



Preliminary Meeting Note

Application:	Cottam Solar Project
Reference:	EN010133
Time and date:	5 September 2023 at 10:00am
Venue:	West Hall, EPIC Centre, Lincolnshire Showground, Grange-de-Lings, Lincoln and Microsoft Teams (Blended)

This meeting note is not a full transcript of the Preliminary Meeting. It is a summary of the key points discussed.

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/east-midlands/cottam-solar-project/>

A transcript and video recording of this Preliminary Meeting is available on the National Infrastructure Planning website and can be accessed [here](#).

1. Welcome and Introduction

Rory Cridland welcomed those present and introduced himself as panel lead. Darren Hendley introduced himself as the other member of the panel. Rory Cridland confirmed that together they constituted the Examining Authority (ExA) for the Cottam Solar Project application.

The ExA explained that it would be examining the application made by Cottam Solar Project Limited ('the Applicant') before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State (SoS). It also confirmed that it was the SoS who will decide whether an Order granting Development Consent for the proposed project, which is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), should be made.

The ExA explained the purpose of the Preliminary Meeting (PM) and noted that the Examination will commence after the PM closes. Following the explanation of the purpose of the PM, the ExA asked certain parties to introduce themselves and reminded parties that it was important that all contributions were made using a microphone so that they were captured for the formal record.

The ExA confirmed that all documents and submissions received and accepted during the Examination will be published on the project-specific page of the National Infrastructure Planning website.

2. The Examining Authority's remarks about the Examination process, including consideration of the interrelationship of Cottam Solar Project with other projects

The ExA briefly explained the examination process under the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008). Further information can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's [Advice Note 8.4](#).

It was explained that the purpose of the Examination is to enable the ExA to make a recommendation to the SoS as to whether this project should receive consent in the form of a Development Consent Order under the PA2008.

Furthermore, it was explained that this is a process in which the ExA takes the lead in establishing what is important and relevant to the decision that the SoS needs to take. Consequently, the ExA will be looking for evidence of what is important and relevant, and testing the evidence put forward to see how robust it is in the context of relevant matters.

The ExA made it clear that while there is provision for holding certain types of Hearing, the Examination is predominantly a written process.

Information on timing of Open Floor Hearing 1 and Issue Specific Hearing 1 on the Draft Development Consent Order was provided by the ExA.

The ExA then outlined the elements of the Examination Process:

Local Impact Reports (LIR's)

The ExA explained that the LIR was a document provided by a Local Authority setting out its views on the application. It referred to the guidance provided by the Planning Inspectorate for Authorities to start preparing their report as soon as the application was accepted.

Statements of Common Ground (SoCG)

The ExA drew attention to the request in Annex H of the Rule 6 documentation for the preparation of SoCG between the Applicant and various parties, as well as providing information on the purpose and use of SoCG within the Examination.

Written Representations

The ExA explained that the purpose of a Written Representation was a further opportunity for Interested Parties to make a submission to the Examination. It noted that the deadline set for that is Tuesday 17 October 2023.

ExA Written Questions

The ExA explained its approach to Written Questions.

Hearings

Hearings will build on the foundations of the various documents and comments that the ExA had outlined. Parties were advised to make their submissions in writing, rather than

assume that a Hearing will be held. It may be that a Hearing on an issue is not held, or it might not address the questions that parties want to ask or answer.

Site Inspections

The ExA informed parties that an unaccompanied site inspection took place over 2 days in March. This was based on viewpoints featured in the Environmental Statement (ES) and on public land in the vicinity of the development. A record of these inspections has been published on the project webpage.

The ExA explained it intends to undertake further inspections of viewpoints listed in the ES and believes that these can be carried out unaccompanied over the next few months. It is not anticipated that there will be a need for accompanied site inspections at locations visited on an unaccompanied basis.

Making effective submissions

The ExA provided some guidance to parties on making effective submissions.

3. Oral Representations on the Examination Process

Conjoining Hearings and Examinations

The ExA stated that it had received representations on conjoining hearings and Examination processes for the Cottam Solar Project and other nearby projects. It was confirmed that it was not possible to do this and the ExA outlined the responsibilities of this ExA and those of other Examining Authorities in respect to its own and other applications being examined. The resource challenges were recognised by the ExA and it was made clear that the timetable had been developed with this in mind.

Hearings

The ExA confirmed that it had received a written submission from 7000 Acres for an Open Floor Hearing (OFH) to be held during the evening. The ExA confirmed there is an opportunity at Deadline 1 for Interested Parties to make requests to attend an Open Floor Hearing (OFH) in December and that it would consider whether to hold an evening hearing at that time.

7000 Acres confirmed an OFH hearing in the evening would be appreciated.

Site Inspections

The ExA confirmed it had received a number of suggestions of other locations to visit and will conduct the visits on an unaccompanied basis. Where public access is not possible, it will seek to visit these on an access required basis. The ExA confirmed there are no plans to undertake an accompanied site inspection at present.

Local Impact Reports (LIR's)

The ExA confirmed it had not received any written submissions on LIR's and invited any oral submissions. During this part of the agenda, an Interested Party queried whether the policy context for the Cottam Solar Project was the same as that for the Gate Burton Solar Energy Park. It was explained by the ExA that it was likely that both applications

would be considered under the same national policy context but that this would be explored further in the examination.

Lincolnshire County Council provided further comments on its written submissions made at Procedural Deadline A. The main concerns were that local communities wishing to participate in this Examination and other examinations should be able to do so in as an effective and simple way as possible and noted there are cumulative effects arising from a number of DCO applications in the Lincolnshire area. It requested that cumulative effects were considered thoroughly and suggested a solution would be to hold link sessions with other examinations to look at this cumulative effect.

The ExA confirmed it encouraged public participation and was aware of the issues that arose in running numerous examinations in the same area with similar timelines. However, it explained that it was unable to examine the applications together but noted the suggestion of hosting hearings in similar locations on the same day.

7000 Acres agreed with the points raised by Lincolnshire County Council. It requested the ExA considers holding an issue specific hearing on Cumulative effects. West Lindsey District Council also confirmed it had concerns about the cumulative effects of this project and others.

The ExA confirmed it does intend to consider cumulative effects as part of the Examination.

Statements of Common Ground (SoCG)

The ExA confirmed it had not received any written submissions on SoCG and invited any oral submissions.

The Applicant noted that Annex H of the Rule 6 letter included a request for a SoCG with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The Applicant confirmed the HSE did not submit its Relevant Representation directly to the Planning Inspectorate and only to the Applicant but that this had since been sent to the Planning Inspectorate. The representation confirmed that the HSE had no comments to make. Based on this the Applicant suggested the SoCG may not be of assistance to the Examination.

Written Representations

The ExA confirmed it had not received any written submissions on its approach to Written Representations and requested any oral submissions. No oral submissions were made.

ExA Written Questions

The ExA confirmed responses to its first round of written questions should be submitted at Deadline 2 by 21 November 2023.

The ExA confirmed it had not received any written submissions and invited any oral submissions.

No comments were made by any of the parties in attendance on the ExA's Written Questions.

4. Examining Authority's remarks about the draft Examination Timetable

The ExA explained that the timetable covers a range of possibilities and that not all the events timetabled may be necessary. It was made clear that once the Examination had closed the ExA cannot take any further submissions into account. Any submissions made after the Examination has closed will be forwarded to the Secretary of State to deal with and the ExA will not see them when writing their report. Therefore, it was made clear that if parties want to send in anything for the ExA to consider then they were strongly encouraged to do so as soon as possible.

It was made clear by the ExA that all deadlines are at 23.59 on the relevant date. The ExA also made it clear that the timetable may be subject to amendment during the Examination.

The ExA provided an overview of the items included within the draft timetable. The ExA noted representations already received in writing regarding the draft Examination Timetable contained in [Annex E](#) of the Rule 6 letter.

5. Oral Representations on the Draft Examination Timetable

The Applicant referred to its response in Procedural Deadline A which noted the limited availability of the Lincolnshire Showground venue for the week commencing 4th December and confirmed the venue is only available for 7th and 8th December for in-person hearings. Their preference would be for certain hearings to be prioritised such as an Open Floor Hearing in the evening and a Compulsory Acquisition Hearing. It suggested other hearings could be held virtually during the same week. The Applicant confirmed it had investigated alternative venues.

West Lindsey District Council requested that all hearings are held in-person rather than virtual so the public can engage in the hearings. 7000 Acres agreed and requested all hearings are held in person. Lincolnshire County Council agreed and requested all hearings are held in-person, especially discussions on environmental matters.

The Applicant noted the requests for in-person hearings and suggested that the hearings are held in the centre of Lincoln where there is greater availability of venues. 7000 Acres questioned the hearings being held in this location suggesting that hearings should be held in the local area.

Lincolnshire County Council commented on resource issues that may result for the delivery of LIRs in line with the deadlines for this Examination and other projects with similar examination timetables. It requested the ExA take this into consideration with deadline dates and suggested an extension to dates noted in the draft timetable.

The ExA noted that the start of the Examination had already been delayed and that it would only extend deadlines in exceptional circumstances. Lincolnshire County Council were strongly encouraged to submit its LIR on time.

West Lindsey District Council commented on the draft examination timetables for West Burton Solar Project and Cottam Solar Project which run in parallel. It requested the ExA consider changes to hearing dates as deadlines are close and will cause resourcing issues and the ability to submit written representations.

The ExA noted that the Preliminary Meeting for the West Burton Solar Project was due to take place later in the week and that it would attempt to avoid clashes with that Examination so far as possible.

7000 Acres agreed with the comments from Lincolnshire County Council and West Lindsey District Council comments on timetabling issues. It requested the ExA exercise its discretion on late submissions.

The ExA explained that while it would exercise its discretion in relation to late submissions, it would do so only in exceptional circumstances.

All comments received were duly noted by the ExA and will be considered by the ExA when finalizing the Examination Timetable.

6. Any other matters

An Interested Party commented on the relationships between Cottam Solar Project and the other solar projects listed on the National Infrastructure Planning Website and requested the interrelationship between these projects was considered in the Examination. It was suggested that the list appeared to be incomplete. The ExA again confirmed that it was their intention that the interrelationships between the projects and their cumulative effects will be examined.

7000 acres raised a query over the Early Adopters Programme and its potential to impact this Examination. The ExA confirmed that this was unlikely to impact on the Examination of the Cottam Solar Project.

Close

The Preliminary Meeting closed at 11:35am.