



Hearing Transcript

Project:	East Park Energy
Hearing:	Issue Specific Hearing 2 (ISH2) - Part 1
Date:	18 March 2026

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AUDIO_EASTPARKENERGY_ISH2_SESSIO N1_180326

Fri, Mar 20, 2026 10:33AM • 1:20:42

00:14

Good Mr. Noon. It's now 2pm and time for this hearing to begin. Like to welcome you all to this issue specific hearing relating to the use of best and most versatile land and traffic construction issues for East Park energy project. Can I just confirm that everybody can hear me clearly, both in the room and online, and can I confirm with the case team that the live streaming and recording of this event has commenced. Thank you. My name is Graham sword. I am a planning inspector and have been appointed by the Secretary of State to examine this application, and I deal with a few housekeeping matters for those attending in person today. So can everyone please set all devices, including phones, smart watches and laptops, to silent. And for those of you in the room, I understand that there is no fire alarm test planned for today. Shouldn't alarm sound, then please leave using the fire exits, one of which is to the rear of the room, facing the car park, or alternatively, opposite the entrance door to this room, across the hall, please go to the fire assembly points to the edge of the car parking area or grass mounds, which have green signs identifying them, should you require the toilet, and there is signage directing you to them in the main hall outside of this room, this meeting will follow the agenda published on the national infrastructure planning website on the 10th of March, examination, library, reference, Ev 301, I am aware that there's been some formatting problems with the document and the numbering is incorrect, for which I apologize. Final for item should be numbered six to nine. Can I ask the applicant to display the agenda please on screen? Thank you. I'd like to stress that this agenda is for guidance only, and we may add other considerations or issues as we progress, we will conclude the hearing as soon as all relevant contributions have been made and all questions asked and responded to. If the discussions can't be concluded, then it may be necessary for us to prioritize matters and defer other matters to written questions. If you can't answer the questions being asked or require time to get the information requested, then can you please indicate that you need time to respond in writing? Today's hearing has been undertaken in a blended way, meaning some of you are present with us at the hearing venue, and some of your of you are joining us virtually, using Microsoft Teams. We will make sure that, however, you have decided to attend today, you will be given a fair opportunity to participate. A recording of today's hearing will be made available on the east Park energy section of the national infrastructure planning website as soon as possible after the hearing has finished, the transcript will also be made available, which will utilize AI technology. With this in mind, please ensure that you speak clearly into a microphone, stating your name and who you are representing each time before you speak. For those with a microphone, you need to press the button to work with the red light indicating that the microphone is live. If you're not at a table with a microphone, there is a roving microphone, so please wait for one of these to be brought to you before you speak. A link to the planning inspector's privacy notice was provided in the notification for this hearing. We assume that everybody here today has familiarized themselves with this document, which establishes how the personal data of our customers is handled in accordance with the principles set out in data protection laws. Please speak to the case team. If you have any questions about this, I'm now going to ask those of you who are participating in today's meeting to introduce yourselves when I state your organization's name, could you introduce yourself, stating your name, who you represent and which agenda item you wish to speak on? If you're not representing an organization, please confirm your name and summarize your interest in the application, and if possible, confirm the agenda item upon which you wish to speak. So if I could, please start with the applicant. Please. Mr.

04:55

Boswell, Good afternoon, sir. I'm Julian Boswell. Small solicitor and partner with Burgess salmon LLP, representing the applicant. We're assuming that you're going with BMV first, because we're going to be swapping speakers for the second topic. Yeah, right. And so I will now ask everybody at the table on our team to introduce themselves, working from my left,

05:25

good afternoon, Sir Alistair field, from British and cultural consultants on behalf of the applicant.

05:34

Good afternoon, Sir Tom rose, played from access on behalf of the applicant.

05:44

Afternoon, sir. I'm Nicholas Andrews from the applicant, but I most likely won't be speaking this afternoon.

05:52

Okay, thank you.

05:54

Vivian hitching, local resident speaking about construction traffic routes.

06:01

Okay, thank you, I was going to move to the local authorities first. You could please wait to be introduced. Thank you.

06:13

Good afternoon, sir. I'm Daniel Stedman Jones of Council. I'm acting on behalf of all three host authorities. This afternoon, we will have two people contributing in addition to myself, at least, and the first is sitting to my right. So I'll ask

06:37

Good afternoon, sir. My name is Ralph Stapleton. I'm representing Bedford Borough Council on items five, construction traffic routes and six traffic management,

06:50

sir. And then if I could invite Mr. Tuttle, who should be online, to introduce himself. If he's

07:03

apologies, sir, I'm here. My name is Jez Tuttle. I work for Cambridgeshire county council in transport, and I will speak on items five and six. Thank you.

07:19

And then, sir, if I may also invite Mr. Brearley if he's on, if he's online,

07:27

Good afternoon, sir. Ewan Briley, I am employed by a com in capacity of expertise in agriculture, forestry and soils, and today, I'm representing the local authorities in those in the matter of soils and best and most versatile land.

07:48

Thank you. Thank you, sir. And then, in addition to those individuals, I also have the head offices from each of the host authorities, although at this stage, I'm not intending that any of them speak, okay, thank you. Okay.

08:03

Are there any agencies, either in the room or online who wish to introduce themselves for speaking today? Yes.

08:17

Jeremy bloom, representing national highways. I'm the third party DCO lead in the east region, and our interest is in items five and six. I'm joined by my colleague Matthew Lewis, and I'll ask him to introduce himself.

08:38

Thank you, sir, as my colleague Jeremy said, I'm Matthew Lewis, also representing national highways, and we'll be commenting on Item agendas five and six.

08:49

Yes, thank you. Any other agencies when they're online or in the room, any parish councils that wish to speak today.

09:02

Yes, I'm James Jubilee from grace. Dorton parish council, I was going to talk about construction and traffic management, which are five and six.

09:13

Thank you. Hi there. Matt Patterson from Dean Shelton parish council, also items five and six, the traffic, traffic and construction movement. Thank you.

09:29

Any other parish councils?

09:32

Hello, I'm Ben. I'm Ben F grave. I'm a resident of little Stoughton, and I'd like to talk about items five and six, construction, traffic management,

09:44

sorry, are you representing the parish council or just as an individual? Just as an individual? Okay, thank you. I will now move on individuals who wish to speak, starting within the room. Do.

10:02

Thank you, Sharon councilor. Sharon Duncan, Sarah, elected councilor for why Boston ward. I will also be speaking in regards to items number five and six. Can I also just put on record? I can't seem to get the agenda up at the moment, but there may be a few others that may wish to speak on. Is that okay? Oh, hold on, if you just bear with me for a second, I've got a printed version here.

10:24

Okay, have the case team got any printed versions of anybody else that's having any problems,

10:32

and item number seven, cumulative impacts from other projects and I think for now, that's it. Thank you. Okay, thank you.

10:51

My name is Christopher Lacey, and I live close to this project I wish to speak on in relation to items, 3456, and seven. Thank you. Kate

11:08

Sean Woodward, resident of Brook end, I'd like to speak about traffic movements and construction movements, and I live within 100 meters of the site. Yes, thank you.

11:31

Mr. Andrew Pike, resident at Hale Weston and nominated spokesperson on behalf of stop East Park energy and I would like to speak today on my gender items, 3456, and seven. Thank you.

11:49

This is Tracy Stokes, a long term resident of great Staughton. I'd like to speak about traffic and construction.

12:02

I thank you. Anybody else in the room? I'll move back to Microsoft Teams. Is anybody else on teams who would like to speak today?

12:17

Richard finston, local resident, I'd like to speak about BMV and food production, but may also have some comments on construction and traffic management. Yeah.

12:29

Thank you very much. Anybody else on teams? Nobody else in the room? Okay, thank you. So that concludes the first agenda item. I'm now going to move on to item two, which is the purpose of the issue specific hearing. Let me briefly explain the purpose of this hearing. Firstly, we won't allow the applicant present and explain the project in relation to the use of BMV, best and most versatile land and the alternatives explored. Secondly, the applicant will be asked to explain the impacts of the proposal and accommodation impacts of food production. Next, I will then ask the applicant to explain the impact of construction traffic in the locality. Following that, I will then ask the applicant to explain its traffic management proposals in relation to

13:40

the locality, plus updates on the consultation with local highway authorities and national highways. And finally, I will ask the applicant to describe what cumulative effects from construction traffic there would be from other large scale projects in the facility. Facility. So does anyone have any questions? About the purpose of today's hearing?

14:10

Okay, I will conclude that item and move straight on to Item three, the use of best and most versatile land. So a large proportion of the relevant representations received have cited concerns regarding the use of high quality, best and most versatile land. So could I ask the applicant explain its overall approach to best and most versatile land and the alternatives that were explored to minimize the use of such land? Thank you.

14:42

Thank you, sir. Tom. Rose blade, on behalf of the applicant, just a initial point of clarity as we're talking this afternoon from the applicant side, when we'll confirm this in our written summary of all representations at deadline one. But. At all references to policy and national policy statements, en one and en three, we will be referring to the 2024, NPSs, so as we're talking this afternoon, if anyone's following along as we're talking, those are the national policy statements we're looking at. So to move on to agricultural land and site selection, I suppose it's important that the approach taken by the applicant to mitigating impacts on agricultural land does go back to that initial site selection exercise undertaken in late 2021 which is reported in the site identification report, Appendix three, dash one of the environmental statement, and that's document reference a, PP, 058, in the examination library. Now for solar, the technology specific site selection policy in en three states that land type should not be the predominant factor in site selection, but the applicant should where possible, use brownfield or previously developed land. Where agricultural land is necessary. Poorer quality land should be preferred use best and I'm sorry, and best and most versatile land should be avoided where possible. The applicant's approach, as reported in the site identification report, followed such a sequential approach. It first defined a 15 kilometer area of search based on the need to be close enough to the Eaton soaking point of connection to keep the grid connection technically and commercially viable. Then, in accordance with lan three's preference for non agricultural and previously developed land, the applicant reviewed brownfield land registers, and in addition, looked at potential previously developed land which would not be on brownfield land registers within that overall 15 kilometer search area, it was concluded that no brownfield or previously developed land parcels met the minimum land requirement for a 400 megawatt scheme, either alone or in practicable clusters, meaning that agricultural Land was going to be necessary to deliver the project. So having established that agricultural land was necessary, the applicant then applied the next step in the mitigation hierarchy by targeting areas more likely to be of lower agricultural quality, doing this by reviewing natural England's provisional agricultural land classification to try to avoid land rather higher environmental value, ie, to avoid best and most versatile land. So we have a bigger which we are we okay to share figure on screen from the site identification report.

18:15

So so the figure on screen is figure six of the site, identification report application that we reference again, A, P, P, 058, it's explained through the narrative of the site identification report itself. But three broad search zones were identified, zones A, B and C, Zone A being at the top of that figure, b to the left and Sea to the south, these were targeted primarily towards areas likely to be of lower agricultural quality, once spatial planning constraints had been excluded, the figure does, I think, demonstrate quite clearly the extent of provisional grade two agricultural land within that 15 kilometer area of search, reflecting the high agricultural land quality in the much broader area, the applicant then balanced agricultural considerations against other en three site selection factors, including the grid connection, topography, proximity to dwellings, accessibility, and recommended taking forward search zone B to the left of the screen, primarily because it offered the most straightforward grid connection, which was the determinative factor. It is relevant that em three, paragraph two, point 10.24. Footnote 84 to talk about the route and type of terrain traversed by cabling linking the solar project to the grid connection, but having an important impact on the project's viability. So. This, this overall balancing exercise in relation to the different factors and how the search zone was was chosen, is set out in detail in Section six and seven of that site identification report. So following identification of broad search zone, search zone B, A, second stage of site selection was undertaken, which is reported in the land identification report. Appendix three, dash two of the ES, and that's document reference a, pp 059, this comprised a review of the land within the search out search zone where landowners had expressed an interest in the scheme in order to establish constraints of development and refine the overall land holding to be taken forward. The culmination of this work, therefore, was the identification of the site where a

sequential approach in relation to agricultural land had been followed to try and steer the development towards an area more likely to be of lesser environmental value, sorry, lesser agricultural value, recognizing the constraints of the High General agricultural land quality in The wider area around this particular substation. To my colleague,

21:25

Alistair field, Alistair field for the applicant, and run through the site specific findings of the surveys that were undertaken. So the initial indications from this study that we carried out in 2022 and our economist reconnaissance survey that we carried out in 2023 was that most, about 75% of the site, was best, most versatile land in grades two and three A, which is probably comparable with the findings of provisional agricultural land classification. So we took the findings of this reconnaissance survey to Natural England and discussed them with Natural England in early 2024 following which we carried out additional surveys to increase the sampling density at the request of Natural England. So table 13.8 of chapter 13 of the ES, which is a PP 049, confirms that 66.4% of the site is known to be BNB, with a further 5.4% as yet ungraded, as in unsurveyed, but for the purposes of the ES, it's been assumed to be grade two BNP land. So the assessment within the ES is therefore based on 551 555.1 hectares, or 71.8% of the order limits being best, most versatile land, mostly in sub grade three a which accounts for 349.5 hectares. This is also the conclusion of the 2023 recombinant survey, although the detailed ALC survey shown a slightly lower proportion of BMP land than we originally thought. Table 13.9 of chapter 13 sets out the distribution of grades in Bedford borough and huntingdonshire district, based also on the provisional ALC data. And table 1310 compares the proportions of each grade at the site against the wider borough and district area. It shows that the site would use no grade one land, which is 10% less than would be found in the wider area, and 15% proportionate, proportionally less grade two land. Conversely, the site would use 31% proportioning more grades free land. So table 1310, therefore shows that the site is located in an area within these two districts that is comparatively lower agricultural quality than found throughout the districts pass back

24:24

tomo is blade again for the applicant. So it's important then to distinguish between the overall order limits and the land that would be taken up by the solar farm itself. The Order limits comprise the land required for the construction, operation and maintenance of the scheme, including land required for both permanent and temporary purposes. And the order limits extend to approximately 773 hectares, with the order limits including land for the solar farm in addition to, but not limited to land for action. Process, cabin corridors, green infrastructure, habitat creation, temporary construction requirements and the grid connection. So in terms of overall, whether it's an efficient use of land within the site, it's set out at paragraph five, point 6.4, of the design approach. Document, which is document reference, A, P, P, dash, 034, the extent of land for the solar energy generating station IU work number one on the works plan covers approximately 446 hectares paragraph five, point 6.4, again, of the design approach document goes on to state that, with reference to paragraph two, point 10.17, of NPS en three, a typical solar farm requires between two to four acres per megawatt of output, and that the schemes land use equates to approximately 2.75 acres per megawatt for a 400 megawatt output, which is consistent, then, with the guidelines in NPS E and three, and as such, in our views, is considered to be an efficient use of the land resource available. I'll also just note in relation to the updated 2026 national policy statement, en three, the paragraph two point 10.9, of 2026 en three states that actually increases the typical land requirement from the two to four acres per megawatt set out in the 2024 NPS, up to between four and 5.6 acres per megawatt. So against the more updated, more recent government policy, the scheme still remains a very efficient use of of the land resource available. So we can now move on and discuss assessment findings, or we can pause so

27:21

carry on with the assessment. Fakings, okay, thank you.

27:30

Alistair field for the applicant. Section 1310, of PS. Chapter 13 presents the residual effects by receptor and provides a component level breakdown for each work type of against each ALC grade within tables 1313, and 1314, 1313, deals with the temporary use within sites a and or within sites A to D, which show that there's 496.6 hectares, or 17 1.5% of those sites is BND land, which increases slightly if the ungraded Land is assumed also to be grade two. Table 1314, sets out the permanent impacts of the of the scheme components which are within work, numbers 1234, and six, by by ALC grade, including the grade two and the ungraded land. And table 1314, shows that the permanent land loss is 13.49 hectares, of which 11.62 hectares is agricultural land and 1.87 hectares is non agricultural on the assumption that the great the ungraded land is also grade two, then 43% or 5.86 hectares of the permanent land loss is BNB, which is substantially below the overall 70 to 75% distribution of grades being BMP within the site, and shows That BNB has therefore largely been avoided by possible inciting the permanent elements. So most of the area of permanent adverse impact is non BNB land, either in grade 3b or non agricultural land. And again, most of the permanent land, the BNB permanent land take is in work number six, which is includes, particularly the permanent access tracks, where as a feature, it's as a linear feature, is difficult to avoid areas of BMV without a various security. You there circuitous route. Managed to get it out eventually, sorry, it wasn't even in my notes. So the total permanent adverse impact to grade two land, again, assuming the ungraded is Grade Two is 1.54 hectares, which is assessed as a significant effect, even though it's a very low magnitude of impact, the receptors seem to be a very high sensitivity receptor. And the area of subgrade three, a land subject to permanent adverse impact is 4.32 hectares. This isn't assessed as a significant impact in the years. The land that's proposed for green infrastructure in work number eight, which includes new grasslands. Planting areas would obviously be removed from agriculture use, but there's no discernible loss or reduction of soil functions that would restrict further future agricultural use. There are many government and agri environment schemes that support farmers in the creation of new woodlands and other habitats, and these changes are reversible, and the land could be returned to agriculture release so they're not therefore considered as a permanent loss of land to agriculture. I can run through the approach that we've taken to the ALC survey, if that

31:42

helps, yes, please.

31:46

So the aquatic line classification approach, including sampling density, is also set out in chapter 13, EPP 049, and supported by es Volume Two, Appendix 13.1, so A, P, P 115, so paragraph 13 point 4.6, of a, p, p 049, explains that the sampling was undertaken at a density of one survey point per two hectares across most of the site and at one survey point per hectare in areas of potentially greater impact, including the best the On site, substation, construction compounds and cable corridors, following as mentioned, right right at the outset, following consultation with with Natural England, we we reviewed the scope of the ALC survey, and paragraph 13, point 3.5, provides a rationale for taking this proportion of page two to the survey density. The approach that has been taken in the assessment to assume that all one graded, unsurveyed agricultural land is Grade Two has shown an assessment has been taken, the worst case, the worst case scenario.

33:29

Sorry, can I just ask today, just in terms of survey intensity, I'm mindful of natural England's response, which was in the examination library, yes, Dash 023, they've suggested survey intensity should be increased. What is your current position?

33:54

Our view is that the approach that we've taken to date is appropriate for planning and for EIA purposes. And I think that the results that we found so far whereby we've gone from a reconnaissance survey at one in four hectares, showing that approximately 75% of the site is best, most versatile, into three A, mostly three a, to a more detailed survey, showing one in two hectares, showing exactly the same results, in fact, slightly less BMP. I think that that demonstrates that the approach we've taken so far is suitable for planning and assessment purposes. However, you know, we have taken, obviously, taken natural England's advice. And for the the current versions of management plan proposes to increase the density of sampling to one in one, one in one for the purposes. That's the detailed soil management plan.

35:04

Okay, and that's good. Sorry, that will be reflected in the statement of common ground with Natural England as well.

35:10

Yes, that's the intention.

35:14

Okay, thank you. Proceed. Yeah.

35:23

Those are our submissions on the first item, yeah, Tom

35:30

rose played on behalf of the app, and I was just going to say that we're going to move on to talking about food production and security. Food Security now, or we can take questions on Paul say, I'll invite questions from around the room and virtually as well, but starting with the local authority, if there are any questions comments in relation to that,

35:57

Daniel Stedman Jones on behalf of the host authorities, so we, I don't have any comments to make at the moment, but I'll just check whether Mr. Brearley wants to contribute at this stage.

36:12

Thank you. I think, broadly, I think the approach has been very well explained, and the sequential approach, particularly to to the zonal concentration of effort once, once, the preferred area of search was identified. And I should like to point out that the standard methodology for agricultural land classification survey is one sample point per hectare, which for which there is an undertaking to increase sampling density to that level for the detailed soil management plan. And Mr. Field has made his observation that for planning, one in two hectares it was, was appropriate and, and I'm not inclined to disagree with that, but clearly, clearly, one in one provides higher quality data, but, but if it is available for the detailed soil management plan, then, then I accept the rationale provided. Okay, thank you. I should like to make one further point, if I may, you and Bradley On behalf of the local authority that it relates to the permanence of trees and hetero planting, and whilst that is reversible, national policy is such that it wouldn't be solely in the gift of the land holder. In the removal of trees and hedges requires authorization, particularly if they've been there for periods of decades. And therefore, whilst, whilst the impact on the soil resource is is not adverse, then I think, I think that should be considered as

a permanent loss of agricultural Land of the given grade, because, as I say, reversal of that would not be solely in the gift of the of the land holder.

38:52

Okay? Thank you. Applicant. Like to come back on that particular point

39:01

Alistair field for the applicant, I disagree. It is a reversible use, and just as easily as trees can be planted and grasslands, species rich grasslands, can be created, they can be reversed as well. It does take it isn't solely at the whim of the landowner that's agreed, but it's not irreversible. It's certainly reversible, and it's not the same as constructing a building on that land, for example,

39:42

okay, but you don't disagree with Mr. Brierly's point that substantial trade planning may require a forestry license or something of no nature. Thank you. Anybody else in the room would. Like to make a comment or have any questions of the applicant in relation to its approach to best and most versatile land, and I could call for the land classification. Mr. Pike,

40:23

thank you, sir. My name is Annie Pike, resident of Hale Weston and nominated spokesperson on behalf of stop East Park energy. I'll address the use of best and most versatile agricultural land. National Policy recognizes BMV as a finite national resource whose loss should be avoided where possible and minimized where unavoidable. Development on such land is not prohibited, but it requires clear evidence that its use is necessary and that lower conflict alternatives are not reasonably available. We've just heard in some detail from the applicant, the way they went about establishing the land parcels for for the project. So I'm going to detail of the 773 hectares, etc, they're using. I think the key question for the examination is not whether BMV land is present, but whether it's extensive use has been shown to be the least harmful practical option, and whether the land assembly has demonstratively sought to minimize the inclusion of BMV rather than simply reflecting availability or convenience, we've heard that the site selection process was driven by proximity to grid capacity and land availability.

41:47

It's not clear from the application materials that lower ground, lower grade land, within feasible connection distance, was comprehensively identified, compared and discounted on transparent planning grants. I don't think that's been made clear in the documents at all. This issue is particularly important where compulsory acquisition powers are sort such powers exist to enable land assembly, where voluntary agreement cannot be reached if lower quality land was available, but more difficult work to acquire. The examination may wish to understand whether its use was considered as an alternative to assembling extensive areas of BMV where development would result in the long term industrialization of a nationally important agricultural resource, confidence is required that the outcome reflects necessity rather than convenience or opportunity or the constraints of assembling your participating land holdings to assist the examination, I'd respectfully invite the examining authority to seek clarification from the applicant on three specific matters, whether the applicant can identify any specific areas of predominantly lower grade agricultural land within technically feasible connection distance that were examined and rejected together with the reasons for their exclusion. What analysis demonstrates that inclusion of extensive BMV land is no more than reasonably necessary in circumstances where lower quality land may not have been voluntary available, but compulsory acquisition powers could have put that within the land assembly and what documentary evidence demonstrates how agricultural land quality was weighed against other site selection factors in

concluding that this location represents the least harmful, practical option. In essence, the examination is being asked to determine not simply whether best and most versatile land is affected, but whether it's extensive loss has been demonstrated to be genuinely unavoidable. National Policy recognizes such land as a finite national resource. Removal from agricultural use on this scale and for this duration represents a substantial impact that may not be fully reversible in practice, even where restoration is proposed, the critical issue is therefore necessity. If the use of high quality agricultural land results primarily from site selection choices, land availability or scheme optimization rather than a demonstrable lack of reasonable alternatives, then the policy expectation to avoid such land where possible may not be satisfied where compulsory acquisition powers are sought. The threshold of justification is particularly high those powers exist to enable and assembly in the public interest, not simply to facilitate development on land that happens to be available stop East Park energy, therefore, respectfully invites the examining authority to consider whether the evidence before it demonstrates that the scale of impact on best and most versatile land is necessary, proportionate and unavoidable, or whether it reflects a site selection outcome that. Could reasonably have been different. Thank you.

45:04

Okay, thank you. I want to have a fuller written explanation, but if you want to give a high level response to that, please.

45:15

Tom rosemary, for the applicant, I was just going to confirm that we'll respond to those three points in writing for deadline one. Okay, thank you.

45:23

Just a supplementary question from myself. Think it's tables 13.10 and 13.11 of ES. Chapter 13 on soils provides an analysis of the proportion of agricultural land classification of the of the site compared to individual local authorities. Think it would be useful for my understanding at least what the wider impact is on regional and national supply, if that could be provided, or if it's already provided, signpost me to it, but I couldn't find anything.

46:09

Tom rosebag for the applicant, will take that as an action. Okay? Thank you.

46:17

Mr. Woodward, I just wanted to make a point about the temporary. Just introduce yourself again. Sorry. Oh, sorry. Sean Woodward, local resident, I live within 100 meters of the proposed site. Just acting for myself today, I find a contradiction with the landscaping, temporary nature of it. We're talking about planting which is going to take 10 years to mature, and then we're talking about removing it after 40 years, which is 30 years later. And that's also part of the 10% biodiversity increase that the applicant's claiming. So there's there's a contradiction there. If you're going to put this in and then take it all again, out again. It's going to completely disrupt the landscape for wildlife again, therefore it must be working against the biodiversity claims, I think. Thank you.

47:15

Okay, the applicant might respond, yeah.

47:19

Tom rose made for the applicant. So the proposed planting, in the sense of the hedgerows, trees, Woodland, are not proposed to be removed at the end of the scheme. They would be left for the

landowners when the land and the leases that the applicant would be under would end. So the planting would be given back to them, and it would be their discretion, ultimately, whether to retain or revert those areas back, but acknowledging points made previously about other environmental protections possibly being there over such over such habitat features do Okay,

48:06

Mr. Bonacie, I live close to the project just one point on the alternative site assessment. Thank you for that justification. But it seems to me that the process is preferred the lowest cost land option, which also happens to be the best food best and most first are food land. And they've approached farmers and landowners for these BMV sites, the applicants have based their scheme on those responses. And there are those approaches, rather than carrying out a fully objective evaluation of the options. So because, you know, we should have been looking at commercial rooftops and brownfield sites and lower quality land, which may have been more expensive but actually should have been properly looked at if we're going to do the test properly,

48:57

thank you. The applicant like to respond to that.

49:03

Tom rose Blake for the applicant, cost was not a factor in ruling out areas of brownfield land or previously developed land. We did look at the Brownfield land registers, as I said, is set out within the site identification report and sought to identify previously developed land in the area. But there was no areas of such a scale that would would suit this project.

49:35

Okay, in terms Mr. Lacy's approach, in terms of different options, rooftops, things of that nature, with that impact and viability of the overall scheme.

49:55

Project is seeking to meet a national need in terms of solar. Generation. We don't disagree that commercial rooftop solar should be delivered at a greater scale than is currently happening, but I suppose it wasn't an option that was explored for a project of this scale, because and I would need an engineer to advise me on this. But connecting such solar, such a solar system, which would be distributed that way across multiple rooftops at a 400 megawatt scale, I don't understand how that would be feasible.

50:35

So, okay, thank you. Can I just make another comment on that there are lots and lots of commercial rooftops along the corridor of the 41 and around the a one area, which basically could have been LinkedIn. So I don't accept that point using best and most versatile land should be an absolute last choice. Thank you.

51:02

Anybody else in the room? Comment? Could get a microphone that gentleman, please?

51:10

Yeah, I will. I wasn't down to speak, but the applicant has put emphasis on the fact that it needs to be within 15 kilometer, kilometers

51:18

of did you introduce yourself. Yeah.

51:21

Les Rand, the local resident, Grace Dalton, the applicant, has placed the importance of the need for their sites to be within 15 kilometers of substation, but we have offshore wind farms that are 100 kilometers away from the nearest substation. So can they answer why they're 15 kilometers is so important. So Dogger, bank east, Anglia one, East, angling, two. They're all miles out to sea, lot more than 15 kilometers. This is just an arbitrary number that you've come up with.

51:57

Tom Rosebud on behalf of the applicant. So it was determined from the outset by the technical engineering team, of which I'm not a part of that team, that a 400 megawatt connection into the Eaton soaking substation would be such that the maximum distance that project could be from the point of connection before it's it's no longer likely to be viable is 15 kilometers. That was the number that was given in terms of the area research I understand that is consistent with other solar projects, nationally significant solar projects of comparative scale across the country.

52:42

I might just, if I might just answer that. That would be because of the overall low output from solar compared to offshore wind.

52:53

Tom rare space for the applicant. I don't have any comment on that.

52:56

Okay, if we can move on any

53:04

sorry, Tracy Stokes resident of great Staughton, it has already been mentioned, though, that there would have been an opportunity to connect the Barford substation. And that would be, would have been land there would have been closer. And all the evidence that I've reviewed is that actually distance to the substation is not an issue. It's only an issue in relation to cost. It's not an issue in relation to anything else. It's not technically necessary to be within 15 kilometers of the substation. So can you perhaps the inspector would like to ask why you didn't consider connections to other substations in the area,

53:44

like the responding please

53:55

Tom rose made on behalf of the applicant, so the point of connection that was given for the project is the Eaton soaking substation, and that's what the connection agreement reflects. It isn't the little Barford substation, I think you referenced. And so we have to connect to a substation where there's capacity for a connection. I'm not saying there isn't necessarily a connection at little buffer, but that's not the connection that's in the agreement that this project has.

54:32

Sorry, May I respond to that? I don't think that answers the question. I think that says that they only considered a connection to the Eaton socombe Power Station. Sorry, substation. They didn't consider alternatives, alternative sites within the area if that was necessary.

54:52

My understanding of the applicant's response was, the capacity for the substation could be that.

55:06

So Nicholas, Andrews from the applicant, thanks for the question. Just clarify that our connection agreement is based on an offer from the national energy system operator, which is driven by assessment of capacity, where export is possible to the grid, and we were offered a point of connection at Eaton, second substation only. Thank you. Thank you.

55:34

Anybody else within the room has a question? Microphone be brought across the sledding corner, please.

55:51

Amanda Patel, I live local to the scheme. I just wanted to make a point around grid connection. There's at least one other solar and sip in the country, which is further away than 15 kilometers from its grid connection, and that's the lime down scheme in Wiltshire. So that isn't a technical constraint, as far as I understand. Thank you. Anything

56:19

Tom rose played on behalf of the applicant. We can't really comment on other projects, because every project's got different specific commercial and technical drivers.

56:27

Okay, thank you. Just one final point if I may. Christopher Lacey, local resident, I believe that this is based on profitability, rather than, you know, looking at the sequential options. So I think you know that profitability point has been a big driver, not just viability. And clearly this is supported by the contract for difference regime, which is ultimately public or Bill payer money. So I just wanted to flag that. Thank you.

57:01

Any other comments online? Richard, for instance, please.

57:09

Thank you very much. Mr. Sword. Just to follow up on that point, it does sound like they're saying Eastern token was the driver of their site selection, and only after that it was any, was any thought considered to brownfield land. And for whatever reason, 75% of this project is BMV, and in every other the average across the UK is 31% so by only focusing on eating token, they've raised a proportion of BMV two and a half times over the average. And it seems to me that if eating seconds are granted, then yes, it's no agricultural area with lots of farmland, but there are vast ways of the country where that wouldn't apply. Thanks very much.

57:59

Okay, thank you. Mr. Vincent, think the applicants responded pretty much to those similar points in previous responses. I'll invite them to say, add anything else?

58:19

Julian Boswell, for the applicant. We don't have a central Electricity Generating board anymore that was wound up long time ago. We have market based system, and as a developer, the applicant has to

operate within the way that market based system operates, and in terms of how it allocates grid connections, and as Mr. Rose and Mr. Andrews have explained, that's what we've done.

58:47

Thank you. Mr. Boswell, conscious of time, so I will now move on to Item four, impacts on food production. Hand over to the applicant. I you.

59:02

Thank you, sir. Alistair field for the applicant, I do first with food security issues in a general sense, and then look at food production issues arising from the particular site. So in terms of general food security issues, I think it's important to understand that food security is shaped by a number of factors, particularly supply, demand, international trade, domestic trends, inputs, outputs, food safety, consumer confidence. And it isn't just a matter of the quantity or the value of food grown in the country. So defra's summary of the assessment of UK foods security is actually a broadly stable picture, even following the Russian invasion of of. Ukraine and well, they haven't responded yet to the latest from Robert anyway, it's been a number of global supply chain shocks in the last five years, and yet the food security system on the even global scale and the national scale has been broadly stable. However, therefore warns that this needs to be seen in the context of longer term risks, particularly from climate change. And the most recent example given in their food security report is exceptionally wet winter and spring in 2024 which really affected domestic production. So the the production to Supply Ratio within deferece agriculture and the UK Statistics has shown a stable trend in the last 20 years, with production at 60% for all food consumed within the country, and 75% for indigenous foods, as in foods that can be grown within this country, so not bananas and pineapples and like so the UK overall relies on imports for something like 40% of its food. Now, the gap in this ratio between all food and food that can be produced in this country has remained stable for the last 70 years. And the only time when since the Second World War, when these proportions were higher than they currently are, was in the 1980s and 1990s when Common Agricultural Policy subsidies, subsidies led to overproduction throughout Europe and the dumping of commodities on the food on world markets. The UK Food Security report also indicates that the UK produces most of its own cereals, with the production supply ratio continuously over to over 80% for the last 20 years, and increasing to 93% in 2023 and that's still that still accounts for the need to import certain cereals that can't be grown in this country. But there's variability, natural variability from year to year, depending particularly on climate, weather events, but also market fluctuations. But generally, overall production is 20 to 25 million tons per annum. The the applicant's position is that this scheme would not significantly affect food security or agricultural production, and this aligns with the government's position, which is set out in the UK, solar, old solar road solar road map produced last year, which notes that the government does not consider the increased solar deployment poses a threat to food security, and that the biggest risk to food security and the natural environment is climate and nature crisis in terms of the agricultural production from the site. Table 1313, of chapter 13 of the US sets out the agricultural land that's taken out of arable use from sites A to D, which totals 694.8 hectares. The site is predominantly in use as arable farmland and mostly cereal crops and oil seeds and other great crops, as well as uses such as the sustainable farming incentive and its various land cover mixes. If we use wheat as the example, crop as a as a reason why to express the scale of available output for gone the the um, the yield in in the east of in this region is eight tons per hectare, which is slightly above the national average. And if we were to remove 694.8 hectares from arable production, assuming it was all wheat, then there would be a loss of 5558 tons of wheat per annum from not farming this site. Within the regional context, the East of England produces something like 3.4 million tons per annum. And the national average of wheat was something like 12 point 8 million tons per annum over the last five years. So in this context, the loss of agricultural production would equate to point one six of total wheat production in the East of England, or not point not. Three. Of the national total. I mean, this is, this is very marginal, and it also it's a worst case in that it assumes that all the site is sown and grows the highest yielding cereal crop, which is wheat.

1:05:22

The within other government measures. The government itself has recognized in the UK solar roadmap that to reach the high end policy scenario for ground mounted solar the area of agricultural land would equate to naught point 6% of the UK's utilized agricultural land by 2030 which equates To 100,800 hectares of arable land. Within other government initiatives. The latest figures on the Sustainable Farming Initiative shows that there are 340,000 hectares of land within that scheme, which the government notes that in extremis, almost all of this land could be brought back into production within one growing season, and that's within also a context of half a million hectares of arable land that is currently uncropped, that includes the 340 within the Sustainable Farming Initiative. So within that within that context, the applicant's petition is that the scheme does not pose a significant risk to UK food security. I

1:07:03

you concluded, sorry. Have you concluded?

1:07:11

Joe, yes, I have. Yes, I have, sorry. That was, that was my concluding comment.

1:07:17

If I could invite any common questions from around the room. See,

1:07:27

I think that that analysis basically doesn't overlay the cumulative loss of best and most versatile land around the country, and I think the team may be familiar with the report science for sustainable agriculture UK food security, the outlook to 2050 by Derek Wilkinson, who was the former chief economist for NFU and CLA, which was released in September last year. That shows that 48% at the moment, round about, hit by his analysis, and I'm happy to share that report with the meeting. And that figure, he also did look to that between 2050 with evidence based, looked at solar as part of that, and looked at the total loss, and looked at land loss, which could get to as much up towards 70% and solar was slighted as being an area with a real risk for best, most versatile land loss. So I'd urge people to look at that and take that into account. Thank you.

1:08:32

It would be helpful. Mr. Lacy, as you said, if you could submit that, give the applicants the opportunity to respond,

1:08:41

I will certainly share that

1:08:46

anybody else in the room with a comment question on food Production, food anybody online that would like to contribute? I

1:09:04

Yes, thank you. I have no further questions on that particular item, so I will move on to,

1:09:15

can I just respond on the cumulative point? Sorry, could I just respond on the cumulative point as well? In the UK, solar roadmap has already undertaken that cumulative assessment in reaching the

conclusion that the high end scenario for solar would require 100,000 odd hectares of agricultural land so that that system has already been undertaken.

1:09:48

So if you could again follow that up for deadline, one, give everybody involved the opportunity to examine. That and respond. Thank you. Okay, thank you, sir. So if I can move on to Item five construction,

1:10:10

sorry, sir, just I understood this agenda item was also going to cover soil quality, rather than just food security or food production.

1:10:22

I thought we had through different presentations. They had been covered. But is there a particular question on soil quality you would ask, like they asked the applicant?

1:10:36

Yeah, well, well, yes, there is Andy pike on behalf of stop East East Park energy. I have more general statement around soil, soil quality and the effects of this development on soil quality itself. I'm happy to put that more in writing, if you would prefer, if that's not what you want to cover in this agenda item. But I was going by by the title of the gender item being the effects of food production and soil quality. So my points were more generated to direct it to soil quality.

1:11:09

Okay, so is there anything you would like to elaborate on that point give the applicant an opportunity to respond, Yes.

1:11:18

Thank you, sir. Andy Pike, on behalf of stop East Park energy. I'd just like to mention that removal of a nationally significant resource from conventional agriculture for approximately 40 years represent generational land use change, rather than temporary interruption. The examination is therefore being asked to consider not only immediate impacts, but the long term implications for agricultural productivity and food production capacity. The large scale solar development is going to include extensive ground and subsurface intervention across a wide area. These include piled foundations, underground cabling, trenches access trunks, substantial infrastructure associated with substations and battery storage facilities. Such interventions alter the soil profile and physical condition of the land for many decades, and in some locations, will alter it permanently driven or bored. Piles penetrate soil horizons and may extend into underlying strata. Cable trenches disturb soil structure and drainage patterns. Hard standing and foundations associated with electrical infrastructure represent concentrated areas of long term disturbance. And in combination, these works can alter water movement, aeration and root penetration, even where the surface appears to be restored, compaction from heavy material machinery, mixing of soil horizons and loss of organic matter can reduce permeability, impaired drainage and diminish fertility. These effects may accumulate gradually and may not become apparent immediately, and can manifest over time. So for recovery to pre disturbance, condition cannot be assumed, where soils remain altered for several decades. The key issue is therefore, not simply short term disturbance, but whether the agricultural capability of the land will be preserved in the long term. I therefore respectfully invite clarification on a number of points which you may wish to point towards the applicant, sir, whether all piled foundations, underground cables and various structures will be removed in full at decommissioning, if any elements are to remain, what assessment has been undertaken of their implications for future agricultural use and soil function, what evidence demonstrates that soil

structure and fertility will be maintained at a level consistent with current productivity over the full operational period? How soil quality will be monitored and what mechanisms will trigger remedial action if degradation occurs, and how the success of soil reinstatement will be verified both after construction and decommissioning, where development like this affects a finite Agricultural Resource. The decisive issue is not whether restoration is proposed, but whether the evidence demonstrates that the land's productivity, productive capacity will in fact be preserved, because once soil function is materially degraded, it cannot realistically be recreated by condition or commitment. Thank you.

1:14:27

Yes, thank you, Mr. Pike, and if you would like to respond high level and followed up in a more detailed response in writing,

1:14:35

Tom rose played on behalf of the applicant. These are points which we're aware have been raised through relevant representations and have been preparing responses on so we'll take an action to respond to each of those points raised by stop E, spark energy. Thank you.

1:14:52

Okay, thank you. It's quarter past three now, so I. I'll take a short adjournment with sorry. I

1:15:13

want to make a quick observation or pose a question on cumulative impact. Could you introduce yourself? Local resident, there was talk earlier of cumulative impact of solar infrastructure in the UK, and I'm just asking to clarify what period that you're referring to. By 2035 the government's target is to have 75 gigawatts of solar, ground mounted solar, and that equates to 375,000 acres of farmland, which is about the size of Greater London. I think that's larger than what you were referring to earlier. So I just wanted to get a point of clarity on that, please. And further to that, the cumulative impact question, because this is not evenly distributed across the UK. It's in Norfolk, Kent, Yorkshire, it's, it's, it's quite clustered. Lincolnshire is very, very clustered. We have our own cluster developing here. We've talked about cumulative impact over the last two days. And within our area, there's a sort of banana shape of 2800 acres of solar infrastructure developing other smaller schemes, developing, and gaps within that. So I think the cumulative impact in regions is something to be determined, particularly nationally. Thank you.

1:16:32

Would you like to comment on that?

1:16:45

The figures from the solar road map were referring to 2030, let's see as time frame so

1:17:06

I just asked, does that include sorry? Sorry, so

1:17:12

we'll just take 30 seconds, please.

1:17:25

Sorry. Tom rose played on behalf of the applicant I was just wants to clarify that where we're talking about the numbers being 2030, that's the number that was used in our evidence of 100,000 hectares, as opposed to the number used by Miss Patel,

1:17:48

as I understand it, yeah, I

1:17:50

think there's some miscorrelation of

1:17:57

well, we'll times And in our submission, summary or submission deadline. One will set out the references that we've used for and in relation to the second point about cumulative impacts from from different projects. I think that's on agenda later, agenda item today, isn't it?

1:18:18

Cumulative impact was going to focus on the traffic, construction traffic, but if you have a point about the cumulative impacts of agriculture here,

1:18:39

Tom rose big on behalf of the applicant, no further comment at this stage on cumulative impacts in relation to aquaculture. Okay, thank you.

1:18:47

One final comment on this agenda item. Sorry, I

1:18:52

just wanted to clarify. Amanda Patel, local resident, it's not it's not my data that I'm quoting. It's government data. Michael Shanks has confirmed 75 gigawatts, 375,000 acres, size of Greater London. That's that's the ultimate target. Thank you.

1:19:09

The applicants said they'll take it away and respond and will be submitted before the examination, during the examination. So one final comment.

1:19:22

Thank you. Tracy Stokes, resident of great Staunton, it seems that these figures are changing all the time, according to the things that I have observed, and I'm not sure that it takes into account all the potential solar and sick projects which are continually being added to the pipeline. So the figures are, it's a continually moving feast. So I think that it needs to be calibrated accordingly.

1:19:48

So we have to assess the latest evidence available, and the applicants will submit that as part of the. For the examination process.

1:20:02

Yeah, thank you. Okay,

1:20:09

so, yes, I'll take a short adjournment 10 minutes. We'll recommence at 330 and move on to Item five, construction traffic. Then if you were watching the live stream, then please be aware that will now stop to view the restarted meeting. You will need to refresh your browser page when we restart. Thank you. It's now adjourned. You.