

Hearing Transcript

Project:	Springwell Solar Farm
Hearing:	Issue Specific Hearing 1 (ISH1) - Part 2
Date:	08 May 2025

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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:02:29 - 00:00:35:14

I will just say again, um, please, please don't approach, um, the examining authority outside of a hearing, uh, which has been, uh, which isn't open. Um, we don't want to appear rude. Um, but for purely for reasons for fairness and transparency, we can't have private, private conversations with anyone. Whilst the subject matter might be completely innocent. Uh, it might not be perceived that way to somebody else. Uh, and that's the reason why we can't have private discussions with anyone. If you have any queries about the running of the hearing outside of the hearings, please contact the case team.

00:00:36:02 - 00:01:03:10

Um, that's exactly why they're here. To support us. Um, they have made me aware that maybe some people are struggling to hear. So if all participants can just make sure that they do speak clearly directly into the microphone. Uh, that would be much appreciated. Thank you. Okay. Mr. Williams, I think you were partway through what you wanted to say. So maybe if you could just recap what you said before the break and, um. Carry on. Thank you.

00:01:05:00 - 00:01:38:16

Yeah. Basically just again, recap. The point is, there is no grid connection. What? Pure and simple. No grid connection. And the inspector needs to start off based on no grid connection. Not with the applicant. Assuming there will be a grid connection. Today, there is no good connection. Tomorrow there is no good connection. Grid connection may come at some point. It may get turned down. So this application needs to be reviewed based on no grid connection.

00:01:38:18 - 00:02:06:28

And what is the benefit based on it having no good connection. There is no good connection. Let's be open and honest about that point. Um, the other point, I would like to just raise one comment. Um, that was mentioned very briefly. There was I think somebody mentioned Drax. Well, we all know about Drax, don't we? It's not doing a great deal for carbon emissions. So let's be honest about that. So we also question whether or not this will be the panacea that the applicant pretends it will be.

00:02:07:06 - 00:02:38:09

Okay. I think the point about Drax was the the similar nature of the necessary for a requirement within the DCO. It was it wasn't comparing the developments per se. It was the the contents of the DCO. Um, and in terms of the the point about the grid connection. Um, National policy statement does consider the option where the grid connection isn't there and already in situ, uh, which is why I've run through some of the questions, which ultimately is what the M.P.s says, and I'm probing the applicant on.

00:02:38:11 - 00:02:45:22

So that's the nature of the questions I've asked and why I've asked them, if that helps. Thank you. Anything from the applicant.

00:02:46:06 - 00:03:19:24

For the applicant. Just briefly. And perhaps when I've said grid connection, that's been implied to mean literally physically existing at the moment. But, um, we do have a grid connection statement submitted with our application that is app 0160. As we're required to set out, um, to give confidence as to how the grid connection will be provided. So to be very clear, we've had a grid connection offer, and we have now an agreement with National Grid to connect and export energy to to Navy in connecting in 2029 and 2030.

00:03:20:00 - 00:03:51:22

Um, National grid as the system operator is under obligations generally and also under that agreement to deliver on that. So there are obligations there. Um, and so that's the point about the grid connection. Uh, in terms of construction, there's no policy requirement that it needs to be consented ahead or with our scheme. And as you've just said, Ian, one envisages this precise situation and allows for that. Um, and then again, I will just, um, come back to that requirement point about the commercial realities of that and that that's unnecessary. And I don't think there's anything further I need to say on, on any of those points.

00:03:51:24 - 00:03:52:12

Thank you.

00:03:52:27 - 00:04:02:27

Okay. Thank you. Anything else? Mr. Alvin, would you like to say something on the grid? Connection. Thank you. So you just wait for the microphone. I think it's just behind you. There we go.

00:04:05:00 - 00:04:36:23

Yeah. I'm concerned when I hear the kind of discussion that's going on here at the moment about the fact that they've got an agreement with National Grid for a grid connection, because what that's telling me is that the conversations and the discussion and the hearings that we're having at the moment are going through an exercise that's really just just that and not really taking account of the views, the concerns, the feelings.

00:04:37:10 - 00:05:33:04

And it's the same with with the ncddc at the end of the day. That decision will need to go before the planning committee, which is made up of elected counsellors who, in theory at least, are supposed to represent the interests of the people who have elected them. And for that matter, a planning committee or planning department is actually employed by and paid for by people living in Ncdcc who will be most affected by this? These proposals, whether that be the um, Springwell development or what the National Grid decide to do, these are things that are being planned in the areas where we live and which we call our home.

00:05:34:19 - 00:06:07:07

And if this is to be anything more than a paper exercise, statements about what you've agreed between one company and another, it's all well and good. But hang on a minute. How about local democracy? How about the fact that the decision should be made by the elected representatives. Hopefully by them listening and understanding what's at stake here. I know there's all kinds of, um, you know, you've got to be tight on planning law and you've got to be absolutely watertight on this and that.

00:06:07:09 - 00:06:24:11

Otherwise they'll go to appeal, and that'll cost tens of thousands of pounds. Maybe people who are paying their rates or their council tax in Ncdcc would like to spend that money on defending, uh, an appeal. Okay. We'll take those kinds of things into account. Otherwise, this is a place.

00:06:24:26 - 00:06:26:05

For us to hear from the.

00:06:26:07 - 00:06:38:11

District council about how it will determine the, the substation and, and some comfort in terms of how how it will treat it as normal in terms of an application for planning permission.

00:06:40:25 - 00:07:05:09

For district council? Yes, sir. The substation will be determined within the corners of that application on its own merits. No application has currently been received, and once it is received, it will be determined in the usual way, so it may or may not go to committee. That will all depend on the Council's constitution and other procedural requirements, so it will be determined on its own merits.

00:07:05:23 - 00:07:17:11

Thank you. And could you, the applicant, maybe just explain the relationship with National Grid and the difference between an offer of grid connection and the deliverability of the proposed substation?

00:07:17:13 - 00:07:50:14

Thank you sir. Miss comm for the applicant. Yeah, the point I was going to pick up on that, um, because we have the grid connection agreement. That doesn't predetermine this. The outcome of this application and this decision. Um, but one of the factors as part of this application is the benefits of our scheme, which is that we will generate a significant amount of renewable energy. So the czar and Secretary of State do need to have some, some comfort as set out in, in one that we will be able to deliver on those benefits which which the Grid Connection agreement offer an agreement, um, goes towards, um.

00:07:50:21 - 00:07:59:19

That's fine. Um, obviously, so that, you know, that, you know, we can provide the benefits that we say we will provide. Um, does that answer your question as well?

00:07:59:21 - 00:08:30:11

Thank you. Yeah. And hopefully, Mr. Alwyn, that's helped to just put your fears. Um, yeah. To address your fears. Thank you. Um, okay. If there's nothing else on grid connection, um, we've got about 15 minutes now before we are due to adjourn for, um, the two minutes silence. So I'll quickly delve into our first agenda item on cumulative effects. But we will pause wherever we are at 1150. Um, so again, a little bit of preamble.

00:08:30:15 - 00:09:02:14

Um, the environmental statement cumulative assessment considers the proposed development alongside other projects. Um, Lincolnshire County Council have requested that a similar approach be adopted for the solar projects in western Lincolnshire, where each applicant was required to provide

or did provide an Inter relationship report at the start of their examination. Um. The County Council note that these reports captured information from emerging national infrastructure projects and as details about the projects became available.

00:09:03:01 - 00:09:27:13

Um, the applicant undertook further assessments, uh, to assess how these might affect the cumulative impact assessment that had been prepared and originally submitted with the EAS. Um. Question for the applicant, please. Are you agreeable to providing such a document that would ultimately be updated at each deadline to help the examination track any developments in relation to the other schemes that are of relevance.

00:09:28:20 - 00:09:36:06

To the applicant? Um, yes, we were able to do that. Um, I can pass you to Mrs. Price to expand upon slightly what that will look like, if that's helpful.

00:09:36:08 - 00:09:37:15

That would be useful. Thank you.

00:09:37:19 - 00:09:38:23

Thank you, Mrs. Price.

00:09:40:26 - 00:10:16:12

Thank you. Sarah Price for the applicant. So as Miss Coleman's just mentioned, we will be preparing this interrelationship report. Um, and the intention is to submit that to you at deadline one. The applicant has worked with the available information to identify the projects where there could be the potential for an interrelationship, and that encompasses inception. So nationally significant infrastructure project applications as well as major applications.

00:10:16:18 - 00:10:53:15

And the projects that we've identified that will be covered by the interrelationship report are, as we've already discussed, the National Grid, Navy and B substation and the Foss Green Solar farm, the Leo de Solar Farm, Beacon Fen Solar Farm, Fen Solar Farm, and also the Lincolnshire Reservoir Project. Um, we're keeping that list under review. And for instance, we understand that there are two recent applications for battery energy storage systems, which we will review and also include those as appropriate.

00:10:54:00 - 00:11:28:08

Um, and we'll be engaging with, um, Lincolnshire County Council and North Kesteven District Council. Sorry, I've got a bit of an echo. Um, to ensure that we agree those list of projects in terms of each of those projects that I mentioned, they have various different relationships with the Springwell project and the example that was given of the projects around the West Burton um, area.

00:11:28:27 - 00:12:01:03

There in some cases was quite a lot of overlap in terms of shared cable corridors, for instance. And that was a big purpose, as I understand it, even though I wasn't involved with those schemes. Um, the opportunities were taken to share some of the infrastructure where appropriate. Um, in this case, um,

there is uh, is much less overlap. And the overlap comes from the fact that a number of the solar farm projects are proposed to connect into the Nathan B substation.

00:12:01:05 - 00:12:32:24

So there is some overlap of cable corridor, um, where each of those are coming into the substation. Uh, they're all coming from different directions. Um, so we don't anticipate that there would be opportunities, as there was for the other projects to, to share, um, cable corridors or mitigation, for instance, um, and with the other projects that I mentioned, which are beacon Fen Phen and the Lincolnshire Reservoir, all of those projects are much further away geographically, so there isn't any overlap with the order limits.

00:12:33:04 - 00:12:58:06

Um, we will nevertheless be, setting out as soon as you have asked for it. The projects where there is a potential for interrelationships, but we expect that that's much more likely to look at how we have assessed them from a cumulative perspective, rather than opportunities for shared cable corridors or mitigation and enhancement, for instance.

00:12:58:21 - 00:13:05:08

Thank you. Thank you. Understood. Um, the county council. Does that sound like what you were seeking?

00:13:06:28 - 00:13:47:21

Thank you sir. Justine Foster for Lancashire County Council. Um, yes. Lincolnshire Council very much welcome the position from the applicant, um, to produce the into a relationship report. Um, I think it will, it will, will bring a lot into the examination. And I think it will certainly, um, help with the understanding, um, of the relationship between these projects. Um, for the, for the communities that are affected and also for, for, for the examining authority, um, and the ultimate state in making those decisions. Um, I think I would just like to say we are seeing in Lincolnshire unprecedented numbers of nationally significant infrastructure projects and other large scale energy developments.

00:13:47:28 - 00:14:19:23

And the interrelationship report that's been produced for the solar schemes around Gainsborough isn't the only example. Now there is another one in existence that's being produced, um, by the outer doubting offshore wind scheme. Um, and that is bringing together, um, lots of the schemes over in the, the eastern part of the county. And whilst a number of those schemes are very long linear schemes, it's also including schemes such as Lincolnshire Reservoir in that process. And um these schemes don't necessarily overlap.

00:14:19:25 - 00:15:08:05

So that's the point that I've wanted to make. They're not necessarily sharing the same grid connection corridors. Um, but it will have a benefits in helping to understand those Interrelationships, details around the timings and construction, phasing, and how the order limits of the projects relate to each other, which I think is a very useful thing to have for the communities that are affected, to see how these schemes all look vocationally together. Um, it also, um, the intention behind the interrelationship is, is also to promote that collaborative working as well, um, where possible between

the developers, which can have benefits in terms of shared mitigation and also from other benefits that could be enhancements that could be delivered as part of the schemes collectively.

00:15:08:23 - 00:15:18:27

Um, and um, it sort of sets out the matters that have been agreed in any further work that could be sort of jointly undertaken and by the projects.

00:15:20:16 - 00:15:31:29

Thank you very much. Okay. Um, just one quick follow up question. When is that likely to be submitted? Will it be Deadline. One. It will be.

00:15:32:12 - 00:15:32:28

Yes, it will be.

00:15:33:00 - 00:15:48:23

Deadline one. Okay. Thank you very much. That's greatly appreciated. Um, next question, uh, is in relation to whether the Leo de solar farm is a sufficient stage in the process now to be considered in the cumulative assessment. And, uh, if I could get the applicant's thoughts on that. Thank you.

00:15:49:11 - 00:15:56:28

It's common for the applicant. Um, I'm going to pass you over to miss Jade Garner, um, principal environmental consultant at RSC. Thank you.

00:15:58:03 - 00:16:21:17

Thank you for the applicant. Um. Thank you. Um, yes, we can confirm that it is a sufficient stage. Um, when we submitted the application, um, the solar farm had not submitted their scoping report. However, um, now, that's in the public domain, and we have that information that will be included as part of our cumulative effect assessment, which will be, um, updated and reissued at deadline one.

00:16:21:19 - 00:16:22:26

Okay. Thank you.

00:16:33:10 - 00:16:50:18

Okay. It's more of a general question for the local authorities and a very high level. Are you generally content with the the approach that the US has taken to cumulative effects? I've come to the county council first. If you're in a position to be able to answer that at this stage.

00:16:51:27 - 00:17:22:04

Thank you, Justine Foster for Lincolnshire County Council. Um, obviously we will make further comments on this in the local impact report. But but at that sort of high level, we acknowledge that the applicant, um, has provided a cumulative assessment. Um, it it has been prepared on the information that's been available today, and I appreciate the comments about that. They will be reviewing that to include the Oda scheme. Um, the approach um, um, has been taken is in line with the planning Inspectorate's advice.

00:17:22:06 - 00:17:57:19

And um, we do welcome the Pacific chapter within the in the ass dedicated to to cumulative impacts. And as a council, we have been consulted during the prep process. Um, on the long and the short list of projects and we will make further comments in our in our local impact report. But as we did highlighting the relevant representation, we are seeing unprecedented numbers of nationally significant infrastructure projects. And, um, it is a very significant concern to, to the council and that we would like to to promote that.

00:17:57:21 - 00:18:27:21

The cumulative impact assessment is kept under regular review whilst the spring wall scheme is going through its DCO process, because a lot of some of these schemes are now being delivered at quite significant pace. So the situation, um, is, is evolving um, all the time. Um, the cumulative assessment with respect to the nave and B substation, we note um, in the ES is a high level appraisal. Um, and it's based on assumptions, tionS on information on similar applications.

00:18:27:27 - 00:19:03:17

Um, and this is stated to be due to the limited amount of information available on this project at that time. Um, but as we've already heard in the connection section, it is an essential part of the development to enable it to go ahead. And therefore, we would question at this stage whether there is enough information available, um, on the nave and B substation for a robust assessment of those inter project effects, um, of the developments. And um, I would like to highlight paragraph four 11.9 of M one um, which um, follows on from the paragraphs we've already heard.

00:19:03:21 - 00:19:25:22

Um, during the grid connection section, which states that if the applicant, um, pursues that option, then there are implicit risks of in doing so, um, and that they must provide sufficient information to comply with the EIA regulations. Um, and that's including around the cumulative effects, um, that will which will encompass information on those grid connections.

00:19:27:13 - 00:19:34:15

Thank you. The district council. We've got about three minutes before we need to adjourn. So if you could squeeze it in that time, that would be fantastic.

00:19:34:17 - 00:19:51:18

Thank you. Thanks for Norfolk District Council. In short, yes, we are happy with the approach that's been taken. We'll comment in more detail in the air and we'll keep it under review, subject to the additional schemes and projects being assessed as part of the interrelationship report and the updates to the Cumulative Cumulative Assessment.

00:19:51:20 - 00:19:57:16

Okay. Thank you. Anything from the applicant just before we do adjourn. On the points raised by the county Council.

00:19:57:19 - 00:20:31:12

Thank you, Miss Coleman, for the applicant. Um, yes. I welcome the, um, the comments from the the two councils in terms of, um, their position and agreement in that respect. I think I would just note on maybe from a district perspective, I think in terms of the approach and cumulative effects, that's not a

scheme that would normally have made the, um, long and short list because of the where it's at and because it comes behind our projection. Obviously, when it is considered, it will also consider the cumulative effect with us, but taking into account the requirements of each one, we have obviously made sure to do that assessment on the available information.

00:20:31:26 - 00:20:51:01

Um, which we don't have a lot of information on that at the moment. So it has had to be based on assumptions which are overly precautionary and has probably resulted in a, um, well, therefore a sort of precautionary, um, and overly conservative, um, assessment. I would say, um, Miss Ghana can expand on that further, but, um, I don't know whether she can do so in minutes remaining.

00:20:51:03 - 00:21:07:15

Thank you. No, that's fine. We'll pick that up if we need to, um, after the adjournment. And then we'll also open the floor to interested parties on cumulative effects as well. Um, so now's a good time to adjourn. Uh, it's 1149. Uh, we will resume at 12:10, please. Thank you.