

Application by INRG Solar (Little Crow) Limited for Development Consent Order for The Little Crow Solar Park

Case EN010101

Examining Authority's Note of its Access Required and Unaccompanied Site Inspections on Wednesday 25 and Thursday 26 August 2021

Access Required Site Inspections (ARSI) on 25 August 2021

Background

As detailed in its letter of 10 August 2021 [PD-011] the Examining Authority (ExA) confirmed as a procedural decision its preference to undertake a combination of ARSI and Unaccompanied Site Inspections (USI). As explained in PD-011 the ARSIs would involve inspections of the Order Limits for the Proposed Development and the grounds of Heron Lodge/Fennswood (Fennswood). For the ARSI the owners and occupiers of the land and premises were requested to grant the ExA access to their land and make arrangements for any gates to be opened and thereafter the ExA would be left to walk around the land and premises.

The ARSI were both scheduled to be undertaken 25 August starting at Fennswood, with the morning of 26 August being a reserve day to conclude the ARSI for the Order Limits in the event that inspection could not be concluded on 25 August. The ExA was able to complete the ARSI of the Order Limits on 25 August, with 26 August being used to undertake a USI. The record for each of the ARSIs are set out below.

ARSI at Fennswood

The ExA arrived at Fennswood at 12:10 and Mr Johnson, one of the owners and occupiers of the house and commercial premises at Fennswood opened the entrance gate. Thereafter the ExA walked up the access track, made itself known to Mr Johnson and explained that it would like to walk around all of the grounds of Fennswood without being accompanied, something that Mr Johnson agreed to. The ExA also requested that Mr Johnson identify the southern extent of Fennswood by reference to the land plan showing the extent of the Order Limits [APP-006]. Mr Johnson advised that the southern extent of the landownership for Fennswood was the southern edge of the access serving this property.

The weather during this ARSI was dry and overcast, with good visibility.

The ExA commenced this ARSI by walking around the grounds of the commercial premises and in so doing observed:

- the nature of the permanent constructure for the buildings that form part of the commercial premises;
- the fencing enclosing the commercial premises;
- the distance between the commercial and the access track intended to serve the construction and operation of the Proposed Development; and
- the woodland surrounding the commercial premises.

The ExA then walked round the grounds of the house to the east of the commercial premises, viewing:

- the position, including height (ground and first floors and roof level), of the fenestration in the front, rear and side elevations of the essentially two storey house;
- the distance between the house and its lawned garden areas and the access track that it is intended would serve the construction and operation of the Proposed Development;
- the type (predominantly deciduous) and number of trees surrounding the house to the north, east, south and west; and
- the nature of the boundary enclosure for the house.

The ExA also listened for the background noise within the grounds of the house, which was predominantly a mixture of some road traffic noise with bird song.

Having walked the grounds of Fennswood the ExA made it known to Mr Johnson that it had concluded its inspection and this ARSI was completed at 13:05.

ARSI of the Order Limits (OLs)

The ARSI of the OLs commenced at 13:15. In advance of undertaking this ARSI the ExA was provided with details of how to open and close the gate at the eastern end of the access track leading from Ermine Street. No one representing the landowner or the Applicant was present during the inspection of the OLs. Throughout this ARSI the weather was dry and overcast, with good visibility.

At Examination Deadline 1 the Applicant submitted a suggested itinerary for the inspection of the OLs [REP1-012]. That itinerary having been agreed with North Lincolnshire Council. The suggested itinerary for the OLs included ten suggested viewing locations (SVL). While the ExA visited the ten SVLs, it did so in a slightly different order to the suggested itinerary route, as explained below. That was because, with the exception of driving along the proposed access track (the route between SVL1 and 2, the ExA walked around the OLs (rather than using a vehicle as envisaged when the itinerary was compiled) and the ExA had already walked part of the suggested route following definitive footpath 214 in undertaking its USI on 6 April 2021 [EV-001].

Having driven to SVL2 (the location within the vicinity of the proposed construction compound for the Proposed Development), observing the surface treatment of the access track and proximity of Fennswood, the ExA walked around the perimeter of the OLs clockwise from SVL2 to SVL4. The ExA

observed: the nature of the boundary between the OLS and Fennswood, including the number and height of trees; and the root crop currently being grown within this north eastern section of the OLS.

The ExA then walked around the perimeter of the OLS between SVL4 and 5, albeit it walked through rather than around 'Gokewell Strip'. While walking this part of the OLS the ExA observed: the cereal crop that was being cultivated; the topography of the land, including the change in levels between the eastern and western halves of the site; the nature of the woodland to the east and south of the OLS; and the scale and proximity of the steelworks to the west.

The ExA then walked the route of definitive footpath 214 between SVL5 [viewpoint photograph location 1 in APP-087], 6, 7 and 3 observing: how the land was being cropped; the changes in land level; the location of Gokewell Priory; the overhead power lines crossing the OLS; and the steelworks. No walkers made use of definitive footpath 214 while it was being walked by the ExA.

From SVL3 the ExA walked northwards across the OLS, via an uncropped strip of land, leading to SVL2 observing: the topography of the land and how it was being cropped; and the woodland adjoining the northern boundary to the OLS. From SVL2 the ExA walked westwards to observe the alternative locations for the proposed battery system and substation at SVL8, 9 and 10.

The ARSI for the OLS was concluded at 17:40.

Unaccompanied Site Inspection (USI) on 26 August 2021

Throughout the USI the weather was dry and overcast, with good visibility.

The ExA commenced its USI at 11:45 having driven to SVL13, the M180 overbridge in Holme Lane to the north east of Messingham [viewpoint photograph location 7 in the Applicant's 'Assessment Viewpoint Photographs' APP-087]. Standing on the bridge the ExA observed the roadside vegetation and the existing Raventhorpe solar farm in the distance to the north east.

The ExA then drove via Holme Lane and the A18 to SVL12 in Lakeside Parkway, Scunthorpe [viewpoint photograph location 6 in APP-087]. From this location the ExA observed the housing and steelworks lying to the south of the OLS.

The ExA then drove via the A1029/Brigg Road and B1430/Normandy Road to observe the general location for the proposed Conesby solar park. From here the ExA drove to High Santon via the A1077, Risby Road, the B1207/Ermine Street, Santon Lane and Dawes Lane. The ExA then walked from the northern extremity of definitive footpath 214 southwards to SVL5, the western end of the footpath 214's crossing of the OLS. Walking this stretch of definitive footpath 214 completed the ExA's inspection of the entire length of public footpath 214 [as shown on REP2-024].

The ExA then drove to Home Beat Drive, via Ermine Street and the A18, in order to walk along the route of definitive footpath 212 and to experience what it is like to use a public right of way passing through an operational solar farm.

The USI was concluded at 16.55.

Conclusion

The ExA has now undertaken various site inspections (including the USI undertaken in April 2021), utilising private and public locations, enabling it to familiarise itself with the extent of the OLs for the Proposed Development and the relationship of the OLs with their surroundings. During its site inspections the ExA has observed the landform and landscape character of the area, the agricultural use of the OLs, the juxtaposition of the OLs with the steelworks, the adjoining woodland and the residential and commercial premises at Fennswood. The ExA has also walked the routes of the definitive footpath crossing the OLs and the proposed temporary diversionary for that public right of way and it has also driven the route (public highway and farm track) that it is intended would be used by construction traffic.

Grahame Gould
Examining Authority