



Mallard Pass

Solar Farm

Mallard Pass Solar Farm

**Introduction to Applicant's
Responses to Interested
Parties' Deadline 2
Submissions**

Deadline 3 - June 2023

EN010127

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document provides an introduction to Mallard Pass Solar Farm Ltd’s (the Applicant’s) response to the documents submitted at Deadline 2 by Interested Parties. This includes responses to the Written Representations (WRs), Local Authority Local Impact Reports (LIRs), and responses to first written questions.
- 1.2 The Applicant has responded to these documents on a thematic tabular basis; and these tables have been submitted as separate documents to the Examination for each theme. In these tables, the Applicant’s approach has not been to respond to every paragraph of every Deadline 2 submission, but instead to group and summarise the key points that have been made, identify the parties who have raised the point in question, and to respond to that point.
- 1.3 This approach has been undertaken to seek to avoid repetition and focus on answering the key points that are raised in a focussed fashion, rather than on generic criticisms of the Proposed Development; and as the most efficient way of responding to the large number of submissions made in the short time between Deadline 2 and Deadline 3.
- 1.4 The thematic tables that have been submitted are as follows:
 - Public Rights of Way and Permissive Paths
 - Site selection, Design and Sizing
 - Need
 - Air Quality, Noise and Vibration and Health
 - Ecology and Biodiversity
 - Land Issues
 - Draft Development Consent Order
 - Climate Change
 - Historic Environment
 - Land Use and Soils
 - Landscape and Visual
 - Socio-economic Effects (including Supply Chain)
 - Traffic and Transportation

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- Water Environment; and
- Other Matters

1.5 There are also a number of appendices associated with these responses. These appendices have been compiled into one consolidated document that is also submitted separately. The Applicant confirms that the Appendix lettering used in the responses in each of the thematic tables refers to the lettered Appendices included in that consolidated document.

1.6 In considering Interested Parties’ Deadline 2 submissions, the Applicant noted that the Mallard Pass Action Group (‘MPAG’) submitted a comprehensive Written Representation at Deadline 2 which made a number of comments about key planning matters, as well as matters related to technical assessments in the Environmental Statement (‘ES’). Given the importance of the issues raised on those planning matters in relation to the Proposed Development, this report includes a section which responds to these matters to enable the Applicant to respond with a fuller submission than would be possible in a tabular format. MPAG’s comments on ES matters are responded to in the submitted thematic tables.

1.7 This report also includes a section which responds in a general fashion to comments by Interested Parties on the pre-application consultation process, reflecting that we are now at Examination stage.

1.8 The rest of this document is therefore structured as follows:

- Section 2: Applicant’s response to MPAG non ES topic-specific comments; and
- Section 3: Applicant’s response to comments on consultation process.

2.0 APPLICANT’S RESPONSE TO MALLARD PASS ACTION GROUP DEADLINE 2 SUBMISSION

2.1 MPAG set out their written representations and supporting documents in Deadline 2 submissions REP2-090 and REP2-089 with assorted accompanying appendices.

Introduction

2.2 This response is intended to supplement the topic specific responses within the tables below to the MPAG Written Representation (MPAG WR) and its accompanying appendices. This document will respond to points of material planning merit and will also signpost to both application documentation and responses made at Deadline 1 and Deadline 2.

2.3 It is acknowledged that at the time of submission of their Written Representation, MPAG will not have had the opportunity to review the Applicant’s response to the Examining Authority’s (ExA) First Written Questions (FWQs). It is considered that the Applicant’s responses to the FWQs help address some of the matter raised within the MPAG WR. For brevity the content of the relevant responses will not be repeated in full here but will be signposted with commentary where appropriate.

2.4 The MPAG WR is split into chapters, largely on a topic-by-topic basis. This response will focus on the non-ES related chapters, notably:

- 3. Scale
- 4. Site Selection
- 5. Alternatives
- 6. Time Limited Application
- 7. Meeting the Energy Need
- 26. Planning Balance

Scale

2.5 The proposed development is a utility scale solar farm, capable of generating 350MW of DC electricity to meet the urgent need for renewable, low carbon electricity generation in the UK which will assist in reaching the Net Zero target. It is one of several similarly sized projects which is currently being considered through the NSIP examination process. Three such projects (Cleve Hill (now known as Project Fortress), Little Crow and Longfield) have received consent with construction

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underway at Cleve Hill. The assertion that the scale of the Application is unprecedented and untested has no material bearing on its consideration and, as with every other DCO, the Application will be examined and determined on its own merits.

2.6 The Application is accompanied by a full Environmental Statement (ES) which has been developed in consultation with relevant statutory bodies. Each chapter sets out the relevant methodology and results of the assessment work. The ES has been undertaken by a qualified team of specialists using established methodology and results are recorded objectively and reported as such. The Applicant strongly rejects any comment which casts doubt over the robustness of the assessment work and wider. It should also be noted that the independent Environmental Statement review that was undertaken by Barton Willmore (now Stantec) on behalf of Rutland County Council and South Kesteven District Council (which was appended to the SKDC committee report when it considered its Local Impact Report on 15th June 2023) (submitted by the Applicant as Appendix A to its responses) concludes that the ES:

- is in compliance with the Infrastructure EIA Regulations’ requirements;
- is in compliance with the requirements of Advice Note 7;
- comprehensively identifies and assesses the likely significant effects of the proposed development;
- provides sufficient information to allow the Planning Inspector to make an informed decision on the Development Consent Order; and
- as with the EIA Scoping Report, and PEIR, the ES includes some superfluous detail and minor errors but given the scale of the ES, these are not deficiencies that require corrective action.

Site Selection

Irradiance, topography, grid connection and substation capacity

2.7 The Applicant refers to the Site Selection Report contained at Appendix 1 of the Planning Statement [APP-203] which sets out the approach and key matters considered which resulted in the chosen site being brought forward within the Application.

2.8 The weight that should be afforded to the availability of the connection at Ryhall substation is significant and, as the Statement of Need [APP-202] clearly demonstrates, the use of existing capacity within the network is a policy priority. Indeed, paragraph 3.10.38 of Revised Draft EN-3 states that *“to maximise existing grid infrastructure, minimise disruption to existing local community infrastructure or biodiversity and reduce overall costs applicants may choose a site*

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based on nearby available grid export capacity”. These key facets of Government policy are critical to the understanding of why the Application Site has been pursued to deliver a NSIP scale solar proposal, particularly in relation to the availability of the Grid Connection and capacity at the Ryhall substation in a location which would also minimise disruption to existing local community infrastructure and biodiversity (as concluded in the ES).

- 2.9 The Applicant notes comments regarding more favourable irradiance elsewhere within the UK. However, this misses the fundamental point that irradiance is only effective where it can generate power that can be transported and used, as recognised in paragraph 3.10.10 of Revised Draft EN-3 which advises *“irradiance of a site will in turn be affected by surrounding topography”*. In simplistic terms, this is one of the reasons why Lincolnshire is an excellent potential location for large-scale solar generation. The network capacity exists as a result of changes in the way the UK generates electricity (phasing out of coal and gas fired power stations) but also the county offers large areas of topographically favourable land where irradiance can be maximised and together these factors create the type of conditions where national policy indicates utility scale solar will be acceptable in principle. These points were also noted in the Application Documents at Para 3.3.17 & 3.3.18 of the Statement of Need [APP-202].
- 2.10 The process of seeking to deliver electrical generating capacity requires, first and foremost, the ability to transport power so that it may be used. It follows that the refinement of site selection require a starting point or locality. The Applicant considers that a sufficiently comprehensive analysis has been undertaken which is compliant with national policy.
- 2.11 In a recent planning appeal decision in Hambleton District Council (Planning Inspectorate reference APP/G2713/W/23/3315877) (Appendix A of the Applicant’s responses includes the Inspector’s Report) , the Inspector recognised the importance of grid connections in the site selection process. The Inspector’s report states that *“given the proposal is seeking to use the spare grid capacity at this sub-station, and bearing in mind the limited opportunities that currently exist for grid connections nationally, I consider it is, in this case, justified to only consider sites within an area that could also make use of this capacity, rather than capacity that may exist at other substations elsewhere”*. While this is a Town and Country Planning Act application it is vindication of the general methodology through which the Applicant has considered the appropriate Application Site by a national planning decision making body which reflects current government direction.
- 2.12 In addition to the above, the Applicant notes its responses in relation to Section 1.3 of the FWQs which relate to matters of Site Selection.

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Flooding

- 2.13 The Planning Statement clearly sets out the Flood Risk position for the Proposed Development. A Sequential Test has been undertaken as part of the Flood Risk Assessment (see Section 4 of Appendix 11.5 to the Environmental Statement). Section 11.4 of the Appendix 11.5 also includes application of the Exception Test as per EN-1, Draft EN-1 and the NPPF while the Planning Statement at 7.15.14 confirms how the Exception Test is passed by the Proposed Development. Neither the Environment Agency nor LCC as LLFA have raised no concerns with the conclusions of the FRA. RCC have raised some concerns as to some detailed aspects, but also have not suggested that they disagree with the overall conclusions.

Proximity to dwellings

- 2.14 The Site Selection Report at paragraphs 3.1.12 – 3.1.14 addresses the proximity of the Application site to residential properties. A Residential Visual Amenity Assessment is included at Appendix 6.4 of the ES [APP-057] and considers impacts on residential receptors in proximity to the site and explains the specific design measures that were undertaken to reduce impacts to those residences.
- 2.15 The Applicant has sought to reduce impact on individual homes, and this was a key part of the scheme development process set out in the DAS [REP2-018]. In many cases, whole fields were removed from the area potentially suitable for solar to ensure sufficient setback from people’s homes, together with significant landscape buffers.
- 2.16 The DAS [REP2-018] also sets out Design Guidance which detailed design will be required to comply with (secured by requirement 6 of the draft DCO [REP2-006]). This includes measures to ensure that residential amenity is respected. For instance, Design Guidance PE.4.3 states that there will be a 250m offset of solar stations and storage containers from residential properties.

Agricultural land classification grading and land type

- 2.17 It is established practice for site selection exercises to use both provisional mapping data in relation to agricultural land classification. It is also inevitable that once comprehensive ALC surveys of a proposed site have been carried out that a greater understanding of its characteristics emerge which subsequently inform design development. The Applicant notes the preference, throughout Government policy and within the updated suite of Energy NPSs, for the use of non-BMV land. However, it is also noted that Draft EN-3 specifically states that:

- *land type should not be a predominating factor in determining the suitability of the location* (Paragraph 3.10.14);

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- *the development of ground mounted solar arrays is not prohibited on agricultural land classified 1, 2 and 3a* (Paragraph 3.10.15), and;
- *it is recognised at this scale, it is likely that some applicants’ developments may use some agricultural land* (Paragraph 3.10.16)

2.18 The Applicant further refers to paragraphs 3.1.6 – 3.1.13 of the Site Selection Report at Appendix 1 to the Planning Statement [APP-203] which addresses its consideration of ALC and land type in the site selection process, the DAS [APP-204] and the Land Use Chapter [APP-042] which explain how other BMV land was removed once detailed surveys were undertaken, as well as its responses to the ExA’s FWQs on the Land Use topic which interrogated this further.

2.19 On the matter of food security, both the recent Longfield Solar Farm (DCO) decision and an upheld appeal against Hambleton District Council (Planning Inspectorate reference: APP/G2713/W/23/3315877) provide a clear indication of the Government’s position in this regard. In his Recommendation Report for Longfield Solar Farm, the Inspector at paragraph 5.7.35 notes that *“while it is acknowledged that food security is an important issue, it is noted that there is no requirement to consider food security in decision making, either at a national or local level”*. The Recommendation Report (at paragraph 5.7.48) continues to note that no evidence was submitted which would indicate that the loss of 150ha of agricultural land over the lifetime (40 years) of the proposed development would jeopardise the UK’s food security wither now or in the future. And critically the Inspector then states, *“when considered through the lens of food security, the Proposed Development would successfully enable the needs of today to be met while preserving the land’s agricultural value for future generations”*. In the Decision Letter for Longfield Solar Farm the Secretary of State agrees with the Examining Authority’s conclusions and ascribes the matter a small amount of negative weight in the planning balance. The Secretary of State further notes that this (and all other matters which weigh against the granting of the DCO), are clearly outweighed by the substantial benefit of the contribution of renewable energy that 500MW project would make.

2.20 On the Hambleton Appeal referred to above, the Inspector took a similar approach towards matters of food security: not that it is an unimportant issue but that there is no basis on which claims that a solar farm would lead to food security impacts were made, even if it was assumed that the whole solar farm was BMV. The Inspector at paragraph 26 points to numerous documents highlighted by the Appellant that state, and statistics show, that there is no food security issue in the UK. Indeed, in December 2022 the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs stated that *“the UK has a large and highly resilient food supply chain. Our high degree of food security is built on*

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supply from diverse sources: strong domestic production as well as imports through stable trade routes”.

2.21 Furthermore, the decision highlighted that:

- *“resting the land from intensive agriculture would be likely to improve soil health by increasing the organic matter in the soil and improving soil structure and drainage;*
- *the specific way agricultural land is used is not a matter that is subject to planning controls. As such, there would be nothing in planning terms to prevent the farmers using the fields that form the appeal site for the grazing of sheep at present or even leaving them fallow. Given this, the fact that the proposal would limit the ability to carry out any arable farming does not, in my opinion, mean that it results in the loss of agricultural land when it can still be used for other agricultural uses. Furthermore, current government schemes actually encourage farmers to take land out of production and put it to grass, meadows, or trees for carbon capture;*
- *there are no national or local policies, guidance or strategies that relate to food security and production...numerous government documents that state, and statistics that show, that there is no food security problem in the country and that the level of food production is good”.*

2.22 The Applicant concurs with the stance taken by the Inspectors in both cases in situations which are comparable to what is being proposed with the Proposed Development, and considers that no evidence by MPAG or any other Interested party has been provided which supports claims that the Proposed Development would impact upon the UK’s food security. Further there is no policy basis in which the representations are founded which could lead to a conflict with the Proposed Development and the Applicant considers that no weight can be afforded to the matter.

Community

2.23 The Applicant presented its proposals to the community during two stages of public consultation and had ongoing engagement with residents and MPAG throughout its development. The Applicant is also aware of the concerns raised within the community and has sought to address these where possible.

2.24 The Applicant undertook an iterative approach to consultation that genuinely sought to gain support from the community. The Applicant consulted at an early stage, when proposals were still developing (Stage One), and at a stage when proposals were more developed (Stage Two). At each

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stage, changes were made to seek to address feedback from the community and questions were asked on specific areas where the community may be looking for physical improvements to the area, for instance, through the addition of new permissive paths, and where concerns were raised about the impacts to the key local community resource that are Public Rights of Way.

- 2.25 As a result, permissive paths were included to enable a circular walk in the local area and specific design measures were developed to minimise impacts to PRowS, as set out in the Amenity and Recreation Assessment [APP-058].
- 2.26 The Applicant is seeking to deliver a large scale infrastructure proposal and accepts that the community, if the project is consented, will bear local impacts as a result of hosting national scale infrastructure. However, the Applicant has sought to reduce effects as far as possible and considers that with the mitigation in place, the benefits of the scheme far outweigh any negative effects.
- 2.27 The Applicant also notes the submissions made about the Proposed Development impact on the surrounding countryside and non-motorised user network as a community resource, and would refer the Examining Authority to its first response in the thematic table on PRowS and permissive paths, which explains how the Proposed Development has sought to account for these matters.

Alternatives

- 2.28 The Applicant refers to pages 27-28 of the Site Selection Report (Appendix 1 to the Planning Statement [APP-204]) which sets out the alternative sites considered and the reason for discounting them. As a solar developer the Applicant did not consider alternative technologies however Chapter 4 of the ES [APP-034] sets out alternative solar technologies and layouts that were considered. The Applicant has complied with the relevant regulatory requirements in this regard.
- 2.29 The MPAG WR discusses onshore wind and an east-west configuration of solar panels. The Proposed Application is not seeking consent for onshore wind (which in any event is not supported by Government policy) and a fixed east-west panel alignment is discussed and the reasons for it not being brought forward are set out in Chapter 4 of the ES. The Proposed Application is required to be considered on its individual merits, not in comparison to another type of project. This is corroborated by paragraph 4.4.1 of EN-1 (reiterated in 4.2.9 of Draft EN-1) which confirms from a policy perspective there is no general requirement to consider alternatives or establish whether a development represents the best option and the recent High Court decision in the Sizewell C Judicial Review.
- 2.30 However, for the reasons given the Applicant considers that the site is a suitable one for the type and scale of development proposed. In addition, as set out in the Applicant’s response to the ExA’s

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FWQ Q1.3.7, the Application Site avoids the Environmental Constraints which surround the Ryhall Substation, which provides additional reasons why the Applicant’s site is preferable from a planning and environmental perspective.

- 2.31 Furthermore, as set out in the Planning Statement and updated Policy Table [REP2-042] the Applicant meets all policy tests which affect the choice of location of projects, such as agricultural land, the sequential test; the mitigation hierarchy; and impacts to protected landscapes (there being none) and heritage assets; and it is also the case that no legal alternatives tests are triggered which would change the location of the Scheme: Stage 3 of the HRA process does not come close to being engaged, there are no significant impacts to WFD watercourses; and the Applicant has and is continuing to seek to minimise compulsory acquisition.
- 2.32 In addition, the Applicant refers to paragraphs 1.2.2 and 5.24 of the Statement of Need [APP-202] which refer to the need for more sites for solar development.
- 2.33 The Applicant further refers to responses made to Section 1.3 of the ExAs FWQs, notably questions 1.3.1 and 1.3.4 and Appendix 2 to the Applicant’s Response to Relevant Representations and its responses to questions of Site Selection submitted at this Deadline 3.

Non time-limited application

- 2.34 Any Applicant is at liberty to seek a DCO for the period of time which it considers most appropriate for the technology. In relation to solar, this is recognised at Paragraph 3.10.56 of Draft EN-3 which advises that while an upper limit of 40 years is typical, applicants may seek consent without a time-period or for differing time periods of operation. There is no policy requirement to justify a deviation from the ‘typical upper limit’ noted in Draft EN-3. However, the solar infrastructure may continue to be operating successfully and safely beyond 40 years and the Applicant considers the flexibility to be permitted to continue generating electricity is important and ensures that the Project maximises its efficiency.
- 2.35 Chapter 2 of the ES sets out the Applicant’s approach to seeking a non-time limited consent. For clarity, all of the technical assessments have been carried out on the basis that the Proposed Development is permanent. However, it is recognised that the electrical infrastructure will have an operational lifespan. As such, for the purposes of assessing decommissioning with the ES, it has been assumed that the Proposed Development has a 40-year operational life span to enable an assessment of decommissioning to be carried out. Although no timescale has been given for the decommissioning stage and the effects during operation are accordingly considered to be permanent in nature, as is recognised at paragraph 3.10.59 of the draft revised NPS EN-3 the solar

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PV installation could be dismantled relatively easily and economically at the end of its operational lifespan. Its impacts are therefore reversible with the relevant management plans in place, including the outline Soils Management Plan.

- 2.36 It is also noted that the definition of maintain in the draft DCO means that the Applicant cannot wholesale replace the Proposed Development. As such, it will come to an end, but, given the possibilities of technological enhancement, a time limit has not been imposed. Therefore, while a time limited consent is not sought, it is anticipated that the development will be decommissioned at some point in the future.
- 2.37 In addition, the Applicant refers to responses to the ExAs FWQs which provide further information on the approach, notably Q.7.0.7 and 7.0.11.

Meeting the Energy Need

- 2.38 The Applicant’s position on need is clearly addressed in the Statement of Need [APP-202] and a further policy update was provided in [PDA-001] and the Planning Statement Addendum [REP2-040] which summarises the robust government policy support for solar and low carbon/renewable electricity generation and delivery. This policy demonstrates the urgency for the delivery of such infrastructure.
- 2.39 Revised Draft EN-1 sets out the Government’s increasingly robust position in regard to need and an applicant’s requirement for it to be demonstrated. Two specific paragraphs set this out :
- 2.40 Paragraph 3.2.5 states: *The Secretary of State should assess all applications for development consent for the types of infrastructure covered by this NPS on the basis that the government has demonstrated that there is a need for those types of infrastructure which is urgent, as described for each of them in this Part.*
- 2.41 Paragraph 3.2.6 follows, stating: *In addition, the Secretary of State has determined that substantial weight should be given to this need when considering applications for development consent under the Planning Act 2008.*
- 2.42 The weight afforded to the delivery of low carbon and renewable energy generating projects is substantial, of this there can be no doubt. The recent Examining Authority Recommendation and Final Report for Longfield Solar Farm concurs with this approach, stating (at paragraph 5.2.80) that *“I consider the Proposal would positively contribute towards a secure, flexible energy supply, help meet the identified need for additional generating capacity. In view of the urgent need for additional low carbon generation, I consider this should be afforded significant weight”*. The Secretary of State

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agreed with this conclusion. This does not, of course, mean that the relevance of other material considerations is diminished, but that the planning balance must reflect the weight afforded in accordance with the relevant policy.

2.43 The Applicant further refers to the Committee for Climate Change’s June 2023 Report to Parliament: Progress in reducing emissions. The key findings of that report state that the prospects of the UK meeting its Nationally Determined Contribution for 2030 and the Sixth Carbon Budget for the mid-2030s have worsened since last year. The report measures progress against key indicators with solar PV achieving the lowest rating stating the solar PV targets are substantially off-track. The report advises that in 2022 0.7GW of solar was deployed and that an average of annual deployment rate of 4.3GW is required to deliver 70GW by 2035. It further states that given short lead times, rapid deployment of onshore wind and solar could have helped to mitigate dependence on imported gas during the fossil fuel crisis. The report, published by government advisers, demonstrates further the absolute criticality of the delivery of projects such as Mallard Pass Solar Farm in order to meet these targets which, we must not forget, are designed to avert a global climate crisis.

2.44 On matters of capacity and delivery, the Applicant refers to the Statement of Need [APP-202], specifically Figure 8.1 and the accompanying commentary. In addition, responses to the ExA’s FWQs, notably questions 1.2.2 and 1.2.3.

2.45 On local policy matters the Applicant refers to updated Appendix 3 of the Planning Statement [REP2-042].

Security of Supply

2.46 The MPAG WR raises a number of concerns relating to security of supply, with particular note that solar cannot be generated when it is most needed and that Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) often accompany solar farm applications as a way of maximising efficiency. These points have been directly addressed in the Applicant’s response to the ExAs FWQs, notably Q1.2.4. In summary, however:

- There is no import capacity available to the Applicant at Ryhall substation, nor does it form part of the Grid Connection offer.
- The application is for a solar farm, not a solar farm with BESS and is required to be assessed as such.

Affordability

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2.47 The Applicant refers to section 10.2 of the Statement of Need which addresses the matters raised on affordability and pricing.

Planning Balance

2.48 The MPAG WR offers a summary of its considerations on a topic by topic basis and concludes by asserting the Project offers limited benefits and is a vast and unjustified scheme. It states that there have been no proper consideration of alternatives and that the locational decision was based on incomplete information.

2.49 The Applicant has robustly demonstrated the process which it has undertaken that resulted in the Application site being selected. The Applicant has duly discharged any legal obligations in regard to alternatives and reiterates the position set out in EN-1 (both draft and existing), repeated at paragraph 1.17 above, which advises there is no general requirement to consider alternatives or establish whether a proposed project represents the best option, but that in any event, the Applicant has selected an appropriate site which complies with policy and legislative requirements and responds to surrounding environmental constraints and whose design has iterated to reduce local level impacts. The consideration of Alternatives was undertaken with the appropriate level of knowledge available at each stage of the process, and there has been nothing that has arisen as a result of assessment in the later stages of project development which would invalidate the results of the earlier stages of development.

2.50 The Applicant further notes the Draft EN-3 position at 3.10.38 which states to maximise existing grid infrastructure, minimise disruption to existing local community infrastructure or biodiversity and reduce overall costs applicants may choose a site based on nearby available grid export capacity. This is a fundamental principle in determining the location for solar which the Proposed Development has achieved, as is the subsequent consideration of the available information to help refine site selection and design development.

2.51 In considering the Planning Balance for the Longfield Solar Farm DCO, the Secretary of State, at paragraph 7.5 of its Decision Letter, agreed with the Examining Authority’s Recommendation and Final Report, at paragraph 7.26, which states that *“both the designated and draft NPS make clear that there is an urgent need for additional electricity generating capacity. The Proposed Development would support the growth of renewable energy, contribute to energy security, network resilience and towards a secure, flexible energy supply. I consider it would make a meaningful contribution to the UK’s transition to low carbon energy generation and afford it*

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substantial positive weight” and stated that such benefits should be ascribed significant positive weight in the planning balance.

- 2.52 In the decision letter for Longfield Solar Farm the Secretary of State concurs with the Examining Authority and ascribes substantial positive weight to the need for the proposed development. This recent decision is a clear indication of both the scale of the challenge but also the context within which applications for renewable energy schemes are being considered. The recent Committee on Climate Change Report only reinforces that fact.
- 2.53 The robust position in terms of the substantial weight that is being afforded to the delivery of renewable and low carbon forms of energy is welcomed and considered consistent with the existing and draft NPSs, particularly paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6.
- 2.54 As set out in Section 8 of the Planning Statement [APP-204], the Applicant considers that the Proposed Development meets the urgent and substantial public need for renewable energy, accords with both the existing and Draft NPSs and NPPF as well as being broadly consistent with local policy, delivers BNG and a number of other benefits; all of which significantly outweigh the limited adverse impacts that arise. It is therefore considered that development consent should be granted.

3.0 APPLICANT’S RESPONSE TO COMMENTS REGARDING CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 3.1 Throughout the documents submitted at Deadline 2 the Applicant has noted a number of comments relating to the consultation process of the project. The Applicant has provided a response to these comments below.
- 3.2 The Applicant conducted a thorough consultation on the Proposed Development across multiple phases of consultation, consistent with relevant legislation and compliance with the Planning Act 2008. This is described and evidenced in the Applicant’s Consultation Report [APP-025] which was reviewed and accepted by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) on 21 December 2022, which sets out the materials provided. The Applicant notes that all three host authorities confirmed in their Adequacy of Consultation responses that they considered that the Applicant had complied with its statutory consultation duties.
- 3.3 Throughout the consultation period and since then, the Applicant has continued to respond to queries raised by the general public, including in relation to the consultation materials provided.
- 3.4 Appendix 4 and 5 to the Consultation Report [APP-026] [APP-027] includes a thorough record of comments submitted through statutory consultation and how these comments have been considered and responded to by the Applicant. The Applicant is confident it acted professionally at all times throughout the public consultation process and has always been committed to open and transparent public consultation that sought the views of the community extensively to inform the final design of the project.
- 3.5 Furthermore, from the start of the pre-application stage to date, the Applicant has continued to keep all project-dedicated communications lines (email, phone, post) open, enabling stakeholders to speak to a member of the engagement team directly to ask questions and request information (including in alternative formats) if this is needed.