



**Planning application 23/01407/FULM (NW Leics)  
P/23/2029/2 (Charnwood)  
Construction of a 49.9MW solar farm with a battery storage facility  
with associated access, landscaping and infrastructure.**

**Summary**

Friends of Charnwood Forest object to this Application on the grounds of visual Amenity.

**Introduction**

Friends of Charnwood Forest is a voluntary Organisation aiming to protect the natural beauty and amenities of the area known as Charnwood Forest (see [www.focf.org.uk](http://www.focf.org.uk)). As part of our remit, we examine Planning Applications and comment on those which we consider to be significantly detrimental to Charnwood Forest, or where we can envisage significant benefits to the Forest.

In preparing this response we have concentrated on Charnwood Borough Council's Policy and Plans. Part of the site lies within North-West Leicestershire Council, and our resources, as a voluntary organisation, do not stretch to detailed examination of NWL's Local Plans, although some reference to it is made below. As our objections are based on landscape character, and this landscape character is unaltered across the administrative boundary, we consider that our comments are equally applicable to both Councils.

**This Application**

The Applicants wish to construct a 49MW "Solar Farm" on 85 ha of land which straggles the M1. The area is within both the Charnwood Forest Regional Park, and the National Forest, areas of considerable landscape, geological, ecological and community access importance, despite relatively small extent and division by the M1 motorway. We note that the original application was for a capacity of 49MW; the extent of the Farm has now been reduced but the capacity remains the same, and we wonder why.

**"Need" for Development**

We do not dispute that large scale solar energy can be a contributor towards the country's journey towards "net zero", although we note that solar farms produce most power during summer daylight hours whereas maximum electricity demand is during winter darkness periods. However, solar farms can be sited virtually anywhere: there is no reason why Charnwood Forest, with its special landscape designation, should be selected for this particular development.

While we note the proximity of the development to the 132kV power line crossing the site, it is our view that other, better locations are available for this application.



## Visual Amenity

The Solar Farm will be easily visible from significant areas of Charnwood Forest, including Beacon Hill and the Access Land at Timberwood Hill (the “Zone of Theoretical Visibility”, see the “Statement of Community Engagement, Part 1, Page 66), although the Applicants attempt to demonstrate that the effects on visual amenity from Beacon Hill will be small (because of distance).

The Statement of Community Engagement (Part 2), Page 67, shows photomontages of the view from Beacon Hill. We believe that these photomontages are misleading: they encompass a wide panorama and photographs such as the ones shown, while helpful, do not adequately emphasise the jarring nature of a large field of solar panels in the wider landscape.

The Application does not include any photomontages from Timberwood Hill. We consider this to be a significant omission from the Application.

We consider that the impact of the solar panels proposed for such a large area would be a very considerable detriment to the Charnwood Forest landscape. Whilst we appreciate there is mitigation offered by planting, the solar farm would still be visible from places visited by many people.

## Biodiversity

We applaud the consideration given to improving biodiversity in the proposals, such as the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan. We are only amateurs in this field, but have some concerns about the pasture and meadow management proposals. We do not understand how the land came to be considered as ‘lowland’ for these proposals, nor how grazing by sheep was regarded as suitable for the winter months.

## Solar Farm Lifetime

The Applicants claim that the solar farm has a “lifetime of 50 years” (see, for example, Paragraph 5.21 in Volume 1 of the “Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment”). This is nonsense.

There is nothing in the design of a solar farm which limits its lifetime. The Solar Farm consists of a large number of individual components (the panels themselves, the grid connection, the control system etc.) each of which has a different lifetime and each of which can be independently replaced. For example, it is probable that the control system will need replacing at least once during this 50 years, while the grid connection will be good for well over 50 years. There is no technological reason why the farm’s lifetime should be limited to 50 years. If solar panel technology improves then individual panels can be simply replaced. And after 50 years, we believe that the farm will continue to generate; we do not consider it conceivable that the Solar Farm owners will decide to spend money on decommissioning it instead of continuing to operate it and make money.

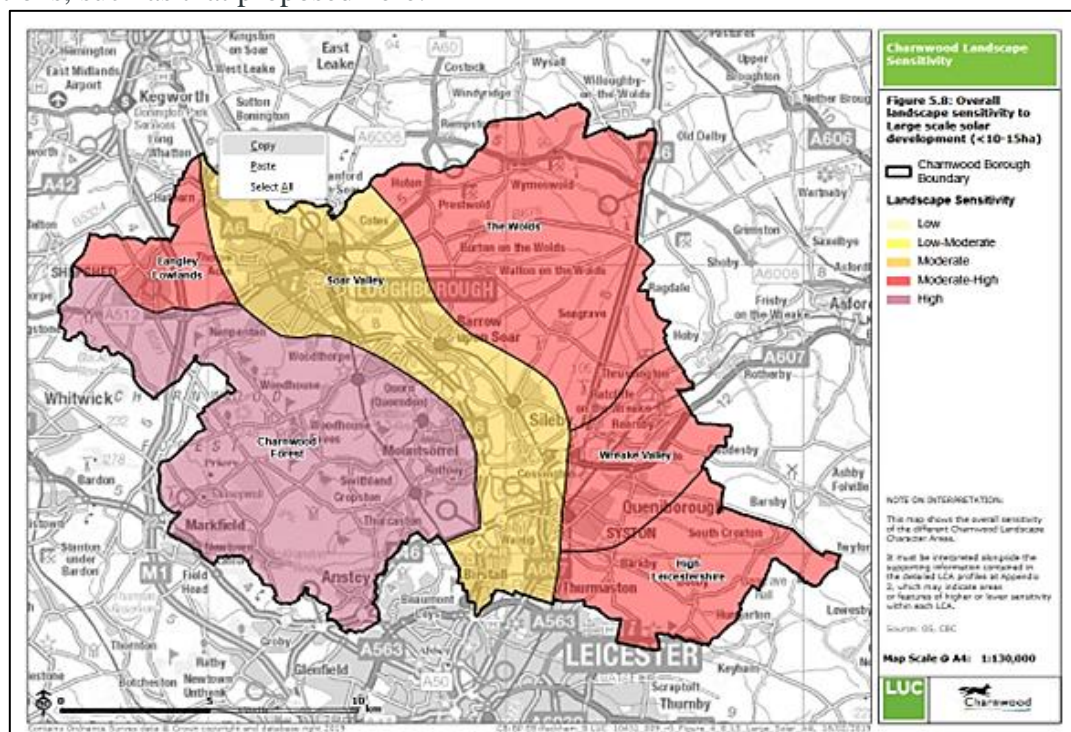
We therefore consider that, if permission is granted, this Solar Farm will be a permanent fixture within the landscape, and should be considered as such when this application is considered.

## Planning Policy: Charnwood

We note that, in 2019, Charnwood Borough Council commissioned a Report “Wind and Solar PV Energy Landscape Sensitivity Assessment” and this showed that Charnwood Forest was “high sensitivity” with respect to large scale Solar Farm development (see diagram overleaf). The results of this consultation study have been incorporated in Charnwood’s Local Plan, Table 9, which shows the scale of Solar Energy Installation that could be accommodated within Charnwood Forest as



“moderate” for “very small (i.e. less than 1 ha)” installations, and with no scope for larger installations, such as that proposed here.



The emerging Charnwood Local Plan 2021-37 contains Policy CC3 which is given below (see [https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/charnwood\\_local\\_plan\\_2021\\_37/](https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/charnwood_local_plan_2021_37/)):

**Policy CC3: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Installations**

**Proposals for renewable and low carbon energy installations will be supported where any adverse impacts, including cumulative impacts have been fully addressed, including impacts on local amenity, the historic environment and the setting of heritage assets, noise and odour, the wider landscape, biodiversity and public safety.**

**Where any localised adverse impacts remain, proposals will be only be supported where these adverse impacts are outweighed by the wider environmental, economic or social benefits of the scheme.**

**In addition, we will require wind energy development involving one or more wind turbines to:**

- be located in an area identified as suitable for wind energy on the Policies Map or in a neighbourhood plan;
- be of an appropriate scale in that area, taking account of the evidence on landscape sensitivity; and
- demonstrate that, following consultation, the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.

**Proposals within the Safeguarded Area shown on the Policies Map will not be permitted if they adversely affect the operational integrity of East Midlands Airport, aircraft operations or radar and navigation systems.**

**In all cases, the contribution of the renewable and local carbon energy proposals to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonising our energy system will be balanced with other policy and material considerations.**

**We will support neighbourhood planning groups to consider identifying locations and the range of renewable and low carbon technologies that could be accommodated within neighbourhood plans.**

and paragraph 7.33 of the draft local plan states “Proposals for renewable energy installations will be expected to have regard to our landscape sensitivity evidence and this will inform the scale of





installation that will be appropriate in each landscape character area”. We do not believe that this application meets this requirement.

The above argument demonstrates that Charnwood Borough Council has assessed not only the need for alternative energy sources (including solar farms), but also where particular technologies might be deployed. This is based on the characteristics of Charnwood, and of Charnwood Forest, using previously developed Landscape Character Assessments.

This proposal is therefore in direct conflict with Charnwood Borough Councils’ policies.

### **Planning Policy: North-West Leicestershire**

The North-west Leicestershire Local Plan ([https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/pages/local\\_plan](https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/pages/local_plan)) was adopted in 2017. This Plan then had a partial review starting in 2018, resulting in “The North-West Leicestershire Local Plan (as amended by the Partial Review)”, adopted in March 2021.

Both the original Plan, and the plan after the review, includes Policy Cc1 as follows (our emphasis):

#### **Policy Cc1 – Renewable Energy**

**(1) Planning applications for renewable energy including any new grid connection lines and any ancillary infrastructure and buildings associated with the development will be supported where:**

- (a) There is no unacceptable impact on residential amenity in terms of noise, shadow flicker, vibration and visual dominance; and**
- (b) There is no adverse impact on the landscape character taking account of the special qualities set out within the individual National Character Areas; and**
- (c) All impacts on biodiversity have been adequately mitigated or enhanced; and**
- (d) Heritage assets and their settings are conserved or enhanced; and**
- (e) Proposals take account of the cumulative effect that would result from the proposal in conjunction with permitted and existing renewable energy schemes; and**
- (f) Proposals are accompanied by details to demonstrate how the site will be decommissioned to ensure the restoration of the site following cessation; and**
- (g) Proposals for large scale renewable energy should demonstrate that the economic, social and environmental benefits are for those communities closest to the proposed facility.**

We believe that this proposal will count as “large-scale renewable energy”. The proposed development will have an adverse effect on the landscape character of Charnwood Forest (contravening section (b) above), and we do not see any economic, social or environmental benefits for local communities, thereby contravening section (g) above.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In our opinion the adverse impacts are not capable of mitigation, and these adverse impacts do not outweigh the wider environmental benefits. We also believe that the Application contravenes Charnwood Borough Council’s own policies as outlined in its draft Local Plan, and also North-West Leicestershire’s policies as given in its adopted Local plan (after partial review). We therefore believe that the application should be refused.



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