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Your contact for this matter is:  
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FREEPOST  
CAWB SOLAR PROJECT

[REDACTED]  
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27 July 2022

BY EMAIL TO: [info@cottamsolar.co.uk](mailto:info@cottamsolar.co.uk)

Dear Eve Browning,

**APPLICATION REFERENCE NO: 145102**

**PROPOSAL: Consultation on the Cottam Solar Project.**

**LOCATION: Cottam Solar Project**

Thank you for your letter, comprising a formal s42 consultation on the Cottam Solar Project.

As you will be aware, West Lindsey District Council is at present in the process of commissioning technical consultants to assist with the technical analysis of your proposed development and to enable the Council to develop its understanding of the local impacts that may occur. Part of their brief will be to assess the environmental information and offer feedback and advice as appropriate.

We will therefore seek to continue negotiations and discussions as you prepare your Environmental Statement.

In the meantime we have taken the opportunity to review the preliminary layouts and Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), and would like to offer the following comments, and raise the following queries, at this stage:

**Chapter 1 (Introduction)**

Contents noted. We do not currently have any comments in this regard.

**Chapter 2 (PEIR Scope and Methodology)**

Contents noted. We do not currently have any comments in this regard.

**Chapter 3 – The Development Site**

It is noted that initial ALC Survey Results have been undertaken (paragraph 3.2.73) with the initial findings across the entire development, as follows:

Grade 2: 26.6 Ha (2.2%)  
Grade 3a: 78.8 Ha (6.4%)  
Grade 3b: 1130.2 Ha (91.4%)

This equates to 105.4ha on best and most versatile land.

It is noted that the areas quoted (appendix 3.2, paragraph 2.6) do have some variation to the site areas in the PEIR (3.2.53 onwards – for instance, Cottam1 is quoted at 923.9ha, whereas the site area in the PEIR is given at 894ha – a variation of 29.9ha. Can this be clarified?

It is noted that the report is based on 38 days of sampling conducted in September, October and November 2021 (approximately 1 sample per hectare) (appendix 3.2, paragraph 2.3), and that *“Further soil sampling (including in-field carbonates testing) has been undertaken to supplement these reports and the samples are currently being processed.”* (paragraph 3.2.73).

We will reserve further comment for the full surveys.

It is noted (paragraph 3.2.9) that *“As the design of the Scheme has evolved some areas of higher-grade agricultural land have been taken out of the Scheme and structures have been set back from Site boundaries generally, and for example, where there is the potential for impacts on residential amenity. As the Scheme design continues to evolve, the Applicant anticipates that the impact of the Scheme on Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land reported in the PEIR will be reduced even further.”*

It is not however clear the extent to which this has taken place – for instance – it is noted that Cottam 1 contains BMV land, whereas the Preliminary Layout drawing (V2 14/04/2022) – indicates that part of this land is nonetheless given over to solar panels? It is also noted that the preliminary plan predates the ALC report (May 2022)?

## **Chapter 4 – Development Proposal**

Solar Panels - It is noted that tracking panels are proposed (4.3.2) – whereas the West Burton Project proposes both tracking and fixed panels. What are the parameters that have been taken into account on deciding the type of panel used?

Energy Storage – it is noted that energy storage is proposed at Cottam 1 – either as one potential area (Option A) or three potential areas (option B). It is presumed that these are the areas indicated on preliminary drawings V3 (27/05/22) – what is the site area for the battery storage? Option B suggests a significantly larger land take?

Cable corridor – it is noted that cables will be underground and “no new overhead lines will be required” (4.3.19).

## **Chapter 5 – Alternatives and Design evolution**

Section 5.2 – Site selection - A description of the reasonable alternatives, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, are a requirement under the EIA Regulations (Schedule 4, paragraph 2)

It is noted that an assessment of commercial rooftops was undertaken (5.2.10) and a high level review of lower grade agricultural land (5.2.11). These should be detailed in order that the site selection can be properly understood. For instance, as noted above, it would appear that development is still being proposed on best and most versatile agricultural land?

Solar PV Arrangement (5.3.2) - It is noted that “*double height (2P) portrait tracking panels, laid out in north-south rows*” is favoured, but that “*The Sites may alternatively require south-facing fixed panelling (laid out in east-west rows) due to site and environmental constraints*”. It is noted that fixed panels are considered likely on the West Burton Solar Project – are they considered likely here? The Environmental Statement should set out and identify clearly the differentiation between the two, across the sites.

Energy Storage System (5.3.8) - It is noted that the compound will be set out over a maximum of 15.4ha, and that units will be a maximum size of 16m (l) x 3m (w) x 3.2m (h). Does 15.4ha cover the 3 sites under option B? What is the size of area under option A?

It is recognised that the site layout is still evolving (paragraph 5.4) – design iterations should be set out in the ES, and how known parameters have influenced the design (for instance – the location of known high grade ALC land).

## **Chapter 6 – Energy Need, Legislative Context and Energy policy**

Contents noted. The transitional provisions following the review of the National Policy Statements are noted, as set out in draft EN-1 (September 2021). Nonetheless, it is considered that the draft NPS, particularly draft EN-3, now contain provisions specific to solar projects and that these should be presumed to be important and relevant considerations, even if the project is accepted for examination prior to designation of the statements.

## **Chapter 7 – Climate Change**

Contents noted.

## **Chapter 8 – Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**

8.2.7 – The West Lindsey Local Plan (First Review) was superseded in 2017 by the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. It is not part of the Development Plan or relevant to the assessment.

8.5.5 – The extent of study area is noted, and implementation of 2km and 5km study areas. The ES will need to clearly explain these parameters. In particular, it is noted that the zone of theoretical visibility is not limited to 5km – figure 8.8 would indicate it extends beyond the study areas. There is also the potential for longer distance views from key Lincolnshire landmarks – namely Lincoln Castle and Cathedral. It is not clear if this has been explored and scoped out, or not.

8.8.1 – It is noted that the layout and design are in an iterative stage of development and is not yet set. It is also noted (table 4.1) that substations have the potential to be up to 13m high. The LVIA should incorporate the “Maximum design scenario” approach (as advocated at section 4.2).

Sensitivity of visual receptors (8.9.174 onwards) – it is noted that the PEIR does identify sensitive receptors, including high sensitivity residential receptors in proximity to the sites.

The identification of potential cumulative development (table 8.6) is noted. It recognises the potential for sequential and combined visual effects with both the West Burton and Gate Burton Projects. It is considered that views from the east and elevated limestone escarpment should be considered when assessing the cumulative effects.

The combination of the West Burton project (1035ha – of which 784ha in WL); Cottam (1270ha) and Gate Burton (684ha) amounts to approximately 3000ha of land. The LVIA needs to pick up the sequential effect on more transient receptors – those that are travelling through the District, be it by car, bicycle, walking / hiking, and even the train. For instance, those travelling along the A1500 (Tillbridge Lane) will be sensitive to, and experience both this and the other projects during their journey, which may be over many kilometres.

## **Chapter 9 – Ecology and Biodiversity**

We are encouraged that consultation has taken place with LWT and Parish Councils (table 9.1).

The presence of badgers (9.4.51) are noted. As this is desk top based, the PEIR is not clear as to whether further survey work will take place – and how the development will then take account of badger presence. Table 9.2 is not clear – they are not considered an important ecological Feature, “but included in impact assessment for legal reasons”. Are they to be distinguished from the other identified IEF?

It is noted that mitigation measures, and enhancement opportunities are considered for various habitats and species. It is also recognised that a detailed Biodiversity Net Gain assessment will be carried out (paragraph 9.9.1) although it cannot be carried out at this time due to incomplete survey data and the preliminary nature of the scheme. It is encouraging that *“it is anticipated that a significant net gain for area-based, linear and water habitats is possible as a result of the scheme.”*

Paragraph 5.3.15 of NPS EN-1 does state that *“When considering proposals, the [decision-maker] should maximise such opportunities in and around developments, using requirements or planning obligations where appropriate.”* The draft replacement EN-1 goes further (paragraph 5.4.22) when stating *“The Secretary of State should consider what appropriate requirements should be attached to any consent and/or in any planning obligations entered into, in order to ensure that any mitigation or biodiversity net gain measures, if offered, are delivered and maintained. Any habitat creation or enhancement delivered for biodiversity net gain should generally be maintained for a minimum period of 30 years.”*

The intention to undertake a detailed BNG assessment is welcomed, and should set out the long term management of the site. Whilst 30 years is noted in policy, the development itself is anticipated to have an operational life of 40yrs (paragraph 4.1.12) and at paragraph 4.5.13 the PEIR states that *“It is anticipated that some of the areas of habitat and biodiversity mitigation and enhancement will potentially be left in situ given that they could contain protected species. The need for any relevant protected species licenses will be considered at that time if reinstatement activities are likely to have an impact.”* It is considered that chapter 9 should address this.

## **Chapter 10 – Hydrology, Flood Risk and Drainage**

10.2.18 – The West Lindsey Local Plan (First Review) was superseded in 2017 by the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. It is not part of the Development Plan and does not require to be referenced.

It is noted that a desktop analysis has taken place (10.3.2), but that a detailed Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Strategy are currently being undertaken and not yet available (10.3.3).

It is however identified that parts of Cottam 1 are in FZ2 and FZ3; the eastern edge of Cottam 2 is in FZ3; and Cottam 3 is wholly within FZ1. It is noted that the PEIR does consider the increase in permanent impermeable area to have a medium adverse magnitude of effect to people and property and the significance of effect is Major Adverse (10.5.19).

It is noted that mitigation will be required to reduce the effect to negligible (10.5.34). The PEIR states that *“it is proposed to maintain the predevelopment surface water regime post development”* (10.8.10) and that *“The arrangements for adoption should be investigated at an early stage and proposals agreed acceptable by the LPA.”* We will therefore await further details – and whether this would be a matter for the Local Planning Authority – or Lead Local Flood Authority.

## **Chapter 11 – Ground Conditions and Contamination**

The preliminary findings are noted and that *“The following potential contaminant linkages were assessed and the PRAs indicate that the risk is generally classified as Moderate to Minor across Cottam 1, 2 and 3”* and that with mitigation *“the potential effects of contamination or risk of contamination will be negligible and not significant.”*

## **Chapter 12 – Minerals**

It is noted that Cottam 1 (50ha), Cottam 2 (25ha) and less than 1.5ha of Cottam 3 are identified as falling within Sand and Gravel Mineral Safeguarding areas. The Preliminary findings conclude a “minor” magnitude of impact upon Cottam 1 & 2, and “moderate/minor” for Cottam 3 and the route corridor, although it is considered mitigation is only necessary for the route corridors.

We will defer to the advice of Lincolnshire County Council, as the Minerals Planning Authority, in this regard.

## **Chapter 13 – Cultural Heritage**

13.4.1 – The ES will need to set out how non-designated heritage assets have been identified i.e. through the Historic Environment Register and ‘local listing’. Whilst 1km is likely to be reasonable in most cases – “setting” is “the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. The extent to which the development may affect the setting of the asset will depend upon the asset itself.

13.4.6 – we are encouraged to note that the study area has been extended to up to 5km for designated assets ‘of the highest significance’. This will then be subject to a ‘sifting’

exercise. The Local Planning authority wishes to be kept informed of this exercise and be given the opportunity to comment.

13.4.8 – it is noted that there are 158 GII listed buildings within the 5km zone and that *“proposed that the assessment of Listed Buildings within 2km of the Cottam Sites previously included in the Scoping Report is built upon as part of the further assessment, bolstered by ‘ground-truthing’ visits where feasible. The resultant evidence base will be agreed with the local authority, if possible, prior to the ‘scoping out’ of assets where appropriate.”* We will wish to be kept informed and consulted upon any intentions to “scope out” designated heritage assets, after these assessments have taken place.

Table 13.6 – As a designated heritage asset – Grade II Listed Buildings should also be valued as “high”. This is consistent with paragraph 5.8.14 of EN-1 which states that *“Loss [of significance] affecting any designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.”*

13.6.1 It is acknowledged that baseline and further baseline data is to be completed, and that a “full impact assessment” has yet to be undertaken and will be included in the ES once all of the results have further evaluation have been completed. West Lindsey DC will wish to be consulted and kept informed, ahead of its inclusion within the ES.

13.7.1 – it is noted that cumulative impacts will be considered, particularly in regards to views from the Lincoln Edge escarpment.

## **Chapter 14 – Transport and Access**

The preliminary findings, and expected trip generation figures are noted. It is noted that a minor adverse effect on pedestrian amenity is expected, to be managed through a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP).

## **Chapter 15 – Noise and Vibration**

It is recognised that baseline noise surveys have been undertaken, and discussed with Council Officers. Operational Noise Assessments are to be undertaken and included in the ES.

## **Chapter 16 – Glint and Glare**

It is noted that some assumptions are based around “Pager Power’s [consultant] experience” (16.4.33; 16.4.35) – the ES should be clear in setting out how these assumptions have been reached. At 16.4.33 it dismisses an assessment of users on the PRow due to factors such as *“The typical density of pedestrians on a PRow is low in a rural environment”*.

However, the PEIR recognises PRow users as a sensitive visual receptor in Chapter 8. They are also recognised as a factor for local tourism and recreation – *“The local network of Public Rights of Way is important to the local population and is thus of a medium sensitivity to [tourism and recreation] impacts”* (18.4.16). Chapter 16 should therefore be clear as to whether PRow users are likely to be affected by glint and glare, and set out that assessment accordingly.

It is noted that the scheme is predicted to have a ‘moderate’ significance of effect that will require mitigation.

## **Chapter 17 – Air Quality**

It is recognised that fire risk has been considered, with mitigation through an “Outline Battery Fire Management Plan” proposed. The PEIR recognises that *“There is a potential fire risk associated with certain types of batteries such as lithium ion.”* As the extent of battery storage area in Cottam 1 is yet to be established, chapter 17 of the ES should be based on a worst case scenario.

It is noted that the Preliminary assessment finds a medium risk for ecology through dust soiling and that mitigation will therefore be required.

## **Chapter 18 – Socio Economics, Agriculture, Tourism and Recreation**

It is noted that the PEIR considers (18.3.16) that the [tourism and recreation] impacts *“are likely to be felt at a local level only as a result of direct visual impacts, or indirectly as a result of changes to their desirability for tourism and recreational use”*.

However, the scale of development is such (1270ha), and taken in combination with the West Burton (1035ha) and Gate Burton projects (684ha) that around 3000ha of arable land in rural Lincolnshire would be transformed to solar project areas. Consequently the ES cannot simply consider the direct impacts at a local level, but must take into consideration the likely direct and indirect impacts upon tourism and recreation at a higher level. As the PEIR acknowledges *“The land does however play a substantive role in providing a landscape context to recreational use of waterways and walking and cycling routes.”*

How will the development, alone and in combination with other projects, affect visitor perceptions of rural Lincolnshire? Will it affect the desirability of West Lindsey as a place to visit? How will it affect visitor numbers?

The development will result in the loss of over 1270ha of agricultural land – of which, 105.4ha is proposed on best and most versatile land (appendix 3.1).

In combination with the West Burton Solar Project (1035ha) and Gate Burton (684ha) – it will cumulatively amount to over 3000ha of Lincolnshire (& Nottinghamshire) agricultural land.

The farming circumstances (18.4.49) should therefore set out the agri-economic impacts of development. The baseline study should set out the current agricultural use of the sites, on a seasonal basis. What is being produced on site? What is its contribution towards food supplies and other sectors? How many are directly and indirectly employed that will be affected by the development and at what socio-economic impact?

Whilst it is noted that this loss may be “temporary” (paragraph 18.5.15) – the development is expected to operate for around 40 years (18.5.20). Taking into account commissioning and decommissioning phases including any necessary site restoration, the impact will be even longer. This is a significant part of a lifetime and within the economic cycle.

These impacts must be fully assessed within the ES.

## **Chapter 19 – Waste**

The preliminary findings are noted.

However, it is noted that at the decommissioning stage, it is estimated that significant volumes of waste will be generated. The PEIR states that *“Standard good practice for waste management will be implemented during decommissioning”*. It is appreciated that decommissioning is expected to take place some 40 years after operations commence – however, it would be relevant to set out principles at this stage. It is noted that further details will be provided with the ES.

## **Chapter 20 – Other Matters**

It is noted that *“The risk zones for fires and explosions are to be fully defined in the ES to determine the number of residential dwellings, and number of publicly accessible highways or rights of way that are of high or medium sensitivity to impacts from the Scheme.”*

It is asked that the above comments be taken into consideration as you continue to develop the ES and prepare your submission for the DCO. We would wish ongoing dialogue to continue – particularly in regard to some of the outstanding matters as cited above.

Yours sincerely,

Russell Clarkson BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI  
On behalf of West Lindsey District Council

Yours faithfully

Russell Clarkson  
On behalf of West Lindsey District Council

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