

FOSSE GREEN ENERGY EXAMINATION

LSH3 – ASSESSMENT OF VISITOR ECONOMY IMPACT

COMMENTS – ANDREW KEELING (IP Ref: ██████████)

1. My Visitor Economy Credentials

I am a resident of Bassingham. I have recently retired from a 40-year career in tourism. For the last 20 years of my career, I was one of the leading tourism consultants in the UK, with a specialism in assessing the potential for visitor accommodation development in destinations across the country. I have been involved in supporting the development of Lincolnshire's visitor economy for over 30 years, firstly in my role as the Regional Tourism Development Manager for the East Midlands Tourist Board, and then as a tourism consultant, undertaking numerous tourism strategy, research and consultancy assignments for Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire Tourism and the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership. I believe therefore that I have the experience and knowledge to act as an expert witness on the likely impact of the Fosse Green Energy project on the Visitor Economy of the surrounding area

I submitted some comments at Deadline 2 on the Visitor Economy Impact section of the County Council's LIR in document REP2-066. The following submission further expands on those comments.

2. Weaknesses of Applicant and Council Submissions on Visitor Economy Impact

In my expert opinion, the assessments of the likely impacts of FGE on the visitor economy made by the applicant, District Council and County Council are:

- Very weak
- Not informed by any expert opinion
- Not backed up with any evidence or research that provides a clear understanding of the area's visitor economy and its potential for future growth

I elaborate below on my reasons for this assessment.

3. The Impact on Serviced Accommodation

The applicant's assessment of the visitor economy impact of the FGE project focuses purely on the impact on serviced accommodation (hotels, B&Bs and pub accommodation). The applicant provides an analysis of the supply of serviced accommodation within a 30- and 60-minute drive from the FGE site and data on current occupancy levels. From this analysis they assert that existing serviced accommodation businesses will be able to accommodate the likely demand for accommodation from contractors working on the construction of the FGE solar farm. The applicant further claims that the demand from FGE contractors could provide a positive benefit in terms of boosting occupancy for local hotels, B&Bs and pub accommodation during quieter periods.

This assessment is fundamentally flawed for a number of reasons:

- a) The applicant fails to understand that contractors will only be looking to use budget-priced accommodation. They will not be able to afford to stay in the luxury and 4-star hotels that are included in the applicant's data on current serviced accommodation provision. The supply of accommodation that FGE contractors will be able to afford will be lower than the figures presented by the applicant.
- b) Contractors will not want to travel from hotels that are an hour away from the FGE site. Only the 30-minute drive time supply of serviced accommodation will be a realistic option for contractors. Para 12.7.23 of Chapter 12 of the Environmental Statement states that within the 30-minute drive time radius at peak seasonal occupancy '*there would be a 4% deficit in capacity*'. So FGE contractor demand will not be fully accommodated as the applicant asserts.
- c) Most importantly, the applicant's analysis fails to take account of the weekly pattern of demand for hotels in the area. I expand on this issue below.

I undertook a study of the Lincoln hotel market in 2017. This included interviewing all of the hotels in Lincoln city centre and most of the hotels in the immediate vicinity of the FGE site. My research found that hotels were consistently fully booked and turning business away on Tuesday and Wednesday nights for most of the year, and frequently also on Monday nights, through a combination of demand from business visitors, contractors working on construction and development projects, and UK and overseas tourists during the summer months. These are the key nights that FGE contractors will require accommodation. While this research is clearly now out-of-date, I doubt that these patterns of demand for hotel accommodation will have changed much since 2017. Lincoln's economy and appeal as a tourist destination have continued to grow (other than during the COVID-19 pandemic) and there have been no new hotel openings to increase hotel capacity. I think it highly likely that hotels in Lincoln and in the immediate vicinity of the FGE site are still consistently filling and turning business away on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, and frequently also on Monday nights. The applicant's contention that existing hotels will be able to accommodate demand from FGE contractors is highly unlikely to be valid therefore. The claim that FGE contractor demand will boost hotel occupancy at quieter periods is equally unlikely to be valid. If FGE contractors are able to secure hotel rooms locally, they will merely be frustrating or displacing demand from other markets, in particular business visitors and contractors working on other projects. This may be a disbenefit to the local economy if FGE contractor demand frustrates demand from other markets, in particular UK and overseas tourists, that are likely to spend more in the local area

4. The Impact on Non-Serviced Accommodation

The applicant and Councils fail to understand that the most significant visitor economy impacts will be felt by the non-serviced accommodation businesses in the area. There are a number of holiday lodge parks, touring caravan and camping sites, holiday rental properties and an eco-cabin site in the areas immediately surrounding the FGE site, including three fairly sizeable businesses.

NON-SERVICED ACCOMMODATION IN THE VICINITY OF THE FGE SITE

Establishment	Location	Number of Units/Pitches
Holiday Parks		
Cathedral View Holiday Park	Thorpe-on-the-Hill	57
Holiday Lodge Parks		
Thorpe Park Lodges	Thorpe-on-the-Hill	14
Touring Caravan & Camping Sites		
Oakhill Leisure	Norton Disney	52
The Railway Inn	Thorpe-on-the-Hill	10
Skybarn Farm	Haddington	5
Grove Farm	Norton Disney	6
Glamping Sites		
The Green Man Eco Pods	Norton Disney	3
Holiday Cottages/ Airbnb Entire Homes		
Cottage in Norton Disney	Norton Disney	1
The Reading Room	Norton Disney	1
Hop Hill	Aubourn	1
Barn House	Aubourn	1
The West Wing at Landings	Bassingham	1
Tiny House	Swinderby	1
The Wren's Nest	Swinderby	1
Standacre Farm House	Bassingham	1

The applicant fails to identify any of these businesses and has made no attempt to speak to them to try to understand why their customers come to stay with them and how their businesses could be impacted by the FGE proposal. I have not spoken to these businesses either but I have spoken to hundreds of similar accommodation businesses in my career. The holiday homes at the Cathedral View Holiday Park are all privately owned and the site is well screened from the surrounding fields. I suspect that this business will not be too perturbed by the FGE project therefore. With regard to that area's other non-serviced businesses however, in my experience their customers are likely to be primarily looking to escape to the country for a relaxing break, peace and quiet and to enjoy countryside activities such as walking, cycling, fishing, birdwatching and sometimes more active outdoor pursuits. Their countryside setting is a key part of their market appeal. You only have to take a look at the websites of some of these businesses to understand the key selling points that they are using to promote themselves. The following quotes from some of their websites amply illustrate this point.

'Our business aim is to offer peace, relaxation, mindfulness and personal and family time away in a quiet rural location, away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. We want to allow people to re-set and spend time with nature in the great outdoors.'

Grove Farm, Norton Disney

'It is easy to fall in love with our ideal setting within the beautiful quiet Lincolnshire countryside'

Oakhill Leisure, Norton Disney

'Leave your troubles behind, recharge your batteries and enjoy the outstanding natural beauty of the countryside'

Skybarn Farm, Norton Disney

I don't think it unreasonable to suggest that the change to the rural landscape that surrounds these non-serviced accommodation businesses, that everybody agrees is going to occur as a result of the FGE project, is likely to impact on their ability to continue to attract customers that are looking for such experiences, thus affecting their future trading and investment potential, and possibly threatening their future viability.

5. The Impact on Future Investment in Visitor Accommodation

The applicant and Councils also fail to consider how the FGE project might affect future investment in visitor accommodation in the area, in terms of investment in existing accommodation businesses, and the development of new ones. There is evidence I believe of potential for new investment in non-serviced accommodation in the area, which I think is likely to be deterred if the FGE scheme goes ahead:

- A site at Thurlby is currently being marketed for a lakeside holiday lodge park with planning permission for 103 holiday lodges. I can provide you with the marketing materials for this site if required.
- I believe that there could be potential opportunities for farmers, other land owners and pubs to diversify into a range of non-serviced visitor accommodation options, including touring caravan and camping sites, motorhome stopovers, glamping sites, eco lodges and cabins, and holiday cottages – as some have done recently.

6. The Impact on Visitor Attractions

The County Council's assessment of the visitor economy impacts of FGE focuses largely on the impact on the visitor attractions in the villages along the Lincoln Cliff Edge, specifically referencing Mrs Smith's Cottage and Temple Brueur. These are very small attractions that are primarily of local interest. In my view they will be largely unaffected by the FGE project as they are such a long way from it. There could be some impact from the construction of the cable corridor if walkers and walking groups using the Viking Way are deterred from visiting during this period. However, I doubt that this would have a significant impact on the local visitor attractions, and hopefully the impact of the cable corridor construction on the Viking Way can be managed through diversions if necessary.

In my Deadline 2 submission (document REP2-066), I drew attention to the fact that neither the applicant nor the Councils make any reference to the recently completed 'On Freedom's Wings' Lancaster aircraft landmark art installation at Norton Disney. It provides a significant addition to Lincolnshire's aviation heritage offer, complementing the International Bomber Command Centre, Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and various RAF airfield heritage centres. It has the potential therefore to provide a significant boost to the area's visitor economy. I cannot say whether this potential might be lessened by the FGE project, but this could be a possibility. It will depend on whether those wishing to come to see the installation are also coming to enjoy the area's countryside as part of their visit or stay. I think it likely that the countryside will also be a draw for at least some of these visitors, especially cycling or walking visitors, that might want to include a visit to the installation on their itinerary.

7. The Impact on Village Pubs

The applicant and Councils fail to understand that the areas immediately surrounding the FGE site attract visiting walkers and walking groups, including those visiting their friends and relatives in the area, and visiting cyclists and cycling groups, that often frequent the pubs in Bassingham, Aubourn, Norton Disney and Thorpe-on-the-Hill. The degradation of the walking routes and countryside around these villages that will result from the FGE project is, I think, likely to result in a loss of this trade for these businesses.

8. Conclusion

On balance, my expert opinion is that the impact of the FGE project on the area's visitor economy will be negative. I can't tell you how negative, but I believe that the impact will be negative. While there may be some positive benefit in terms of increased demand for serviced accommodation during the construction phase, this benefit will be short-lived, and may merely displace demand from other potentially higher spending markets that are looking to stay in the area's hotels, such as business visitors and tourists visiting Lincoln. It will also be outweighed by the more permanent negative impacts on existing non-serviced accommodation businesses, the potential for future investment in non-serviced accommodation development, and the loss of business for local pubs from walking and cycling visitors.