

Land East of Hawksworth and
Northwest of Thoroton,
Shelton Road,
Thoroton , Nottinghamshire

Summary Proof of Evidence –
Effects on Landscape
Character and Appearance

Appeal by Mrs Claire Chamberlain

LPA Reference: 22/02241/FUL

PINS Reference: APP/P3040/W/23/3330045

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1 Introduction

1.1 Qualifications and Experience

1.1.1 This evidence has been compiled by Robert Browne, Director at Wynne-Williams Associates, a firm of Chartered Landscape Architects, registered with the Landscape Institute.

1.1.2 I hold a BSc (Honours) degree in Geography, an MA in Landscape Architecture, and I am also a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). I have 8 years' experience in both planning and design projects across the commercial, residential, education, and care sectors. I specialise in landscape planning work and regularly produce landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIAs), townscape and visual impact assessments (TVIAs), landscape character assessments (LCAs), site appraisals including Green Belt Assessments, and provide expert evidence for planning appeals on behalf of both appellants and Local Authorities. My work covers a range from scales varies from sites including a single proposed dwelling to advising on the effects of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

1.2 Appeal Context

1.2.1 The appeal is against refusal of planning permission for the "Installation of renewable energy generating solar farm comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, together with substation, inverter stations, security measures, site access, internal access tracks and other ancillary infrastructure, including landscaping and biodiversity enhancements". The site is located on Land East of Hawksworth and Northwest of Thoroton, Shelton Road, Thoroton, Nottinghamshire. The site is currently undeveloped and is in use for agriculture. Planning permission for the scheme was refused for two reasons, with this evidence relating to Reasons 1 only.

1.2.2 My involvement with the appeal scheme began in January 2023, when I was appointed by Rushcliffe Borough council (RBC) to advise on the original planning application, 22/02241/FUL. My findings were issued as a Landscape Review report in March 2023. In March 2024, I was informed that an appeal had been lodged against refused planning permission and I was appointed by RBC to prepare evidence for this Inquiry. I have reviewed the relevant application documents and applicable policy documents, and I have made

multiple site visits to appraise the appeal site and its environs in terms of landscape character and visual impact. My evidence provides my professional opinion on the potential effects of the appeal scheme on the existing landscape character and appearance. My methodology adheres to guidance set out in GLVIA3, as well as Landscape Institute TGN 02-21.

2 Summary of my Opinion

2.1 Landscape Susceptibility and Sensitivity to Change

2.1.1 I have established the planning context for the appeal by identifying the relevant national and local planning policies. My evidence also considers the relevant baseline landscape character documents ranging from a national to a local scale, as well as character observations made on site. It is my opinion that the area displays many of the characteristics identified within the baseline studies, in particular the local landscape character assessment. I have identified the relevant landscape receptors to the appeal scheme and assess the site itself to hold high susceptibility, the Hawksworth and Thoroton settlement edges to each hold high susceptibility, and the wider local character area SN06: Aslockton Village Farmlands to hold a high susceptibility to change.

2.1.2 Using Landscape Institute TGN 02-21, I have assessed the landscape value of the site and surroundings. Although the site itself does not hold any national landscape designations, it forms an important part of the character setting to Hawksworth and Thoroton. However, I do not consider it as a 'valued landscape' for the purpose of NPPF Paragraph 180(a).

2.1.3 For each receptor I have assessed the sensitivity to the appeal proposals by combining the identified landscape value and susceptibility. The site itself was assessed to hold medium sensitivity, with medium to high sensitivity assessed for the two settlement edges and SN06: Aslockton Village Farmlands.

2.2 Magnitude of Significance of Landscape Change

2.2.1 I have considered the predicted magnitude and significance of landscape change that would result from the appeal scheme. The proposals represent a considerable reduction in the agricultural land which forms a rural setting to Hawksworth and Thoroton, with undeveloped

arable fields replaced by intrusive built form and associated infrastructure. This would equate to the total loss of a key landscape characteristic and would be detrimental to the character of the settlement edge to both villages. The introduction of solar arrays and associated infrastructure would introduce an uncharacteristic and dominant built influence to the area. Within the site itself landscape effects will be significant, with a considerable alteration from the baseline characteristics across the full site. In terms of the immediate surroundings, there will be a notable change in the character of the separate Hawksworth and Thoroton settlement edges, eroding the established rural setting to each village. Landscape effects will be restricted to a local level, however, with limited effects on the wider DPZ (SN06: Aslockton Village Farmlands) as a whole. Predicted landscape effects will not be permanent, as the solar farm will have an operational lifespan of 40 years. Therefore, effects should be considered to be long-term, but reversible. Effects will be amplified during construction due to the increase in activity and the temporary presence of uncharacteristic machinery and stockpiles of materials.

- 2.2.2 By Year 10, the significance of landscape effects was assessed to be major to moderate adverse for the site itself, moderate adverse for the Hawksworth and Thoroton settlement edges, and minor adverse for SN06: Aslockton Village Farmlands.

2.3 Magnitude and Significance of Visual Change

- 2.3.1 When considering visual effects of the appeal scheme, there is disagreement on the level and significance of visual effect to receptors. It is my opinion that the Appellant's LVA underestimates the predicted visual effects of the appeal scheme and overestimates the effectiveness of proposed mitigation. I predict major to moderate adverse visual effects on users of bridleways BW1 and BW6, which cross Fields 2, 4, and 5 of the appeal site. In an attempt to mitigate visual effects on users of the PRoW, the proposals are to plant a corridor of hedgerows either side of the bridleway for the majority of the route. This will change the existing views of open countryside to a narrow tunnel of hedgerow. Although this may reduce some visibility to parts of the solar arrays, the loss of longer distance views represents a considerable reduction in visual amenity. It also prevents walkers from appreciating their location within the landscape in relation to the two settlements and perceiving the

undulating topography. In particular, scenic views from higher ground in Field 5, towards the spire of the Church of St Helena in Thoroton, will be interrupted by solar arrays at lower levels and potentially screened all together by proposed planting eventually. This is also true for the view to Belvoir Castle in the far distance.

2.3.2 I predict moderate visual effects to remain for residential receptors at the northern end of Hawksworth by Year 10. From here, the proposals represent a high level of change from existing views of undeveloped agricultural land to an expanse of solar arrays. This would cause the widespread loss of characteristic features and the blanket addition of built form into the view and would be particularly apparent from upper floor windows. This view is recognised as a 'significant view' within the Hawksworth Conservation Area Appraisal and holds value in perceiving the rural setting of the village. Moderate visual effects are also predicted for residents at the northern end of Thoroton, which also represents a 'significant view' in the relevant Conservation Area Appraisal. From this viewpoint solar arrays on sloping topography in Field 5 will be prominent above proposed mitigation planting.

2.3.3 Visual effects on walkers along footpath FP3 south of Hawksworth are predicted to be moderate to minor adverse by Year 10, with effects on vehicle users and cyclists along the local road network assessed as minor adverse.

2.4 Conflicts with Local and National Planning Policy

2.4.1 It is my opinion that by failing to be sympathetic to the local character and landscape setting, the appeal scheme is in conflict with NPPF Paragraph 135, sub-section C. It is also my opinion that the scheme fails to address the predicted landscape character and visual impacts, placing it in conflict with NFFP Paragraph 160, sub-section A. In addition, the proposals do not recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside as required by NPPF Paragraph 180, sub-section B.

2.4.2 In reference to local planning policy, it is also my opinion that the proposals do not make a positive contribution to the sense of place, they do not reinforce valued local characteristics, nor do they conserve the setting to the Hawksworth and Thoroton Conservation Areas. This places the scheme in conflict with LPP1 Policy 10 and the guidance provided for DPZ SN06 Aslockton Village Farmlands. The inappropriate siting of the solar farm and identified level

of landscape effects also conflicts with LPP2 Policy 16. The identified adverse impact on views to the surrounding countryside and scenic views towards the spire of the Church of St Helena in Thoroton places the scheme further at odds with LPP1 Policy 10. Visual effects arising from the proposals, particularly those identified to be moderate adverse or greater provide further conflict with LPP2 Policy 16 and effects on PRowS at odds with LPP2 Policy 34.

2.5 Summary Conclusion

2.5.1 For the reasons above, I conclude that the appeal scheme would result in development that would significantly and demonstrably harm the landscape setting, character and appearance of the site, as well as the settlement edges of Hawksworth and Thoroton.

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