

Summary of oral presentations made at the Frodsham Solar NPI Issue Specific

Hearing on behalf of Frodsham Active Travel on 24th & 25th

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the views of Frodsham's Active Travel team. As I mentioned at the hearing this team is a formal collaboration between Frodsham Town Council and Cycle North Chesire to develop proposals which would encourage and enable walkers, wheelers and cyclists to travel more actively more often.

The summaries are linked to four of the issues Examiners explored in their agenda. i.e.

3c iii) PROW user experience within the Solar Array development (SADA)

3c iv) PROW condition surveys and maintenance during construction, operational and decommissioning phases

3d Landscape and Visual

3f i) Potential impact (on birdlife) of additional PROWs

3c iii) PROW user experience within the Solar Array development (SADA)

During the examination, Examiner Claire Beloe questioned whether there was sufficient screening of the arrays within the development and whether there were an adequate number of photo images which showed what the experience would feel like to pass through the development.

The applicant was invited to respond and said there will be 5 km of new hedging but as I recall did not offer to provide more photos or state what proportion of panels which would be screened from view.

I was invited to share the views of the Active Travel team on this topic which are summarised in [REP1- 071](#). I said that 5 km of new hedging sounds promising but it was not clear whether this would be sufficient to screen all of the unattractive, ugly 4m high panels from view when people walk along the tracks. Suggestions in [REP1- 071](#) to mitigate their regimented monotony are :

- Placing natural screens of trees and shrubs to hide each section of panels.
- Vary the type and height of trees & shrubs used.

We would hope that the Examiners will specify that a high proportion of panels should be screened off and a much clearer representation provided of how this would look.

3c iv) PROW condition surveys and maintenance during construction, operational and decommissioning phases.

Having been invited to speak on this topic, I explained that several surveys of the Restricted Byways (RBs) on the marshes have been carried out. The surveys show the RBs are consistently severely degraded with multiple potholes up to 30 cm deep which are flooded in winter due to the absence of drainage and banks on either side. This has a serious adverse impact for not only leisure and commuter users now but potentially for future access by service vehicles and the emergency services. Photographic evidence had been presented previously to the Director of Axis, Andrew Russell.

The applicant's states its position on this topic in [its Phase 2 response](#) on pp 29 to FS2_OFF_021:

"The project would improve the surfacing of the section of the NCN5 that lies within the Order Limits (only) at the end of the construction period "

The Active Travel team's reaction to his response is that it ignores para 105 Section 8 of [National Planning Policy Framework](#), "Promoting healthy and safe communities" which states :

Para. 105. Planning should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users for example by adding links to existing networks like National Trails.

This policy is reinforced by : **Cheshire West's Local Plan (2015)**

12.2.13 Opportunities to improve the quality, accessibility and connectivity of the network of recreational routeways should be maximised.

I enquired if the Examiners considered whether para 105 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) applied to this application or not.

Post hearing note : RBs which link directly from both ends of Frodsham to the Solar farm would be : Weaver Lane, Straight Length and Lordship Lane.

During a separate discussion on what the response time would be for a 28 ton fire tender, based in Frodsham to access a fire (say) in the Battery Energy Storage site (BESS), I pointed out that it would be much longer if a tender could not access the BESS directly via Marsh Lane/Brook Furlong but had to make a 10 mile detour through Helsby and Elton/Ince and then back track over the marshes using degraded RBs.

In discussion the applicant made it clear that *'It could not solve all the problems'*.

Post meeting observation : This 'problem' appears not adequately resolved.

3d Landscape and Visual

In open session, several Interested Parties said that the impact of the development would have a major negative impact on the landscape. I emphasised that residents love living in Frodsham and a major reason is the quality of the surrounding countryside and the view from the hill. This showed up in dozens of responses to the [Phase two consultation](#) and was reinforced later by Representations made by a third of the Interested Parties showing how important is the need for a green vista.

The applicant's response on pp.16 to [feedback](#) expressing broader concern for the visual impact (No's FS2_OFF_007, 009, 012, 014, 017, 023, 032, 033 and 053) recognises that an impact **does exist** but states :

These effects cannot be further mitigated through the mitigation hierarchy.

The applicant's response on pp. 17 to Phase Two feedback specific to views from high ground, i.e. No's, FS2-OFF -033, 032, 051, 056, 019, states :

*"- assessment from elevated positions including at Frodsham Hill and Helsby Hill and concludes that **visual effects would not be significant.**"*

-when respondents strongly disagree and feel their needs are being ignored.

I highlighted the fact that the applicant avoided addressing the matter by stating :

*"Mitigation measures such as planting for screening **would not be effective** given the change in elevation.*

I challenged this position as it ignores trigonometry and said that evidence was provided in the Active Travel Representation [REP1-071](#) which shows that as the viewing angle from Frodsham hill is only 5.5° , a row of trees 7m high would screen from view over 31m of the panels behind the front row. This screening benefit would double for the most distant panels.

Post hearing note : And these benefits would double again for views from Helsby Hill as the viewing angle will be much less. See the National Trust's response. [RR-002](#)

Evidence is also presented in [REP1-071](#) which shows that panels screen the sun from the rows behind them when the sun is at angle of 20° or less. If screening trees were planted such that if they subtended the same 20° angle to the front row, this row of panels would receive the same amount of sunlight as all other panels.

I confirmed that this evidence was discussed with the applicant's lead planning consultant, Mr Russell, at the pre-examination meeting on 2nd December, who offered to discuss this further, but this has not yet happened.

Post hearing note : In conversation with Axis's Mr Russell on 2.03.26 he offered to discuss this further with the applicant's team but made no specific commitment was offered.

3f i) Potential impact (on birdlife) of additional PROWs

Cheshire West's Planning expert, Laura Hughes briefed the Examiners on some aspects of the implications for ecology of the proposed development and are recorded in [REP1-048](#).

She expressed her concerns for birdlife in para 5.7, that : *"the proposed mitigation is inadequate and will negatively impact the on-breeding bird population"*

Laura Hughes then mentioned several recommendations, one of which (Para 5.8 d) has implications for active travel. i.e. *"either omit proposed permissive footpaths A & B (pp 86 [OLEMP Fig 1](#).).... or reroute them"*.

At this point I asked to speak and said that we appreciated the need to provide adequate mitigation for bird life but that these two footpaths were an important part of the applicant's mitigation strategy to provide more active travel options, which our team had proposed during the very early stages of the consultation.

I explained that the reason for this is that these two footpaths would provide new loops for walkers and birders in what would be an attractive location to visit, as they are close to the river, Ship canal and the open areas, so removing them would be a major reduction in the mitigation offered.

Post hearing note : Cheshire West suggested alternative mitigations in [REP1-048](#). Paras 5.8 a -c).

[REDACTED]

Frodsham Active Travel Team : Project leader