# Public Inquiry Hearing W/c 10th July 2024
# LPA Reference 22/02241/FUL Rushcliffe Borough Council

## Personal Statement

My name is Chris Clayton and I have resided at Top Farm Hawksworth since 2016. I love this village, I love this area and can not think of a better place to live.

Since graduating with a degree in Agriculture in 1989 from Newcastle, I have spent my entire career working in the agricultural industry both domestically and internationally.

I am currently the Managing Director of Agrovista UK Ltd. Based in Nottingham, Agrovista UK Ltd is a leading supplier of agronomy advice, seed, crop protection products and precision farming services. Working in partnership with arable, fruit, vegetable, horticultural and amenity sectors, Agrovista is committed to helping their farming customers manage their businesses more efficiently and more profitably.

I am a past Chairman of the Agronomy and Crop Protection Sector of the Agricultural Industries Confederation. Also served two terms on the main board of the AIC.

On a more serious note, I am the driving force behind the Hawksworth Agricultural Group (HAGs). This is formed of Hawksworth residents who wanted to learn more about what was happening in the fields around village and more in general about UK agriculture and food production. I am representing this group plus 2 local landowners, Andrew Kay and Peter Onions.

I passionately believe in UK agriculture and food production. Food security for increasingly populous country in an ever changing world should be a key strategic priority for the next government. Estimates would suggest that the UK is 60-65% self sufficient in its food production. More land is being taken out of production for housing, industrial developments and environmental schemes. We therefore have to produce more food from less land. I do not dispute that Energy security is also strategically critical for the UK and that renewable energy or energy from non carbon sources is critical for the future of the planet. However, there are many ways to meet our Energy security needs via nuclear, wind and bio energy to name but 3. If we do not produce food domestically then the only way we have to meet demand is to import, often from areas of the world that do not have the same levels of environmental compliance and control that UK farmers are subject to and embrace. We should also not forget that prior to the conflict in Ukraine, Russia was easily the largest single country exporter of wheat with Ukraine in 5th position. The war caused a significant shortfall on the global market leading to significant commodity price and subsequently food price inflation. Do we as a country want to be dependent on food imports from areas of the world that are both politically unstable and poorly regulated?

I am sure that other speakers will highlight the issues with solar energy. However, it does appear obvious to a layman like myself that solar does not create electricity at the time of the year when it is most needed ie the winter and creates most electricity in high summer when demand is at its lowest. Is this the best use for productive arable land?

I also quote John Pettigrew, the CEO of National Grid – 'There are more than enough renewable projects to meet the government's 2035 clean power network goal'. In fact, there are nearly

400GW of projects in the connection pipeline across the UK networks which is over 5X the amount needed to meet the UK Governments 2035 decarbonised electricity system commitment. I also note that the UK's last coal fired power station at Radcliffe on Soar will be decommissioned this year. So why are we proposing to take out more productive arable land to produce solar energy that we do not need?

It should also be noted that the land in question and many hectares in the local vicinity are routinely used to grow crops such as maize and rye that are then used as feedstock for biodigesters. These biodigesters create methane that is then either cleaned and fed straight into the gas mains or used to fuel large engines that in turn feed electricity into the grid. Being spring planted, having maize in the crop rotation is very beneficial to the overall rotation in terms of blackgrass control and soil management. The biproduct of the anaerobic digestion is either solid or liquid digestate which in turn is a highly nutritious organic fertiliser that is then applied back onto the land. Therefore, the land in question, whilst predominately being used for food production, is already being used to create renewable energy. This was pioneered in the area by Severn Trent Green Power whose plant at Stow Bardolph now produces 52 GW hours electrical equivalent. In layman's terms, this is sufficient electricity to meet the annual requirement for 15,000 average sized homes. So again, why are we proposing to take this land out of production and turn these fields into an industrial zone?

As a side note, Solar developers have argued in previous submissions that in fact the operational site has a dual use with the continuation of agricultural use via low intensity sheep grazing. To put this in perspective, the stocking rate for sheep on an intensive lowland pasture would be around 50 - 60 ewes and lambs per hectare. The stocking rates for solar farms where the grass remains unfertilised and unproductive is around 12 sheep/ha in the summer, dropping to 5/ha over the winter months. Sheep are simply used as grass cutters at zero economic value to the developer or the landowner. Indeed, they may well have to pay a grazier to provide sheep for the site for this purpose.

Turning to the 220 acres in question, when consulting the Provisional Land Classification (PLC) maps from Natural England, it can clearly be seen that at least 50% of the proposed site has a Grade 2 classification, the remainder being Grade 3 (with no split between 3a and 3b). This land and land immediately bordering the site has been used to grow most arable crops eg cereals (wheat, barley, oats and rye), oilseeds (Oil Seed Rape and Linseed), pulses (Beans and Peas). Sugar Beet is regularly grown close by. As immediate neighbouring landowners, Andrew Kay and Peter Onions state that the land they farm is of good quality and predominately Grade 2 producing above average yields over a wide range of crops. It does appear to me that the Agricultural Land Classification report commissioned by the developers significantly downgrades the land from what in fact is the established understanding of the local agricultural community. This appears to me to be a trend across most solar project proposals that are destined for good quality arable land, perhaps this is a co-incidence??

To quote Andrew Kay 'As recently as the August of 2021, I was fortunate to have been the preferred bidder to some 135 acres next to the proposed solar site running up to the village of Hawksworth from the Sibthorpe crossroads. This land was marketed and sold by Fisher Germain as Grade 2/3 land and priced accordingly (see attached Farmers Weekly advert). Having already improved the land via good farming practices, we have now been given a Countryside Stewardship grant allowing us to continue to lay new hedges, improve fencing and gateways with new woodland following in the spinney and corners. I am therefore enhancing the whole area with more conservation initiatives whilst maximising food production from the

majority of the area. In the summer of 2022, we have harvested an average of 8 tonnes per hectare of winter barley and in the summer of 2023, 4t/ha of oil seed rape. The fields are currently planted with a high potential crop of winter wheat, one of the few fields of wheat that were planted and established last autumn in extremely challenging conditions.

It is clear that many landowners have been courted by developers promising guaranteed long term returns from their land that would never be possible by traditional farming means. Some landowners like Andrew Kay have rejected these approaches, preferring to work hard to enhance their land both for food production and the greater benefit of the environment. I can only conclude that a proposal to cover 220 acres of productive arable land in an area of outstanding natural beauty is driven solely by financial gain, some may call it greed, on behalf of the landowner and the developer.

In summary, we are desperate to preserve this beautiful part of the Vale of Belvoir. Not only for the residents and those that pass through but also for the farming industry to requires quality land like this to meet the growing demand for food in the UK. Turning this beautiful area into an industrial zone is not necessary, it is the wrong place for a solar development. Therefore, it appears to me that to propose to remove this 220 acres of productive arable land from food production and replace crops with inefficient solar panels, producing expensive renewable energy that is not required to meet our national renewable energy targets, is morally indefensible and economically unjustifiable. I therefore oppose this appeal in the strongest terms.