



Historic England

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Direct Dial: 0121 625 6870

Our ref: P01296230

5 May 2021

Dear Mr Cunningham

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015  
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**LAND EAST OF JERICHO COVERT, JERICHO LANE , BARKESTONE LE VALE  
Application No. 20/01182/FUL**

Thank you for your letter of 14 April 2021 regarding further information on the above application for planning permission. On the basis of this information, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

**Summary**

The landscape in which the application site is located is historically important with heritage assets of outstanding importance in a setting with few modern interventions. It is therefore sensitive to large scale development.

By virtue of its scale and man-made character the proposed solar farm would appear incongruous and alter the character of the landscape which forms the setting to several highly graded heritage assets. In our view it would cause less than substantial harm to the significance that Grade I Listed Belvoir Castle, its Grade II\* Registered Park and the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Peter and St Paul, Barkestone, derive from their setting. We question whether an intervention of this nature should be introduced to this landscape and have concerns about the precedent it could set.

As the decision maker, your authority should assess whether the proposals would be justified or outweighed by public benefit in their current form in accordance with the paragraphs 194 and 196 of the NPPF. During this assessment you should consider whether proposals of this nature would be acceptable in this landscape. If you consider they would be, you should contemplate whether the proposals should be amended to reduce their impact.

**Historic England Advice**



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## Significance

### a) Belvoir Castle

Belvoir Castle is a large hilltop feudal palace which boasts impressive turrets and battlements, adding interest and intrigue to the skyline.

The topography of the landscape and siting of the castle on the hilltop is spectacular and enhances the castle's visual presence and dominance across the landscape. Its prominent and far reaching views have been important throughout history, originally as a strategic defence mechanism. The name Belvoir ('beautiful view'), dates to Norman times, demonstrating the importance of the outward views across the landscape, even from its first conception.

The Norman Castle was largely rebuilt in the earlier 16th century and mid to late 17th Century by James Wyatt. A great fire destroyed the north-west and north-east fronts and was re-built in the 19th Century.

The Castle is little changed since the early 19th century. Its main feature is Thoroton's huge projecting tower on the centre of the north-east front, which echoes Wyatt's tower on the south-west side.

The Castle's exceptional architectural and historic interest are recognised in its Grade I listing which places it in the top 2.5% of listed buildings in the country.

### b) The Registered Park and Garden of Belvoir Castle

The Registered Park and Garden (RPG) of Belvoir Castle has evolved over almost a thousand years since the first Norman Castle was established. It contains a reservoir and several listed structures, the principal one being Belvoir Castle.

Belvoir's park extends for approximately 2km east, west and south of the Castle. While the RPG is mostly early 19th century it incorporates late 17th and 18th Century elements. The RPG is largely laid out to a plan of 1780 by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-83), the pre-eminent English landscape designer of the mid to late 18th century who had a profound influence on the parks and gardens surrounding many country houses in England.

Belvoir is one of the later designs by Brown. After his death, his plans and folio album continued to be used when alterations and improvements were initiated on the estate, altogether shaping the land and views following the ideals of the landscape park.

The RPG at Belvoir's more than special interest is recognised in it Grade II\*





designation.

c) The Church of St Peter and St Paul in Barkestone Le Vale

Is a parish church which is mainly from the 14th Century with some 15th Century elements. A south aisle was added and the clerestory rebuilt in 1840 by William Parsons, the church was restored in 1857. Built from ironstone with ashlar dressings and slate roofs the church is Grade II\* Listed which places it in the top 9% of listed buildings in the country.

The church is one of a number within the Vale of Belvoir landscape where their spires and towers act as prominent landmarks within the setting of Belvoir Castle. The height and prominence reference the high status on churches in the medieval times when they were constructed. Their spires and towers would have acted as visual way points to help people navigate the landscape for centuries. The church's prominence within the landscape forms an important part of its significance.

Impact of the proposals

a) Historic England's Previous advice

Historic England first commented on this application in our letter dated 16 November 2020. In this advice we expressed concerns regarding the lack of information submitted with the proposals and advised that further detailed assessment of the proposals impact to the setting of Belvoir Castle, its RPG and the Church of St Peter and St Paul should be carried out.

b) The proposals

The proposed development concerns a solar farm extending 183.5 acres, including free-standing solar panels rising to a height c. 2.8m to be orientated to the south together with necessary service infrastructure and a site compound. The anticipated operational life of the proposal is up to 40 years. The proposals have been amended slightly to exclude panels from the south west corner of the site, the area of land south of the public right of way (PROW) that passes through the site.

c) Definition of setting

The NPPF glossary defines the setting of a heritage asset as follows;

*"The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."*





d) Belvoir Castle

We welcome the additional supporting information which accords with our previous advice. The supporting information demonstrates that the proposed development would be visible from Belvoir Castle, both within the castle and from its immediate surroundings, including the Cannonade.

While the views from the cannonade are sheltered by the existing tree belt the supporting information details that these may not be a permanent feature; *“However, it is noted that these trees, which are located immediately in front of the view from the canons, are not part of the designed setting of the castle and may be removed as part of the ongoing work at Belvoir to restore its surrounding RPG. They are therefore considered to be a temporary screen which may change in the future. Should these trees be removed from the view, it is evident that the solar array would become visible within the landscape.”* You should bear this in mind during your assessment of these proposals.

The proposed development would clearly be seen from the upper floors of the castle. Viewpoint 2A demonstrates that the extent of the site in these views would be considerable.

Although there is a presence of human activity and disturbance (pylons, road, farmland) within the setting of the castle the area retains a predicted naturalness and rurality, the introduction of these manmade features would be incongruous and detract from these elements which we consider to contribute to the setting of Belvoir castle.

Development within the setting is predominantly small, human scale of the features across the vale. The proposed scale goes against this characteristic of the setting which we consider it to contribute to the significance it derives from its setting.

Within the setting of the castle the landscape, including the application site has a strong rectangular field pattern of mixed farming bounded by hedges. The proposed development would subsume these boundaries and erode this character.

The supporting information also shows the castle would be visible from the site looking back. So, one will experience the modern intervention in the landscape within the setting of the castle.

We consider these proposals would alter the way in which the castle would be experienced, the incongruous nature and large scale would alter the character of the castle’s setting causing less than substantial harm to the significance it derives from its setting. We have concerns that this could set a negative precedent for development within this landscape.



#### e) Impact on the RPG

The designed setting of the castle and registered park at Belvoir stretches beyond the area of the registered park and garden. Enclosure of the estate landscape contrasts with the designed landscape of the park, which retained the character of a chase landscape with little enclosure.

As noted in the Heritage Statement, Redmile was enclosed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, contemporary with Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's designs for the park and castle. Knipton, to the south, was also enclosed at a similar time and more specifically integrated into the park landscape.

Approaches such as the Redmile Avenue, planted with an avenue of trees, provide a designed approach to an 'announcement' for the castle. Tree planting in hedgerows and fields contribute to the estate character of the landscape. Woodland planting on the Belvoir Scarp is also a part of the designed setting of the Castle and its park, prominent in views from the surrounding landscape, and offering a burst view from the Great Riding to the Castle. It is therefore clear that the designed landscape and designed setting doesn't end at the registered boundary.

The supporting information shows that the proposals would be visible from the RPG and in views looking back to it. Consequently, they would affect the way in which it would be experienced. The landscape around Belvoir Castle has largely retained its historic rural character, which would be altered by the installation solar panels. Hedgerows will be retained, which means that the structure of the historic landscape will not be lost, but its character would be altered. This would contribute to the less than substantial harm to the significance, derived from their setting, of the Castle and park, in addition to the specific impact on views from the Castle and registered park, and views to the Castle from points in the surrounding landscape.

#### f) Church of St Peter and St Paul

We can see from the supporting information (view point 6) that St Peter and St Paul's Church would be seen alongside the development. The large scale of the development would compete with its prominence in the landscape, causing harm to its significance.

The landscape surrounding the church has inherent historic qualities which contribute to its individual significance. The proposals would alter the rural, agricultural character of the church's setting, causing harm to the significance it derives from its setting.

### Legislation, Policy and Guidance

As the application affects the setting of listed buildings, the statutory requirement to



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have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of a listed building (s.66 (1), 1990 Act) must be taken into account by the local planning authority when making its decision.

Our advice reflects guidance in the good practice advice notes produced by Historic England on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum in GPA 2: 'Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment' and GPA 3: 'The Setting of Heritage Assets'.

We also refer you to paragraphs 192, 194 and 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Paragraph 192 encourages local authorities to sustain and enhance the significance of heritage assets. Paragraph 193 outlines that 'great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be)'.

Paragraph 194 details that 'any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification'.

Paragraph 196 states that 'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal'.

### Historic England's Position

Historic England has considered the proposals above. In our view they would cause less than substantial harm to the significance that Grade I Belvoir Castle, Grade II\* RPG of Belvoir and the Church of St Peter and St Paul derive from their setting. This would be by virtue of the large scale of the development and its incongruous character in the agricultural landscape. We therefore question whether an intervention of this nature should be introduced to this landscape and have concerns about the precedent it could set.

In accordance with the NPPF your authority should assess whether the proposals would be justified or outweighed by public benefit in their current form. During this assessment you should consider whether proposals of this nature would be acceptable in this landscape. If you consider they would, you should contemplate whether the proposals should be amended to reduce their impact. The resultant harm could be reduced if the proposals better respected the existing field boundaries and the amount of development was reduced.

### **Recommendation**



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Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of paragraphs 192, 194 and 196 of the NPPF.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Janine Dykes

**Janine Dykes**

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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