

Mr Simon Raywood
National Infrastructure Planning
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN
(By Email Only)

Date: 11th March 2022

Dear Mr Raywood,

Longfield Solar Farm – Adequacy of Consultation Request under Section 55 of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended)

Thank you for your letter dated 1 March 2022. In response to your request for representations from Essex County Council on the adequacy of consultation, and having had regard to Section 42 (Duty to consult), 47 (Duty to consult the local community) and 48 (Duty to publicise) of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended), I can confirm that Essex County Council is of the view that Longfield Solar Farm Ltd. has carried out adequate pre-application consultation in accordance with the provisions as set out in Sections 42, 47 and 48 of the Act.

The Applicant commenced early engagement with Essex County Council (alongside Braintree District Council and Chelmsford City Council) from September 2020. Regular meetings with the three host authority Planning Leads, together with technical meetings with Highways, Minerals and Waste and Lead Local Flood Authority Officers, and the host authorities' Landscape, Heritage and Ecology Consultants, have taken place throughout the majority of the pre application process, up until the submission of the Development Consent Order (DCO) application.

Two Member engagement briefings have been held with Essex County Councillors. These briefings took place during statutory consultation and prior to the submission of the DCO application to the Planning Inspectorate, with the latter Member briefing providing the opportunity for County Councillors to hear how Essex County Council's issues and concerns raised at statutory consultation have been addressed within the proposed scheme design.

Pre-application engagement has been undertaken during the COVID 19 pandemic, resulting in all engagement with Essex County Council and the other two host authorities undertaken virtually. A variety of consultation methods, as listed in the Statement of Community Consultation were identified and flexibly applied to ensure inclusive engagement with local communities.

The Applicant conducted a period of non-statutory engagement between 2 November and 14 December 2020. On 4 December 2020 Essex County Council responded to the EIA Scoping Opinion from the Planning Inspectorate and raised a number of matters including highways and transportation, minerals and waste and flood risk and management.

In advance of formal consultation on the draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), meetings were held with the three host authorities to discuss the draft SoCC; allowing early feedback from Essex County Council and the two other host authorities prior to the Applicant finalising the draft SoCC.

Longfield Solar Farm Ltd. consulted Essex County Council on the draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) on 10 March 2021. ECC responded on 9 April 2021. The points raised in response to the draft SOCC were:

- The approach outlined in the draft SoCC to ensure effective engagement with those impacted by the proposed scheme, key stakeholders and interested parties, is supported.
- The flexibility to use more traditional forms of engagement, if lifting of Covid 19 restrictions allow, is supported.
- The omission of reference to consultation documents being available in alternative formats for residents with impairments, for example Braille and translated into other languages.
- The draft SoCC should include a 'Hard to Reach' list, without which it is difficult to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the 'Hard to Reach' strategy.
- Recommending strongly that the start of statutory consultation is pushed back to avoid the start of statutory consultation on 7th May, the day after the local government elections.

The Applicant addressed these, and other matters raised by Essex County Council in the final version of the SoCC; as detailed in Appendix C-4 of Applicant's Consultation Report, dated February 2022.

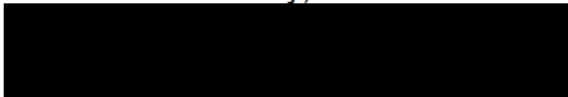
The Applicant undertook their s42 consultation between 1 June 2021 and 13 July 2021 and allowed 42 days for consultation responses rather than the 28 days minimum. Essex County Council raised a number of points which are summarised in Appendix J-2 of Applicant's Consultation Report, dated February 2022.

Following statutory consultation, the Applicant undertook additional targeted consultation from 26 October to 23 November 2021 and from 11 January to 8 February 2022 on changes and corrections to the scheme boundary. Essex County Council raised a number of points which are summarised in Appendix J-5 of Applicant's Consultation Report, dated February 2022.

The Applicant's Consultation Report dated February 2022 which sets out the Applicant's consultation programme has been reviewed and I am satisfied that Longfield Solar Farm Ltd. has undertaken an extensive and inclusive consultation programme in support of their scheme.

I can therefore confirm that Essex County Council considers that Longfield Solar Farm Ltd. has carried out adequate pre-application consultation in line with Sections 42, 47 and 48 of the Planning Act 2008.

Yours sincerely,


Graham Thomas
Head of Planning & Sustainable Development

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