

During the examination of this scheme the issue of losing tree screening to the National Grid substation at Bicker Fen has been raised.

The loss of the tree screening was indicated in the 'Change application' consulted on by Ecotricity in the summer of 2023. Boston Borough Council responded to this on 28 July 2023 and the text of our response was submitted at Deadline 1 (REP1-027). The issue of tree loss was also the subject of our accompanying comments at Deadline 1 that are also contained in REP1-027.

During Issue Specific Hearing 2 the Black Sluice IDB advised that a local land owner was going to plant an area of trees nearby. This information was submitted as REP1-034. The Borough Council have spoken to the land owner and it appears the scheme will be fully grant funded and should be planted during January or February 2024. As a result funding from Ecotricity is not required to secure replacement planting close to the substation.

At Deadline 2 National Grid Electricity Transmission Plc refers to the loss of trees (REP2-094). Also at Deadline 2 the Forestry Commission advised they were satisfied the woodland planting in the solar farm is suitable compensation for the loss at Bicker Fen substation. (REP2-090)

The Forestry Commission operate at a national scale and at that strategic level replacing the trees at the solar park site is a reasonable point of view. However, locally it does not address the level of tree cover in Boston Borough.

In the Statement of Common Ground submitted at deadline 2 (REP2-065 & 066) it states in section 1.4:

'Where opportunities to connect the main Energy Park site with Bicker Fen Substation ecologically is possible this should be explored and implemented. As an alternative, an appropriate contribution to a planting scheme within the Borough may be appropriate.'

This is consistent with the comments we made in (REP1-027) that suggested making better landscape scale connections. The Forestry Commission also support this stance in their comments.

The applicants have continued to work on this issue and have drafted amended wording to be inserted into the Outline Landscape and Environmental Management Plan:

1. *In addition to the offset planting to the north-west of the Energy Park Site, the following mitigation and/or enhancement measures would be undertaken:*
 - 1.1. *The Applicant will offer landowners hosting the grid connection cable in Boston Borough hedgerow planting, gapping up of existing hedgerows, or another improvement to connectivity for biodiversity between natural habitats as may be deemed suitable on their landholding. This will be at no cost to the landowner(s) and the cost of the planting or other measures (inclusive of contractors, legal agreement, plants and maintenance) will be to a maximum value of £10,000.*
 - 1.2. *If landowner agreement cannot be secured, the Applicant and/or its appointed contractors will:*
 - 1.2.1. *where possible, provide an alternative scheme for connectivity or planting in Boston Borough Council up to the cost of £10,000; or*
 - 1.2.2. *provide a contribution of £10,000 to Boston Borough Council for connectivity or planting in Boston Borough Council.*

- 1.3. *The amount referred to in paragraph 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 is to be reduced by a proportionate amount based on the cost of any agreements reached with the landowners for hedgerow planting, connectivity, and/or biodiversity improvements under paragraph 1.1.*

- 1.4. *In the final LEMP submitted for approval under Requirement 8 the Applicant will confirm which of the measures detailed above (in paragraphs 1.1, 1.2.1, 1.2.2 or a combination of the measures) it proposes to implement.*

The Borough Council are happy with this approach.