising of DNO switchyard compound comprising terminations, protection and monitoring equipment, switchgear, disconnectors, busbars and main transformer. A DNO control building is sited adjacent to the compound for the sole use of the DNO. Underground power cabling connects the compound to the Solar PV and BESS Substation which is in turn connected to the energy park 33kv distribution system. Additional infrastructure includes access tracks, security fencing and security cameras;
- A temporary construction compound will be located to the north east of the development area for the duration of construction and a grid connection cable will connect the site to the local electrical distribution network (subject to a separate consenting process).

3.2 It is anticipated that the proposed development will be generating electricity for a period of 40 years. The proposed renewable energy park will have an installed AC capacity of up to 49.9MW and the panels will be ground mounted to a maximum height above ground of 3 metres. The BESS could host up to 100MWh that is discharging at 50MW over two hours.

3.3 The application site is technically suitable for a solar farm with an appropriate grid connection and the site design software PVSyst confirms a good energy generating potential.

3.4 It has been predicted that the proposed solar farm will generate sufficient energy to offset the equivalent annual electricity needs of approximately 11,200 Nottinghamshire homes (based on average domestic consumption per household of 3 900kWh (DBEIS, 2020).

3.5 From the displacement of electricity generated from fossil fuels, the proposed development would offset the emission of a significant quantity of pollutants, particularly carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere. This reduction in emissions would contribute to the national legislation of achieving zero net carbon emissions by 2050 and international reductions required under the legally binding obligations of the Climate Change Act 2008 and International Paris Agreement 2016 and also contribute to local targets.

3.6 Electricity generated using a solar system varies throughout daytime hours according to changes in irradiance (or light levels). The BESS will therefore complement this generation. The battery serves a number of purposes, including stabilising the generation as well as operating independently of the solar farm to provide energy during times of peak demand or system frequency instability.

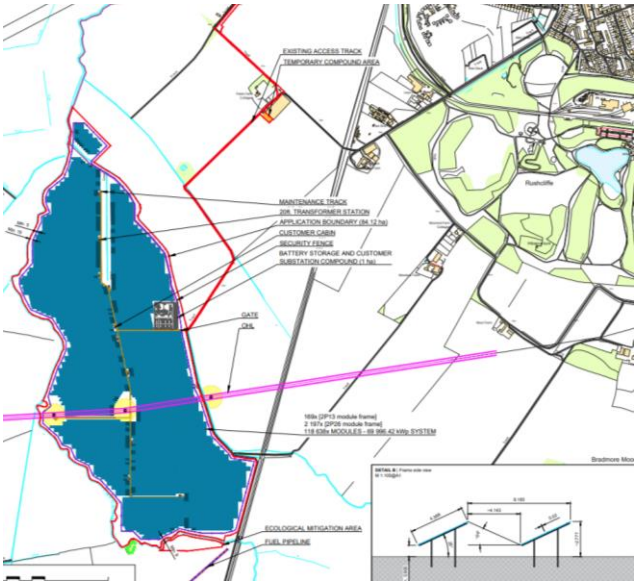

Figure 2: Proposed Layout Plan

3.7 Once operational there are very limited impacts from the development in terms of noise or traffic movements etc. and the use is essentially temporary.

4. Planning Policy Context

4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 indicates that the statutory Development Plan will continue to be the starting point for the consideration of planning applications for the development or use of land, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 This section of the statement identifies the Development Plan in force for the area in which the application site is located and also sets out the Development Plan policies of relevance to the assessment of the current application proposals. The key material considerations relevant to the determination of the application are also highlighted.

Development Plan

4.3 For the purpose of section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the currently adopted Development Plan comprises:

- Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (adopted 2014)
- Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies (adopted 2019)
- Ruddington Neighbourhood Plan (adopted 2021)

Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (adopted 2014)

4.4 The application site is located within the Green Belt as shown on the adjacent extract (figure 3) from the local plan proposals map. It is not subject to any other planning policy designations.

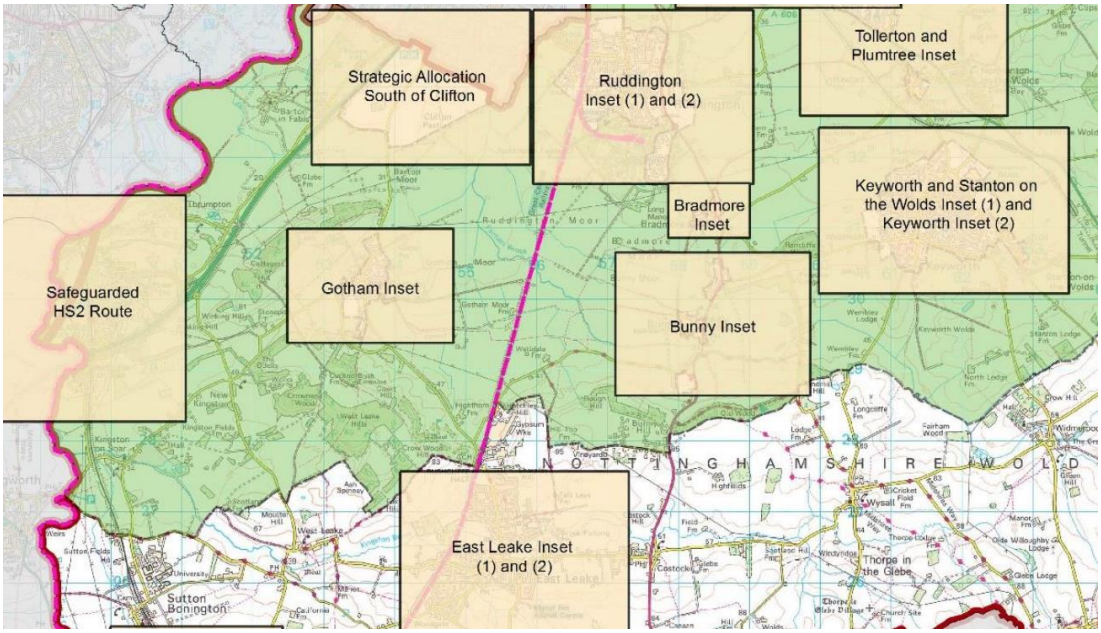

Figure 3: Extract Local Plan Proposals Map

4.5 The following policies from the Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy are of relevance to the consideration of the planning application:

- Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- Policy 2: Climate Change
- Policy 4: Nottingham-Derby Green Belt
- Policy 17: Biodiversity

Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies (adopted 2019)

4.6 The following policies from the Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies are of relevance to the consideration of the planning application:

- Policy 1: Development Requirements
- Policy 16: Renewable Energy
- Policy 17: Managing Flood Risk
- Policy 18: Surface Water Management
- Policy 19: Development affecting Watercourses
- Policy 21: Green Belt
- Policy 28: Conserving and Enhancing Heritage Assets
- Policy 38: Non-Designation Biodiversity Assets and the Wider Ecological Network

Ruddington Neighbourhood Plan (adopted 2021)

4.7 The following policies from the Ruddington Neighbourhood Plan are of relevance to the consideration of the planning application:

- Policy 19 – Biodiversity in New Developments
- Policy 20 – Village Setting
- Policy 21 – Green Infrastructure Network

Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

4.8 The National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") updated in July 2021 is a significant material consideration in the consideration of planning decisions. This was a revision to the NPPF that was originally published in March 2012. Paragraph 2 of NPPF confirms that development which accords with the Development Plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.9 The NPPF confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development and, in order to achieve this purpose, the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

a) *an economic objective* - to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) *a social objective* – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) *an environmental objective* – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.'

4.10 The NPPF introduces a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision making this is defined in paragraph 11 as approving development proposals which accord with the development plan without delay; and where the development plan is silent, absent or relevant policies are out of date, permission should be granted unless any adverse effects of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of specific policies of the NPPF that indicate that development should be restricted.

4.11 Section 13 of the NPPF sets out the Government's policy guidance in the Green Belt. The paragraphs relevant to the development proposals are set out below:

147. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

148. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

*151. 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. **Such very***

special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

4.12 Section 14 of the NPPF outline policy guidance on meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change.

155. To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, plans should:

a) *provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts);*
b) *consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and*
c) *identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for colocating potential heat customers and suppliers.*

158. When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should: a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent

applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.

4.13 Section 15 of NPPF relates to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

174. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;

e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

180. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles: a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused; b) development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest; c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and d) development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

4.14 Section 16 relates to conserving and enhancing the historic environment and sets out the government's policies on these matters. Paragraph 195 of NPPF states that LPAs should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset).

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

4.15 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is an online resource which provides guidance on how the governments planning policies in the NPPF should be applied. Of relevance to the consideration of the development proposals is the following guidance (Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327).

> What are the particular planning considerations that relate to large scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms?
>
> *"The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.*
>
> *Particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider include:*
>
> - *encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;*
> - *where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays. See also a speech by the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, the Rt Hon Gregory Barker MP, to the solar PV industry on 25 April 2013 and written ministerial statement on solar*

energy: protecting the local and global environment made on 25 March 2015.

- *that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;*
- *the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare (see guidance on landscape assessment) and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;*
- *the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;*
- *the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;*
- *great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;*
- *the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;*
- *the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.*

The approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large scale solar farms is likely to be the same as assessing the impact of wind turbines. However, in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with

effective screening and appropriate land topography the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero".

National Policy Statements

4.16 Paragraph 5 of NPPF confirms that the national policy statements form part of the overall framework of national planning policy and may be a material consideration in preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications. These include:

- Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1)
- National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)

5. Planning Assessment

5.1 Having regard to the local planning policy context and the requirements of the NPPF, the key planning consideration are:

- Principle of Development
- Are the proposals Sustainable Development as envisaged in the NPPF?

5.2 This section assesses the proposals against the relevant policies (having regard to the context of the site in respect of constraints) in the NPPF. It also considers the development proposals against relevant up to date development plan polices.

Principle of Development

5.3 The policy support at a national level to increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy is clear through the government's policies set out in NPPF. Paragraph 158 of NPPF sets out the main planning policy test in relation to renewable and low carbon developments and confirms local planning authorities should:

- *"not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and*

- *approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale*

projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas".

5.4 Whilst there is no requirement to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, the accompanying Environmental Statement prepared by Engena sets out the position in relation to global climate change and associated policies, climate change in the UK, as well as energy security which has come to the fore in recent months following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The impacts of the proposed development are also considered further in this Statement, the Environmental Statement as well as the accompanying supporting reports.

5.5 As outlined above, the application site is located with the Green Belt and notwithstanding the clear broader planning policy support for the development of renewable energy schemes, the principle of development on the site turns on demonstrating compliance with the relevant Green Belt policies.

5.6 Policy 21 of the Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies (Green Belt) confirms that applications for development in the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with the NPPF.

5.7 Paragraph 147 of NPPF confirms:

"*Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances*"

5.8 Paragraph 148 follows:

> "*When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations".*

5.9 In terms of whether development is inappropriate in the Green Belt, the NPPF advises that new buildings are inappropriate subject to a number of exceptions (Para. 149). Paragraph 150 advises that certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it, however none of these exceptions are considered relevant to the development proposals.

5.10 Paragraph 151 relates specifically to renewable energy projects and 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. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources".*

5.11 The proposed development is by definition inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The acceptability of the proposals in planning terms therefore turns on whether the harm to the Green Belt as a result of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

5.12 The Planning Statement now considers the development proposals against the Green Belt purposes before outlining the case for very special circumstances.

Green Belt Purposes

5.13 Paragraph 137 of NPPF advises that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

5.14 Paragraph 138 of NPPF outlines the five purposes of the Green Belt as:

a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

5.15 PPG provides guidance on what factors can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722) and advises:

"Assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgment based on the circumstances of the case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

- *openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;*
- *the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and*
- *the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation".*

5.16 The proposed development will consist of solar panels that are ground mounted in rows facing south, and ancillary infrastructure including inverters, transformers, grid connection cabling, CCTV, storage containers, a substation cabinet and a temporary construction compound. In addition, a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will be located near to the substation.

5.17 The solar panels will be mounted at a fixed angle of approximately 25 degrees and will have maximum height of 3m, with a minimum clearance from the ground of 0.9m. The other elements of the proposals including the transformer, storage container, battery storage, and security fence ranging from 1.8 metres to 2.5 metres in height. The tallest solid block elements of the substation compound are the DNO Control Room and Solar PV and BESS Substation building at 5 metres to the roof apex. As such, the overall scale of the development proposals from a height perspective is limited.

5.18 As outlined at paragraph 137 of NPPF, the essential characteristics of the Green Belt are their openness and their permanence. The proposals also only have a temporary lifespan of 40 years after which they will be decommissioned, so any harm arising will be temporary and reversable and will not result in the permanent loss of Green Belt.

5.19 Moreover, the degree of activity generated by the development proposals when operational will be very limited. During normal operations, personnel will visit the site approximately once a month, in a light van or four-wheel drive vehicle and the panels will be cleaned once or twice a year.

5.20 The development proposals have been assessed against the 5 purposes of the Green Belt set out at paragraph 138 of NPPF, below.

a) *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas*

5.21 The development proposals would not result in unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas as shown on Figure 1. Renewable energy parks are not development which would result in the type of sprawl which purpose a) is trying to prevent. Moreover, it is only often possible to locate renewable energy park of the scale proposed (and needed to increase the amount of green energy generated in this way) on greenfield land in the countryside. As such, large scale renewable energy parks are no longer an unusual feature in the countryside as opportunities to place them anywhere else are limited.

b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

5.22 The application site is physically detached from the settlements of Ruddington and Clifton. It currently detached from Clifton but a new housing development is being built at Fairham Pastures which will be close to the site boundary. Whilst the proposed renewable energy park will be located in the gap between these settlements, the nature of the development and remaining gaps ensure that the towns will not merge into one another.

5.23 Moreover, the nature of the development itself, with the majority of the elements proposed being less than 3 metres in height, alongside the majority of the proposed renewable

energy park will be well screened by proposed trees and hedgerow planting ensuring that there will be no perception of merging.

c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

5.24 It is acknowledged that the introduction of man-made structures into what is currently open agricultural fields would change the character of the land and would represent an encroachment of 'development' into the countryside. However, the wider context of the site includes large 400kV pylons, a British Gypsum facility, artex facility, railway line and the Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station chimney.

5.25 Moreover, the proposed development has a temporary lifespan of 40 years and will be decommissioned unless a further permission is sought, so any harm arising will be temporary and reversable.

5.26 In addition, the degree of activity generated by the development proposals when operational will be limited. During normal operations, personnel will visit the site approximately once a month, in a light van or four-wheel drive vehicle and the panels will be cleaned once or twice a year.

5.27 In terms of the residual landscape and visual effects of the proposals, the ES concludes:

> *"The site is located within SN02: Ruddington Alluvial Fringe DPZ and there would be some short-term significant adverse effects on the character of the site and surrounding landscape within SN02 during the construction phase. During the operational phase (years 1 – 5) there would be some medium-term significant adverse effects on the character of the site and surrounding landscape, but these significant effects on landscape character would not extend beyond the railway line*

to the east of the site, more than approximately 850 m to the north and west or more than 400 m south of the site (to Moor Lane). During the remainder of the operational phase (years 5 onwards) the proposed new boundary vegetation would establish and significant effects on landscape character would be confined to the site and immediate surroundings, extending no more than approximately 50 m from the perimeter vegetation.

There would be a significant effect on the views and visual amenity of residents in Fields Farm Cottages and Ruddington Farm during the construction and early operational phases, before the boundary vegetation has established, but not during the remainder of the operational phase nor during the decommissioning phase as the site would then be screened by the proposed boundary planting. The acceptability of significant effects on residential properties is a planning matter and is addressed in the accompanying Planning Statement.

Walkers on the footpath alongside the railway line to the immediate east of the site (Ruddington FP6) and on the footpath from Gotham to the railway line (Gotham FP5) within 1km of the site would have relatively close and open views of the site and there would be a significant effect on the visual amenity of walkers on these footpaths during the construction and operational phases.

For walkers on the footpath from Clifton to Gotham (Barton in Fabis FP4) and on footpaths and bridleways to the east of the railway line, including around the periphery of Rushcliffe Country Park and across Bradmore Moor and Bunny Moor, there would be significant effects on views and visual amenity during the early operational phase but not during the construction phase, the remainder of the operational phase or the decommissioning phase".

5.28 The key consideration from a Green Belt perspective is that impact on views is relatively limited and localised in the context of the scale of the scheme. There would be very limited significant effects (in landscape and visual terms) more broadly on landscape character or views in the local area once the proposed new boundary vegetation has established.

d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

5.29 It is not considered that the development proposals impact upon the setting or special character of any historic towns.

e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

5.30 Whilst not directly contributing to urban regeneration it is not considered that the proposal would neither hinder nor discourage urban regeneration in the settlements of Nottinghamshire.

5.31 As such, it is considered that the resultant harm to the openness of the Green Belt has been kept to a minimum and will be reduced further by the landscape enhancements that will be implemented as part of the development proposals. Therefore, in addition to any harm arising from the fact that the development would be inappropriate, there is a degree of harm arising from the loss of openness albeit the proposals are only temporary as set out previously. Also, within the immediate/wider context of the site are large 400kV pylons, a British Gypsum facility, artex facility, railway line and the Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station chimney. It is considered for the reasons above that the level of harm to openness, as a result of the nature of the proposals and enhancements proposed, will be relatively low.

Other Harm

5.32 No other planning harm has been identified as outlined throughout this statement in addition to the harm to the Green Belt by virtue of inappropriateness, and landscape harm already outlined above.

Site Selection

5.33 The critical element for new renewable energy parks in the current climate for energy generation is the grid connection and grid capacity in the area. The availability of a grid connection with available capacity in close proximity to the site of a solar farm is a fundamental element of the technical and cost considerations which drive the search for sites for solar farms in England. Without a readily available grid connection close to the site, most sites for solar farms would not be viable. Indeed, as sites scale up in terms of their capacity, the nature of the power lines and connection points becomes even more critical. In addition, the extent of available capacity in the local grid is of equal relevance, since there is significant variability across a District, County or Region as to the available capacity in the grid network.

5.34 In terms of current proposals, the developer went through a detailed site selection process and considered a range of environmental and technical constraints. Within Rushcliffe Borough, the Developer secured a 49.9MW grid connection, with adequate import capacity to provide battery charging capacity on the 132kV overhead line to the southeast of Clifton, south of Nottingham.

5.35 Land within relative proximity of this connection location was then screened to identify areas with enough contiguous land to host a solar farm with an associated BESS facility. An

arbitrary search radius was not applied, rather, a pragmatic review of proximate farmland was considered in light of environmental constraints. Considerations included:

- proximity to ecological, historic or landscape designations
- proximity to settlements
- access
- agricultural land classification
- land availability

5.36 Taking these constraints into account, land was identified to the south of Clifton and Ruddington and the application site was chosen as a suitable option. Further information is contained within the Environmental Statement on how the site area was refined.

5.37 Where sites are available and come forward that demonstrate they have the essential characteristics necessary for electricity generation with an economically viable scheme such opportunities should be embraced due to the limited site options available and the urgent need for domestic renewable energy, especially in light of the Government's BES strategy (published 2022) of an expected five-fold increase in solar.

Case for Very Special Circumstances (VSC)

5.38 Lord Justise Sullivan in his judgment in R. (Chelmsford BC) v First Secretary of State [2003] EWHC Admin 2978) advises that the decision-maker must first decide whether VSC exists before then determining whether those VSC outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt. Moreover, other established case law (Sullivan J. in R (Basildon DC) v FSS [2004] EWHC 2759 (Admin)) confirms that a number of factors, none of them "*very special*" when considered in isolation, may when combined together amount to very special

circumstances. The judgement goes on to say that "*there is no reason why a number of factors ordinary in themselves cannot combine to create something very special*".

5.39 The VSC relevant to this case are considered to be:

- the presumption in favour of the proposed development as a sustainable renewable energy scheme;
- the urgent need for renewable energy projects to contribute towards meeting the legally binding and challenging net zero targets, as recognised at a national and local level; and
- the wider environmental, social and economic benefits associated with the proposed development.
- High quality technology and design
- location

<u>Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development</u>

5.40 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF outlines the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Renewable energy can be recognised inherently as a form of sustainable development and in this case fulfils all three of the limbs of economic, social and environmental elements of sustainable development as set out within the NPPF.

5.41 The proposed development benefits from a presumption in favour of sustainable development at a national and local level and as a clean renewable energy project, it is a form of development which is supported in principle for the reasons set out earlier in this Statement.

Urgent Need for Renewable Energy

5.42 The accompanying Environmental Statement provides a detailed summary of the policy and guidance which underpins the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. This is accepted at international, national and local levels, with the Council having also declared a climate emergency and acknowledged the part it is required to play in contributing towards meeting those targets.

5.43 It has been predicted that the proposed renewable energy park will generate sufficient energy to offset the equivalent annual electricity needs of approximately 11,200 Nottinghamshire homes (based on average domestic consumption per household of 3 900kWh (DBEIS, 2020). This level of renewable energy generation is significant and itself justifies very special circumstances.

5.44 From the displacement of electricity generated from fossil fuels, the proposed development would offset the emission of a significant quantity of pollutants, particularly carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere. This reduction in emissions would contribute to the national legislation of achieving zero net carbon emissions by 2050 and international reductions required under the legally binding obligations of the Climate Change Act 2008 and international Paris Agreement 2016. It also contributes to the Council's aims of achieving net zero carbon and its commitment to supporting local residents and businesses reduce their own carbon footprints following the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019.

5.45 Calculations undertaken by Engena and set out in the accompanying Environmental Statement advise that on a conservative basis, the electricity produced by the solar array

will offset approximately 9,270,000kgCO2 /annum or 9,270 tonnes CO2 per annum (to 3 S.F.). As such, the development proposals would significantly contribute towards reducing CO_2 emissions and the Government meeting its zero net carbon target by 2050.

5.46 In addition to the clear environmental benefits associated with the reduction of CO_2 emissions, the development of such facilities will help ensure energy security which has become a much more pertinent issue since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the pledges made to reduce reliance on Russian oil and gas. It will also reduce the impact of volatile and high gas prices if we're able to use less gas. In April 2022, the UK Government published the British Energy Security (BES) Strategy in response to the global energy price rise and conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. The Prime Minister set out that "*we're going to take advantage of Britain's inexhaustible resources of wind and - yes – sunshine*" (DBEIS and Prime Ministers Office, 2022a).

5.47 For solar the BES Strategy reported that there is currently 14GW of solar capacity in the UK and the cost has fallen so a five-fold increase in deployment is expected by 2035. It goes on to state, "*we will continue supporting the effective use of land by encouraging large scale projects to locate on previously developed, or lower value land, where possible, and ensure projects are designed to avoid, mitigate, and where necessary, compensate for the impacts of using greenfield sites*."

5.48 The development proposals will deliver enough electricity annually to power approximately 11,200 Nottinghamshire homes (based on average domestic consumption per household of 3 900kWh (DBEIS, 2020). This is a significant amount from one development and will further assist the UK in meeting its energy needs in a clean and sustainable manner.

Wider environmental, social and economic benefits

5.49 In addition to the clear benefits arising from the proposed development as a renewable energy scheme outlined above, the following site specific benefits will also arise from the proposed development:

- socio-economic benefits to local and national UK based contractors, including the supply of construction materials, accommodation and food for construction workers, and on construction, the owners of the land where the panels are located will benefit from rental payments helping to support rural business diversification, as well as service personnel for site maintenance, with further local demands for equipment and materials, and the payment of business rates for the completed renewable energy park. The total construction cost for the Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park is estimated to be approximately £46 to £50 million which is a significant investment.

- a range of biodiversity benefits including a significant biodiversity net gains of 123 habitat units (an increase of 75%) and 24.6 hedgerow units (an increase of 100%) arising from the restoration of lowland meadow, native hedgerow planting, native woodland planting and the provision of 1ha. plot on the southern edge of the site (outside the area in which the solar panels would be located, for groundnesting birds (including lapwing and skylark)). The provision of bird (owl and songbird) and bat boxes around the site.

- economic benefits in the form of job generation over the construction, operational and decommissioning phases. Though not quantified, there will be jobs generated in respect of the construction and decommissioning phases for work including civil

engineering design, geotechnical ground investigations, civil works, onsite electrical network design, installation and commissioning, aggregate supply, haulage, plant hire and ancillary and tertiary sectors relating to supplies, accommodation, catering etc.

High quality technology and design

5.50 The use of the battery storage facility is considered to reinforce the power generation of the solar farm. Energy will be stored at times of low demand and released when there is higher demand or when there is less power being produced in cloudy conditions.

Location

5.51 The site has been chosen following a selection procedure. It is accepted that proximity of a site to the point of connection to the Local Distribution Network is critical for viable and successful renewable energy deployment. The development has secured such a grid connection in close proximity as identified and considered within the Environmental Statement.

Conclusions on Green Belt Policy

5.52 The development proposals are by definition inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The acceptability of the proposals in planning terms therefore turns on whether very special circumstances can be demonstrated and the harm to the Green Belt by virtue of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

5.53 It is considered that the harm to the openness of the Green Belt has been kept to a minimum given the nature of the proposals, position of the site and the landscape and habitat mitigation proposed. The resultant harm is therefore considered to be limited. No other planning harm has been identified.

5.54 Paragraph 151 of NPPF advises in relation to renewable energy development that, "*very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources*".

5.55 For the reasons outlined below, it is considered that very special circumstances exist for the development of the proposed renewable energy park in the Green Belt to the south west of Ruddington on the basis that the identified limited harm is clearly outweighed by the following benefits of the scheme:

- the presumption in favour of the proposed development as a sustainable renewable energy scheme.
- the application site is technically suitable for a Renewable Energy Park with an appropriate grid connection and the site design software PVSyst confirms a good energy generating potential.
- the proposed Renewable Energy Park will generate sufficient energy to offset the equivalent annual electricity needs of approximately 11,200 Nottinghamshire homes (based on average domestic consumption per household of 3 900kWh (DBEIS, 2020).
- calculations undertaken by Engena and set out in the accompanying Environmental Statement advise that on a conservative basis, the electricity produced by the solar array will offset approximately 9 270 000kgCO2 /annum or 9 270 tonnes Co2 per annum (to 3 S.F.).

- the development proposals would significantly contribute towards reducing CO_2 emissions and the Government meeting its zero net carbon target by 2050.
- the development of such facilities will help ensure energy security which has become a much more pertinent issue since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.
- the proposal has a temporary lifespan of 40 years after which it will be decommissioned, so any harm arising will be temporary and reversable.
- a range of biodiversity benefits including a significant biodiversity net gains of 123 habitat units (an increase of 75%) and 24.6 hedgerow units (an increase of 100%)
- the scheme will deliver wider social and economic benefits as outlined in paragraph 5.48.

5.56 It is therefore considered that harm to the Green Belt by virtue of inappropriateness, and other limited identified harms, are clearly outweighed by the substantial environmental benefits from the generation of renewable energy that will flow from the granting of planning permission for the development proposals along with the other identified social and economic benefits. For the reasons outlined above, these significant environmental, social and economic benefits amount to very special circumstances. The proposals therefore accord with the requirements of section 13 of NPPF and Policy 21 (Green Belt) of the Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies.

Are the development proposals sustainable development as envisaged by NPPF?

5.57 This section assesses the proposals against the relevant policies in the NPPF. It also considers the development proposals against relevant up to date development plan polices.

Will the scheme meet the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change?

5.58 Paragraph 152 of the NPPF advises that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to:

- Shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions
- Minimise vulnerability and improve resilience
- Encourage the re-use of existing resources
- Support renewable and low carbon energy, and associated infrastructure

Planning for Climate Change

5.59 As set out throughout this Statement, the development proposals will support the transition to a low carbon future by providing a solar farm and battery storage facility with sufficient capacity to power approximately approximately 11,200 Nottinghamshire homes (based on average domestic consumption per household of 3,900kWh (DBEIS, 2020).

5.60 At a local level, Policy 16 (Renewable Energy) of Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies (adopted 2019) is of most relevance to the assessment of the proposals and confirms:

"1. Proposals for renewable energy schemes will be granted planning permission where they are acceptable in terms of:

a) compliance with Green Belt policy

b) landscape and visual effects

c) ecology and biodiversity

d) best and most versatile agricultural land

e) the historic environment

f) open space and other recreational uses

g) amenity of nearby properties

h) grid connection

i) form and siting

j) mitigation

k) the decommissioning and reinstatement of land at the end of the operational life of the development

l) cumulative impact with existing and proposed development;

m) emissions to ground, water courses and/or air

n) odour

o) vehicular access and traffic; and

p) proximity of generating plants to the renewable energy source.

2. In addition to the above criteria, wind energy developments will be permitted provided:

a) *the development site is in an area identified as being suitable for wind turbine development in a Neighbourhood Plan; or*

b) *the development site is in an area identified as being of low or lowmedium sensitivity to wind turbine development in Appendix C; and*

c) *following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.*

5.61 The development proposals have been assessed against the criteria in Policy 16 in Table 1 below.

Policy 16 (Renewable Energy)	
Policy Criteria	**Response**
a - compliance with Green Belt policy	It's has been demonstrated at paragraphs 5.3 to 5.53 that the development proposals comply with Green Belt policy.
b - landscape and visual effects	The conclusions of the landscape and visual assessment are summarised at paragraph 5.27.
c – ecology and biodiversity	The existing habitat on the application site open arable farmland which is of low ecological value. The main species that it has been identified the development proposals may impact upon is therefore breeding birds. A number of mitigation measures have been embedded into the design of the scheme and others have been identified for the constructional and operational phases in the Environmental Statement chapter.

	The scheme will deliver significant biodiversity net gains of 123 habitat units (an increase of 75%) and 24.6 hedgerow units (an increase of 100%) arising from the restoration of lowland meadow, native hedgerow planting, native woodland planting and the provision of 1ha. plot on the southern edge of the site (outside the area in which the solar panels would be located, for ground nesting birds (including lapwing and skylark). The provision of bird (owl and songbird) and bat boxes around the site.
d – Best and most versatile land	This is considered further at paragraphs 5.66 to 5.70.
e – the historic environment	The development proposals will have no direct physical impacts on any designated or non-designated heritage assets. The Heritage Assessment prepared by Orion Heritage has considered the setting and significance of two potential non-designated heritage assets, Field Farm Cottages and Ruddington Fields Farm both located c. 630 – 850 metres to the northeast of the application site boundary. The assessment has shown that although the proposals constitute a change in the wider rural context of the assets, the application site is not considered to contribute to the assets' significance. This combined with the limited intervisibility they share with the application site and in the absence of any definitive historic ownership or

	functional links they may share with the site, it is considered they will be preserved from any harm.
f - open space and other recreational uses	The application site is entirely privately owned agricultural land and has been designed to retain any Public Rights of Way.
g – amenity of nearby residents	The development proposals would be visible from Fields Farm Cottages and Ruddington Farm as outlined in the landscape chapter of Environmental Statement and these are the closest residential properties. However, there is no right to a view in planning terms and the proposed application site is a considerable distance from the properties. The application is supported by a Noise Assessment which concludes the calculations indicate that operational noise from the renewable energy park during the likely operating hours would be relatively low in absolute terms and an assessment using Government's planning guidance would indicate no observed adverse effect. It is therefore not considered that the development proposals will give rise to any undue impacts on the amenity of nearby residents.
h – grid connection	The applicant has secured a 49.9MW grid connection, with adequate import capacity to provide battery charging capacity on the 132kV overhead line to the southeast of Clifton in close proximity to the application site.

I – form and setting	The development proposals will not unduly impact on the setting of any settlement or heritage asset. As such, the development proposals also comply with the requirements of Policy 20 of the Ruddington Neighbourhood Plan.
J – mitigation	The planning application and accompanying Environmental Statement provide full details of any mitigation which has been identified through the various assessments as needed to address the impacts arising from the proposals.
K - the decommissioning and reinstatement of land at the end of the operational life of the development	At the end of the operating life of the renewable energy park, the panels and associated infrastructure will be fully decommissioned.
L - cumulative impact with existing and proposed development	The Environmental Statement considers potential cumulative effects with other existing and proposed development in the vicinity of the application site. The main consideration in cumulative terms is landscape and visual terms effects and this has been considered in detail in the Environmental Statement. It concludes: *"With regards to cumulative effects, due to the separation distances between the permitted and proposed solar farm developments in the study area, each would affect the character of the landscape and the views and visual*

	amenity of receptors local to each site. Consequently, the proposed development would not result in any significant additional cumulative effects on landscape character or visual amenity in the context of any of these schemes".
M - emissions to ground, water courses and/or air	The development proposals will not generate any emissions which would impact upon ground, watercourses or air.
N – odour	The development proposals will not give rise to any odours.
O – vehicular access and traffic	The main traffic movements associated with the proposed development will be during the construction phase. In response to comments during the community consultation, the applicant sought an alternative location for the construction access to avoid traffic passing through Ruddington Village. It is proposed that construction traffic will travel along Pasture Lane and south to Asher Lane to reach the site. A temporary steel plate track (each plate measuring 2.5 x 3 m) will be laid on top of agricultural land in the field parallel to the existing agricultural track at Pasture Lane. In terms of maintenance, the panels will be cleaned periodically to ensure maximum production, this involves the transportation of a tractor unit de-ionised water bowser and cleaning team (generally 3-4 personnel) to site once or twice a year.

	It is clear that the level of vehicular movements from the site will be very limited during the operational phase.
P - proximity of generating plants to the renewable energy source	This criteria is not relevant to the development proposals.

5.62 The development proposals will not affect any sites of international, national, and local nature importance or other irreplaceable habitats. The visual and amenity impacts of the proposed structures has been assessed in the LVA both individually and cumulatively. The project will not affect the permanence of the Green Belt given any planning approval would be time limited.

5.63 The assessment in Table 1 demonstrates that the proposals positively address the requirements of Policy 16 (Renewable Energy) of Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies (adopted 2019) and can therefore be considered to fully accord with the policy.

Planning & Flood risk

5.64 The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment by RAB Consultants. Although part of the site lies within Flood Zone 3, detailed hydraulic modelling has been undertaken to assess site-specific risk. A sequential approach has been adopted to manage risk coupled with item-specific mitigation measures. Given a safe sustainable scheme is available within the site, as assessed in the accompanying FRA report, the proposed use in considered appropriate.

5.65 The development proposals will positively address the requirements of section 14 of NPPF by delivering a renewable energy scheme which will support the transition into a low carbon economy by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, the proposals accord with Policies 17 and 18 of the Rushcliffe Local Plan.

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

5.66 Paragraph 174 of NPPF confirms that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)
- by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland
- maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate
- minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures
- preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water

quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

- remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate

Landscape

5.67 The conclusions of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment submitted with the planning application has been summarised at paragraph 5.27 of this Statement.

5.68 The development proposals incorporate a significant amount of landscape planting through the restoration of lowland meadow, new native hedgerow planting, new native woodland planting.

Agricultural Land

5.69 The Environmental Statement prepared by Engena includes a detailed section on agricultural land classification and summarises the findings of a detailed assessment of the site that was undertaken in February 2022. It confirms that the proposed development will be located on grade 3a land which is best and most versatile in line with the NPPF definition.

5.70 In terms of agricultural land, the NPPF requires that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things,

> *"recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland"*

5.71 It is clear from the NPPF that decision makers are required to recognise the benefits and it is not suggested that development on best and most versatile land should be restricted. Whilst the benefits of best and most versatile land are recognised, it is considered for the reasons set out throughout this Statement that the benefits associated with the production of clear renewable energy on the scale proposed clearly outweigh the temporary loss of agricultural land.

5.72 It is only intended that the proposed solar farm will operate for a temporary period of 40 years after which the land will be restored and, as such, the proposed use does not result in any loss of agricultural land. This is acknowledged in the PPG which states at Paragraph 13 (Reference ID: 5-013- 20150327) that: '*solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use*.'

5.73 Further detailed analysis is provided in the accompanying Environmental Statement including details on the benefits to agriculture of renewable energy parks. This includes benefits to the productivity of agricultural land through extended fallow periods and the farm with a stable diversified enterprise that makes little demand on farm capital, machinery or manhours. In addition, the land can continue to be used for sheep grazing and therefore agricultural purposes. It will be the Applicant's intention to enter into a sheep grazing licence at the appropriate time.

Biodiversity

5.74 The Environmental Statement includes a chapter on ecology which outlines the conclusions of the Ecological Impact Assessment undertaken on the development proposals and considers the potential impacts on protected species as well as biodiversity net gain.

5.75 The existing habitat on the application site open arable farmland which is of low ecological value. The main species that it has been identified the development proposals may impact upon is therefore breeding birds.

5.76 Mitigation measures have also been incorporated into the site design to avoid more ecologically sensitive habitats including:

- Minimum 9m buffer along the Fairham Brook flowing through the site.
- Minimum 5m buffer from all other watercourses/drainage ditches.
- Minimum 5m buffer from all hedgerows, woodland and isolated trees

5.77 The biodiversity enhancements that will be incorporated with the development of the renewable energy park and managed over the project life in accordance with an outline Landscape and Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Plan. The measures include:

- Restoration of lowland meadow – the large majority of the site is currently arable farmland of low diversity and low ecological value. This grassland will be managed after construction of the solar farm to promote the re-establishment of a diverse meadow plant community. The target will be to enhance 83ha of improved grassland to a more biodiverse neutral grassland.
- Native hedgerow planting – 3.2km of new native hedgerow will be planted
- Native woodland planting – 0.45ha. of new native broadleaved woodland will be planted in the south-west and north-west corners of the site.
- Provision of 1ha. plot on the southern edge of the site (outside the area in which the solar panels would be located, for groundnesting birds (including lapwing and skylark).

5.78 In addition, a range of bird and bat boxes will be installed to improve the availability of nesting and roosting resources, all to be manufactured from high quality long-lasting material such as 'Woodcrete'. This will include:

- Barn owl boxes – two to be erected at a secure location within the site (specific location confidential to avoid disturbance to this species which is specially protected from disturbance under Schedule 1 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act).
- Songbird nest boxes – 20 boxes of mixed type (5 x small hole for tits, 5 x larger hole for sparrows, 5 x larger boxes for starlings and 5 x open-fronted boxes for flycatchers/ robins/thrushes). These will be erected within woodland patches and on trees within existing hedgerows/field boundaries.
- Bat boxes – 10 boxes – same locations as songbird nest boxes

5.79 The creation of new habitat areas will deliver significant biodiversity net gains of 123 habitat units (an increase of 75%) and 24.6 hedgerow units (an increase of 100%) in line with the requirements of NPPF.

5.80 For the reasons outlined above, the development proposals positively address the requirements of section 15 of NPPF along with Policy 38 (Non-Designation Biodiversity Assets and the Wider Ecological Network) of the Rushcliffe Local Plan and Policy 19 of the Rushcliffe Neighbourhood Plan.

Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

5.81 Paragraph 195 of NPPF states that LPAs should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset).

5.82 The development proposals will have no direct physical impacts on any designated or non-designated heritage assets. The Heritage Assessment prepared by Orion Heritage has considered the setting and significance of two potential non-designated heritage assets, Field Farm Cottages and Ruddington Fields Farm both located c. 630 – 850 metres to the northeast of the study site boundary. The assessment has shown that although the proposals constitute a change in the wider rural context of the assets, the application site is not considered to contribute to the assets' significance. This combined with the limited intervisibility they share with the study site and in the absence of any definitive historic ownership or functional links they may share with the site, it is considered they will be preserved from any harm.

5.83 For the reasons outlined above and within the accompanying report, the development proposals meet the requirements of section 16 of the NPPF and Policy 28 of the Rushcliffe Local Plan.

6. Conclusions

6.1 This Planning Statement (inc. Green Belt Assessment) has been prepared to support a full planning application for a solar array, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated infrastructure on land to the south west of Ruddington Village, Nottinghamshire.

6.2 As the application site is located within the Green Belt an assessment of the relevant policies within NPPF has been undertaken. It has demonstrated that any harm to the Green Belt by virtue of inappropriateness and other limited landscape, are clearly outweighed by the substantial environmental benefits from the generation of renewable energy that will flow from the granting of planning permission for the development proposals along with the other identified social and economic benefits as outlined below:

- the presumption in favour of the proposed development as a sustainable renewable energy scheme
- the application site is technically suitable for a solar farm with an appropriate grid connection and the site design software PVSyst confirms a good energy generating potential
- the proposed energy park will generate sufficient energy to offset the equivalent annual electricity needs of approximately 11,200 Nottinghamshire homes (based on average domestic consumption per household of 3 900kWh (DBEIS, 2020).
- calculations undertaken by Engena and set out in the accompanying Environmental Statement advise that on a conservative basis, the electricity produced by the solar array will offset approximately 9 270 000kgCO2 /annum or 9 270 tonnes Co2 per annum (to 3 S.F.).

- the development proposals would significantly contribute towards reducing CO_2 emissions and the Government meeting its zero net carbon target by 2050. The development proposals will also assist the Council deliver on its zero net carbon target following its declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019.
- the development of such facilities will help ensure energy security which has become a much more pertinent issue since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.
- The project will not affect the permanence of the Green Belt given any planning approval would be time limited.
- the scheme will deliver wider social and economic benefits as outlined in paragraph 5.49

6.3 The proposals are therefore deemed to accord the requirements of section 13 of NPPF and Policy 21 (Green Belt) of the Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies.

6.4 It has also been demonstrated that the development proposals positively address the requirements of Policy 16 (Renewable Energy) of Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies (adopted 2019) and are therefore deemed to be acceptable in principle. The development proposals will make a valuable contribution towards cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

6.5 The application is supported by a suite of technical documents and an Environmental Statement. These demonstrate that the development proposals will not give rise to any issues which cannot be adequately mitigated. It has been demonstrated, through the planning application, the development proposals would deliver a scheme which complies with the requirements of the Rushcliffe Local Plan, Ruddington Neighbourhood Plan and also fully addresses polices and guidance in the NPPF and PPG.

6.6 For the reasons outlined in this statement and in line with paragraph 11 of NPPF planning permission should be granted without delay.