



Tillbridge Solar Project

Written Representation

EN-010142

West Lindsey District Council

November 2024

Contents

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction	3
Purpose and scope of the Written Representation	3
Relationship with the Local Impact Report	3
2. West Lindsey District - Local Context	4
Central Lincolnshire and the West Lindsey district	4
Landscape character	5
Socio-Economic	5
Environment	6
Site and Surrounding Area	6
Key challenges	7
3. The Scheme	8
4. Decision Making and Policy Framework	9
Legislation	9
Local Impact Report	10
Other Relevant Matters	10
5. Key issues	14
Cumulative impacts	14
Tillbridge Solar Project – in solus	18
6. Other impacts	21
7. The draft Development Consent Order	25
Article 47 – Schedule 17	25
8. Planning balance	28

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document forms the Written Representation (WR) of West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) to the examination of the Tillbridge 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 Tillbridge 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.
- 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 Tillbridge Solar Project application.
- 1.7. This WR is therefore to be read alongside the LIR as a document that goes beyond solely identifying impacts and 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 1,150km² 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 Tillbridge Solar Project 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 km² 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. Following the closure of RAF Scampton and Home Office decision to end its plans to house asylum seekers there, the Council has announced its own intentions to accelerate a £300 million regeneration plan, along with its development partner. 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. In this area field sizes are large and the landscape character is of an open, agricultural landscape with well-spaced field boundaries and long-distance views.
- 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 initiatives 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.

Site and Surrounding Area

- 2.23. The majority of the proposed Tillbridge Solar Project (hereafter referred to as 'the Scheme') is located within West Lindsey District Council (WLDC). The Scheme is located approximately 5km to the east of Gainsborough and approximately 13km to the north of Lincoln. The area within and surrounding the Order limits is a primarily rural setting, comprising open agricultural fields with sparse areas of woodland and villages.
- 2.24. There are two parcels that make up the Order limits:
- a. 'the Principal Site', which is the location where ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, electrical substations, and battery energy storage systems (BESS) will be installed; and
 - b. 'the Cable Route Corridor', which will comprise the underground electrical infrastructure required to connect the Principal Site to National Grid Cottam Substation.
- 2.25. The Principal Site is located to the south of Harpswell Lane (A631), to the west of Middle Street (B1398) and largely to the north of the unclassified Kexby Road and to the east of Springthorpe. The Principal Site covers an area of approximately 1,350ha and is located entirely within the administrative area of West Lindsey District Council.
- 2.26. Harpswell Lane (A631) and Middle Street (B1398) form the extent of the northern and eastern boundaries of the Principal Site respectively. A thin strip of land on the western side of Middle Street is included within the Order limits to allow for landscape screening. The Principal Site extends to the south of Kexby Road with the inclusion of field parcels that are located to the south of the road.
- 2.27. The Principal Site comprises numerous field parcels used for arable farming. The fields are large with limited hedgerows and trees. Where there are hedgerows, these generally form the boundaries of fields as they adjoin roads. There are also some small, scattered areas of woodland located within the Principal Site, along with some rural dwellings as well as agricultural buildings dispersed across the area.

- 2.28. Mature hedgerows and trees line the northern boundary of the Principal Site along the A631. To the west, the surrounding area is predominantly open fields with some defined hedgerows within these. To the east, the landscape is defined by a sharp slope referred to as the Lincoln Cliff. This area is relatively elevated compared to the general character of the area, which is characterised by its flat rural landscape.
- 2.29. Immediately surrounding the Principal Site are a series of villages interspersed along the B1398 Middle Street (east of the Principal Site) including Harpswell (to the north), Glentworth, Fillingham and Ingham (to the south). Springthorpe and Heapham are located to the west of the Principal Site. The surrounding area consists of predominantly flat, rural fields, some of which are used for farming.
- 2.30. The Principal Site will be connected to National Grid Cottam Substation located at the decommissioned Cottam Power Station in Cottam on the Nottinghamshire border.
- 2.31. The Cable Route Corridor is approximately 18.5km long (approximate distance between the Principal Site and National Grid Cottam Substation). The total area of the Cable Route Corridor outside of the Principal Site is approximately 318 ha. Heading south from the Principal Site, the cable route runs parallel to Glentworth Road and crosses Common Lane, Cow Lane, Kexby Road and Fillingham Lane, before turning to the west crossing South Lane, Stone Pit Lane and Normanby Road (B1241) (located to the south of Willingham by Stow). The Cable Route Corridor continues in a westerly direction before crossing the East Midlands Railway line that provides services between Doncaster and Lincoln and runs in a broad north-south direction to the west of Willingham by Stow and to the east of Gate Burton. The route then continues westwards crossing the A1500 (Stow Park Road), followed by the A156 (High Street) before crossing the River Trent to connect with the National Grid Cottam Substation.

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 the supporting Planning Statement and the Environmental Statement (ES) A summary of the scheme based upon these documents is set out below.
- 3.2. The scheme comprises the following principal areas/components:
- The Principal Site – solar PV arrays, electrical substations, grid balancing infrastructure, cabling and areas for landscaping and ecological enhancement;
 - The Cable Route Corridor – 400kv underground corridor approximately 18.5km in length connecting the Principal Site to the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS) at the existing National Grid Cottam Substation. The scheme will import and export electricity to the NETS.
- 3.3. The scheme also includes ‘associated development’ that is able to be applied for alongside the principal development in accordance with the PA2008. Such works include:
- Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and protective structures, monitoring and control systems and cooling systems;
 - Substations (A and B) – comprising main components, buildings, hardstanding and water storage structures;
 - High voltage electricity cables – including works to lay the 400kV cables, site clearance, access tracks, footpaths, hardstanding, fencing, security, maintenance, drainage, mitigation works and associated infrastructure;
 - Works to the National Grid Substation (Cottam) – connection works to the NETS
 - Construction and decommissioning compounds – including hardstanding, parking areas, site and welfare offices, security provision, storage areas, drainage and waste management infrastructure and service connections;
 - Solar Farm Control Centre – including security, welfare facility parking and equipment storage;
 - Habitat Management Areas – including landscape and biodiversity creation and enhancement areas, internal access tracks and watercourse crossings, permissive paths and fencing;
 - Access points – creation of access to deliver specific works;
 - Archaeological site protection and management – including habitat creation, management and fencing.

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. National Policy Statements (NPS) EN-1 and EN-1 provide policy for solar photovoltaic energy generation and are therefore designated NPSs that have effect for the proposed application. The Tillbridge Solar Project is to be determined under section 104 of the PA2008, which states:

“104 Decisions in cases where national policy statement has effect

- (1) *This section applies in relation to an application for an order granting development consent if a national policy statement has effect in relation to the development of the description to which the application relates.*
- (2) *In deciding the application, the Secretary of State must have regard to –*
 - (a) *any national policy statement which has effect in relation to development of the description to which the application relates (a “relevant national policy statement”),*
 - (aa) *the appropriate marine policy statements (if any), determined in accordance with section 59 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009;*
 - (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 thinks are both important and relevant to the Secretary of State’s decision.*
- (3) *The Secretary of State must decide the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement, except to the extent that one or more of subsection (4) to (8) applies.*
- (4) *This subsection applies if the Secretary of State is satisfied that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would lead to the United Kingdom being in breach of any of its international obligations.*
- (5) *This subsection applies if the Secretary of State is satisfied that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would lead to the Secretary of State being in breach of any duty imposed on the Secretary of State by or under any enactment.*
- (6) *This subsection applies if the Secretary of State is satisfied that deciding the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement would be unlawful by virtue of any enactment.*

- (7) *This subsection applies if the Secretary of State is satisfied that the adverse impact of the proposed development would outweigh its benefits.*
- (8) *This subsection applied if the Secretary of State is satisfied that any condition prescribed for deciding an application otherwise than in accordance with a national policy statement is met.*
- (9) *For the avoidance of doubt, the fact that any relevant national policy statement identifies a location as suitable (or potentially suitable) for a particular description of development does not prevent one or more of subsections (4) to (8) from applying.*

Local Impact Report

- 4.4. WLDC have submitted a Local Impact Report (LIR) relating to the Tillbridge Solar Project alongside this Written Representation.
- 4.5. 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.

Other Relevant Matters

Statutory development plan

- 4.6. 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 24th April 2023 and therefore represents an 'up to date' statutory development plan to which significant weight should be afforded in decision making under section 104 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

- 4.7. Whilst the CLLP should be read as a whole as an important and relevant matter, Policy S14 provides the technology specific policy applicable to the Tillbridge Solar Project.
- 4.8. Compliance with this policy is considered essential for solar energy generating projects to be granted through the Planning Act 2008 as an important and relevant matter that should be given significant weight under section 105.
- 4.9. Policy S14 affirms a commitment to supporting the transition to a net zero carbon future and seeks to maximise appropriately located renewable energy generation in Central Lincolnshire, with an acknowledgement that such energy generation is likely to be wind and solar developments. The policy is supportive of the deployment of renewable energy schemes where direct, indirect, individual and cumulative impacts on a range of consideration are acceptable.
- 4.10. In order to comply with S14, compliance with the following three tests is required to be demonstrated:
- i. The impacts are acceptable having considered the scale, siting and design, and the consequent impacts on landscape character; visual amenity; biodiversity; geodiversity; flood risk; townscape; heritage assets, their setting and the historic landscape; and highway safety and rail safety; and
 - ii. The impacts are acceptable on aviation and defence navigation system/communications; and
 - iii. The impacts are acceptable on the amenity of sensitive neighbouring uses (including local residents) by virtue of matters such as noise, dust, odour, shadow flicker, air quality and traffic.
- 4.11. Applicable policies within the CLLP are used to test a proposals compliance with test i) above.
- 4.12. For all three criteria, applicants are required to submit robust assessments. Where significant adverse effects are concluded by the decision maker following consideration of such assessments, the effects are to be weighed against the wider benefits of the application.
- 4.13. As part of a planning balance, significant additional weight in favour of the proposal will arise for any proposal which is community-led for the benefit of that community.
- In addition to the above, Policy S14 provides additional policy specific for solar based energy proposals. In summary:
- Solar thermal and photovoltaic panels (and associated infrastructure) to be installed on existing property will benefit from a presumption in favour of permission unless there is a clear and demonstrable significant harm arising.
 - Proposals for ground based photovoltaics and associated infrastructure, including commercial scale proposals, will be under a presumption in favour unless:

- There is clear and demonstrable significant harm arising; or
- The proposal is to take place on Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land and does not meet the requirements of policy S67 (BMV Agricultural Land); or

4.14. The land is allocated for another purpose in this Local Plan or other statutory based document, and the proposal is not compatible for such other allocation. Other key local plan policies that feed into the consideration of S14 criteria include:

- **Policy S53 ('Design and Amenity')** - requires all development to achieve 'high quality sustainable design that contributes positively to local character, landscape and townscape, and supports diversity, equality and access for all' and that 'good design will be at the centre of every development proposal...'. Policy S53 provides a range of criteria for projects to demonstrate compliance which, although written in a form that relates to a wide range of developments, it includes policy that relates to the Tillbridge Solar Project proposal including;
 - Integrating into its surroundings;
 - Relating well to a site's local and wider context to enhancing existing character and distinctiveness to ensure development can satisfactorily assimilated into the surrounding area;
 - Enhancing existing character;
 - Making effective and efficient use of land;
 - Incorporate and retain as far as possible existing natural features;
 - Minimise the need for resources both in construction and operation.
- **Policy S62 ('Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of Great Landscape Value')** requires proposals within, or within the setting of, AGLV to:
 - Conserve and enhance the qualities, character and distinctiveness of locally important landscapes.
 - Protect, and where possible enhance, specific landscape, wildlife and historic features which contribute to local character and landscape quality.
 - Maintain landscape quality and minimise adverse visual impacts through high quality building and landscape design.
 - Demonstrate how proposals have responded positively to the landscape character in relation to siting, design, scale and massing and where appropriate have retained or enhanced important views, and natural, historic and cultural features of the landscape.
 - Where appropriate, restore positive landscape character and quality.
 -
- **Policy S54** requires the potential for achieving positive mental and physical health outcomes to be taken into account when considering all development proposals and requires developers to submit a Health Impact Assessment for non-residential development proposals of 5ha or more. Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has also been published to help guide developers and decision makers on the implementation of policy S54 Health and Wellbeing in the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan.
- The adopted SPD defines Health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. As well as access to good quality healthcare services and lifestyle choices, there are many factors that affect health and wellbeing. These include the physical and social conditions in which people live, culture, education, housing, transport, employment, crime, income, leisure, and other services. These all influence health in either a positive or negative way, both directly and indirectly. These factors are commonly known as the wider determinants of health." (page 2).

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.

Glentworth Neighbourhood Plan

- 4.16. The Glentworth Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2036 (GNP) sets the vision for the future of the neighbourhood and sets how that vision will be realised through planning and development. The GNP adds depth and local context to the CLLP.
- 4.17. The GNP sets out a number of objectives: including Objective 2 ‘to protect and where possible enhance the natural environment of the plan area, retaining the visual connections with the surrounding countryside’ and Objective 3 ‘to identify and protect specific assets and features of the natural environment valued by the local community’.
- 4.18. The GNP sets out that it is widely recognised that certain views are key in defining the character of the settlement. Such views involve the countryside surrounding the settlement as much as views toward the village or within the built environment.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.19. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the governments planning policies for England. The NPPF does not include policies specific to NSIPs.
- 4.20. 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.
- 4.21. With regard to conserving and enhancing the natural environment, paragraph 180 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).”*
- 4.22. WLDC consider the paragraph 174(a) to be a relevant consideration to the examination of the Tillbridge 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.

Other relevant policy.

- 4.23. 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 four key areas. These are set out below:
- 1) The cumulative impact of the Tillbridge Solar Project with other solar NSIP projects upon landscape character and visual effect
 - 2) The cumulative impact of the Tillbridge Solar Project with other solar NSIP projects upon local communities with regards to construction impacts (including traffic and transport (inc. traffic management), noise and disturbance).
 - 3) The impact of the Tillbridge Solar Project in solus on the landscape character and visual effects.
 - 4) The impact of the Tillbridge Solar Project in solus in terms of maintenance and waste management.

Cumulative impacts

Landscape and visual

- 5.2. WLDC considers the proposal unacceptable in planning terms due to the cumulative impacts with other projects on the landscape character and visual effects will be significant and adverse, causing material harm to the landscape character of West Lindsey and the interpretation of its distinct characteristics.

Background and approach to cumulative impacts in decision making

- 5.3. The assessment and consideration of cumulative impacts arising from the multiple NSIP solar applications being examined in the West Lindsey District has been raised as a key concern by WLDC since the submission of the first application (Cottam Solar Project) and the first application to commence examination (Gate Burton Energy Park).
- 5.4. The emergence of the Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production (STEP) project at the West Burton power station site will represent a further significant scale energy generation project in the locality. Whilst the project is at an early stage with detailed design yet to be established, the project is anticipated to have a major impact environmentally and socio-economically. The project represents a government funded industry partnership programme, sponsored by the Department for Energy and Net Zero, to scale a consistent fusion energy supply. The project is part of the Government's Major Projects Portfolio and the UK's flagship fusion programme. Understanding the delivery of the STEP project alongside the proliferation of other NSIP projects is a priority for WLDC.
- 5.5. WLDCs concern was that each project was to be examined and determined by the SoS on an individual basis only. This approach would not enable the consideration of each application (three of which overlapped in their examination and Tillbridge being examined soon after decision making/awaiting a decision shortly).
- 5.6. WLDCs initial position on the previous solar DCO NSIP examinations was that, if no conjoined approach was facilitated by the PA2008, the respective cumulative assessments should include assessment of each combination of sites so that all interested parties, the ExA and the SoS understand the relative impacts each project has in relation to their benefits. This would have been helpful where, in the event that it was considered that not all of the four projects were acceptable together, the combination of projects with the fewest cumulative impacts could be identified.

- 5.7. This approach was dismissed by the respective ExAs, although the ExA for the Cottam Solar Project acknowledged the point and defined it as an 'all or nothing' scenario whereby the decision maker could only refuse all projects, grant one of them or grant all projects.
- 5.8. The approach therefore taken has been to only consider cumulative impacts in terms of compliance with statutory and policy requirements (i.e. that a cumulative assessment been carried-out) and to determine the application on its own merits.
- 5.9. This was the approach taken for the Gate Burton Energy Park and the Cottam Solar Project (which the SoS also didn't reference that the Gate Burton Energy Park had been consented).
- 5.10. WLDC respects the approach although maintains that its suggested approach would have been helpful and would have enabled a considered approach to the decision making on all of the cumulative projects at the same stage of development.
- 5.11. In terms of this Tillbridge Solar Project, it therefore falls to be considered as the fourth project in sequence and must be judged as an addition to the previous three projects.
- 5.12. WLDCs previously expressed view was that a combination of the Cottam Solar Project plus one other project would represent a 'tipping point' in the acceptability of the cumulative impacts in planning terms. This view is maintained.
- 5.13. As the Cottam Solar Project and Gate Burton Energy Park have been consented, WLDC consider the addition of Tillbridge Solar Project as having an unacceptable impact upon the landscape character of the West Lindsey District, materially eroding and accelerating a harmful shift in its character from agricultural to a solar farm landscape.
- 5.14. The cumulative impacts of the Tillbridge Solar Project with the other consented solar NSIPs Gate Burton and Cottam, and the West Burton project (awaiting decision) is deemed wholly unacceptable in planning terms. The unprecedented circumstance of delivering potentially four NSIP large scale solar projects within the rural district of West Lindsey will have significant adverse impacts upon the rural landscape character of the Till Vale and The Cliff LCAs (The Cliff protected as an AGLV). The magnitude and rapid pace of this character change will adversely affect the interpretation, appreciation and culture of the landscape and communities in West Lindsey.
- 5.15. The lifespan of the projects up to 60 years does not represent temporary impacts. These are inter-generational and will be experienced as effectively permanent features in the landscape.
- 5.16. The cumulative construction of the project, all of which could occur for around a decade depending on the commencement of works and the speed of construction, will cause material harm to the rural landscape of West Lindsey, adversely affecting communities and visitors through disruption, noise, construction traffic congestion/management and the impact on the landscape as construction takes place.

Food production

- 5.17. WLDC considers the loss of agricultural land for food production to a material planning consideration that should be given significant weight in the planning balance.
- 5.18. The NPPF (para. 180) highlights the economic and other benefits of BMV. Footnote 62 sets out that, where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of higher quality. It then states that 'the availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development'.
- 5.19. Central Lincolnshire Local Plan policy S67 protects BMV agricultural land in order to protect opportunities for food production and the continuance of the agricultural economy. Significant development resulting in the loss of BMV will only be supported where there is a need and insufficient lower grade land is available, the benefits outweigh the need to

protect such land, impacts on agricultural operations have been minimised and the restoration of land.

- 5.20. Both national and local planning policy requires the protection of valuable agricultural land, including specifically for the production of food. Whilst it is understood that the grazing of livestock alongside solar panels falls within the category of 'food production', to rely upon this to demonstrate compliance with policy, it must be demonstrated that land will genuinely be 'available' for tenants. Simply stating that land 'could' be available does not go far enough to contend that land for the production of food will not be 'lost' for the 60 year lifespan of the project.
- 5.21. The cumulative loss of significant areas of land that is currently available for food production is a material planning consideration that weighs negatively in the planning balance.

Construction impacts

- 5.22. The impact of potentially four NSIP solar projects on the West Lindsey District and its communities in terms of construction impacts will be significant, harmful and unacceptable.
- 5.23. The four projects are all to benefit from a five year consent lifespan, with the quickest construction period being 2 years for each project. This means that the projects could either all commence construction at the same time, or they could be sequenced in a period of up to seven years and beyond (for those commencing close the expiry of the consents).
- 5.24. The impacts that local communities would be material and harmful. The volumes of construction traffic using multiple access points across the district, noise, disturbance, general construction activities including groundworks, piling, tree felling/hedgerow removal and temporary compounds and fencing, would create a single construction site spanning the rural landscape from the A156 to the A15 and from Saxilby to north of Gainsborough at Blyton.
- 5.25. WLDC are unaware of any NSIP project that has been consented having such significant construction impacts within a rural area in close proximity to communities. Should all four projects be constructed concurrently, the effect will be as a single project on communities and the environment.
- 5.26. Despite the clear significant impacts of multiple sites being constructed concurrently, overlapping or in sequence, WLD remains concerned about the lack of management delivered through management plans secured as mitigation for each project. The approach in the determination of other projects has been to secure mitigation through mechanism such as Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP) in relation to that specific project. There are 'best endeavour' commitments to work in a collaborative way with other projects, however such measures lack rigour, detail and genuine co-ordination to manage construction activity.
- 5.27. The lack of commitment obliging a co-ordinated approach also introduces a significant enforcement difficulty for WLDC. With multiple construction activities being carried out together with no joint approach to managing impacts, determining the source of complaints should the arise will be very difficult for WLDC to investigate and resolve.
- 5.28. WLDC has been consistent in its view that a co-ordinated approach should be included in the construction related management plans. This would include the identification of single point of contact (co-ordinator) with whom WLDC could liaise should investigation or monitoring be required. WLDC consider this is a wholly reasonable request in the public interest.

Shared cable corridor

- 5.29. WLDC recognises the approach taken by the applicants to deliver each project through a shared cable corridor. The benefits of this approach is that it focuses the impacts on a specific area and reduces the number of such corridors across the district.

- 5.30. The approach does however result in potential scenarios that may give rise to significant impacts, a lack of clarity on remedy and similar enforcement issues as discussed above.
- 5.31. With projects able to be constructed to their individual programme and timescales, it is feasible for a contractor to carry out construction works associated with the laying of cables and subsequent mitigation, only for the next project to then commence their construction and compromise that mitigation/restoration.
- 5.32. This practical scenario would create an illogical situation, where the party responsible for ensuring mitigation/restoration would be challenging for WLDC to determine.
- 5.33. The construction traffic management at the shared corridor area will also be significant, again with the potential to be in place for well over 5 years. The impact upon the A156, a main route to Gainsborough, and the village of Marton will very significant and harmful. The disruption, frustration and stress likely to be endured by that local community and those travelling in the district will be unacceptable.
- 5.34. WLDC would wish to see more a detailed and development co-ordinated management of construction matters at the shared corridor area.

Maintenance & Waste management – operational and decommissioning phases

- 5.35. The provisions of the order to enable 'maintenance' throughout the operational phase of all project creates the opportunity for significant impacts to occur in an uncontrolled and a currently un-assessed manner.
- 5.36. The definition of 'maintenance' in the dDCO for Tillbridge Solar Park and the made Orders for Cottam Solar Project and Gate Burton Energy Park allows for significant work to take place in replacing panels, BESS and substations throughout the lifespan of the projects (40-60 years). The applicant acknowledges the need to replace such infrastructure due to their failure rates and inability to operate solely through maintenance for the whole consent lifespan sought.
- 5.37. Such activities will give rise to engineering operations that have the clear potential to give rise to significant adverse environmental impacts on the environment and the local community. WLDC acknowledges the constraint in the maintenance definition with regard to such impact having to be within the scope of the EIA; however this judgement is left to the applicant to make with no requirement to notify WLDC or involve them in the decision making.
- 5.38. The scope of the 'maintenance' provision in the dDCo and made DCOs allow the opportunity to replace significant amounts of the project at any frequency or decided programme (e.g. hectares of panels can be replaced in sequence without any control from an LPA or other regulator). There is not a threshold that restricts the amount of infrastructure to be replaced and thus 're-powering' of the generating station can occur, largely unchecked, throughout the whole 60 year lifespan of the Tillbridge project and the other DCO projects nearby.
- 5.39. WLDC contends that such activity is not considered in the required detail to provide a true scenario of the potential impacts of significant infrastructure replacement by a number of projects over a 60 year period.
- 5.40. WLDC also contends that the scope under 'maintenance' provides opportunity to ensure the assessed levels of impacts in the ES are not exceeded through replacing infrastructure in a piece-meal fashion. Smaller sections being replaced in a phased manner could be considered and presented as individual maintenance events, as opposed to a sequence of construction activity that could span a long period of time.
- 5.41. This risk becomes more likely the older infrastructure becomes. In previous examinations, applicants have suggested that solar panel may need replacing from 20 years of active

operation, and BESS and substation are likely to be replaced at least once the project lifespan.

- 5.42. A multiplication of such activity over four NSIP scale solar generating stations with no control or regulation causes WLDC significant concern.

Tillbridge Solar Project – in solus

Landscape and visual

- 5.43. WLDC considers the proposal unacceptable in planning terms due to its impact on 'The Cliff' Landscape Character Area (LCA) and Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). This is due to its proximity to the AGLV causing harm to the character of The Cliff both from views towards it and out of from it.
- 5.44. The harmful erosions of the ability to interpret the character of The Cliff and its intrinsic relationship with the adjacent LCA 'Till Vale', compromises its policy designation contrary to planning policy at all tiers from national to local.

The Cliff AGLV

- 5.45. There two distinct landscape character areas described in the West Lindsey Landscape Character Assessment (1999) that are affected by the proposal; the lower Till Vale (within which the project sits) and The Cliff.
- 5.46. The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (2023) policy S62 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of Great Landscape Value' designates an area immediately to the east of the proposed Order Limits as an 'Area of Great Landscape Value' (AGLV). There is a general correlation between the AGLV designation and the Local Character Area (LCA) defined as 'The Cliff' in the West Lindsey Landscape Character Assessment.
- 5.47. Although the LCAs are defined, there are natural transitions from one area to the other. With regard to the Till Vale and The Cliff, this transition takes place at the foot of the ridge as the Till Vale starts to rise and contribute to the character of The Cliff.
- 5.48. The key characteristics of The Cliff (and consequently the AGLV) are defined in the West Lindsey Landscape Character Assessment as:
- Straight limestone capped scarp slope with a due north-south alignment.
 - Diverse pattern of mixed pasture and arable land with good hedgerow boundaries;
 - Springline villages at the foot of the scarp with historic character and trees.
 - Historic halls and associated parkland landscapes.
 - Pond and lakes along the springline
 - The Cliff is a straight and prominent, limestone capped, scarp slope extending north-south across the centre of the district.
- 5.49. The extend of the AGLV near to the Tillbridge Solar Project site is shown in Figure 5.1 below.



Figure 5.1 – Policy S62: Area of Great Landscape Value

- 5.50. It is a clear planning policy objectives that sensitive, impacts and valued landscape characteristics should not be materially harmed by new development.
- 5.51. With regard to landscape character and visual effects, WLDC considers the scheme to have significant adverse impact in planning terms, especially upon ‘The Cliff’ AGLV and the ‘spring line’ villages including the village of Glentworth (located within the AGLV).
- 5.52. The impact and influence of the proposal extend well into The Cliff LCA/AGLV. WLDC contends that areas of transition between landscape character types are often particularly sensitive, such as the change from lowland strath (large valleys) to upland foothills or scarp slopes. This reflects the sensitivity between the Till Vale and The Cliff, which is not only an LCA in its own right and designated as an AGLV, but also have clear influence on the character of the adjoining LCAs.
- 5.53. The Cliff provides a strong defining edge to the Till Vale LCA and perceptible across the landscape. The Cliff is a sensitive, important and defining elements of the NCA. The Cliff’s raised skyline is a distinctive landform closely associated with the Till Vale landscape character below it.
- 5.54. The encroachment of the scheme (including panels and associated infrastructure such as substations and the BESS) towards the AGLV fails to protect its character, causing material harm to this sensitive and important landscape feature in the district. This material harm is demonstrated through the viewpoint analysis carried out by the applicant, including viewpoints 1, 2a/ 2b, 4, 5 6, 7, 11, and 15.
- 5.55. The GNP sets out a number of viewpoints that important to the setting and character of the village (Policy Map 1(a)). View 10 aligns with application LVIA viewpoint 7, and its importance is described as ‘*glimpses of the church, Glentworth Hall and the characteristic pantile roofs, softened and harmonised by the trees. Emphasises the discrete rural setting*’. This viewpoint is located within the AGLV looking down towards Glentworth and wider large scale landscape. The GNP states that development proposals will be supported where they take account of Key Local Views and have demonstrated how they are maintaining and responding positively to such views.

5.56. WLDC consider that the Tillbridge Solar Park fails to maintain and responds positively to the key views identified in the GNP, which serve to underpin statutory development plan policy and 'The Cliff' AGLV.

Maintenance & Waste management – operational and decommissioning phases

5.57. The concerns expressed regarding maintenance and waste management above when discussing cumulative impacts, also apply to the Tillbridge Solar Project in isolation.

5.58. WLDC wishes further discussion and potential resolution to this matter through consideration of further controls on maintenance activity.

6. Other impacts

Community culture and wellbeing

- 6.1. 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.
- 6.2. 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.
- 6.3. 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.
- 6.4. 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.
- 6.5. 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.
- 6.6. The proliferation of construction traffic activity and disruption 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. This is recognised by the Applicant and states *“the presence of construction traffic on local routes may cause a moderate, localised fear and intimidation impact which may negatively impact the desirability of walking, running and cycling along local routes, thus having a negative impact on commuting methods and on **health and wellbeing**”*.
- 6.7. 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.
- 6.8. 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.
- 6.9. 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.

- 6.10. 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

- 6.11. 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.
- 6.12. 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.
- 6.13. 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.
- 6.14. The long construction period (both individually for the Tillbridge 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.
- 6.15. The applicant suggests that they will potentially work together to minimise any cumulative effects. This does not commit the Applicant to a joint Construction Traffic Management Plan. In absence of any commitment to working collaboratively with the other proposed solar schemes, the local community will be uncertain of how construction traffic will be effectively managed. This may also result in conflicting CTMPs which could cause disruption on the local road network meaning that local residents will be deterred from using local roads for leisure activities such as running or cycling.
- 6.16. The cumulative assessment only considers two worst case scenarios of i) 3 projects at the same time and ii) 3 projects in sequence in relation to the cable corridor only. The assessment does not consider the construction of the main arrays and the impact this may have on the wider population.
- 6.17. WLDC considers that it is the impact of the whole project in combination with others that has the potential to affect the health, wellbeing and amenity of local communities.

BESS – Fire Safety

- 6.18. WLDC is aware of fire safety incidents involving BESS infrastructure. It is noted that the applicant recognises there is a risk within its application and has assessed the potential impacts, concluding that the risk of fire would be unlikely due to embedded mitigation including the BESS design. The mitigation is to be delivered through a Battery Safety Management Plan (BSMP), to be approved post-consent in accordance with a specific DCO 'requirement'.
- 6.19. The introduction of a risk of fire where presently there is none, and fear of such an occurrence by local communities, remains a concern for WLDC. The following matters are expected to be included in the final BSMP;
- Commitment to liaison with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, who should be a consultee on the final BSMP;

- Details of thermal runaway management through venting and water fire suppression systems to be utilised;
- Commitment to safety audits;
- Access arrangement for firefighters in the event of a fire incident;
- A fire water management plan to be included in the BSMP, to include details of the containment, monitoring and disposal of fire water.

Tourism

- 6.20. 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.
- 6.21. 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 fell from £44m to £21m (reduction of £13m) and retail spend fell from £59m to £29m (a reduction of £20m). Recreational spend reduced by £10m to £8m. Overall, local tourism businesses have experienced a reduction of over £100m from their revenue.
- 6.22. 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 reliant
- 6.23. upon the local tourism sector accommodating the visitor demand it creates.
- 6.24. 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.
- 6.25. The Tillbridge Solar Project will have a significant negative impact on the local tourism sector, causing damage to its image and recovery.

Grid connection and infrastructure

- 6.26. WLDC acknowledges that the applicant has secured a grid connection from National Grid Electricity System Operator Limited (NGESO) to connect the Tillbridge Solar Project to the NETS.
- 6.27. It is also acknowledged that, for decision making purposes, the SoS has to be satisfied that appropriate network connection arrangements are/will be in place for a given project (NPS EN-1 para.4.11.12). The Tillbridge Solar Project application therefore satisfies policy in this regard.
- 6.28. WLDC does, however, have concerns over the cumulative impact of generating stations in Lincolnshire connecting to the main Points of Connection (PoC), all within a similar timeframe. We are aware of a number of nationally significant infrastructure projects seeking to connect to the Cottam station (Gate Burton Solar; Cottam Solar Project; and the Tillbridge Project) and West Burton station (West Burton Solar; Steeple solar; and the development of the STEP fusion project) and whilst connection agreements are in place, what has not been confirmed in the application documents is whether there is existing capacity at the PoC to connect all of the projects, or the implications for all developments seeking to make connections within a similar timeframe.

- 6.29. The importance of this as a cumulative impact is to confirm that the PoCs can accommodate all of the projects without requiring the delivery of new capacity. Should additional capacity be required, clarity on what this would involve in terms of new development/infrastructure should be provided.

WLDC Values

- 6.30. WLDCs 'Vision', established through its Corporate Plan 2023-2027, is "West Lindsey is a great place to be where people, businesses and communities can thrive and reach their full potential". The WLDC 'vision' is to be achieved through the implementation of 'Core Values', which includes 'To have integrity in everything we do'.
- 6.31. The above 'vision' and 'values' apply to all WLDC activities and responsibilities, including planning related duties. With regard to its role as a relevant Local Authority for the examination and determination of the Tillbridge Solar Project, WLDC wishes to ensure that the proposed development, if consented, would be constructed, operated and decommissioned in a manner that satisfies those values.
- 6.32. WLDC would welcome confirmation from the applicant, Tillbridge Solar Limited, that all aspects of the project, including organisation values, use of human resources, supply chain management and approach to engagement with local communities will be governed by appropriate values and ethics.

7. The draft Development Consent Order

Article 47 – Schedule 17

Procedure for Discharge of Requirements

- 7.1. WLDC strongly objects to the Schedule 17 as currently drafted. Schedule 17 states that an 8 week time period to be imposed for the approval of details submitted pursuant to DCO 'requirements', 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.
- 7.2. The 8 week approval period currently required by Schedule 17 (article 47) 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.
- 7.3. WLDC expressed this position at other NSIP DCO applications recently examined in the District. In making the Order to grant development consent for the Cottam Solar Project, the SoS, following further consultation post-examination, concluded that a 13 week determination period for the approval of DCO 'requirements' was necessary *"to account for the number of applications coming forward in Lincolnshire, whilst seeking to avoid delays to the progress of the Proposed Development."*
- 7.4. WLDC considers that the timescale applied in the Cottam Solar Project DCO must, as a minimum, also be applied to the Tillbridge Solar Project DCO. The timescales have been held to be reasonable and necessary.
- 7.5. In the event that further information is considered necessary by WLDC, the following time periods within which to request such information should be applied as expressed in the Cottam Solar Project DCO:
- In the event that the relevant planning authority considers such further information to be necessary and the provision governing or requiring the application does not specify that consultation with a requirement consultee is required, the relevant planning authority must, within 20 working days of receipt of the application, notify the undertaker in writing specifying the further information required.*
- If the provision governing or requiring the application specifies that consultation with a requirement consultee is required, the relevant planning authority must issue the consultation to the requirement consultee within 10 working days of receipt of the application, and must notify the undertaker in writing specifying any further information the relevant planning authority considers necessary or that is requested by the requirement consultee within 10 working days of receipt of such a request and in any event within 20 working days of receipt of the application (or such other period as is agreed in writing between the undertaker and the relevant planning authority).*
- 7.6. The current dDCO for the Tillbridge Solar Project does not reflect the above timescales in Schedule 17 and must be amended to ensure consistency and reasonableness.
- 7.7. WLDC submit that the usual fee provision (see the Cottam DCO and National Infrastructure guidance), which has been excluded without any justification given by the Appellant, is reinstated in Schedule 17.

Fee schedule

- 7.8. The dDCO does not make provision for the payment of fees associated with the submission of details for approval pursuant to DCO 'requirements'.
- 7.9. WLDC request that for the following 'requirements' a fee of £2,535 be payable for each application (index linked to track inflation)
- 5 – Detailed design approval
 - 6 – Battery safety management
 - 7 – Landscape and ecological management plan
 - 8 – Biodiversity net gain
 - 10 – Surface and foul water drainage
 - 12 – Construction environmental management plan
 - 13 – Operational environmental management plan
 - 14 – Construction traffic management plan
 - 16 – Public rights of way
 - 18 – Soils management
 - 20 – Decommissioning and restoration
- 7.10. WLDC also request that a fee of £578 for each subsequent application for the discharge of each 'requirement' listed above and any application under 'requirement' 5 in respect of the matters listed.
- 7.11. For all other 'requirements, WLDC requests a fee of £578 (index linked to track inflation).
- 7.12. The above fee requirements were made by WLDC to the Cottam Solar Project (the most recently determined DCO solar application in West Lindsey) and we subsequently included in the DCO as made granting development consent for the project.
- 7.13. The requests have therefore been considered reasonable, proportionate and required. In the interests of necessity and consistency, the fee requirements should be included in the Tillbridge Solar Project dDCO.
- 7.14. WLDC request that the dDCO be amended to include a fee provision and maintain an objection until such amendments are made

Enforcement

- 7.15. WLDC recognises its role as the enforcing authority in relation to the Tillbridge Solar Project in the event that development consent is granted. With multiple other NSIPs within the West Lindsey District, such responsibility has the potential to require the deployment of significant resources to investigate enquiries and to ensure compliance.
- 7.16. Due to the different approaches to project construction and operation adopted by each applicant, WLDC appeals for as much consistency as possible in terms of DCO 'requirements' and scope of 'control' documents.

Other matters

- 7.17. WLDC have raised other matters relating to clarifications and DCO drafting both to the applicant and at Issue Specific Hearing 1. These matters will not be repeated verbatim in this Written Representation and it is hoped they can be resolved through collaboration with the applicant.

8. Planning balance

- 8.1. The application falls to be determined in accordance with section 104 of the PA2008.
- 8.2. WLDC raises significant objections to the project; key issues being the cumulative impact on the landscape and visual amenity and construction impacts, and the impact of the project in solus on landscape character and visual effects.
- 8.3. 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.
- 8.4. The cumulative circumstances of this proposal being determined alongside three other NSIP solar projects results in unprecedented cumulative impacts in construction, operation and decommissioning.
- 8.5. Scheme has unacceptable impacts upon the landscape character and visual impacts both in solus and cumulatively, causing material harm to The Cliff LCA/AGLV.
- 8.6. WLDC concludes that that proposal fails to accord with the relevant NPSs, the NPPF, the adopted Local Plan and adopted Neighbourhood Plans with regard to its cumulative impacts and the impact on landscape character and visual effects/amenity.
- 8.7. WLDC consequently objects to the Tillbridge Solar Project and invites the SoS to refuse development consent.

**If you would like a copy of this document in large print, audio, Braille or in another language:
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