

Land to the West of Main Street Kelham

Appeal by Peridot Solar

Planning Application Ref: 23/01837/FULM

PINS Appeal Ref: APP/B3030/W/25/3364181

Rebuttal Proof of Evidence of Daniel Baird

[M.I. Soil Sci]

relating to Best and Most Versatile Land

Date: 08 October 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 I have prepared this Rebuttal Proof of Evidence following the exchange of Proofs of Evidence with Newark and Sherwood District Council on 23 September 2025 in relation to appeal reference APP/B3030/W/25/3364181 for the installation, operation, and decommissioning of a solar farm.
- 1.2 This Rebuttal Proof of Evidence has been prepared on behalf of Peridot Solar (**‘the Appellant’**).
- 1.3 In the preparation of this evidence and in my conduct at the forthcoming inquiry, I have and will continue to adhere to the rules of conduct of the professional body (the British Society of Soil Science) of which I am a member. The evidence which I provide for this Appeal Inquiry (reference: APP/B3030/W/25/3364181) is true and is given in accordance with the requirements of my professional body.
- 1.4 The Appellant has considered the Proofs of Evidence of Christopher Whitehouse (‘Proof of Evidence Planning’) [CD 11.5 and 11.6] submitted on behalf of the Newark and Sherwood District Council. It considers that it is necessary to submit a short rebuttal to the proof of evidence on the matter of the use of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land.
- 1.5 Paragraph 3.21 of Christopher Whitehouse’s proof refers to the Overarching Statement of Common Ground (OSoCG) paragraph 9.17. Both parties do indeed agree that the operational site would not be actively farmed for arable purposes for a period of 40 years. However the OSoCG paragraph 9.17 goes on to note the agreed position between the parties that agricultural use of the land can continue through the solar farm operational phase, grazing sheep or other small livestock.
- 1.6 Paragraph 3.21 of Christopher Whitehouse’s proof then goes on to state that *“It is a matter of fact that for the period of time in which the appeal scheme is operational, 60.3ha of BMV will not be able to function as BMV, and as such there will be a loss of it across the period.”* This is incorrect. The BMV status of agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales) is not dependent upon agricultural land use. There is no test of land being able to function as BMV.
- 1.7 In Section 1 of the MAFF Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land (MAFF October 1988) [CD6.1] provides a list of assumptions made to ensure a consistent approach when classifying land.
- 1.8 The first of these assumptions is that land is graded according to the degree to which physical or chemical properties impose long term limitations on agricultural use. The third assumption is that where any long term limitation outside the control of the farmer will be removed by a third party (with the example given being flood alleviation works) the land is classified as if the change has already taken place. Therefore were an operational solar farm to be subject to an ALC assessment, the land would be classified as if the solar farm had already been decommissioned.
- 1.9 Following these assumptions, Christopher Whitehouse is wrong to claim that there will be a loss of BMV land across the operational period of the solar farm. The BMV land resource remains BMV land through the operational period of the solar farm and following the removal of the Solar PV at decommissioning.
- 1.10 Agricultural land routinely has constraints on how the land is managed without any claimed effect on BMV status. Farmers lease arable fields for a number of years to outdoor pig rearing units, with the temporary fencing, feeders, water troughs and pig arks all preventing arable management for the duration of the lease. The presence of any BMV land does not constrain this land use and there is no ‘loss of BMV land function’. Similarly BMV land may be let

indefinitely for equestrian use with no change in ALC Grade. In 2005 the UK began its transition away from arable area payment that had been in place since the mid 1980s. Under this scheme farms had to place 10% of arable land in 'setaside' where no productive use could be made of the land. ALC grading and the extent of BMV land was not affected by setaside.

- 1.11 Paragraph 4.12 of Christopher Whitehouse's proof, in reference to the soil health and soil organic matter (SOM) benefits delivered by a period of fallow, claims the Appellant does not provide any specifics on how this benefit would be achieved in this instance. Section 10 of the Appellants Agricultural Proof of Evidence [CD11.2] provides specifics of how this soil health benefit is achieved.
- 1.12 Furthermore, the soil health benefits of reverting arable land to pasture are well established as would have been confirmed to Newark and Sherwood District Council if they had sought the advice of a soil scientist or agronomist. Defra R&D project SP08016 [CD6.2] is clear that reverting arable land to pasture provides a reliable recovery of SOM and soil health that is depleted by arable land management. It is a part of the Government evidence base for current Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) measures such as WBD4: Arable reversion to grassland with low fertiliser input (<https://www.gov.uk/find-funding-for-land-or-farms/wbd4-arable-reversion-to-grassland-with-low-fertiliser-input-how-much-youll-be-paid>) [CD6.9]. Under this five year duration scheme, a farmer is paid £489 per hectare per year in return for the known environmental benefits. Placing arable land in fallow for the duration of a solar farm provides the same benefit.
- 1.13 Given that the environmental benefit of reverting arable land to pasture is well established and significant, Christopher Whitehouse is wrong to conclude in paragraph 4.12 that such benefits do not outweigh the temporary loss of BMV land, particularly where there is no loss, temporary or otherwise, of BMV land to the Solar PV installation.
- 1.14 With no loss of BMV land extent or quality to the Solar PV, and Christopher Whitehouse's finding of no policy conflict (paragraph 4.13 of Christopher Whitehouse's proof) the planning balance should consider the agricultural effect of the scheme to be negligible.