

# FOSSE GREEN ENERGY EXAMINATION

## COMMENTS ON NORTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL'S LOCAL IMPACT REPORT

**ANDREW KEELING (IP Ref: [REDACTED])**

I am a resident of Bassingham and wish to make the following comments on North Kesteven District Council's Local Impact Report (LIR).

### 1. Site Selection

Paragraph 10.1 of the LIR states that the Site Selection Report (Appendix A of the Planning Statement) '*describes the process which the applicant has gone through to identify the site.*' This is not the case however. The Site Selection Report does not relate to the **initial** selection of the site. Rather, it represents a retrospective justification of the site on the basis that a POC can be achieved through the substation that National Grid has subsequently proposed at Navenby in response to the grid connection request from Fosse Green Energy and the Springwell Solar Farm project. The Site Selection Report is clear that the site was selected in response to an approach from the landowners, so not as a result of the process that is described in the Site Selection Report.

Paragraph 14.19 of the LIR states that '*it is considered that the selection of the application site has taken a reasonable approach.*' Notwithstanding my comment above, I do not believe this to be the case, so take issue with the LIR's conclusion on this point. Paragraph 10.2 correctly states that the process described in the Site Selection Report took as its starting point a search for a site of approximately 1,000ha to accommodate the proposed solar arrays, associated infrastructure and mitigation land. At ISH1 the applicant indicated that around 450ha of land will comprise the energy generation hectarage. This was not however the starting point for the site search process.

The Fosse Green Energy site includes 284ha of BMV agricultural land that will be left undeveloped in terms of solar panels and energy infrastructure. With a total site area of 1,070ha, that means that some 336ha of land will be used for mitigation purposes. If the site selection process had genuinely been driven by a search for sites that could accommodate 450ha of solar energy generation infrastructure, then a broader range of smaller sites, of perhaps 600-700ha, that do not incorporate as much BMV agricultural land or require such extensive mitigation measures, could surely have been considered. The site search was however limited to larger sites.

The Site Selection Report dismisses Sites 6,7 and 8 on the basis that they include woodland; incorporate BMV agricultural land; are close to residential receptors; include heritage assets; use narrow roads for HGVs; and have PRow running through them. All of these factors apply equally, if not more so, to the Fosse Green Energy site (Site 9), yet are ignored in its selection. If robustly applied, these criteria would result in an assessment that Site 9 is also unsuitable for a large-scale solar farm development. The main reason that Site 9 was selected was because it is over 1,000ha, but as outlined above, smaller sites, without the inclusion of BMV agricultural land and need for significant mitigation requirements, would be adequate to support an energy generation hectarage of 450ha.

For these reasons, I do not accept the LIR's assessment that the Site Selection Report describes a reasonable approach, as:

- a) It does not relate to the initial selection of the site;
- b) It does not represent a genuine attempt to find the most suitable site to accommodate 450ha of solar power generation infrastructure within the 15km of the proposed Navenby substation.

I do not therefore believe that the applicant's contention that the chosen site represents the best site for a large-scale solar farm with the 15km radius of the substation stands up to scrutiny, and suggest that the Site Selection Report should not be awarded weight in the Examination of the DCO application.

## **2. Use of Agricultural Land**

Paragraph 14.40 of the LIR states that *'the Council in general agrees that, within the policy framework set out in the relevant NPS, the application has justified its use of agricultural land to accommodate this development.'* Given that the site was not initially selected following any attempt to locate a site that utilises brownfield, previously developed, contaminated or industrial land, as prioritised for solar deployment in NPS EN-3, I do not accept this contention of the LIR.

## **3. Loss of BMV Agricultural Land**

Paragraph 14.24 of the LIR states the Council's view that *'the application appears to present a scheme which in general terms has had due regard to avoiding the use of BMV land as far as possible.'* As I have set out above, there is no evidence that the applicant sought to avoid the use of BMV land when the site was initially selected in response to the approach from the landowners. Furthermore, the applicant has provided no evidence that the BMV land contained within the site will continue to be farmed for crop production. If it cannot, then clearly this high-quality land will be lost to agricultural production. I do not believe that the applicant has provided sufficient evidence to justify the Council's contention regarding the avoidance of the use of BMV land, and weight should not therefore be given to its view on this point.

## **4. Cumulative Impacts**

Paragraph 26.13 of the LIR concludes *'that there will be **negative** effects on cumulative grounds, in particular in relation to the potentially extensive alteration of regional landscape character.'* I am concerned that the LIR has not fully identified all of the renewable energy infrastructure projects that are seeking a POC through the proposed Navenby substation. The LIR references the long-list and short-list of projects that the applicant considered regarding inter-project cumulative effects, as set out in Table 15.8 of ES Chapter 15. In terms of renewable energy projects that are seeking a POC via the proposed Navenby substation, the lists identify the Springwell Energy Farm and Leoda Solar Farm solar projects, in addition to the Fosse Green energy scheme, and the Navenby, Brant (Coleby) and Wellingore (Gorse Hill Lane) BESS projects. In its pre-examination submission National Grid references that the proposed substation at Navenby will facilitate up to seven customer connections for generation projects in the area, so potentially another four schemes in addition to Fosse Green Energy, Springwell and Leoda. It seems likely therefore that the cumulative negative effects of all of the renewable energy infrastructure projects that will be looking to connect to the grid through the proposed Navenby substation could be even more significant than the LIR envisages. I do not believe that the applicant's cumulative assessment has fully captured the realistic scale and interaction of all of the renewable energy infrastructure projects that will be seeking a POC

through the proposed Navenby substation. Further work is needed to achieve a comprehensive and transparent assessment.

## **5. Grid Connection**

Paragraph 28.1 of the LIR states that *'the Fosse Green Energy solar farm is reliant upon National Grid constructing a new substation at Navenby.'* Paragraph 28.6 notes the applicant's assertion that *'there are no obvious reasons known to the applicant why consent for the Navenby substation and associated overhead lines to connect it into the national grid would be withheld.'* Paragraph 28.7 rejects the applicant's assertion on this point, stating that *'the Council does not consider that such high-level commentary is sufficient to evidence that there are 'no obvious reasons' why the NGNS application would not be refused.'* The LIR is not particularly helpful here in that it provides no commentary on whether the development of the Navenby substation is in line with local or national planning policy. While I can see that the Council may not be willing to comment in detail until such time as it has received a full planning application for the substation, a discussion of the local and national planning policy context for the substation proposal would have been helpful to the ExA. From my assessment of the relevant policies of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan and NPS EN-3 in relation to solar deployment, as I describe in the Written Representation that I submitted at Deadline 1, I believe that there is every reason to think that the substation planning application may well be rejected both by NKDC and the Planning Inspectorate at appeal. I believe that the uncertainty regarding the likely approval of the Navenby substation casts doubt on the deliverability of the Fosse Green Energy scheme. The public benefit claimed by the applicant should not therefore be afforded full weight unless the ExA is totally satisfied that a deliverable connection pathway can be secured.

## **6. Compliance with Central Lincolnshire Local Plan**

Paragraph 29.3 of the LIR states that *'the delivery of renewable energy of this nature and scale is in accordance with the strategic policies of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan.'* I believe that this statement is inaccurate and misleading. While it is true that the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan is supportive of the development of solar farms and the wider energy infrastructure needed to support them, the Local Plan also includes policies that seek to protect Central Lincolnshire's landscape and character. The Fosse Green Energy solar farm project is clearly contrary to policies S5 on Development in the Countryside; S53 on Design and Amenity; and S67 on Best and Most Versatile Land. Even policies S14 on Renewable Energy and S16 on Wider Energy Infrastructure, which are the most relevant to the Fosse Green Energy proposal, are caveated in terms of requirements for renewable energy infrastructure projects to be sited in locations which minimise harm arising. I contend therefore that the Council's statement on this point should not be given weight in the ExA's consideration of the LIR.