Cottam Solar Project

Written Representation

EN-010133

West Lindsey District Council - 20037171

October 2023

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1. This document forms the Written Representation (WR) of West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) to the examination of the Cottam Solar Project Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) application.

1.2. This written representation is based on the Council's current understanding of the information comprised in the DCO application for the Scheme at the time of writing. The Council's position on individual topics may therefore change and/or be supplemented as the Examination progresses particularly if there is meaningful engagement with the Applicant on key topics of concern.

Purpose and scope of the Written Representation

1.3. This WR set out WLDC's case in terms of the merits of the Cottam Solar Project. It sets out the statutory decision making requirements, and the relevant planning policy framework upon which the application is to be assessed to determine whether development consent should be granted under the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008).

1.4. This WR focusses on the key matters of concern for WLDC and provides an assessment of the overall project against policy, balancing its benefits and disbenefits to reach an overall conclusion about the acceptability of the application.

Relationship with the Local Impact Report

1.5. WLDC have submitted a Local Impact Report (LIR) under the provision of section 60 of the PA2008, in accordance with Advice Note 1, into the examination process alongside this WR at Deadline 1 of the examination in accordance with the Examining Authority's (ExA) timetable.

1.6. The purpose of the LIR is to set out WLDC's view on the local impacts of the project. Following an assessment of the application documents, the LIR identifies these key impacts and provides reasoning as to why they have been identified. The LIR does not calibrate any weighting to the impacts identified, and nor does it carry out an assessment against policy with a 'planning balance' exercise to reach a conclusion on the overall acceptability of the Cottam Solar Project application.

1.7. This WR is therefore to be read alongside the LIR as a document that goes beyond solely identifying impacts serves as an assessment of the merits of the application against policy as required by the PA2008.

2. West Lindsey District - Local Context

Central Lincolnshire and the West Lindsey district

2.1. West Lindsey is a district council located in Central Lincolnshire, a collective area that encompasses the City of Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey. The West Lindsey district covers an area of over 1,150km^2 and is located within Lincolnshire County Council who are the county council and are also impacted by the proposed solar farms.

2.2. Central Lincolnshire is characterised by a population that lives in a range of settlements that vary in size and character. Lincoln is the largest settlement with a population of approximately 110,000 living in the principle urban area. Lincoln acts as a service centre over a wide geographical area, with villages sourcing most services and employment requirements in the city, effectively extending its catchment population to around 165,000.

2.3. West Lindsey borders North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire to the north; East Lindsey in the east; North Kesteven and the city of Lincoln in the south. The River Trent forms a natural boundary to the west where the district meets Bassetlaw District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council, both of which are affected by the proposed Cottam solar farm and the grid connection.

2.4. The West Lindsey district hosts main towns such as Gainsborough, Caistor and Market Rasen, which serve the northern and southern parts of the wider Central Lincolnshire area. Gainsborough experienced significant growth during the 19th century as an industrial and engineering centre, with a shift of focus to manufacturing in the 20th century. It now provides a thriving manufacturing/engineering sector with national and international companies headquartered in the town.

2.5. WLDC is predominantly rural and interspersed with settlements across the area. The district provides an attractive setting for its three market towns of Caistor, Gainsborough and Market Rasen. The district is the 13th most sparsely populated area in England with a population of 95,153 and a density of 82 people per km^2 based on 2021 census data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS). The population has increased by 6% since the last census in 2011. Over 23% of the population of West Lindsey in the census are over the retirement age compared to 19% in the rest of the United Kingdom

2.6. The remainder of Central Lincolnshire and the West Lindsey district is predominantly rural, characterised by a settlement pattern of villages as well as the smaller towns of Market Rasen and Caistor. As set out above, the average population density is amongst the lowest in lowland England, with the majority of settlements not exceeding a few hundred people.

2.7. Collectively, the rural area nonetheless accounts for over half of Central Lincolnshire's population. Functionally, the rural villages typically operate as clusters that share key services, with larger villages acting as local service centres upon which communities rely for basic facilities and as social hubs.

2.8. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has a strong presence in the West Lindsey District and the wider Central Lincolnshire area. Active Royal Air Force (RAF) bases at Waddington, Cranwell and Digby make a significant contribution to the area's demographic and economic make up. Former bases have been utilised to deliver new housing and employment development. Central Lincolnshire is home to the Red Arrows and its RAF heritage (including Lincolnshire's historic role as the centre of Bomber Command and the neighbouring base for the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight in East Lindsey) support the expansion for the area's existing visitor economy.

Landscape character

2.9. Central Lincolnshire's natural environment is varied and contrasting, characterised by gentle chalk and limestone uplands with low lying fens and fenland. The Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) falls partly in Central Lincolnshire, with its distinctive landscape of rolling hills and nestling villages.

2.10. The wider rural landscape of Central Lincolnshire comprises a sweeping character with big skies, and is a highly valued asset, making a significant contribution to local distinctiveness and attractiveness.

2.11. The West Lindsey landscape is characterised by a consistent north-south grain, which forms one of its most striking characteristics. The broad valleys of the Trent and the Ancholme/Barlings Eua are subdivided by a narrow Jurassic limestones ridge, known locally as the 'Cliff'. The 'Cliff' is relatively narrow (circa. 5km) and runs the full length of Central Lincolnshire, forming a unifying topographic feature and, as a key factor in the origins and historic development of Lincoln, makes a strong contribution to its present quality and character. The 'Cliff; is a significant local feature, with a west facing scarp and a shallow eastern dip slope that falls towards the Lincoln Clay Vale.

2.12. Outside of the urban areas, land use in Central Lincolnshire and West Lindsey in particular is predominantly agricultural with intensive arable crops dominating. Soils are typically fertile and of high quality for agriculture.

2.13. West Lindsey and the wider Central Lincolnshire area hosts a wide range of natural habitats, including wetland, woodland, calcareous grassland and remnants of heathland fen, which together provide ecological networks and nodes of sufficient scale to support wildlife adaptation and environmental resilience to climate change.

2.14. Biodiversity in the area is experiencing pressure from factors including climate change, habitat fragmentation, development and large scale intensive agriculture. Major landscape-scale initiation are proposed to restore and enhance the areas ecological networks and corridors.

Socio-Economic

2.15. As set out in the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, which is the Local Plan adopted by West Lindsey, Central Lincolnshire is located within the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) area and represents roughly 30% of the GLLEP area's population, employment and business base. The draft Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) notes that Greater Lincolnshire has an economy of £20.7bn with an ambition to grow the Gross Value Added (GVA) by £3.2bn by 2030. The GLLEP area boasts a mix of traditional manufacturing, a comprehensive agri-food sector, energy and services, and is strong in health and care and the visitor economy. In these sectors and others the area benefits from a large number of small businesses – a distinctive feature of the economy.

2.16. The GLLEP's priority sectors include; agri-foods, energy and water, health and care, visitor economy and ports and logistics, but this should not diminish the important roles of other sectors, including manufacturing and engineering, to the local economy. The Central Lincolnshire Authorities will play a key role in the delivery of the vision for most of these sectors.

2.17. The Economic Needs Assessment (ENA) (2020) projects the economic growth and job growth to 2040, which in turn was influenced by the LIS and other work being produced by the GLLEP. The ENA highlights that there has been strong growth in recent years, outstripping anticipated growth, and projects forward a growth of approximately 992 jobs per year.

Environment

2.18. The district is characterised by large scale arable farmland and also hosts areas of valuable heathland, grassland, wetland and woodland interests. The most important grassland habitats are found on the chalk escarpment with a high concentration of acid grassland.

2.19. Scotton Common in the north west corner of the district support rare plant and animal communities akin to the Brecklands, of exceptional quality and is the best area of heathland in Lincolnshire.

2.20. To the south and eastern fringes of Gainsborough there lies areas of wet meadow providing habitat for breeding waders such as curlew and redshank. A small meadow in the centre of the Marsh is designated as an SSSI with valuable wet meadow flora.

2.21. Water is an important aspect of Central Lincolnshire's environment. The area has a long history of land drainage and flood management, and significant areas of low-lying land are maintained for agriculture by pumped drainage. River flooding is closely controlled through embankments and washlands as part of wider management plans for the main river catchments. Conversely, Lincolnshire is already experiencing pressure on its water resources from increasing trends in consumer and commercial demand, coupled with predicted increases in the frequency and severity of drought due to climate change. Major new infrastructure to supply the Lincoln area with water abstracted from the Trent was completed in July 2014.

2.22. Due to its topographical characteristics, the area has a history of land drainage and flood management, and significant areas of low-lying land are maintained for agriculture by pumped drainage. River flooding is closely controlled through embankments and washlands as part of wider management plans for the main river catchments.

The site and surrounding area

2.23. The majority of the proposed Cottam Energy Project (hereafter referred to as 'the Scheme') is located within West Lindsey District Council (WLDC).

2.24. The area within which the scheme is located is characterised by a rural setting surrounded by agricultural land, with scattered villages and farmsteads located across the landscape.

2.25. The main highways of the A1500, A632, B1205 and the A15 are all within the scheme's Order Limits or nearby.

2.26. The Site comprises approximately 824 hectares (ha) of land for solar PV, battery storage, a grid connection and associated infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity measures.

2.27. The land within the site Order Limits mainly consists of agricultural fields interspersed with individual trees, woodlands, hedgerows, linear tree belts, farm access tracks, and local transport roads.

2.28. The land is predominantly Grade 3b (moderate quality agricultural land) with some 3a (good quality agricultural land). The hedgerows within the Order Limits are predominantly low and intermittent. The arable fields are large and generally of regular shape. Woodland is more prevalent in the north of the Solar and Energy Storage Park.

2.29. Due to the design of the project, covering a significant area of the district, many villages will be affected through construction and/or operational impacts. The list below provides a summary of some of the villages that will experience impacts from the project:

Grid corridor:

- Marton – (including cumulative impacts with other projects).

Cottam 1 section:

- Thorpe le Fallows;
- Sturton by Stow;
- Stow;
- Normandy by Stow;
- Willingham by Stow;
- Aisthorpe;
- Brattleby;
- Cammeringham;
- Ingam;
- Fillingham;
- Scampton;
- and Glentworth.

Cottam 1 to 2 sections - cable corridor:

- Heapham;
- Sturgate; and
- Springthorpe.

Cottam 2 section:

- Hemswell;
- Willoughton;
- Yawthorpe;
- Corringham; and
- Aisby.

Cottam sections 2 to 3 cable corridor

- Aisby

Cottam 3 section

- Blyborough;
- Grayingham,
- Pilham;
- Blyton; and
- Northorpe.

2.30. The Scheme will connect to the National Grid at Cottam Power Station. Cottam Power Station was a coal fired power station on a site extending over 250 hectares to the west of the River Trent at Cottam, near Retford.

2.31. The Grid Connection Corridor passes from the Solar and Energy Storage Park to Cottam Power Station through largely agricultural land, to the immediate south and east of Marton, 400m to the north of Brampton in Lincolnshire, then 50m to the north of Cottam and 300m east of Rampton to connect with Cottam Power Station in Nottinghamshire.

Key challenges

2.32. West Lindsey District and the wider Central Lincolnshire area is facing a range of challenges. These include the requirement to improve social and economic conditions, including health, housing, jobs and the range and quality of facilities, whilst also ensuring

that the environment is improved and that growth does not erode the area's environmental and heritage assets, or increase pressure on natural resources.

3. The scheme

3.1. The description of the scheme is set out in Chapter 3 of the Environmental Statement (ES) (Doc. Ref. APP/C6.2.3.) and chapter 2 of the supporting Planning Statement (Doc. Ref. APP/C7.5). A summary of the scheme based upon these documents is set out below.

3.2. The land within the scheme DCO Order Limits comprises 4 separate sites, referred to as Cottam 1, 2 3a and 3b. The applicant refers to the as the 'Sites' reflecting their spatial separation and distinction from each other. The scheme DCO Order Limits also includes land required for the grid connection; referred to as the 'Cable Route Corridor'.

3.3. The scheme comprises the following core elements:

- The four Solar Array Sites;
- The Cable Route Corridor; and
- Associated Accesses.

3.4. The scheme is located within a 19km radius of the Point of Connection at Cottam Power Station. The majority of the scheme is located within the West Lindsey District and Lincolnshire County Council. The solar array sites are all situated within the West Lindsey District. The Cable Route Corridor is part located within Bassetlaw District council to the point it connects at Cottam Power Station.

3.5. The total extent of the Order Limits is 1451.23ha.

The four Solar Array Sites

Cottam 1

3.6. Cottam 1 surrounds the hamlet of Coates as a discontinuous circular arrangement, which is located within the parishes of Cammeringham, Fillingham, Stow, Sturton-by-Stow, Thorpe in the Fallows and Willingham. The area totals 812.1ha.

3.7. The site consists of agricultural fields used for arable crops or animal grazing, with some smaller areas comprising trees, riverbanks and grassland. The site is located within the River Till plain and consequently has a flat topography.

3.8. The site is interspersed with existing farmsteads and other landholding, including farm access tracks and field accesses.

3.9. The site is crossed by several Public Rights of Way, including local roads. Overhead lines operated by the local Distribution Network Operator cross parts of the site.

Cottam 2

3.10. Cottam 2 is located to the north of Cottam 1 and is located to the east of Corringham. The site area is 132.66ha with the land take area upon which solar panels, substation and associated infrastructure being 109.7ha.

3.11. The land use at Cottam 2 is predominantly agricultural fields used for productive arable crops, and small areas of agriculture related storage, grasslands and ponds.

3.12. The topography at Cottam 2 is predominantly flat, large open fields divided by hedgerows.

3.13. Cottam 2 does not have any Public Rights of Way crossing the site.

Cottam 3a

3.14. Cottam 3a is located to the north of Cottam 2 and Cottam 3b, to the north east of Blyton. The size of the area covered is 169.49ha, with the area containing solar panels, substation

and associated infrastructure totalling 140ha. The remaining land within he Order Limits will be used for landscape and ecological mitigation.

3.15. The land comprises predominantly agricultural fields used for arable farming. Part of the site also comprises the former airfield, which includes areas of hardstanding currently used for material storage. Overhead electricity transmission lines cross parts of the site.

3.16. The topography of the area is flat, with large fields bounded by hedgerows and ditches. The site has existing field accesses and utilises the existing Blyton Race Track access.

Cottam 3b

3.17. Cottam 3b is located to the north of Cottam 2 and to the east of Pilham, comprises an area of 74.27ha. The area containing solar panels, substation and associated infrastructure comprises 63.1ha, with the remaining land being used for landscape and ecological mitigation.

3.18. The site is wholly agricultural land currently used for arable farming. The topography is flat with hedgerow field boundaries. The site is served by existing field accesses and is crossed by a Public Right of Way. The northern boundary is adjacent to the Brigg Branch of the Sheffield to Lincoln railway line.

Cable route corridor

3.19. The sites are all connected to each other through to a single Point of Connection at Cottam Power Station. The inter-connecting cables comprise approximately 27.5km of high voltage cable circuits. The project 400kv circuit is located within Cottam 1.

3.20. The cable route corridor crosses predominantly agricultural land. Horizontal directional drilling will be required to cross underneath railway lines, the River Till and the River Trent.

3.21. The cable route corridor overlaps the corridor that is to be used for the cable connections associated with the Gate Burton, West Burton and Tillbridge solar farm projects.

4. Decision Making and Policy Framework

Legislation

4.1. WLDC recognises the application as one made under the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) for a Development Consent Order (DCO) for development that falls within the definition of energy generating stations set out in section 15 of the PA2008.

4.2. The proposed development comprises the construction, operation and decommissioning of solar arrays for the generation of electricity, also including a Battery and Energy Storage System (BESS), the import/export connection to the National grid and onsite converter stations.

4.3. The PA2008 provides for two different decision making procedures for NSIP applications;

i) Sec. 104 - where a relevant National Policy Statement (NPS) has been designated and has effect; and

ii) Sec.105 – where there is no designated NPS or there is a designated NPS but which does not have effect.

4.4. The application will be determined under section 105 of PA2008 due to electricity generation by solar generating stations being excluded from the scope of NPS' EN-1 and EN-3. Energy storage infrastructure also does not fall within the scope of NPS' EN-1 and EN-3. There is therefore no designated NPS that has effect in relation to the proposed development.

4.5. Section 105 of the PA2008 states that in determining the proposed development, the decision maker must have regard to:

a. Any local impact report (within the meaning given by section 60(3)) submitted to the Secretary of State before the deadline specified in a notice under section 60(2);

b. Any matters prescribed in relation to development of the description to which the application relates, and

c. Any other matters which the Secretary of State (SoS) thinks are both important and relevant to the SoS's decision.

Local Impact Report

4.6. WLDC have submitted a Local Impact Report (LIR) relating to the to the Cottam Solar Project alongside this Written Representation (Deadline 1 – 17/10/2023). The LIR sets out what WLDC consider to be the key impacts of the scheme that should be given due consideration in the determination of the DCO application as being 'important and relevant' factors.

4.7. The content of the LIR is not repeated in this WR. As a summary, the key impacts identified are summarised as follows:

Landscape and visual

- The Applicant assesses that there will be a negligible or beneficial cumulative impact to the landscape. This assessment is based on Cottam being constructed and in operation alongside the Gate Burton, Tillbridge and West Burton solar schemes mitigation during operation. However, at paragraph 18.7.112 of the Socio-economic chapters (Doc. Ref. EN010133/APP/C6.2.18) states that the Scheme will '*have a long-term impact on the landscape character of some tourism and recreation receptors that are reliant on the landscape context for their value, such as viewpoints, landmarks, and cultural heritage assets*'. These two assessments appear to be in conflict.
- In addition to the above, the Gate Burton scheme has assessed a cumulative moderate adverse impact based on the same schemes. The design of the Scheme

relies on a ‘network of sites’ which will blot the landscape for decades and does not follow a contiguous site area. This does not demonstrate the contiguous design which has been an objective for the Gate Burton scheme.

- The conclusion provided on the impact of the Scheme being cumulative is therefore in conflict with the assessment undertaken by a similar scheme within West Lindsey.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- During construction, the Scheme will result in the loss, degradation and fragmentation of habitats. It will also cause disturbance the flora and fauna of West Lindsey. There is also the potential that the Scheme would introduce invasive species.
- Operational impacts of the Scheme could include light disturbance to bats and birds. There is also the potential that Battery and Energy Storage System (BESS) will generate noise attraction or disturbance.
- Maintenance activities could also have an impact on ecological receptors.

Socio Economics, Tourism and Recreation

- The Applicant recognises that there is a limited accommodation in the Local Impact Area. This will result in an oversubscription during the peak construction months meaning that there will not be enough temporary accommodation. This impact would be amplified if the cumulative schemes were to be constructed at the same time.
- As set out above, the Applicant recognises that during the operational the Scheme will have a long-term impact on the landscape character of some tourism and recreation receptors that are reliant on the landscape context for their value, such as viewpoints, landmarks, and cultural heritage assets. This, along with construction impacts, will also mean reduced spending in the visitor and tourism economy.
- There will be more jobs lost than the 17 reported in the application ES. This figure does not account for wider supply chain job losses that will occur as a consequence of the loss of agricultural land and activity. There is also no cumulative assessment with other projects to identify the likely impact on agricultural employment in the event this application is implemented alongside other solar projects in Lincolnshire and further afield.
- There will also be a loss of agricultural jobs that are unlikely to return after nearly half a century.
- There are concerns regarding the safety of the BESS infrastructure and the potential for fire risk.

Cultural Heritage

- The Scheme will have an impact on several designated and undesignated heritage assets.
- Although some of the affects are considered not significant, there a multiple slight adverse impacts which, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Transport and Access

- Traffic during the construction of the Scheme is a key concern. Whilst this Scheme would likely be acceptable given the contained nature of the site, it is the cumulative effects that would impact West Lindsey if the Gate Burton, Tillbridge and West Burton schemes where all to be in their construction periods at the same time.

- The cumulative construction traffic routes are shown clearly at Appendix C and demonstrate the impact on the West Lindsey with the majority of the district affected.

Hydrology, Flood Risk and Drainage

- There is a potential for several impacts from the Scheme where the cable corridor crosses the River Trent, Seymour Drain, Marton Drain and several unnamed watercourses. The ES states that Grid Connection Corridor will be constructed beneath the channels of the watercourses via HDD techniques. This therefore causes there to be a potential impact to the water quality of the watercourses.

Noise and Vibration

- The Scheme will result in noise and vibration impacts which would be result of from construction activities and construction traffic. The cumulative impacts from construction could be compounded if the other solar schemes of Gate Burton, Tillbridge and West Burton were being constructed at the same time as the

Other Relevant Matters

Policy framework

4.8. The relevant policy framework against which the scheme will be assessed is an 'important and relevant' matter for the Secretary of State to give due consideration in determining the application.

4.9. As stated above, there is no 'relevant' NPS that applies to the proposed development, it is for the decision maker to weight policy accordingly. Under the scope of section 105, WLDC content that the starting approach is to consider each policy document on its merits, with no pre-ordained weighting applied at the outset. In practice, this means that both local and national planning policy should be considered on an equal basis.

4.10. The approach under section 105 should also be that there is no 'presumption in favour' of granting development consent and the need case for the project requires robust justification.

Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (April 2023)

4.11. The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (Local Plan) forms the adopted development plan for the West Lindsey district. The Local Plan was adopted on 24th April 2023 and therefore represents a wholly 'up to date' statutory development plan. WLDC considers that the Local Plan should be considered 'important and relevant' for the purposes of section 105 and should be afforded significant weight in the decision making process as statutory policy.

4.12. The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (CLLP) forms part of the development plan for West Lindsey (replacing the previous Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, adopted in 2017). The Local Plan was adopted on 13th April 2023 and therefore represents an 'up to date' statutory development plan to which significant weight should be afforded in decision making under section 105 of the PA 2008. The key policies relevant to the development are listed below.

- Policy S1: The Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy
- Policy S2: Level and Distribution of Growth
- Policy S10: Supporting a Circular Economy
- Policy S11: Embodied Carbon
- Policy S14: Renewable energy

- Policy S15: Protecting Renewable Energy Infrastructure
- Policy S16: Wider Energy Infrastructure
- Policy S17: Carbon Sinks
- Policy S20: Resilient and Adaptable Design
- Policy S21: Flood Risk and Water Resources
- Policy S28: Spatial Strategy for Employment
- Policy S29: Strategic Employment Sites (SES)
- Policy S31: Important Established Employment Areas (IEEA)
- Policy S43: Sustainable Rural Tourism
- Policy S45: Strategic Infrastructure Requirements
- Policy S47: Accessibility and Transport
- Policy S53: Design and Amenity
- Policy S54: Health and Wellbeing
- Policy S56: Development on Land Affected by Contamination
- Policy S57: The Historic Environment
- Policy S58: Protecting Lincoln, Gainsborough and Sleaford's Setting and Character
- Policy S59: Green and Blue Infrastructure Network
- Policy S60: Protecting Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Policy S61: Biodiversity Opportunity and Delivering Measurable Net Gains
- Policy S62: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of Great Landscape Value
- Policy S66: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
- Policy S67: Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Lincolnshire County Council

4.13. Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) is the county council that governs the non-metropolitan county of Lincolnshire, apart from the areas governed by the unitary authorities of North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire. The council is responsible for public services such as education, transport, highways, heritage, social care, libraries, trading standards, and waste management.

4.14. The council has several policies, strategies and plans which cover planning and the environment. Those which are relevant to the solar DCOs are set out below:

Table 4-1 – Lincolnshire County Council Policy Documents

Policy Document	Summary
Carbon Management Plan (Jan 2019)	The Carbon Management Plan (CMP) sets out their strategy and action plan for continuing to reduce carbon emissions over the next 5 years.
Joint Lincolnshire Flood Risk and Water Management Strategy 2019-2050	LCC is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for the administrative county of Lincolnshire. Because of this role, since 2010 the Council has been responsible for implementing and monitoring a local flood risk management strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to manage the impact of flood risk to people, businesses and the environment across Lincolnshire.

Policy Document	Summary
Green Masterplan	The Green Masterplan is a multi-year programme running until 2050 to ensure that LCC meet the national carbon reduction targets of being net zero by 2050. The Green Masterplan is backed up by an Initial Action Plan and has three guiding principles: Don't waste anything; consider wider opportunities; and take responsibility and pride.
Local Enforcement Plan (Nov 2020)	This plan sets out our priorities for investigation, explains what will be investigated and what will not, and the priorities for responses to complaints and the timescales for these responses. Although this is plan does not refer to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, it is likely to be a material consideration during the construction phase of the development.
Local Transport Plan 5	This plan is designed to cover the short, medium, and longer-term time horizons for transport and highways for the whole of Lincolnshire. The plan does not cover the impacts of construction traffic, but it is likely to be a material consideration in LLC's stance on the DCOs, particularly during construction and how this could impact the plan.
Statement of Community Involvement (Sep 2019)	The statement of community involvement outlines how the council plans to involve and consult the public and stakeholders in relation to the minerals and waste local plan. This may be used to inform LCC's approach to consultation during the DCO examination.
Travel plan guidance (Dec 2021)	This guidance sets out the highways authority requirements for development travel plans and identifies when they are required in support of a planning application.
Minerals and waste local plan	The minerals and waste development scheme identifies the documents that make up the minerals and waste local plan and sets out the timetable for preparation and review. Part of the Grid Connection Corridor is also located within a Mineral Safeguarding Area for Sand and Gravel. However it was confirmed with NCC and LCC that there is not a need for a standalone Mineral Safeguarding Assessment to accompany the DCO Application.

Neighbourhood Plans

4.15. Thirteen Neighbourhood Plans within the WLDC administrative area are either being prepared or adopted in close proximity to the Order Limits of the DCO application and/or are likely to experience impacts from the proposed development.

4.16. The adopted and/or emerging Neighbourhood Plans that are either within or near to (within 1km) the Cottam Solar Project are:

- Corringham;
- Sturton by Stow;
- Blyton (draft stage);
- Ingham (draft stage);
- Laughton (draft stage); and
- Upton and Kexby.

National Policy Framework

NPS EN-1 – Overarching Policy Statement for Energy

4.17. NPS EN-1 sets out the government's commitment to increasing renewable generation capacity, with a recognition that much of the short-term delivery will derive from onshore and offshore wind.

4.18. The generation of energy from other sources, including solar, is not included in the scope of NPS EN-1. WLDC acknowledge that the solar generating station such as this application comprise a development that comprises an NSIP and that some policies within EN-1 are relevant to the determination of such applications.

NPS EN-3 – National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure

4.19. NPS EN-1 provides further policy specific to renewable electricity generating technologies. As with EN-1, it expressly only relates to energy from biomass, onshore wind and offshore wind.

4.20. Due to solar being expressly excluded from NPS EN-3, WLDC hold the view that it cannot be considered either 'important or relevant' for the determination of the application.

NPS EN-5 – National Policy Statement for Networks

4.21. Whilst providing policy for long-distance transmission systems (400kv and 275kv lines), NPS EN-5 also covers associated infrastructure such as substations and converter stations.

4.22. Due to the scope of the proposed development, WLDC consider NPS EN-5 to be an important and relevant matter with regard to the relevant associated development of the proposed application.

Draft National Policy Statements for Energy

4.23. The government have published consultation drafts of revisions to NPSs EN-1 to EN-5 inclusive.

4.24. WLDC consider that as the draft NPSs have not been designated, they do not have effect for decision making under section 104 the PA2008. Their publication does not change the decision making requirement under section 105.

4.25. WLDC acknowledge that the emerging NPSs provide an indication of the government's future approach to the delivery of electricity generation technologies with the objective of meeting the UKs net-zero commitments. As a consequence, WLDC consider that there may be elements within the emerging NPSs that may be considered to be important and relevant under the provision of section 105, however the weight that should be afforded to it should be lower than that of the adopted NPSs and the adopted statutory development plans.

The National Planning Policy Framework

4.26. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the governments planning policies for England. The NPPF does not include policies specific to NSIPs.

4.27. The NPPF nonetheless provides guidance on the requirement for good design, promoting healthier communities, conserving the historic environment, conserving the natural environment, sustainable transport and meeting the challenges of climate change.

4.28. With regard to conserving and enhancing the natural environment, paragraph 174 states that "*Planning authorities and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

a) *Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan*)."

4.29. WLDC consider the paragraph 174(a) to be a relevant consideration to the examination of the Cottam Solar Project, particularly with regard to indirect impacts upon the designated Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) protected by policy S62 of the adopted development plan.

4.30. A Written Ministerial Statement was issued on 25th March 2015 imposing a strong policy protection for the natural and historic environment. It states that Local Planning Authorities should take into account the socio-economic and environmental benefits of the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land when determining planning applications.

4.31. With regard to solar energy development, the Minister's Statement affirms:

- Local communities have genuine concerns that when it comes to solar farms insufficient weight has been given to these protections and the benefits of high quality agricultural land.
- Meeting energy goals should not be used to justify the wrong development in the wrong location and this includes the unnecessary use of high quality agricultural land.
- NPPF requires explanation that BMV land is necessary and hat poorer quality land is to be used in preference to land of a higher quality.
- Any proposal for a solar farm involving the best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence.
- every application needs to be considered on its individual merits.

4.32. The Ministerial Statement therefore clarifies that the protection of agricultural land from solar development is a material planning issues, and that the need case for solar development should not override impact on values agricultural land.

4.33. With due regard to the scope of the policy at a national level, WLDC consider the NPPF to be an important and relevant matter for the determination of the application under section 105 of the PA2008.

Other relevant policy.

4.34. In addition to the above, WLDC consider the following policy to also be relevant and important for the determination of the application under section 105:

- Powering up Britain (March 2023);
- The British Energy Security Strategy (2022);
- The National Infrastructure Strategy (2020);
- The Energy White Paper: Powering our Net Zero Future (2020); and
- A Green Future: Our 25 year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018).

5. Key issues

5.1. West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) has identified that the key impacts of the Scheme can be categorised into five key areas. These are set out below:

1) The approach to the consideration of the Cottam Solar Project
2) The approach to site selection and alternatives for the scheme.
3) The impact of the development on the community.
4) The impacts of the development from the main site.
5) The combined Grid connection corridor.
6) The cumulative impacts with other projects.

1) Approach to the consideration of the Cottam Solar Project

5.2. As described above, the application has been described by the applicant in terms of four separate sections:

- Cottam 1;
- Cottam 2;
- Cottam 3a; and
- Cottam 3b.

5.3. Whilst this approach is useful in some respects to consider the impacts of each section, the site must be considered as a whole. In identifying matters, WLDC consider the scheme as a whole and not as piecemeal components.

2) Approach to site selection and alternatives

Legislative and policy background – alternatives, site selection and design

5.4. The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the 'EIA regs') require applicants to provide a description of the 'reasonable' alternatives studied, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the options chosen, taking into account the effects of the development on the environment ((reg 14(2)(d)).

5.5. National Policy Statement (NPS) EN-1does not contain a general requirement on applicants to consider alternatives or to establish whether the proposed project represents the best option but does however (para. 4.4.2):

- Require applicants to include in their Environmental Statement, as a matter of fact, information about the main alternatives they have studied. This should include an indication of the main reasons for the applicant's choice, taking into account the environmental, social and economic effects and including, where relevant, technical and commercial feasibility;
- In some circumstances there are legislative requirements, notably under the Habitats Directive, for the Secretary of State to consider alternatives; and
- In some circumstances, the relevant energy NPSs may impose a policy requirement to consider alternatives (EN-1 does so in Sections 5.3, 5.7 and 5.9).

5.6. Where there is a policy or legal requirement to consider alternatives, NPS EN-1 requires applicants to describe the alternatives considered in compliance with those requirements. In doing so, the following principles when deciding what weight should be given to alternatives(4.4.3):

- The consideration of alternatives in order to comply with policy requirements should be carried out in a proportionate manner;
- The Secretary of State should be guided in considering alternative proposal by whether there is a realistic prospect of the alternative delivering the same infrastructure capacity (including energy security and climate change benefits) in the same timescale as the proposed development;
- Where (as in the case of renewables) legislation imposes a specific quantitative target for particular technologies or (as in the case of nuclear) there is reasons to suppose that the number of sites suitable for deployment of a technology on the scale and within the period of time envisaged by the relevant NPSs is constrained, the Secretary of State should not reject an application for development on one site simply because fewer adverse impacts would result from developing similar infrastructure on another suitable site, and it should have regard as appropriate to the possibility that all suitable sites for energy infrastructure of the type proposed may be needed for future proposals;
- Alternatives not among the main alternatives studies by the applicant (as reflected in the ES) should only be considered to the extent that the Secretary of State thinks they are both important and relevant to its decision;
- as the IPC must decide an application in accordance with the relevant NPS (subject to the exceptions set out in the Planning Act 2008), if the IPC concludes that a decision to grant consent to a hypothetical alternative proposal would not be in accordance with the policies set out in the relevant NPS, the existence of that alternative is unlikely to be important and relevant to the IPC's decision;
- alternative proposals which mean the necessary development could not proceed, for example because the alternative proposals are not commercially viable or alternative proposals for sites would not be physically suitable, can be excluded on the grounds that they are not important and relevant to the IPC's decision;
- alternative proposals which are vague or inchoate can be excluded on the grounds that they are not important and relevant to the IPC's decision; and
- it is intended that potential alternatives to a proposed development should, wherever possible, be identified before an application is made to the IPC in respect of it (so as to allow appropriate consultation and the development of a suitable evidence base in relation to any alternatives

5.7. NPS EN-1 section 4.5 provides policy relating to 'Criteria for "good design" for energy infrastructure. It states that, whilst visual appearance of a building is sometimes considered to be the most important factor in good design, 'high quality and inclusive design' goes far beyond aesthetic considerations. It states that applying 'good design' to energy projects should produce sustainable infrastructure sensitive to place, efficient in the use of natural resourced and energy used in their construction and operation, matched by an appearance that demonstrates good aesthetic as far as possible.

5.8. Section 4.5 also states that good design is also a means by which many policy objectives in the NPS can be met, for example the impacts sections show how good design, in terms of siting and use of appropriate technologies can help mitigate adverse impacts such as noise (para. 4.5.2).

5.9. NPS EN-1 continues (para 4.5.3) by stating that, given the importance which the Planning Act places on good design and sustainability, the Secretary of State needs to be satisfied that energy infrastructure developments are sustainable and…are as attractive, durable

and adaptable as they can be. In doing so, the Secretary of State should satisfy themselves that the applicant has taken into account both functionality…and aesthetics…as far as possible. Whilst the applicant may not have any or very limited choice in the physical appearance of some energy infrastructure, there may be opportunities for the applicant to demonstrate good design in terms of siting relative to existing landscape character, landform and vegetation.

5.10. For the Secretary of State to consider the proposal for a project, NPS EN-1 (para. 4.5.4) requires applicant to be able to demonstrate in their application documents how the design process was conducted and how the proposed design was evolved. Furthermore, applicants and the Secretary of State should consider taking independent professional advice on the design aspects of a proposal. In particular, Design Council CABE can be asked to provide design review for nationally significant infrastructure projects and applicants are encouraged to use this service (para. 4.5.5).

5.11. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides national planning policy that is important and relevant to the determination of the Cottam Solar Project. Section 11 of the NPPF provides policy on 'making effective use of land' and states that 'planning…decisions should promoted an effective use of land in meeting the use of homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment…' (para 119).

5.12. Section 12 of the NPPF (paras. 126-136) provides policy on 'achieving well designed places'.

5.13. With regard to project design, the National Infrastructure Strategy (November 2020) states that "*"All infrastructure projects to have a board level Design Champion in place by the end of 2021 at either the project, programme or organisational level, supported … by design panels.".*

Applicant's approach

5.14. The ES Chapter 5: Design Evolution and Alternatives sets out the methodology adopted to identifying the Cottam Solar Project site. An initial four-stage methodology was implemented, summarised as follows:

- Stage 1 – Identification of the Area of Search
- Stage 2 – Exclusion of Planning, Environmental and Spatial Constraints
- Stage 3 – Identifying Potential Solar Development Areas
- Stage 4 – Evaluation of Potential Solar Development Areas (PDAs)
- Stage 5 – Widening the Search to consider Grade 3 agricultural land.

5.15. ES Appendix 5.1 Site Selection Assessment (ref. APP/C6.3.5.1) provides the Site Selection Assessment for the scheme.

5.16. The applicant has also provided an explanation of the design approach in the submitted application document 'Design and Access Statement' (Parts 1-4) (ref. APP/C7.6) and the Planning Statement (ref. APP/C7.5)

Key issues

5.17. The overarching methodology to site selection follows an orthodox approach from a wide area of search, narrowing to a identified site. What appears to be absent from the methodology; however, is a clear set of objectives or principles to guide the decision making process to ensure the final shortlisted site is consistent with the design, planning and environmental objectives for the project.

5.18. For solar infrastructure projects of this scale it is expected that objectives that would reflect a well-designed project are identified and embedded at the start of the site selection process. Such objectives would include:

- Minimising the distance between the grid connection and the solar panels to minimise environmental impacts;
- Topography being flat or with shallow south facing slopes'.
- Sites to be of a size suitable for economic viability and being fields that are large and regular in shape;
- Fields identified to be contiguous to provide a self-contained site that minimises impacts;
- To be located near to existing main highways with ease of access for construction and decommissioning;
- Brownfield land opportunities to be identified and considered;
- Preference for a small number of willing landowners to form a contiguous site.

5.19. It is acknowledged that the applicant firstly considered a study area of 5km from the point of connection at Cottam Power Station. This reflects the 8km study area adopted by the Gate Burton Energy Park scheme, which also declared that such a distance represented the 'maximum viable distance' for a new solar farm (Gate Burton ES, Chapter 3, para.3.3.8 (document ref. EN010131/APP/3.1).

5.20. Furthermore, the West Burton NSIP application states that the maximum viability distance from the point of connection at Cottam Power Station for that project is 15km. As that applicant for West Burton is the same as this Cottam project (Island Green Power) WLDC this raises concerns regarding the viability distance, consistency between projects and the manner in which this influences good design that minimises impacts on the environment and communities.

5.21. Having initially searched within a 5km area, the applicant then quickly extended to 20km due to insufficient land being available (ES Appendix 5.1 para.2.1.13). Due to the lack of clear objectives to guide the design principles of the project, the methodology has enabled the applicant to extend the area of search and increase the geographic spread of adverse impacts without acknowledging the significant harm this will cause.

5.22. It is also unclear to WLDC why, following the statement from the Gate Burton Energy Park scheme that 8km is a maximum viable distance for new solar farms of this scale (circa. 600MW installed capacity), that a leap to a range of up to 20km has no implications on the viability of the Cottam Solar Project and nor principles of good design.

5.23. The site selection process is predicated upon finding sufficient land to deliver a project that meets the capacity of the grid connection offer of 600MW. This, the applicant states, equates to some 1,300ha (exc. cable route) plus 10%. WLDC contends that this approach begins from a starting position that only sites that achieve this area are acceptable and that is wholly flawed. There is no statutory or policy requirement in planning terms that dictates appropriate sites areas to be determined by a size that correlates to a grid connection capacity agreement. Whether a site is appropriate or not should be based upon its environmental and socio-economic impacts and based upon sound project/site selection design objectives and criteria.

5.24. The failure of the Cottam Solar Project to embed such objectives and principles in their site selection methodology has resulted in outcome that has simply identified parcels of land, spread in an ad-hoc and incoherent manner across a wide geographical area affecting many communities.

5.25. The resulting 'project' is one that does not represent a single coherent project. It is a series of 4 poorly configured eras of land which have weak physical relationships between each other reflected in their separation. Even within themselves, each 'area' does not demonstrate good design principles for solar development; that is delivering a contiguous site that ensures impacts are minimised.

5.26. The piecemeal approach to site selection has had the opposite effect to meeting NPS policy requirements to minimise impacts. Due the creation of isolated areas hosting arrays, there has been an enforced requirement for additional plant, cabling, compounds, and construction vehicle access that otherwise would not be necessary, had an appropriate site been identified.

5.27. The application documents do not explain how the current design was arrived at. For a project whose current design comprises four separate parcels of arrays with long interconnecting cable sections, to inadequately explain how the layout and design was arrived at in a rational manner, based upon sound design principles. In the absence of such an explanation WLDC has significant objections to the Cottam Solar Project on the basis that the magnitude of the impacts have not been justified through a sound assessment and explanation of the design principles and the subsequent requirement for multiple infrastructure components.

5.28. Notwithstanding the guidance stated in the National Infrastructure Strategy, the project design has not been guided by a 'design champion'. WLDC considers that, had such an approach been adopted, clear design principles would have been established at an early stage of the project's development, which would then have guided the overarching approach to the assembly of sites/land required to deliver a project that delivered the benefit. The outcome is that a sprawling site, requiring multiple infrastructure components (such as substations, BESS, cable construction, construction compounds and construction/operation vehicle access points), which serve to significantly increase the impacts of the project that a well-designed scheme would achieve.

5.29. The approach to site identification has resulted in significant adverse impacts across a wide geographical area affecting a wide range of communities. The infrastructure requirements have been duplicated as a consequence to effectively deliver four physically separate projects with unnecessary cable lengths to connect them.

5.30. WLDC considers that the approach to site selection has been wholly inadequate, with limited explanations as to how the ad-hoc and wholly irregular site has been selected as the only option to deliver the project. As a consequence, it is clear that the benefits of the project through the generation of low-carbon electricity from a renewable source, could be achieved by having a site that demonstrates a level of design required to accord with important and relevant policy.

3) Overarching impact on Communities

5.31. The impacts of the Cottam Solar Project, both individually and cumulatively with other projects, upon the communities within the West Lindsey District must be given significant adverse in the DCO decision making process.

5.32. The proposed scheme will have a significant impact upon the communities of West Lindsey that will have a negative impact upon their daily lives. These impacts will be experienced during the construction and operation of the Cottam Energy Project and will be materially experienced cumulatively with other NSIP project proposed in the locality.

5.33. The settlement character and nature of community life in West Lindsey is strong and has been embedded over hundreds of years. The area is characterised by large areas of expansive agricultural land and associated economic activity, with settlements interspersed within this cultural landscape. Communities are close knit, with the largely rural highway network servicing the link settlements with each other and with the major towns such as Gainsborough.

5.34. As a consequence of the geography of the area, communities travel throughout the area using the network of rural and major highways to carry daily trips for work or recreational purposes. This also extends to the use of local highways for walking and cycling activities, which are an integral feature of life in the district. Communities are particularly dependent upon the use of adopted highways for recreation and leisure purposes. Due to the

intensive agricultural character of the district, public rights of way across field are limited. This results in communities using highways for recreational activities with walkers, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders all sharing roads with vehicular traffic.

5.35. The geographical sprawl of the Cottam Solar Project in excess of 16km in length is such that is have a particularly adverse impact on communities. The multiple unrelated areas of arrays and cabling will combine with multiple plant, construction compounds and site access points to have significant and harmful impacts on a wide area within the district affecting many residents.

5.36. WLDC notes that it is assumed that all of the PV Panels will require replacement once during the Scheme's design life, with a further 10% requiring replacement to cover equipment failures, at a constant rate throughout the 60-year project life. This means that there will be continued works throughout the scheme which is likely to cause disruption to the local residents.

Community culture and wellbeing

5.37. The proposed scheme, on its own and in conjunction with other proposed solar projects, will have an adverse impact upon the culture, character and way in which local communities engage with, and live within, the district.

The NPPF supports the role of planning to create healthy, inclusive communities and recognises that the design and use of the built and natural environment are major determinants of health and wellbeing. The impact of development on human health and wellbeing is therefore a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. In addition, the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan was adopted on 13th April 2023. The Local Plan includes policies so that new development within Central Lincolnshire can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

5.38. The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan has produced a Supplementary Planning Document to help guide developers and decision makers on the implementation of policy S54 Health and Wellbeing in the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. S54 sets out a requirement for developers to submit a HIA for non-residential development proposals, 5ha or more.

5.39. The local community have a strong connection with agricultural culture of the area, which is reflected in its landscape, land use and the way in which people live. The impact on the landscape will be replaced by large scale utilitarian photovoltaic solar arrays and their associated development. This will result significant change for a period of more than half a century which will degrade the character and culture of the West Lindsey and negatively impact the connection communities have with it.

5.40. Furthermore, communities are particularly dependent upon the use of adopted highways for recreation and leisure purposes. Due to the intensive agricultural character of the district, public rights of way across field are limited. This results in communities using highways for recreational activities with walkers, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders all sharing roads with vehicular traffic.

5.41. The proliferation of construction traffic for 5 years or more will discourage the use of rural highways for recreation use, resulting in a further negative impact upon the wellbeing and mental health of local residents and people using the district for leisure purposes.

5.42. Settlements and the communities that live within in them have a strong connection with agricultural culture of the area, which is reflected in its landscape, land use and the way in which people live.

5.43. The landscape itself is strongly characterised by large open fields for intense agricultural use. The removal of this land use to be replaced by large scale utilitarian photovoltaic solar arrays and their associated development, will result the direct removal of this cultural land use character, significantly harming the way in which communities perceive and relate to the place in which they live. This significant change for a period of over half a century

will inevitably degrade the character and culture of the West Lindsey District and negatively impact the connection communities have with it.

5.44. The proliferation of construction traffic for 5 years or more will discourage the use of rural highways for recreation use, resulting in a further negative impact upon the wellbeing of local residents and people using the district for leisure purposes.

5.45. WLDC also maintains concerns over the safety risk of fire resulting from BESS infrastructure. Assurances will be sought regarding how such risks will be minimised and addressed in the event of an incident.

Construction activities

5.46. The disruption caused by construction and operational traffic to local communities will be significant and will have an extremely negative impact upon day-to-day life. Residents will experience additional HGV and AIL traffic upon local roads which, alongside traffic control measures, will elongate journey times in the immediate local and wider areas across the district.

5.47. The increase in construction traffic using the rural highway network will increase the perception of a decrease in highway safety, making it less attractive to local communities to use the network for recreational purposes in particular. The decline in noise and air quality conditions will further degrade the quality of life for communities, resulting in a significant decline in their living standards for a period of over 5 years. The reduction in the quality of the environment alongside the conflict cause by construction traffic, will have a negative impact on recreational activity, to the detriment of local communities.

5.48. The influx of construction activity and worker over a period in excess of 5 years will place pressure on accommodation and local services in the area. The disruption, inconvenience and uptake of accommodation will dissuade visitors (both local and from further afield) which will have an impact upon local services such as tourist accommodation (Bed & Breakfast, hotels etc), shops and public houses.

5.49. The long construction period (both individually for the Cottam scheme and cumulatively with other solar projects) will have an impact on the desirability to live in the locality, resulting in concerns regarding the value of properties and businesses.

4) Main Site

5.50. As stated in Section 2 above, WLDC have significant concerns about the methodology applies to identify the chosen site and subsequently form the basis of the assessment of alternatives in the ES.

5.51. The approach has resulted in an irregular and inchoate site, leading to significant adverse impacts being experienced over a wide geographical area across the West Lindsey District.

5.52. This section sets out the key matters that derive from the ‘main site’; that is the whole site area that hosts solar array and ancillary infrastructure.

Landscape and visual impacts

5.53. WLDC have significant concerns and objections to the project based upon its impacts upon visual amenity and direct impacts on landscape character.

5.54. The approach to site selection and design is considered to be wholly inadequate, lacking a clear methodology that embeds good principles of design from the

5.55. The Cottam Solar Project scheme will cause significant harm to the landscape character of the area, altering it from its agricultural use and character potentially irrevocably. The visual effects on communities are visitors will be significant.

5.56. With a consent period of 40 years being sought, this timescale should not be considered temporary in the decision making process. Generations of communities would experience

the solar farm landscape for most of their lives and to dismiss such impacts as temporary is disingenuous. Whilst site decommissioning is likely to result in the removal of much of the infrastructure, there remains uncertainty about what may remain and consequently hindering a return to agricultural use and the districts cultural landscape character. WLDC therefore disputes the applicant's contention that the impacts of the development are temporary and reversable.

5.57. WLDC strongly refutes the conclusions reached in the ES that the construction of this extensive solar farm project will lead to an 'improvement' in local or regional landscape character. This conclusion is considered erroneous, failing to reflect the conclusions reached in other ESs for similar projects and, logically, the introduction of significant industrial elements (panels, substations and related infrastructure, security fencing/lighting etc). The ES assessment does not address the significant negative impact to landscape character that would occur from the introduction of these industrial elements ('detractors' when considering local landscape character).

5.58. The Gate Burton NSIP application has carried out an assessment that concludes that the project would have minor adverse cumulative impacts with Cottam and Tillbridge, moderate adverse with West Burton, and moderate adverse LVIA impacts when considered cumulatively with all projects.

5.59. WLDC therefore have significant concerns about the adequacy of the LVIA assessment and the conclusions it reaches. The LVIA impacts are clearly, in WLDC's view, adverse both in terms of the scheme in solus and cumulatively with other projects. As the Gate Burton project has correctly concluded adverse impacts, the legitimacy of the Cottam assessment is questioned. WLDC does not consider that the impacts assessed are valid and they should not be taken into the overall planning balance.

5.60. The applicant has an over-reliance on landscape planting to integrate and screen the development. Whilst this may reduce visual impact, it will not achieve the screening of the entirety of the development and thus adverse visual impacts will occur. It is recognised that landscaping may help reinforce the woodland features of 'Wooded Vales', but the open nature of the wider agricultural landscape is a key characteristic. Extensive planting in areas that are otherwise open agricultural landscapes would not reflect landscape character and would obscure views. This key characteristic is noted in the West Lindsey Landscape Character Assessment 1999 with description of 'this is a landscape of long views', of 'long westward views to the power stations on the River Trent, and eastward views to the scarp face of the Lincoln 'Cliff''.

5.61. The solar panels/arrays and substations are clearly the most intrusive elements. It is accepted that the impact of the grid connection itself may be minimal if cables are buried and features re-established (hedgerows etc), but this planting will take time to establish, especially if it is re-disturbed by consecutive solar farms.

5.62. In relation to treatment of the effects as 'temporary' it is worth noting that impacts will be of long-duration 40 years plus (which could be two generations). Although impacts may be reversible, WLDC do not consider them to be short-term. They adverse impacts will be experienced by communities for generations.

Cultural heritage

5.63. There will be a several significant impacts on designated heritage assets including Scheduled Monuments and Grade I listed buildings which are detailed below. This will have a long term impact on these local assets.

5.64. Although some of the affects are considered not significant, there a multiple slight adverse impacts which, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Transport and access

5.65. A key consequence of the scheme design and the resultant geographical spread of the project is that there are multiple site accesses being created, particularly in the construction phase. Each access will result in many minor roads experiencing a significant increase in traffic levels and non-domestic construction vehicles.

5.66. This increase in traffic will result in traffic management, affecting communities and local businesses over a significant construction period. Local minor roads, which connect rural villages, are well used by communities for recreational users. The additional of construction traffic will cause significant disruption and introduce highway safety (including the perception of highway safety concerns) issues that will affect local people.

5.67. Had a better designed scheme been derived, the spread of the project and the use of minor roads could have been significantly reduced.

5.68. Within the ES, the traffic survey data used to derive the baseline is from 2017 and 2019, which is before the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Nonetheless, this traffic data is now quite historic, with some of the data being more than five years old. Therefore, WLDC consider that more recent traffic surveys should be considered to verify that the derived baseline traffic flows are representative of current day conditions.

5.69. It is unclear to WLDC if the potential environmental effects due to any temporary highway works necessary to accommodate access by large construction vehicles and abnormal loads, that may require the removal of hedgerows for example, have been covered by the ES. WLDC requests clarification from the applicant on this matter.

5.70. It is noted that deliveries will peak hours where possible; however, no reasons are provided as to why this might not be possible.

5.71. There are 16 separate construction traffic access points for the solar farm elements of the Scheme, with 13 access points for Cottam 1 alone. Moreover, there are 32 access points of the cable route access, with 12 access points required for the cable route between Cottam 1 and Cottam 2. Collectively the Scheme is proposing 48 access points. This would mean that there would be construction traffic along the route and using the local road network. It is questioned by so many accesses are needed and highlights the issue around the use of a ‘network of sites’.

Tourism

5.72. The visitor economy is a significant and growing sector within West Lindsey. The area is an attractive, peaceful rural area which combines an outstanding natural environment with historic villages in close proximity to the City of Lincoln. Lincolnshire’s visitor economy is worth £2.4bn (STEAM data Lincolnshire County Council), with the sector supporting 30,000 jobs and a far reaching supply chain across the county. Food and drink spending alone generates £44m into the local economy, with recreation adding £18m and retail contributing £59m. The visitor economy is a significant sector for people’s livelihoods.

5.73. The impact of Covid lockdowns has been severe. Lincolnshire has experienced a 52% reduction in all tourism spending (STEAM data 2020), with full time jobs being reduced by half from 2,500 jobs to just over 1,200. There has been a 52% reduction in visitor numbers and a 50% reduction on the number of visitor days. Food and drink spend feel from £44m to £21m (reduction of £13m) and retail spend fell from £59m to £29m 9a reduction of £20m). Recreational spend reduced by £10m to £8m. Overall, local tourism businesses have experienced a reduction of over £100m from their revenue.

5.74. Reflective of the defining agricultural character and culture of West Lindsey, one of the key tourist events is the Lincolnshire Show, held annually at the Lincolnshire Showground. The show is a flagship event for the area, with over 60,000 visitors and 500 exhibitors each year. The success of the Lincolnshire Show is strongly relies upon the local tourism sector accommodating the visitor demand it creates.

5.75. Forecasts have predicted that it will take a timescale of up to 2025/26 for businesses in the sector to recover to pre-Covid levels, based on the assumption that no material externalities will compromise this recovery.

5.76. The Cottam Solar Project will have an significant negative impact on the local tourism sector, causing damage to its image and recovery.

5.77. The construction phase will result in disruption and a degradation to the environmental attributes of the West Lindsey District, which will materially reduce its attractiveness as a destination for visitors. Traffic delays will affect the ability of visitors to travel to and within the district, and construction traffic will conflict with the recreational activities both in terms of use of rural road networks and the attractiveness of the landscape and environment (noise, disturbance, visual impacts etc).

5.78. It is recognised that there are some financial benefits as a result of the Scheme. When considering that there are potentially four solar schemes located within West Lindsey it is questioned how the Scheme will identify the required workforce given the level of resource needed to deliver all the schemes at the same time.

5.79. The analysis of serviced accommodation units shows that accommodating the anticipated temporary employee requirement would lead to an oversubscription of rooms for approximately 4 months of the anticipated 24-month construction period. The maximum rate of oversubscription during these months is 2.7% if normal occupancy of rooms for business and tourism are retained. This therefore shows that there is insufficient accommodation space within the Local Impact Area for the construction peak months. This event would occur just for the construction of Cottam. Therefore on a cumulative level, the accommodation for temporary employees would lead to further oversubscription of rooms if the schemes were to be constructed at the same time.

5.80. The Applicant recognises that during the operational the Scheme will have a long-term impact on the landscape character of some tourism and recreation receptors that are reliant on the landscape context for their value, such as viewpoints, landmarks, and cultural heritage assets. Thus, the maximum long-term moderate-minor adverse effect on the desirability of local tourist attractions and recreation centres in the Local Impact Area could lead to a proportional maximum long-term moderate-minor adverse effect on the local tourism industry and economy. Should the other solar schemes in the area be consented, it is considered that this impact will be amplified as large areas of West Lindsey will be characterised by solar farms.

5.81. The Applicant recognises that there will be a long-term impact on tourism as a result of the Scheme during the construction phase. There is a potential for the Scheme to reduce the desirability of the Local Impact Area for tourism, and as such, an estimated worst-case scenario of a 1% drop in visitor spending per annum is assessed herein. It is therefore questioned that once the operation period has started and noting the applicants recognition that there will be a that the impact on a long-term impact on the landscape character whether it has been assessed about the loss in long-term loss for the tourism economy.

5.82. The Scheme will result in the loss of approximately 17 agricultural sector jobs in the Local Impact Area. It is claimed that these jobs will return following the decommissioning of the Scheme; however, following a 40 year gap in employment it is difficult to determine whether these jobs will realistically return.

Impact on best and most versatile land / agriculture

5.83. The ES considers the impact of the project on best and most versatile land (BMV) and has adopted the IEMA guidance in an appropriate manner.

5.84. The ES assessment is, however, limited to considering soil functions and does not provide an assessment of the impact on agricultural holdings.

5.85. IEMA Guidance has been utilised for assessing impact on agricultural holdings. However, the publication is principally concerned with soil functions and does not provide methodology for assessing impacts on agricultural holdings. It is therefore not clear if, as a consequence of the scheme, tenants will be displaced. In the absence of such information, WLDC raise significant concerns about what would be an unquantified adverse socio-economic effect.

5.86. The cumulative assessment is based upon an absence of site specific assessments which are required to determine Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). It is accepted that during the authoring of this chapter the information for other projects may not have been available, however, given Gate Burton and West Burton are both now accepted or are already in the examination process it is presumed the data for the other schemes is now available to allow an adequate assessment to be carried out.

Ecology

5.87. The scope and methodology used to form the basis of the assessment reported in the ES is considered appropriate, however WLDC identify several matters of concern.

5.88. The ES assessment does not appear to include any consideration of combustion emissions from on-site plant or transport to the site. If this matter has been scoped out of the EIA, it would be helpful for the applicant to clarify that this is the case and provide an updated justification.

5.89. The Scoping Opinion, item ID 2.2.1, indicates that the applicant should include decommissioning of West Burton A in the ES cumulative assessment, but this does not seem to be included in Chapter 9 Section 9.9. WLDC seeks clarification from the applicant as to why this decision has been made contrary to the Scoping Opinion.

5.90. Chapter 9 paragraph 9.7.82 (and Table 9.3) of the ES concludes that a beneficial effect significant at a district level for grassland will be realised and this is welcomed. However, it is unclear whether the information provided in this chapter or APP/C7.3: Landscape and Ecological Management Plan: Outline Plan contains sufficient secured detail to support this conclusion at this stage. WLDC therefore requires further clarification, and information if required, to ensure that the mitigation proposed is adequate to justify the conclusions on residual impacts.

5.91. Chapter 9 para 9.9.19 of the ES states that : '*However, there is the potential for increased temporary, but medium/long term fragmentation or disturbance effects on species like bats, badgers, hedgehogs, reptiles, amphibians and harvest mice which utilise field margins especially.'* WLDC considers this statement to be unclear, and requests further information to demonstrate that there will be no significant cumulative impacts.

5.92. The Outline LEMP (APP/C7.3: Landscape and Ecological Management Plan: Outline Plan) contains a number of important measures that are relied on for the conclusions in Chapter 9. However, in places these measures lack confirmed detail. Further detail to confirm that these measures will be secured is required in order to fully support the conclusions in the Chapter.

5.93. WLDC considers that the conclusions as presented in App/C7.20 'Information to Support a Habitat Regulations Assessment: Cottam Solar Project' (the 'ISHRA') to be reasonable. However, WLDC are concerned that the report lacks detail normally contained in such documents, along with its failure to follow a systematic approach to assessment. Due to this lack of detail, WLDC maintains a concern that there may be a possibility that some effect pathways have been overlooked and request that the applicant provides clarification/more certainty in this regard.

5.94. Planning Inspectorate ins Advice Note 10: Habitats Regulation Assessment relevant to nationally significant infrastructure projects contains a list of information that Applicants should provide. It appears to WLDC that there are elements missing from the Habitat

Regulations Report submitted as part of this Scheme and requests that the applicant provides further clarification with direct reference to Advice Note 10.

5.95. ISHRA para 4.1.1 appears to be misleading with regard to Ramsar sites. WLDC considers that there is the potential for the Ramsar Sites to have been overlooked by this assessment.

5.96. The Applicant's assessment is based primarily on the assumed knowledge of the other solar schemes in the West Lindsey District. Whilst it is understood that the Applicant may not have had access to the data of the other schemes when producing the ES, the Gate Burton and West Burton schemes are both in the examination process and therefore have published all their information.

5.97. The Applicant has based the Shared Cable Route Corridor on a construction programme taking 18 months in the Ecology and Biodiversity chapter. This differs from the Gate Burton scheme which accounts for a 24-36 month construction period. This would also circumvent the BNG guidelines which stipulate that 'temporary loss' of habitat is only when this cannot be restored (in full) to baseline condition within 2 years. If the cable route were to take longer than this then it is expected that the BNG calculations should be revisited.

5) Cable Corridor

5.98. WLDC consider the identified cable corridor to the south of Marton as an area that will experience significant impacts during the construction phase. The current assessment provided by the applicant fails to provide sufficient detail relating to how projects will be delivered in the shared grid corridor with regards to construction phasing and methods, likely traffic figures and the implementation and retention of post-construction mitigation.

5.99. The proposed application correctly assesses the impact of the scheme in solus, however WLDC maintain residual concerns regarding the potential cumulative impact with the West Burton and Cottam solar NSIP project with whom the project will share the same corridor.

Traffic and highways

5.100. In determining this application, WLDC contend that the Secretary of State must consider the cumulative construction traffic impact and carry out an assessment against the relevant policy framework.

5.101. The 'worst-case' scenario could range from all three projects (and more) being constructed concurrently, or they could be constructed in sequence. The scale of impact could vary from a multiplication of impacts or could be experienced for a 5-7 year construction period.

5.102. It is noted that there will be 'a small number of abnormal load movements to transport large transformers'; however, exact numbers are not provided. WLDC request that these number be provided to enable an adequate cumulative assessment to be made.

5.103. The level of information provided in the ES and sought to be controlled through the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) is inadequate in explaining how activities will be co-ordinated and mitigation implemented. Due to the lack of rigour in assessing the cumulative scenarios, the likely impacts upon communities and the environment have not been identified or calibrated to a sufficient detail. WLC consider that the impacts of just two project being constructed wither concurrently or in sequence could result in unacceptable impacts that fail to comply with policy.

5.104. To address this uncertainty, WLDC request that more detail be provided in the draft 'Plans' cited above to explain how concurrent projects will be co-ordinated. For example, the Cottam Solar Project application is silent on the actual number of Abnormal Indivisible Loads (AILs) that will be required to deliver project components. Whilst such movements will be controlled by the Police, in the event that multiple AIL movements occur in close proximity could result in significant traffic impacts that are not currently identified. A

mechanism to control such movements could be through the adoption of a traffic co-ordinator that manages the frequency of AIL movements, and the general movement of other construction traffic in the area.

5.105. WLDC concern stems from a currently un-calibrated impact on local communities as they travel through the district on strategic roads such as the A156. A1500, A15 and A631. The cable corridor is a particular focus due to the condensed activity that could occur over a significant timescale and the extent to which this affects local residents in Marton, and wider travel throughout the district.

Noise and vibration

5.106. As with traffic and highways above, a key requirement for WLDC is to exert appropriate control on vehicle movements and construction activity to ensure that the potential cumulative impacts are adequately controlled over what could be a significant time period.

5.107. Including a co-ordination mechanism on control documents (e.g. CEMP/CTMP) will assist in controlling these impacts and allowing communities to carry-out day to day activities with knowledge of traffic controls, AIL movements and working pattern on sites.

5.108. Such a mechanism will allow for the consideration of measures to minimise impacts at a point in time and communicate effectively with WLDC and communities.

Ecology

5.109. The Applicant has based the Shared Cable Route Corridor on a construction programme taking 18 months in the Ecology and Biodiversity chapter. This differs from the Gate Burton scheme which accounts for a 24-36 month construction period. This would also circumvent the BNG guidelines which stipulate that 'temporary loss' of habitat is only when this cannot be restored (in full) to baseline condition within 2 years. If the cable route were to take longer than this then it is expected that the BNG calculations should be revisited.

6) Cumulative Impacts

5.110. A key concern for WLDC relates to the cumulative impact of the solar NSIP projects upon the district. The three applications currently ‘accepted’ for examination are this Cottam Solar Project, alongside the Gate Burton (examination Phase) and West Burton (pre-examination phase).

5.111. WLDC maintains concerns about the adequacy of cumulative assessment material being considered as part of all examinations. The assessments provided fail to consider the various combinations of each project, which WLDC need to be provided to enable the Secretary of State to make an informed decision on each project.

5.112. The following matters are of particular concern to WLDC.

Landscape

5.113. In terms of cumulative effects, the ES (EN010133-000250-C6.2.8 page 241 onwards) claims ‘Beneficial’ effects in relation to Contributors to Landscape Character, in relation to ‘Nationally and Locally Designated Landscape’ and ‘Ancient Woodlands and Natural Designations’ but does not justify why these effects would be Beneficial (for both it states that impacts would be ‘Not Significant’). WLDC strongly content that such impacts cannot be deemed ‘beneficial’ due to their obvious harm as alien features in the countryside have a significant adverse impact upon both visual amenity and landscape character.

5.114. Cumulative effects in the ES appear to have been considered on an incremental basis only; that is the impact of the Cottam Solar Project when added to the cumulative projects. There is no assessment of the various combination each cumulative project could have with each other and this is considered to be a significant shortcoming in the ES. As the Secretary of State will potentially be required to determine cumulative NSIP applications at

the same time, there is a requirement to provide the environmental information that will allow them to make such a decision.

5.115. The cumulative figure included in the ES for Cottam (Fig 8.15.2) shows that all 7 of the proposed solar farms considered would be seen in views from many locations along the cliff.

5.116. None of the application documents provide and assessment that considers how many solar projects are 'acceptable' in planning terms, or which combination of projects that would be acceptable would be the least damaging/intrusive re landscape character and views. This is a significant shortcoming and prevents WLDC from being able to make considered judgement on the cumulative impacts.

Grid corridor

5.117. The application does not provide sufficient detail to explain how multiple projects will be constructed within the shared grid corridor. The level of information relating to construction phasing, construction methods, approach to the implementation and retention of mitigation/restoration and how activities will be coordinated is inadequate.

5.118. In order to fully understand the likely impacts on communities, further information is required to understand the likely disruption, the approach to construction (i.e. shared approach with single trenching, compounds, construction traffic etc) or whether the impacts will be multiplied with the risk of site restoration measures being implemented but then destroyed as construction commences on another project.

5.119. WLDC requires the development of a detailed co-ordination plan that is committed to by all developers to control and minimise cumulative impacts. This includes single points of contact, single notifications to the local authorities and clarity around what works relate to which project. This is essential to enable effective enforcement from the local authorities.

Ecology and nature conservation

5.120. The cumulative impacts of the project will create the potential for multiple impacts occurring in the shared grid corridor, especially in the event that each project is constructed in sequence. With each NSIP seeking a DCO time period of 5 years, there are no guarantees that construction activity within the corridor will be co-ordinated. Each project will have the right and powers to carry out works that will result in direct removal of tress, hedgerows and other natural features.

Traffic and transport

5.121. The Scheme states that the shared Grid Connection Route utilises different routes from the other solar schemes. This suggests the cumulative impact of the roads will be felt more widely.

5.122. The cumulative effects chapter is very limited and only considers the routes associated with the construction routes for Cottam. Whilst this is understood for the purpose of this assessment, the cumulative impact of construction traffic should be considered as there is the potential for the schemes to affect WLDC for 5 years or more that is associated with the construction of the shared grid connection corridor.

Tourism and recreation

5.123. The broad concerns relating to impacts upon tourism stated above, are equally applicable to all proposed solar projects. On a cumulative basis, these impacts would be multiplied resulting is significant harm to the short, mid and long term tourism sector in the West Lindsey District.

Cultural impacts

5.124. Whilst WLDC acknowledge that each application is to be examined and determined on its own merits, the potential cumulative impacts two or more of the applications being

constructed and operated cannot be ignored. To determine each application solely on the basis that it is isolated, without considering the likely combination of impacts with the other applications, would be inadequate. Such an approach could lead to a conclusion that each scheme is acceptable in its own merits without considering how they relate to each other and whether this results in a conclusion that such impacts become unacceptable.

5.125. The Cottam Solar Project will have an impact on agricultural businesses. As set out previously in this Written Representation, the impact on agricultural land tenant farmers should also be considered in the wider context of the four proposed solar NSIP's which will occupy a large area of Lincolnshire's land area (1%). There are real concerns as to the displacement of tenant farmers across significant tracts of agricultural land over a 40-60 year period and the seeming expectation that the agricultural industry will simply be able to pick up and recommence in the year 2088 where it left off 60 years earlier. This is not adequately addressed by the application.

5.126. In assessing potential job losses in the agricultural sector, the applicant has simply identified the current full time employees associated with the farm businesses that currently operate on land within the Order Limits. This assessment therefore fails to consider the true impact of the project on employment in the agriculture sector as it does not consider the wider supply chain that serves the industry. Furthermore, there has not been a cumulative assessment carried out to identify the impacts of all solar projects in West Lindsey District, Lincolnshire and beyond upon employment and commercial activity in the agricultural sector.

5.127. WLDC recognises the impact on tourism from the proposed solar schemes would be detrimental to West Lindsey's character which is a key factor which attracts visitors to the area. With a growing visitor economy at present, the impact of the cumulative developments could result in the potential loss of employment in this sector as people will not be attracted to the area.

5.128. The cumulative impact of all three currently submitted DCO projects (and future NSIPs planned for submission) would result in unacceptable significant adverse harm to the landscape character of West Lindsey to which WLDC objects to in the strongest manner. The geographical coverage of the three project would span approximately over 13 miles from the southern-most point to the northern-most. The landscape would be transformed from a predominantly large scale agricultural character, to one that is characterised by solar electricity generating stations.

5.129. The cumulative impacts of all projects will be experienced over a wide area, particularly from the Lincoln Cliff over the Trent Valley, which would be significantly altered and character harmed as a consequence of the proposed projects. The blanket of utilitarian, industrial solar panel arrays would be punctured by a proliferation of Battery Energy Storage Systems, substation/converter stations and other associated development.

5.130. Whilst landscape mitigation measures are proposed, these effectiveness of these measures in themselves will also be nullified by the amount of development proposed cumulatively.

5.131. WLDC disputes the applicant's contention that the impacts of the development are temporary and reversable. With a consent period of 60 years being sought, this timescale should not be considered temporary in the decision making process. Generations of communities would experience the solar farm landscape for most of their lives and to dismiss such impacts as temporary is disingenuous. Whilst site decommissioning is likely to result in the removal of much of the infrastructure, there remains uncertainty about what may remain and consequently hindering a return to agricultural use and the districts cultural landscape character.

5.132. WLDC consider that these wider impacts must be adequately assessed during the examination (including site visits where necessary) and must be weighed in the planning balance.

5.133. The cumulative traffic impacts are discussed in detail above but bear repeating again here. WLDC are very concerned about the potential cumulative construction timescales, which will result in significant impacts on communities and the socio-economic dynamic of West Lindsey, which could last for 5 to 7 years (as assessed by the applicant).

5.134. To dismiss these impacts as temporal and insignificant is inadequate. WLDCs contend that they should be considered as long term impacts and must be given significant weight in the decision making process.

5.135. WLDC maintain an objection to the project on the basis of cumulative impacts; however, commit to engage with potential solutions suggested in the above sections of this representation. It is essential in WLDC's view, that detailed control mechanisms are developed during the examination phase to ensure that the application is determined with these in place.

5.136. WLDC also maintain significant concerns regarding the manner in which the DCO examinations into each NSIP are being carried out. The current approach of solely considering the application subject of the application without testing the application alongside the various scenarios that could arise as a consequence is flawed. It is essential that the combinations of each cumulative project are understood and assessed so that that ExA and the Secretary of State can reach sound conclusion on NSIPs that are all being examined at the same time and situated in the same locality.

5.137. If all DCO applications are considered individually without proper regard to the cumulative impacts, they may all be considered acceptable as isolated schemes, but with no consideration of whether there is a 'tipping point' from acceptability into unacceptability. This approach to decision making is flawed as it would allow projects to progress that could have unacceptable cumulative impacts with each other.

5.138. WLDC's strong view is that, in order for the decision maker to have adequate information before them to make a sound decision, a cumulative assessment that addresses the following combinations should be provided as a minimum:

- Cottam + Gate Burton
- Cottam + West Burton
- Cottam + Tillbridge
- Cottam + Gate Burton + West Burton
- Cottam + Gate Burton + Tillbridge
- Cottam + West Burton + Tillbridge
- Cottam + Gate Burton + West Burton + Tillbridge

5.139. The above combinations relate to what is reasonably required to be assessed by the Gate Burton project. WLDC expect the Cottam, West Burton and Tillbridge project to carry out an assessment of the same combinations in relation to their applications. In WLDC's view a failure to do so, would result in inadequate information being before the Secretary of State to enable them to make an informed decision based upon the actual impacts that will be experienced as a consequence of the projects (three of which are likely to be before them for determination at the same time).

5.140. The assessment should relate to the entire projects (not just the cable corridor) and cover the scenarios of concurrent construction and in sequence construction (whilst recognising the 5 year commencement limitation for each project)

5.141. Hearing(s) can readily be held to then examine the details of such an assessment, and representation from the other projects could be invited to participate.

6. The draft Development Consent Order

Article 46 – Schedule 17

6.1. WLDC strongly objects to the Schedule 17 as currently drafted. Schedule 17 has been amended from a 6 week to 8 week time period, however that continues to be considered unreasonably short for the reasons set out below. The Applicant has not provided any further justification in the updated Explanatory Memorandum and accordingly WLDC's previous submissions remain as follows.

6.2. The 8 week approval period currently required by Article 46.2 does not adequately reflect the usual timescale for EIA development which is 16 weeks. It is submitted this time period should apply given some of the requirements include the need to assess complex material (especially in respect of requirement 5 which is akin to a reserved matters application), may require the need to procure external expertise to review material, and there may be the requirement for approvals to be determined by WLDC committee(s) therefore requiring the alignment with meeting calendars and processes. It is noted that the Longfield DCO allowed a period of 10 weeks, however discharge applications under this DCO are likely to be made concurrently with Gate Burton, West Burton, and Tillbridge applications if they are granted consent. It is also noted that there is no mechanism in the dDCO restricting the number of discharge applications that could be simultaneously submitted. In this context a 16 week determination period is entirely reasonable. WLDC would consider the proposal for some requirements to be subject to a shorter determination period than others, where they are less complex and are not subject to consultation requirements. Subject to the submissions made above in respect of consultation requirements, WLDC consider that a provision should be added allowing agreements for a reasonable extension of time, with such an agreement not being unreasonably withheld, particularly if the relevant determining authority is required to consult other bodies.

6.3. WLDC object to the deemed approval provision. The justification relied on the by the Appellant is one of efficiency do not cite any unique or specific reason why such a provision should be included. This is especially relevant whether other DCOs, including those cited in the Explanatory Memorandum itself, do not provide for deemed approval or only do so in relation to certain requirements, rather than all of them. Given the importance and significance of the substantive areas governed by the requirements WLDC submits that it is unacceptable for any of the requirements to be subject to deemed approval.

6.4. WLDC maintains its objection to the requirement under Article 46.3.(2) that further information must be requested in 10 working days. The relevant determining authority will need to sufficiently assess the information to be able to identify whether further information is required. This essentially requires that the WLDC all but procedurally determine the application in 10 working days. Similarly, WLDC object to the time periods in 3.(3), in particular, it is unreasonable to require the relevant determining authority to request further information within 15 working days where they have consultation requirements, as the response period of such consultees is not within their control.

6.5. WLDC submit that the usual fee provision (see the Longfield DCO and Advice Note 15), which has been excluded without any justification given by the Appellant, is reinstated in Schedule 17.

7. Planning balance

7.1. WLDC raises significant objections to the project relating to specific impacts, many of which arise from the poor design of the project resulting in a sprawling project of ad-hoc sections of array development, triggering the need for multiple infrastructure components (e.g. substations, BESS, construction compounds, construction and operational site accesses). As a consequence, the project affects a significant number of communities throughout the West Lindsey district, imposing harm over an unacceptably large area.

7.2. The sprawling layout of the project results in failure to have regard to local context, resulting in the inefficient use of natural resources.

7.3. The application fails to carry out an adequate cumulative assessment with other projects to enable a robust planning balance to be made.

7.4. WLDC recognises that the Scheme would help meet a national need for additional electricity generating capacity, and this accords with the UK's energy policy to decarbonise electricity generation and deliver security of supply.

7.5. Whilst it is recognised that there is an urgent need for energy generation of all types and this is established through the NPSs and is carried forward into the draft NPS; however, there are elements of the Scheme which require further assessment and justification.

7.6. Solar electricity generating stations do not benefit from a 'relevant' NPS and as a consequence do not derive benefit of a 'presumption in favour' and nor do they benefit from all of the policy (e.g. the effective overriding of local landscape designations). The balance of the effectiveness of solar proposals given the climate conditions and grid capacity with the loss of prime agricultural farmland that defines the culture, character and economy of West Lindsey must be carefully considered.

7.7. WLDC consider that the harm caused to its economy, communities and landscape caused by this proposal is unable to mitigated and its impacts irreversible.

7.8. Due to the design of the project, WLDC object to the project on the basis that the benefits of the project can be delivered with far fewer impacts had a well-designed project, coupled with a rational approach to land assembly, been proposed.

7.9. WLDC consequently objects to the Cottam Solar Project, finding that the disbenefits clearly outweigh the benefits in accordance with section 105 of the PA2008.

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Cottam Solar Project

Summary of Written Representation

EN-010133

West Lindsey District Council – 20037171

October 2023

1. Introduction

1.1. This document summarizes West Lindsey District Council's (WLDC) Written Representation (WR) regarding the Cottam Solar Project application.

Decision Making and Policy Framework

1.2. WLDC outlined the legislative context, emphasizing the application's scope under Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) and its determination through section 105 due to solar projects' exclusion from relevant National Policy Statements (NPS).

1.3. Local and national planning policies, including the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, neighbourhood plans, NPSs, NPPF, and energy-related strategies were summarised.

Key issues

Approach to the consideration of the Cottam Solar Project

1.4. The application has been described by the applicant in terms of four separate sections, but the site must be considered as a whole in the decision making process.

Approach to site selection and alternatives

1.5. WLDC considers that applicant's approach to site identification has been wholly inadequate, and the benefits of the project could be achieved by having a site that demonstrates a level of design required to accord with important and relevant policy.

Overarching Impact on Communities

1.6. The Cottam Solar Project will have a significant impact on communities in West Lindsey, both individually and cumulatively with other projects. The project will have a negative impact on daily life, during construction and operation, and will affect a wide area within the district. The project will also require replacement of PV panels throughout the scheme's design life, which is likely to cause further disruption to local residents.

Community Culture and Wellbeing

1.7. The Cottam Solar Project will have a negative impact on the culture, character and way in which local communities engage with, and live within, the district. The project will replace the agricultural landscape with large-scale solar arrays, which will significantly change the character of the area and negatively impact the connection communities have with it.

1.8. The project will also have a negative impact on the well-being of local residents and people using the district for leisure purposes. The proliferation of construction traffic for 5 years or more will discourage the use of rural highways for recreation.

1.9. WLDC also maintains concerns over the safety risk of fire resulting from BESS infrastructure.

Construction Activities

1.10. The Cottam Solar Project will have a significant negative impact on local communities during construction and operation. The increase in traffic, noise, and air pollution will degrade the quality of life for residents and make it less attractive to use the area for recreation. The influx of construction workers will place pressure on local services and accommodation, and could dissuade visitors. The long construction period could also impact the desirability to live in the area, resulting in concerns regarding the value of properties and businesses.

1.11. In summary, the Cottam Solar Project will have a negative impact on the day-to-day lives of local residents, the environment, and the local economy.

Main Site

1.12. The methodology used to identify the site and subsequent layout for the Cottam Solar Project results in an irregular and inchoate site with significant adverse impacts.

Landscape and visual impact

1.13. The Cottam Solar Project scheme is a controversial development proposal that has been met with significant concerns from West Lindsey District Council (WLDC). WLDC's primary concerns are the scheme's impact on landscape character.

1.14. WLDC believes that the applicant's approach to site selection and design is inadequate, lacking a clear methodology that embeds good principles of design. The council also believes that the scheme will cause significant harm to the landscape character of the area, altering it from its agricultural use and character potentially irrevocably.

1.15. WLDC also disputes the applicant's contention that the impacts of the development are temporary and reversable. It is strongly refutes the conclusions reached in the Environmental Statement (ES) that the construction of the solar farm will lead to an 'improvement' in local or regional landscape character. The council believes that this conclusion is erroneous and that the ES assessment does not address the significant negative impact to landscape character that would occur from the introduction of the solar farm's industrial elements.

Cultural Heritage

1.16. The proposed development will have a significant, long-term impact on designated heritage assets, including Scheduled Monuments and Grade I listed buildings.

Transport and access

1.17. The Cottam Solar Project will have a significant impact on local roads, particularly during the construction phase, due to the multiple site accesses being created. This will cause disruption and safety concerns for local communities and businesses. The traffic survey data used to assess the impact is out of date and does not take into account the current volume of traffic. It is also unclear whether the environmental impacts of any temporary highway works have been considered. The applicant should provide more information on these matters and explain why it is not possible to schedule deliveries for peak hours.

Tourism

1.18. The Cottam Solar Project will have a significant negative impact on the local tourism sector, causing damage to its image and recovery from Covid. The construction phase will result in disruption and a degradation to the environmental attributes of the West Lindsey District which will materially reduce its attractiveness as a destination for visitors. The operational phase will also have a long-term impact on the landscape character of some tourism and recreation receptors that are reliant on the landscape context for their value. The Scheme will result in the loss of approximately 17 agricultural sector jobs in the Local Impact Area.

Impact on best and most versatile land / agriculture

1.19. The ES assessment is limited to considering soil functions and does not provide an assessment of the impact on agricultural holdings. This is a significant concern, as it is unclear if, as a consequence of the scheme, tenants will be displaced. WLDC also raises concerns about the cumulative assessment, which is based upon an absence of site specific assessments which are required to determine Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). WLDC believes that the data for the other schemes is now available to allow an adequate assessment to be carried out.

Ecology

1.20. The Cottam Solar Project's ES is adequate in scope and methodology, but West Lindsey District Council has concerns about combustion emissions, decommissioning of West Burton A, grassland impacts, habitat pathways, other solar schemes, and the Shared Cable Route Corridor. The applicant should provide further information and clarification to address these concerns.

Cable Corridor

1.21. WLDC is concerned about the significant impacts of the Cottam Solar Project's cable corridor during construction and the lack of detail on how the project will be delivered in the shared grid corridor.

Traffic and highways

1.22. Overall, WLDC is concerned that the cumulative construction traffic impact of the proposed project and other projects in the area will have a significant negative impact on local communities and the environment. They are calling for the developer to provide more information and mitigation measures to address these concerns.

Noise and vibration

1.23. WLDC considers that it is important to control vehicle movements and construction activity to ensure that the potential cumulative impacts are adequately controlled over what could be a significant time period. One way to do this is to include a co-ordination mechanism on control documents (e.g. CEMP/CTMP). This would assist in controlling the impacts and allowing communities to carry-out day to day activities with knowledge of traffic controls, AIL movements and working patterns on sites.

Ecology

1.24. The Applicant has based the Shared Cable Route Corridor on a construction programme taking 18 months in the Ecology and Biodiversity chapter. This differs from the Gate Burton scheme which accounts for a 24-36 month construction period. This would also circumvent the BNG guidelines which stipulate that 'temporary loss' of habitat is only when this cannot be restored (in full) to baseline condition within 2 years. If the cable route were to take longer than this then it is expected that the BNG calculations should be revisited.

Cumulative Impacts

1.25. WLDC is concerned about the cumulative impacts of the Cottam Solar Project and other proposed solar projects in West Lindsey District. They argue that these impacts could have a significant negative impact on the local economy, environment, and landscape character.

1.26. It is important that these impacts must be adequately assessed during the examination of the Cottam Solar Project and that they must be weighed in the planning balance.

1.27. WLDC also maintains significant concerns regarding the manner in which the DCO examinations into each NSIP are being carried out. They argue that the current approach of solely considering the application subject of the application without testing the application alongside the various scenarios that could arise as a consequence is flawed. It is essential that the combinations of each cumulative project are understood and assessed so that the ExA and the Secretary of State can reach a sound conclusion on NSIPs that are all being examined at the same time and situated in the same locality.

The draft Development Consent Order

Article 46 – Schedule 16

1.28. WLDC objects to the Schedule 16 provisions, advocating a 16-week approval period for EIA development due to complexity. They contest deemed approval's efficiency claim, citing Schedule 16's distinct nature. WLDC objects to 10-day information requests and seeks reinstating omitted fee provision with reasonable timeframes, emphasizing proper process.

Planning balance

1.29. WLDC objects to the Cottam Solar Project because it is poorly designed, resulting in significant and irreversible harm to the economy, communities, and landscape. More specifically, WLDC raises concerns about the following:

- The sprawling layout of the project, which results in failure to have regard to local context and inefficient use of natural resources.
- The lack of an adequate cumulative assessment with other projects, which prevents a robust planning balance from being made.
- The fact that solar electricity generating stations do not benefit from a 'relevant' National Policy Statement (NPS) and therefore do not derive the benefit of a 'presumption in favour' or all of the policy (e.g. the effective overriding of local landscape designations).
- The balance of the effectiveness of solar proposals given the climate conditions and grid capacity with the loss of prime agricultural farmland that defines the culture, character and economy of West Lindsey.
- The fact that the harm caused to West Lindsey's economy, communities and landscape caused by this proposal is unable to be mitigated and its impacts irreversible.
- The fact that the benefits of the project could be delivered with far fewer impacts had a well-designed project, coupled with a rational approach to land assembly, been proposed.

1.30. In conclusion, WLDC finds that the disbenefits of the Cottam Solar Project clearly outweigh the benefits in accordance with section 105 of the Planning Act 2008.

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