

Stonestreet Green Solar

Environmental Statement

Volume 4: Appendices

Chapter 12: Socio-Economics

Appendix 12.1: Policy Review

PINS Ref: EN010135

Doc Ref. 5.4

Version 1

June 2024

APFP Regulation 5(2)(a)

Planning Act 2008

The Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009



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Appendix 12.1: Policy Review

12.1 Introduction

12.1.1 This Appendix presents summary of the relevant planning and economic policy to the Project to support **ES Volume 2, Chapter 12: Socio-Economics (Doc Ref. 5.2)**. It includes the analysis of relevant planning policy and guidance at national, regional and local levels.

12.2 Legislation and Planning Policy

National Planning Policy

- 12.2.1 The **National Planning Policy Framework** ('NPPF') (2023)¹ sets out the principles of sustainable development and the national economic, social and environmental objectives. It requires planning authorities to collaborate effectively with applicants to secure developments that will have a beneficial impact on social, economic and environmental conditions and that would support economic growth and productivity.
- 12.2.2 The NPPF notes in paragraph 157 that the planning system *'should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change' and 'support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure'*.
- 12.2.3 In relation to the rural economy, paragraph 88(b) of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should enable *'the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses'*.
- 12.2.4 The role of Public Rights of Way ('PRoW') for public use and leisure is stated in the NPPF, which requires planning policies and decisions to *'protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users'* (paragraph 104).
- 12.2.5 The **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**² Part III: Public Rights of Way sets out the requirement for Local Authorities to produce *"definitive maps and Statement"* of PRoWs and reflect diversions, extension and extinguishment on the map when these changes are made.
- 12.2.6 The **Planning Act 2008**³ notes that *'an order granting development consent may extinguish a public right of way over land' if "(a) an alternative right of way has been or will be provided, or (b) the provision of an alternative right of way is not required* (section 136).
- 12.2.7 The **Overarching National Policy Statement ('NPS') for Energy (EN-1)** (2023)⁴ sets out the Government's policy for the delivery of major energy infrastructure, particularly renewable electricity, to support national energy security. Commitments

would also ensure reducing dependency on fossil fuels, decrease greenhouse gas emissions and provide economic opportunities.

12.2.8 The **NPS EN-1** (2023) outlines that the construction, operation and decommissioning of energy infrastructure may have socio-economic impacts at local and regional levels such as job creation, provision of local services and effects on tourism (paragraph 5.13.4). Paragraphs 5.13.5 to 5.13.7 set out the following requirements for Applicants:

- Applicants should describe the existing socio-economic conditions in the areas surrounding the proposed development and should also refer to how the development's socio-economic impacts correlate with local planning policies;
- Socio-economic impacts may be linked to other impacts, for example visual impacts but may also have an impact on tourism and local businesses;
- Applicants are encouraged, where possible, to demonstrate that local suppliers have been considered in any supply chain;
- Applicants should consider developing accommodation strategies where appropriate, especially during construction and decommissioning phases, that would include the need to provide temporary accommodation for construction workers if required.

12.2.9 Paragraphs 5.13.8 to 5.13.11 set out that the Secretary of State will consider in their decision-making:

- Whether mitigation measures are necessary to mitigate any adverse socio-economic impacts of the development. For example, high quality design can improve the visual and environmental experience for visitors and the local community alike;
- that limited weight is to be given to assertions of socio-economic impacts that are not supported by evidence;
- any relevant positive provisions the applicant has made or is proposing to make to mitigate impacts (for example through planning obligations) and any legacy benefits that may arise as well as any options for phasing development in relation to the socio-economic impacts.

12.2.10 The **NPS EN-1** makes reference to the need to promote active travel (starting from paragraph 5.14.9), noting that walking, wheeling and cycling routes and associated facilities should be prioritised should transport infrastructure be included in proposals.

12.2.11 The **NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)** (2023)⁵ requires that Applicants should set out what would be decommissioned and removed from the site at the end of the operational life of the generating station, which for solar projects includes where there may be socio-economic benefits in retaining site infrastructure after the operational life, such as retaining pathways through the site or a site substation (paragraph 2.10.69). This national policy statement highlights policy on the transmission of infrastructure for renewable energy installations, in addition to

other interrelated themes considered in the socio-economic assessment which includes transport and traffic.

12.2.12 **NPS EN-3** recognises that new development might affect public rights of way (PRoWs) to enable construction and operation (paragraphs 2.10.40 to 2.10.45). Opportunities to enhance existing PRoW and create new ones should be considered and maximised in proposals to facilitate access.

National Economic Policy

12.2.13 In March 2021, Her Majesty's ('HM') Treasury published **Build Back Better – our plan for growth**⁶, which sets out the government's plans to support economic growth, levelling up economic prosperity across the country and supporting the transition to Net Zero by 2050.

12.2.14 In October 2021 (and updated April 2022) the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy ('BEIS')¹ produced a **Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener**⁷ which sets out (in Chapter 4, Parts 4ii and 4iii) the Government's priorities for 'green' investment and skills. Green investment primarily relates to finance and regulation, but green skills refers to incentivisation of local supply chain transition towards renewable technologies, and the promotion of transferrable construction and installation skills.

12.2.15 The **Agriculture in the UK Evidence Pack (2022)**⁸ Report published by Defra provides an overview of UK's agriculture economy.

12.2.16 The **Food Security Report (2021)**⁹ published by Defra provides an overview of agriculture and food security at a national level.

Regional and Local Planning and Economic Policy

12.2.17 The **Framing Kent's Future Strategy (2022-2026)**¹⁰ sets out Kent County Council's ('KCC') vision in delivering a healthy environment for residents to live in. Improving access to natural and green spaces is one of the key strategies set by the Council, which notes that PRoWs could support access and improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

12.2.18 The Kent and Medway Economic Strategy **Smarter, Faster, Together: Towards a Local Industrial Strategy (2018)**¹¹ produced by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership ('SELEP') sets out the objectives for region in ensuring long-term economic growth, including the need to increase productivity in each economic sector.

¹ BEIS existed until 2023 when it was split to form the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero ('DESNZ') and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology ('DSIT').

12.2.19 KCC's **Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2018-2028)**¹² sets out future strategies for the PRoWs for Kent to continue to provide a dense network of PRoWs and the benefits that are associated with use, including access to amenities.

12.2.20 The **Kent Downs AONB Management Plan (2021-2026)**¹³ notes that the good maintenance and enhancement of the PRoW network is essential in ensuring access to the Kent Downs AONB.

12.2.21 The **Kent Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy**¹⁴ seeks to *“improve health and wellbeing outcomes, deliver better coordinated quality care, improve the public’s experience of integrated health and social care services, and ensure that the individual is involved”*.

12.2.22 The **Ashford Local Plan 2030 (2019)**¹⁵ provides a policy and delivery framework for Ashford Borough between 2011 and 2030 to ensure economic growth and prosperity, and upskilling of the workforce. The following policies are of relevance to the Proposed Development:

- Policy SP1 – Strategic Objectives sets out economic growth objectives;
- Policy SP3 – Strategic Approach to Economic Development seeks to promote rural employment opportunities in sustainable locations and improve skills in the workforce;
- Policy EMP1 – New Employment Uses supports the provision of new employment opportunities in rural settlements;
- Policy EMP11 – Tourism supports the retention of existing tourism facilities and encourages the sustainable growth of tourism; and
- Policy ENV10 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy states that proposals to generate energy from renewable and low carbon sources will be permitted provided that the development does not result in a loss of amenity to nearby residents.

12.3 Guidance

12.3.1 The **Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)**¹⁶ provides further guidance on how economic need can be established by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). The guidance highlights the important to assess existing employment land supply and market condition (including supply and loss of employment), understand demand and the wider potential for economic growth. It also requires for LPAs to expected economic need as well as labour demand long term. The PPG also highlights the role of PRoWs in providing sustainable transport links and emphasises on the need to protect and enhance existing PRoWs.

12.3.2 Defra has published the **Right of Way Circular (1/09) (2009)**¹⁷ to guide LPAs on maintaining, enhancing, and protecting the PRoW network. It sets out the procedures that should be in place when the PRoW network is modified through either extinguishing and diverting PRoWs.

12.3.3 The Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management Environmental published a guide to how public rights of way and wider outdoor access resources should be assessed in EIA. The **Impact Assessment: Appraising Access (2020)**¹⁸ provides guidance on how to assess changes to the PRow network within EIA. This document has informed this assessment.

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