Kelham Solar Farm Inquiry

Councillor Keith Melton – verbal evidence

Personal Introduction

My name is Keith Melton, and I have been a resident of Staythorpe since 1974, spending about six years on the Averham, Kelham and Staythorpe Parish Council at the end of the 1970s into the 1980s.

In May 2023 I was elected a District Councillor for the Trent Ward which includes the parish of Averham, Kelham and Staythorpe plus Upton and villages along the River Trent – Rolleston, Fiskerton cum Morton, and Bleasby.

I am also a member of the NSDC Planning Committee and have been so since being elected to NSDC Council.

I am also currently the Vice Chair (Organisation) for the Green Liberal Democrats, the environmental Think Tank and pressure group of the Liberal Democrats nationally. I recently retired after just over five years as Chair and I was, indeed, the Founding Chair back in 1988 when the Party was formed from the Liberal Party and the SDP.

As an officer of GLD I have supported and spoken in favour of renewable energy and the need to store such energy on innumerable occasions, though I have favoured other forms of storage than the use of Lithium-ion batteries (*the kind proposed for the Staythorpe and Averham Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) as well as those included in the Kelham proposal*) – such as gravity-based batteries, including hydro-based generation, using water pumped up to reservoirs, or molten salt or silica batteries, heated using spare renewable energy generated above immediate needs.

The Planning Committee Decision

I can confirm what an earlier speaker said about the Planning Committee Decision, that it brought a unanimity of all the political views on the spectrum, since the Committee at that time included Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem, Green and Independent councillors, all of whom voted to refuse permission for this proposal, based upon local knowledge.

All three of the factors being considered by the Appeal Inquiry – a) Change of use of BMV land; b) Heritage damage; and c) Cumulative Landscape Harm – were aired during the Committee discussions. The land use argument was very strong due to the very high percentage – over 90% of the land being covered – being grade 2 BMV land. The Heritage argument was also considered to be very strong, members feeling that officers had underplayed that aspect in their recommendation. But, far and away, the most significant factor, as far as members were concerned, was the huge cumulative impact of the proposal on the residents of AKS Parish and the wider community.

As I said on the stand, we are continually told, when considering proposals before us, that we must regard each proposal "on its own merits", but this was the third in a very

short time-frame that related to this single Parish Council area. And, for each of the previous applications, we already knew that the others were in the pipeline, so we knew the cumulative nature of the totality of proposals, but were explicitly advised we had to ignore the cumulative effect – until, of course, we came to what must be considered the "last straw" – the Kelham Solar Farm. Here again we felt officers underplayed the issue.

The Barrister for the appellant, referring to one of the witnesses' views, indicated that to put energy hardware around the parish was perfectly in order "*because there was an 'Energy Characteristic' in the locality*".

Indeed there is, and those of us who live here have accepted the presence of the Power Station and the National Grid site because they have been there in some form or another since the late 1940s.

Nevertheless, the PRIMARY local characteristic, ***the key characteristic locally***, is that the area is a quiet RURAL area. We are surrounded by fields, farmland, rolling hills, woodland, and with streams and a major river running through the area. For many people living locally, the Power station is largely hidden from view (apart from its tall chimneys, of course) by woodland and hedgerows. It is also on the other side of the railway.

Cumulative Impact

Evidence from the Parish Council and one of the residents had already provided maps and indications of the cumulative impact for each of the villages and the Parish area as a whole. It was also mentioned (but not specifically in this context) that the Carbon Capture programme proposed by the Power Station (in a decision that will be taken nationally, rather than locally) would bring potentially double the height chimneys as well as additional industrial structures.

It should also be noted in passing that the National Grid site has, in recent years, been adding new, taller, and more intrusive equipment as part of so-called "permitted development", without any need for local planning permission. This has added often unwelcome additional industrialised landscape details, without any "by our leave" by local residents!

Specifically, my reason for wanting to speak is that I wanted to draw the Inspector's attention to the relevance of the land allocations in the extant NSDC Local Development Framework. The Development Plan Document (DPD) associated with this, was Adopted in July 2013 for the period 2013-2026.

Policy DM8 "Development in the Open Countryside declares it … "…*will be strictly controlled and limited to the following types*…" – so, when talking of item 8, "Employment Uses" the DPD says "**Small Scale employment development** will only be supported where it can demonstrate the need for a particular rural location…" (*my highlighting*)

Section 1.34 of the DPD indicates a total area of land allocated to “Employment Uses”, between 2013 and 2026, is 225.44 Hectares.

If you take the **Staythorpe BESS**, the **Averham BESS** and the **Kelham Solar Farm** together, they would account for over 50% of the total Employment Use land allocated for the **WHOLE district** between 2013 and 2026, ending up in just one very small parish council area. If you also add in the proposals associated with the GNR Solar Farm the Employment Use land taken in AKS Parish, it would account for over 80% of the area allocated for the *whole district*.

Despite this, the Barrister for the appellant quoted one of their witnesses as indicating the impact would be “*minor, limited and localised*”.

Localised it certainly is, but it is NOT minor, nor is it limited. The impact on the Quality of Life for around 250 householders and our families is already significant in terms of turning the area from a quiet rural area to a totally Industrialised Landscape.

To add a huge acreage of solar panels and yet more lithium-ion batteries and vertical structures, as well as narrowly constrained new pathway “tunnels”, with restricted views for both residents and ramblers, is not something that is either minor or limited. Also, though I recognise it is not considered to be a “material planning reason”, the fact that there has been a negative financial impact upon local homeowners due to a significant reduction in the valuation of our properties, merely adds insult to injury.

A Thriving Community

Ever since I arrived in the area over 50 years ago, it has been apparent to me that this has always been considered to be a thriving local community. In simpler times, for example, the Queen’s Silver Jubilee, in 1977, was celebrated with a well-attended, joint villages, Fete and Pig Roast in the grounds of Kelham Hall.

As things stand now, however, the local “WhatsApp” community has become a place of notable grievances and there are signs of stress and a decline in overall mental health for many residents.

I made reference in my verbal evidence of a motion I introduced to the Full Council in September of 2023, passed by a substantial majority, relating to the potential use of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a guide for council decisions. It is sad to say that the officers apparently took little note of *that* motion in their original consideration of the planning application.

I have attached the motion as an appendix to this document. Please note the last line of the motion, which refers to the consequential building of a *“… more equitable, sustainable, and resilient world for future generations*.” Although a major solar farm may contribute to making the world a little more *sustainable*, it certainly does not make it “*equitable*” for local residents when we are already faced with significant industrial plant impacting our quality of life and our ability to ‘thrive’.

Enough is enough. I repeat, the *localised* cumulative impact is both *major* and *unlimited*. The benefits will be felt in the South East of the UK where the new energy is destined to be sent; and in the pockets of the shareholders of the appellant and the companies contracted to deliver the planned development. The disbenefits, however, will fall to the local residents of Averham, Kelham and Staythorpe and surrounding communities, impacted as we will be by the new levels of industrialised landscape expected.

That is not a recipe for equity.

Councillor Keith Melton
October 2025

Appendix - UN SDG motion to NSDC Full Council September 2023

“This Council notes with concern the recent Special Report from the United Nations Secretary General – “Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a rescue plan for people and planet“- published in July 2023 to mark the midpoint between 2015 and the delivery date of 2030.

The Secretary General finds that “… many of the Goals are moderately to severely off track and puts forward five major recommendations to rescue the Goals and accelerate implementation between now and 2030.”

In particular, this Council notes the third of those recommendations, calling upon Governments to “… strengthen national and subnational capacity, accountability and public institutions to deliver accelerated progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.”

To that end, Newark and Sherwood District Council resolves to adopt the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) as a framework for informing our local authority's policies, work programs, functions, and initiatives.

By doing so, we commit to aligning our strategies with the national and global agenda for sustainable development and working towards achieving these goals within our sphere of influence; thus recognising the significance of the UN SDGs as a comprehensive framework for sustainable development at the global level. We shall seek to apply the UN SDGs at the local level for the wellbeing of our residents.

The Council believes that:

1. Adopting the UN SDGs will provide a clear direction for our local authority's policies, work programs, and initiatives, ensuring their alignment with the national and global agenda for sustainable development.

2. Emphasising the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships will help in implementing the UN SDGs effectively.

3. Committing to regular monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of our progress towards achieving the UN SDGs is vital to engage our community in the process.

4. Encouraging cooperation and knowledge-sharing with other local authorities across the UK and world that have already adopted the UN SDGs, will help in promoting collective action and learning both locally and globally.

The Council therefore agrees to:

A. Adopt the UN SDGs as a framework for informing our local authority's policies, work programs, and initiatives.

B. Contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs through delivery of the Community Plan.

C. Actively engage and collaborates with other local authorities, organisations, and community groups to share best practices, experiences, and lessons learned in advancing the UN SDGs.

D. Receive an annual report from the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change setting out the Council's contributions to the global agenda for sustainable development.

By taking this step, we can also demonstrate our commitment to contribute to the global effort to achieve a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient world for future generations."