

Date: 02 April 2024
Our ref: 470698
Your ref: EN010132



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Dear Andrea Mageean

NSIP Reference: EN010132 – West Burton Solar Project
Consultation: Examining Authorities Second Written Questions

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Please find Natural England's responses to the Examining Authorities first written questions at **Annex A** below.

For any further advice on this consultation please contact the case officer Robbie Clarey and copy to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Robbie Clarey
Planning & Environment Senior Adviser

Annex A

Question Reference	Question	Natural England response
2.2.6	<p>Best and Most Versatile land</p> <p>Do the amendments to the Outline Soil Management Plan: Revision A REP3-016 provide additional confidence for Natural England and the Host Authorities to ensure the correct Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) will be identified and the soil managed to ensure that any disturbed land will be restored to a similar ALC grade. If not please explain why not.</p>	<p>Yes. Natural England have worked with the applicant to embed the changes, and associated actions, into the oSMP.</p>
2.2.7	<p>Written Ministerial Statement 25 March 2015</p> <p>Please can IPs comment on the extent to which the Written Ministerial Statement of 25 March 2015 in relation to BMV, if they have not already done so. Please comment how it is relevant and important to the consideration of the effects of the development on BMV in this case.</p>	<p>This statement sets out the importance of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land, making clear direction that non-agricultural, and lower quality agricultural land should be preferred to BMV land. However, the statement does not preclude solar development on BMV land altogether. The statement's key points relating to BMV land are enshrined within the NPS EN-1 (5.11.12 & 5.11.34) & EN-3 (2.10.29, 2.10.30 & 2.10.145).</p> <p>NE have provided comment on BMV land, especially with regard to appropriate survey and management across the development's area and lifetime. The planning inspectorate must consider the impact of the proposal upon Best and Most Versatile Land in line with the relevant NPS, when making their recommendation.</p>
2.2.9	<p>Soil Health</p> <p>Through NE's work with the applicant on the SoCG, it has been agreed that a programme of soil health monitoring will be undertaken throughout the operation of the proposed development to better understand the impact of solar development on soil health. Please can both parties provide</p>	<p>NE welcome the commitment made by the applicant to set out a programme of soil health monitoring in the Detailed OEMP, and consider this matter resolved. At present, Natural England do not have any standard soil health monitoring specifications. However, we have advised the applicant of ongoing work by Lancaster University with regard to field trials (10 solar farms across the uk) which have been</p>

	<p>an update on the soil health monitoring programme and confirm the extent to which matters are resolved.</p>	<p>completed and are due to be published shortly, which may provide a useful basis. NE may be able to provide comment on the programme of monitoring where necessary.</p>
<p>2.3.5</p>	<p>Cable Depth</p> <p>The Applicant concludes that burying the cables to a minimum depth of 0.9m and given the limited span of the corridor this would provide sufficient mitigation to prevent adverse effects on aquatic life and in particular protected species. The Outline Design Principles provide a minimum buried depth below the bed of the river Trent of 5m. Please can IPs comment on the potential impact on aquatic life from cable depth of 5m.</p>	<p>Natural England note the potential for impacts to aquatic life from the installation and operation of cables under the River Trent. NE consider that a depth of at least 5m is likely to be sufficient in avoidance of any significant effects and has no specific comment to make.</p> <p>Nonetheless, as set out in NPS EN-3 section 2.8.247, NE would note that monitoring of aquatic activity and EMF in the River during the operation of the project may provide evidence to inform future EIAs.</p>