

Additional Responses to Change Application – Boston Borough Council

Boston Borough Council in its LIR and its response to the Change Application for the works required at the Bicker Fen Substation have raised the loss of the trees at Bicker Fen Substation. This would be harmful in terms of character, screening and ecology impacts.

As a Borough, Boston has a limited amount of tree coverage and the proposals to remove trees would further reduce this and as a consequence we do not consider replanting them on the Energy Park, some distance away and within NKDC, is an appropriate solution. We do not object to tree planting on the Energy Park as an activity, but do not consider it resolves the issue relating to the loss of trees at the substation and within Boston Borough.

During the Issue Specific Hearing 2 the Black Sluice IDB mentioned that a local land owner intended to plant an area of trees and the Examining Authority requested that details of this were submitted at this Deadline 1. This is an interesting initiative, but the Borough Council points out if this planting was going to happen in any case and the Heckington Fen Solar farm did not require the trees to be felled at the substation, the Borough would have benefited from additional tree planting in any case. As a result of the felling required at the substation, the Boston Borough will remain short of what it could have had in tree coverage.

The Examining Authority will decide if the details of the tree planting scheme and any support the applicant can provide to it are sufficient compensation and whatever mechanism is used to achieve this is suitable.

The Borough Council would like to suggest additional compensation is sought to off-set the loss of the trees.

The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan Policy 28 (Submitted as Appendix 4 in the Council's Local Impact Report) in section 3a ii and iv encourages addressing gaps in the ecological network. Nationally policy encourages 'landscape scale solutions'.

Within the farmed landscape there is screen planting around the Bicker Fen National Grid substation, a similar planting scheme is to be planted around the Tritton Knoll substation, the South Forty Foot Drain is a Local Wildlife site and there is a network of drains around the fields. In addition, if built, the two nearby sub 50MW solar schemes propose to plant hedges. Finally, as illustrated in the discussions on 'Best and Most versatile' agricultural land the land quality is not uniform and so there may be pockets of poorer land where the farming businesses may be considering using the Governments new agricultural support mechanism to convert them to biodiversity planting because the land maybe less productive than other land. The Heckington Fen solar park site (within NKDC) will also introduce a large area of new habitat.

The Borough Council is therefore suggesting, within the confines of the red line of the DSO, that there may be an opportunity to connect these habitats together for the wider ecological benefit. The A17, the railway and the South Forty Foot drain do severely disconnect the solar park from the wider substation area and bridging that would be difficult. However, potentially a length of hedge, a copse or a pond would help link habitats together to improve connectivity for wildlife, improving biodiversity across the wider area and improving resilience of species as mitigation of the works being undertaken in this area. Boston Borough Council would therefore request that these options are taken into account by the Examining Authority when assessing the proposals.

Our ref no: B/22/0271

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Date: 28 July 2023

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Targeted Consult on changed to DCO to BBC for the proposed Heckington Fen Solar Energy Park.

Thank you for your recent further consultation in relation to additional works at Bicker Fen Substation that are required to enable the grid connection. These works lie outside of the current Order Limits at the Bicker Fen Substation.

These works are Associated Development and are necessary as a consequence of the Proposed Development and include:

- a new section of NGET infrastructure at the Bicker Fen substation comprising a busbar extension, including a section breaker, a bus coupler, and a feeder circuit on land owned by NGET to the south of Bicker Fen substation; and
- a new cable sealing end compound on land owned by NGET to the west of Bicker Fen Substation.

Boston Borough Council have the following comments to make on the proposed changes:

One area labelled AW2 is screened by the existing substation and Boston Borough Council have no objections to it.

The other area labelled AW1 requires the removal of trees that were planted when the substation was constructed in order to screen it which is disappointing. They are on the southern boundary and so visual impact is lessened by the fact that few people will venture here as it is very remote.

The amount of trees to be removed depends on what type of infrastructure is used. One type (Air insulated) requires a large amount, the other (Gas insulated) requires less and would be in a building. A row of oak trees on the frontage are to remain.

The trees are not protected by a TPO and even if they were by virtue of the interplay between Article 14(1)(a)(iii)(cc) of the TPO regs 2012 and Part 15 Class B(a) of the GDPO development of upto 29 cubic metres would allow their removal. However, it seems this proposal requires permission as if it is not covered by the DCO an application under the planning act is required, and not the favoured option.

The submitted documents on the PINS web site include a BNG calculation but the contents are blank. NSIPS will be required to produce 10% uplift from 2025. Given what is suggested on the solar park itself there could be an opportunity to show a 10% net gain despite the felling of these trees.

The submitted information with this email does balance the direct adverse effects of the trees' removal with the proposed orchard planting on the solar park. However, the sites are some distance apart and the orchard does nothing for this localised impact. It would be welcomed if the loss of the trees could be mitigated for on the substation site.

Therefore, Boston Borough Council would prefer the gas insulated option so fewer trees are felled and those that are felled are replanted on the substation to repair the localised harm.

This amended proposal should also take into consideration the Temple Oaks and Beacon Fen solar farm projects in terms of additional infrastructure that may be required at the substation and cumulative impacts this may have.

The amendments constitute a further extension within the Borough's area, and so from an economic and social perspective, the Council would like to see the development doing as much as it possibly can to maximise the benefits for local people and businesses for hosting this infrastructure. Such examples could include local 'low voltage' grid upgrades; additional capacity being created within the substation (beyond that to serve the development) to enable further projects to have capacity to connect; options for enhanced skills offerings, particularly in relation to Net-Zero and energy for local people via colleges etc; promotional events and supporting communities to engage with the development during construction and during operation – eg skills fairs, procurement advice; use of social value engines to maximise benefits, and development of other schemes which can create a positive legacy for hosting this sort of infrastructure.

This advice is based upon the information available at this time. Please note that the advice is given without prejudice to any future decision made by the Local Planning Authority upon the receipt of further information.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the case officer Abbie Marwood.
Yours faithfully

Mike Gildersleeves
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