One Earth Solar Farm

Local Impact Report

EN-010159

West Lindsey District Council

July 2025

Contents

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1. Executive Summary

1. One Earth Solar Farm Limited has applied for a Development Consent Order (DCO) for the One Earth Solar Farm (OESF) project.

2. The application is for the construction, operation and decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating facility, energy storage facility and export connection to the National Grid.

3. The application for the DCO has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, with the decision on the DCO being made by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (SoS) under the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) (as amended).

4. As part of the process, West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) are invited to submit a Local Impact Report (LIR). The LIR provides details of the likely impacts of the proposed development on the authority's area and is given statutory weight in the decision-making process.

5. The proposed OESF project will have a range of environmental, socio-economic and amenity impacts during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases of the project. Such impacts will be experienced as a consequence of the scheme alone (in solus) and cumulatively with other similar scale solar generating station NSIP projects.

6. This report constitutes WLDC's LIR. It provides details of the likely impact of the proposed development on the district of West Lindsey and will be submitted to inform the examination of the OESF application by the Examining Authority (ExA) on behalf of the SoS.

7. WLDC has significant concerns regarding the cumulative impact of the scheme with other NSIP solar generating station projects. The likely impacts experienced during construction, operation and decommissioning will have significant adverse impacts upon the natural environment, character and communities within the West Lindsey District.

8. The OESF project on its own merits will also give rise to significant adverse impacts on the natural environment and the amenity and lives of communities living in the near and surrounding area to the scheme.

9. The key impacts identified and expanded upon in the LIR include:

   - Project design;
   - Landscape and visual impacts;
   - Agricultural land impacts (BMV);
   - Traffic impacts;
   - Tourism impacts;
   - Cultural heritage;
   - Hydrology (development in Flood Zone 3)
   - Maintenance; and
   - The draft Development Consent Order.

10. Some of the impacts relating to the above can be resolved through clarifications and/or the provision of further information by the applicant. More significant impacts may require more material

amendments and/or the submission of further information to enable the project to be determined with all required information before the examination.

11. Having identified the local impacts, WLDC maintain a commitment to engage with the applicant to seek to address the adverse impacts, where possible. Matters of agreement and disagreement will be set out in a Statement of Common Ground between the parties.

2. Terms of Reference

Introduction

2.1. This report comprises the Local Impact Report (LIR) of West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) for the One Earth Solar Farm (OESF) (the 'Scheme') that has been submitted by One Earth Solar Farm Limited ('the Applicant').

2.2. WLDC have had regard to the purpose of LIRs as set out in s60(3) of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) and the following government guidance:

- Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Examination Stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects guidance (30/04/2024);
- Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Advice for Local Authorities (16/12/2024)

2.3. The 'Examination Stage' guidance sets out what a Local Impact Report (LIR) is and the role it has in the examination of an application. It states that, once an application has been accepted for examination, the local authority in whose area a proposed project is located will be invited by the Examining Authority to submit an LIR.

2.4. An LIR is defined as a written report submitted by an affected local authority detailing the likely impact of the proposed development on any part of the local authority's area and community.

2.5. An LIR is based on the local authority's existing body of local knowledge and robust evidence of local issues. This includes an appraisal of the proposed development's compliance local policy and guidance.

2.6. Special status is afforded to an LIR in the examination of an application. Section 104 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) obliges the Secretary of State (SoS) to have particular regard to an LIR in reaching a decision.

2.7. WLDC note that the application relates to development for which Environmental Impact Assessment must be carried out and that an Environmental Statement has been submitted as part of that application in accordance with the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (EIA Regulations).

One Earth Solar Farm: Description

2.8. The scheme seeks development consent under the Planning Act 2008 for the construction and operation for a solar electricity generating station. The scheme falls within the definition an onshore generating station exceeding 50MW generating capacity as defined by the Planning Act 2008. The scheme consequently qualifies as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).

2.9. The applicant's submitted Planning Statement (APP-165) and Environmental Statement (Chapter 5) (APP-034) both provide description of the One Earth Solar Farm. The project described in those documents are summarised in section 3 below.

3. The One Earth Solar Farm project

3.1. The Scheme comprises the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic (PV) array electricity generating station. The project includes:

- Solar PV panels;
- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS);
- Onsite substations;
- Associated grid connection to export electricity to the proposed National grid High Marnham Substation.

3.2. The applicant has secured a connection agreement with National Grid allowing the export and import of up to 750 megawatts (MW) of electricity to the High Marnham Substation.

3.3. The lifetime of the Scheme is proposed to be for an operational period of 60 years.

3.4. The spatial extent of the Scheme is defined through the 'Order Limits', which represents the boundary within which the authorised development can be carried out (both temporary and permanent works). The Order Limits for the Scheme extend to approximately 1,414ha (3,494 acres).

3.5. The Order Limits span the administrative districts of Newark and Sherwood District Council, Bassetlaw District Council, as well as West Lindsey District Council. The Order Limits are also within Nottinghamshire County Council and Lincolnshire County Council administrative areas.

3.6. All land within the Order Limits is included in the draft Development Consent Order (dDCO) and comprises the following:

- PV modules;
- Mounting structures;
- Power Conversion Stations 9PCS);
- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS);
- Onsite Substation and Ancillary Buildings;
- Low Voltage Distribution Cables;
- Grid Connection Cables;
- Fencing, security and ancillary infrastructure;
- Access Tracks; and
- Green Infrastructure.

3.7. The above list of components is expressed in the dDCO as numbered 'Works' which form the 'authorised development' should the Scheme be granted development consent. The work numbers and the development to which they comprise are set out in turn below.

Work No.1: Solar PV Infrastructure

3.8. A ground mounted solar photovoltaic generating station with a gross electrical output of over 50 MW that include:

a) Solar panels fitted to mounting structures

b) Power conversion stations

c) 'associated development'

Work No. 2: BESS

3.9. An energy storage facility comprising batter energy storage system compounds that include:

a) Battery energy storage system (BESS) units each comprising an enclosure for BESS electro-chemical components and associated equipment, joined or close couples to each other, mounted on a concrete foundation slab;

b) Transformers and associated bunding;

c) Inverters, switch gear, power conversion systems and ancillary equipment;

d) Containers or enclosures housing all or any of Work Nos. 2(a), (b) and (c) and ancillary equipment.

e) Monitoring and control systems housed within the containers or enclosures comprised in Work Nos. 2(a) or (d) or located separately in its own container or enclosure;

f) Heating, ventilation and air conditioning or liquid cooling systems either housed on or within each of the containers or enclosures comprised in Work Nos. 2(a), (d) and (d), integrated into or attached to the side or top of each of the containers or enclosures, or located separately to but near to each of the containers or enclosures;

g) Fire safety infrastructure including water storage units, aerosol systems, automatic sprinklers and a shut-off valve for containment of fire water and hard standing to accommodate emergency vehicles;

h) Containers or similar structures to house spare parts and materials required for the day-to-day operation of the BESS facility;

i) Acoustic fencing; and

j) Ancillary buildings including control room, office, welfare, storage, workshop and metering.

Work No. 3: Substations

3.10. Works in connection with onsite substation compounds that include:

a) Substation including transformers, 400kV switchgear either housed within a building or gas insulated, 33kV switch room buildings and ancillary equipment including harmonic filters and reactive power units; and

b) Ancillary buildings and structures including control buildings, metering equipment, office welfare, storage and workshop.

Work No. 4: Grid Connection Cable Route

3.11. Works to lay high voltage electrical cables and to facilitate the connection of the authorised development to the National Grid High Marnham Substation and access for the electrical cables, including:

a) Works to lay up to 400 kilovolt electrical cables connecting Work No. 3 into the National Grid High Marnham Substation;

b) Laying down of temporary construction areas and internal access tracks, ramps, means of access, footways, including the laying and construction of drainage infrastructure, signage and information boards; and

c) Electrical engineering works in and around the National Grid High Marnham Substation.

Work No. 5: Ancillary Works

3.12. Works including:

a) Electrical cables up to 132kV;

b) Fencing, gates, and other boundary treatments;

c) Security measures including CCTV columns, lighting columns, cameras, weather stations, and communication infrastructure;

d) Landscape and biodiversity mitigation and enhancement including planting of new vegetation and seeding;

e) Vegetation removal;

f) Electrical, gas, water, foul water drainage and telecommunications infrastructure connections, diversions and works to, and works to alter the position of, such services and utilities connections;

g) Laying down and creation of internal access tracks, ramps, means of access and footpaths and improvement of access tracks;

h) Temporary footpath diversions;

i) Earthworks;

j) Tunnelling, boring and drilling works;

k) Sustainable drainage system ponds and general drainage; and

l) Laying down of permissive paths, signage and information boards.

Work No. 6: Construction and Decommissioning Compounds

3.13. Temporary construction and decommissioning compounds including:

a) Work No. 6A – up to two primary temporary construction and decommissioning areas-

(i) Areas of hardstanding;

(ii) Car parking;

(iii) Site and welfare offices, canteen and workshops;

(iv) Are to store materials and equipment;

(v) Storage and waste skips;

(vi) Area for download and turning;

(vii) Security infrastructure, including cameras, perimeter fencing and lighting;

(viii) Site drainage and waste management infrastructure; and

(ix) Electricity, water, wastewater and telecommunications connections; and

b) Work No. 6B – up to ten secondary temporary construction and decommissioning areas-

(i) Areas to store materials and equipment;

(ii) Storage and waste skips;

(iii) Are for downloading and turning;

(iv) Security infrastructure including cameras, lighting and fencing; and

(v) Site and welfare offices, canteens and workshops.

Work No. 7: Highway works

3.14. Works to facilitate access to Work Nos. 1 to 6 and 8 including:

a) Creation of accesses from any street or highway;

b) Creation of visibility splays;

c) Works to alter the layout of any street or highway;

d) Works to widen and surface any streets; and

e) Making and maintaining passing places.

Work No. 8: Landscape and Ecology

3.15. Works to create, enhance and maintain green infrastructure and mitigation including:

a) Landscape and biodiversity mitigation and enhancement areas;

b) Habitat creation and management, including earthworks, landscaping, means of enclosure, and the laying and construction of drainage infrastructure; and

c) Improvements to existing public rights of wat, signage and information boards.

Associated development

3.16. In connection with Work Nos. 1 to 8 above, further associated development to be authorised within the Order Limits include:

a) Fencing, gates, boundary treatment and other means of enclosure;

b) Bunds, embankments, trenching and swales;

c) Works to the existing irrigation system and works to alter the position and extent of such irrigation system;

d) Surface water drainage systems, storm water attenuation systems including storage basins, oil water separators, including channelling and culverting and works to existing drainage networks;

e) Electrical, gas, water foul water drainage and telecommunications infrastructure connections, diversions and works to, and works to alter the position of, such services and utilities connections;

f) Works to alter the course of, or otherwise interfere with, non-navigable rivers, streams or watercourses;

g) Works for the provision of security and monitoring measures such as CCTV columns, security cabins, lighting columns and lighting, cameras, lightning protection masts and weather stations;

h) Improvement, maintenance, repair and use of existing streets, private tracks and access roads;

i) Laying down, maintenance and repair of new internal access tracks, ramps, means of access, footpaths, permissive paths, cycle routes and roads, crossings of drainage ditches and watercourses, including signage and information boards;

j) Temporary footpath diversions and closures;

k) Noise, landscaping and biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures including planting and acoustic barriers;

l) Tunnelling, boring and drilling works;

m) Earthworks, site establishments and preparation works including site clearance (including vegetation removal, demolition of existing buildings and structures); earthworks (including soil stripping and storage and site levelling) and excavations; the alteration of the position of services and utilities; and works for the protection of buildings and land;

n) Other works to mitigate any adverse effects of the construction, maintenance, operation or decommissioning of the authorised development,

3.17. And further associated development comprising such other works or operations as may be necessary or expedient for the purposes of or in connection with the construction, operation and maintenance of the authorised development but only within the Order Limits and insofar as they are unlikely to give rise to any materially different environmental effects from those assessed in the environmental statement.

4. Local Context

Central Lincolnshire and the West Lindsey District

4.1. West Lindsey is a District Council located in central Lincolnshire. It is a collective area that encompasses the historic City of Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey. The West Lindsey District covers an area of over 115,700Ha (1,157km^2) within the County of Lincolnshire.

4.2. Central Lincolnshire is characterised by a population living in a range of settlement that vary in size and character. Lincoln is the largest settlement with a population of approximately 110,000 living in the principal urban area. Lincoln functions as a service centre to a wide geographical area, with villages sourcing many services and employment opportunities in the city. This has the effect of extending its catchment to around 165,000 people.

4.3. West Lindsey borders North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire to the north; East Lindsey in the east, North Kesteven and the city of Lincoln in the south. The River Trent forms a natural boundary to the west where the district meets Newark and Sherwood District, Bassetlaw District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council.

4.4. The West Lindsey district hosts main towns such as Gainsborough, Caistor and Market Rasen, which serve the northern and southern parts of the wider Central Lincolnshire area. Gainsborough is a town that experienced significant growth during the 19th century as an industrial and engineering centre, with a transition to manufacturing in the 20th century. Gainsborough currently has a thriving manufacturing/engineering sector with national and international companies headquartered in the town.

4.5. West Lindsey is predominantly a rural district, interspersed with settlements across the area. The district is the thirteenth most sparsely populated areas in England with a population of 95,153 and a density of approximately 82 people per km^2 based on 2021 census data from the Office of National Statistics. The population has increased by 6% since the last census in 2011. Over 23% of the population of West Lindsey in the census are over the retirement age compared to 19% in the rest of the United Kingdom.

4.6. Collectively, the rural area accounts for over half of Central Lincolnshire's population. Functionally, the villages typically operate as clusters that share key services, with larger villages acting as local service centres upon which communities rely for basic facilities.

4.7. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has a strong historic presence in the West Lindsey District and the wider Central Lincolnshire area. The Royal Air Force (RAF) bases Waddington, Cranwell and Digby make a significant contribution to the area's demographic and economic make up. Former bases have been utilised to deliver new housing and employment development, with the Council. Following the closure of RAF Scampton and Home Office decision to end its plans to house asylum seekers there, the Council has announced its plans to accelerate a £300 million regeneration plan, along with its development partner. Central Lincolnshire is home to the Red Arrows and its RAF heritage (including Lincolnshire's historic role as the centre of Bomber Command and the neighbouring base for the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight in East Lindsey) support the expansion for the area's existing visitor economy.

Landscape character

4.8. Central Lincolnshire's natural environment is varied and contrasting, but with strong key characteristics. Gentle chalk and limestone uplands with low lying fens and fenland define the area, with the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) fall partly in Central Lincolnshire, with its distinctive landscape of rolling hills and nestling villages.

4.9. The escarpment of the Jurassic Lincolnshire Limestone, known locally as the Lincoln Edge or 'Cliff', runs the full length of Central Lincolnshire, forming a unifying topographic feature that makes a strong contribution to the quality and character of Lincoln due to its historic influence on the origins and development of Lincoln.

4.10. The wider rural landscape of Central Lincolnshire is a highly valued asset, comprises a sweeping character with big skies, which make a significant contribution to local distinctiveness and attractiveness. West Lindsey itself is characterised by its large-scale agricultural fields with intensive arable crops dominating the landscape character and culture. Reflective of this use, soils are typically fertile and of high quality and character.

4.11. West Lindsey and the wider Central Lincolnshire area hosts a wide range of natural habitats, including wetland, woodland, calcareous grassland and remnants of heathland fen, which together provide ecological networks and nodes of sufficient scale to support wildlife adaptation and environmental resilience to climate change.

4.12. Biodiversity in the area is experiencing pressure from factors including climate change, habitat fragmentation, development and large-scale intensive agriculture. Major landscape-scale initiatives are proposed to restore and enhance the areas ecological networks and corridors.

4.13. The Order Limits are located across two landscape character areas as defined in the West Lindsey Landscape Character Assessment[1]; the 'Trent Valley' and the 'Till Vale'.

The 'Trent Valley'

Character

4.14. The 'Trent Valley' is characterised by:

- Low-lying, gently undulating landform with higher terrain to the east and south of Gainsborough.
- Comprises significant blocks of deciduous woodland, good hedgerows and hedgerow trees that create a relatively enclosed landscape.
- The River Trent and its adjacent washlands are enclosed by steep flood embankments.
- Historic parklands are present, including a medieval deer park and landmarks including the ruins of Torksey Castle (some distance to the north of the Scheme).
- Main roads are significant features in the landscape, with recent development concentrated along main roads, bypassing original village centres (e.g. Newton on Trent).
- Views towards the west are dominated by the power stations situated along the River Trent.

4.15. The 'Trent Valley' character area ranges from Gainsborough to the southern district boundary south of Newton on Trent. The River Trent, with its flood defence bund, forms a western boundary to the character area and to the District itself, however, the eastern boundary to the character area provides a more subtle transition between the Trent Valley and the neighbouring 'Till Vale'.

4.16. The characterisation of an undulating landform and tree cover provides a sense of enclosure, with longer views generally experienced to the east of the A1133 spine roads.

4.17. In the southern part of the character area (within and adjacent to the Scheme), views to the west are dominated by power stations along the River Trent and the associated transmission lines.

Landscape sensitivity.

4.18. View in the area are typically contained by tall hedgerows, woodlands and tree groups, giving the landscape some capacity to accommodate change. The most sensitive parts of the landscape are located to the north of the Scheme around and to the south of Gainsborough, the Fossdyke, Torksey Castle and the low-lying land along the River Trent.

[1] "West Lindsey Landscape Character Assessment", West Lindsey District Council (1999)

Principles for landscape management

4.19. Priority should be given to new woodland, shelterbelt or hedgerow planting which is designed to link existing woodlands. Local species such as field maple, hawthorn, ash and oak would be appropriate.

4.20. Hedgerow and hedgerow trees should be managed to retain the existing landscape pattern, screen settlements and contribute to local identity.

4.21. Due to the visually dominant roads, including the A1133 within the Scheme site, efforts to reduce their influence through tree planting, hedgerow management and signage would represent an appropriate landscape strategy. This should also take account of key views and the entrances to settlements which would benefit from distinctive planting schemes.

Principles for accommodating new development

4.22. Development on the low-lying land to the west of the A156/A1133 would be prominent and cannot easily be accommodated without detracting from the gentle transition to the open, flat farmland on the banks of the River Trent.

The 'Till Vale'

Character

4.23. The 'Till Vale' lies to the east of the 'Trent Valley' within which a large amount of proposed development within the West Lindsey administrative area is located. It is characterised by:

- An agricultural landscape with large flat open fields.
- Low hawthorn hedges with few hedgerow trees define the fields.
- An extensive network of rivers, dykes and ditches which have little visual presence in the landscape.
- Ancient enclosure roads with characteristic wide verges and hedgerow boundaries, particularly in the east.
- Long westward views to the power stations on the River Trent, and eastward views to the scarp face of the Lincoln 'Cliff'.

4.24. The wider landscape character of the 'Till Vale' is defined by an agricultural landscape with large, flat, open fields and a strong rural character. The hedgerow boundaries to the fields are predominantly hawthorn, are kept low and have few hedgerow trees. The landform is more enclosed to the east where the Scheme is proposed, however the large open character of the agricultural fields is evident.

Landscape sensitivity

4.25. The most sensitive parts of the 'Till Vale' landscape include:

- Rural roads and minor farm tracks bordered by wide verges and hedgerows;
- Edges of villages which show evidence of medieval settlement;
- Avenues and lines of trees on the approaches to farms
- View to Lincoln Cathedral.
- Small woodlands and their edges being vulnerable to agricultural activity/works

Principles for landscape management

4.26. New tree planting along the approaches to villages and farms to improve the identity of the local landscape. Lines of trees are characteristic. Tree planting should be confined to hedgerows (i.e. not verges) on all historic enclosure roads.

4.27. The management and replanting at existing small farm woodlands and shelterbelts to create well-structured edges.

4.28. The management and improvement of trees and hedgerows that contribute to the landscape setting of villages and along rural roads.

4.29. Reinstatement of hedgerows removed to provide sightline for vehicles. Heavy goods vehicles erode the character of rural roads through the loss of hedgerows and trees, and by the presence/use of roads in the landscape.

Socio-economic context

4.30. As set out in the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, which is the Local Plan adopted by West Lindsey, Central Lincolnshire is located within the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) area and represents roughly 30% of the GLLEP area's population, employment and business base. The draft Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) notes that Greater Lincolnshire has an economy of £20.7bn with an ambition to grow the Gross Value Added (GVA) by £3.2bn by 2030. The GLLEP area boasts a mix of traditional manufacturing, a comprehensive agri-food sector, energy and services, and is strong in health and care and the visitor economy. In these sectors and others, the area benefits from a large number of small businesses – a distinctive feature of the economy.

4.31. The GLLEP's priority sectors include; agri-foods, energy and water, health and care, visitor economy and ports and logistics, but this should not diminish the important roles of other sectors, including manufacturing and engineering, to the local economy. The Central Lincolnshire Authorities will play a key role in the delivery of the vision for most of these sectors.

4.32. The Economic Needs Assessment (ENA) (2020) projects the economic growth and job growth to 2040, which in turn was influenced by the LIS and other work being produced by the GLLEP. The ENA highlights that there has been strong growth in recent years, outstripping anticipated growth, and projects forward a growth of approximately 992 jobs per year.

4.33. The visitor economy is a significant and growing sector within West Lindsey. The area is an attractive, peaceful rural area which combines an outstanding natural environment with historic villages in close proximity to the City of Lincoln. Lincolnshire's visitor economy is worth £2.4bn (STEAM data Lincolnshire County Council), with the sector supporting 30,000 jobs and a far-reaching supply chain across the county. Food and drink spending alone generates £44m into the local economy, with recreation adding £18m and retail contributing £59m. The visitor economy is a significant sector for people's livelihoods.

4.34. The impact of Covid lockdowns has been severe. Lincolnshire has experienced a 52% reduction in all tourism spending (STEAM data 2020), with full time jobs being reduced by half from 2,500 jobs to just over 1,200. There has been a 52% reduction in visitor numbers and a 50% reduction on the number of visitor days. Food and drink spend feel from £44m to £21m (reduction of £13m) and retail spend fell from £59m to £29m a reduction of £20m). Recreational spend reduced by £10m to £8m. Overall, local tourism businesses have experienced a reduction of over £100m from their revenue.

4.35. Reflective of the defining agricultural character and culture of West Lindsey, one of the key tourist events is the Lincolnshire Show, held annually at the Lincolnshire Showground. The show is a flagship event for the area, with over 60,000 visitors and 500 exhibitors each year. The success of the Lincolnshire Show strongly relies upon the local tourism sector accommodating the visitor demand it creates.

4.36. Forecasts have predicted that it will take a timescale of up to 2025/26 for businesses in the sector to recover to pre-Covid levels, based on the assumption that no material externalities will compromise this recovery.

5. Decision making Policy framework

5.1. The Application falls to be determined under Section 104 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) and that section must be read in its entirety when determining compliance.

5.2. S104(2) PA2008 sets out the matters to which the SoS must have regard in deciding an application submitted in accordance with PA 2008. In summary, the matters set out in s104(2) include any relevant national policy statements, any local impact report and any other matters the SoS thinks are both important and relevant to the decision.

5.3. Section 104(3) of the PA 2008 requires that the SoS must decide the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement (NPS), except to the extent that the SoS is satisfied that, in summary:

- doing so would lead to the United Kingdom being in breach of its international obligations;
- doing so would lead to the SoS being in breach of any duty imposed on him under any enactment;
- doing so would be unlawful under any enactment;
- the adverse impact of the proposed development would outweigh its benefits, or
- that any prescribed condition for deciding the application otherwise than in accordance with the NPS would be met.

5.4. S104 PA2008 also sets out the circumstances in which the SoS may decide the application otherwise than in accordance with a national policy statement, s104 needs to be considered in full alongside all other relevant legislation.

5.5. In order to be granted development consent under Section 104, a development proposal must comply with the relevant National Policy Statements (NPS). WLDC agree that NPS EN-1 and EN-3 are the relevant NPSs applicable to the Application.

5.6. WLDCs position is that the determination of NSIPs under section 104 of the PA 2008 requires consideration of that section as a whole (compliance with all subsections is required).

5.7. The determination of applications for development consent for NSIPs under the PA2008 requires the decision maker to have regard to all criteria set out in subsection (2) of section 104. S104(2) PA2008 sets out the matters to which the SoS must have regard in deciding an application submitted in accordance with PA 2008. In summary, the matters set out in s104(2) include any relevant national policy statements, any local impact report and any other matters the SoS thinks are both important and relevant to the decision.

5.8. In determining NSIP applications, the decision maker must decide the application in accordance with all subsections (3) – (9) inclusive. A failure to comply with one or more of the subsections, would indicate non-compliance with section 104.

5.9. Under Section 104(3) of the PA2008 the Secretary of State is required to determine the scheme in accordance with relevant NPSs. The Scheme is therefore required to comply with the NPSs in order to be granted development consent.

5.10. In the event that the Secretary of State find the Scheme compliant with section 104(3), compliance with, inter alia, section 104(7) which requires them to be satisfied that the adverse impacts of the Scheme would outweigh its benefits.

5.11. In determining compliance with section 107(7), the Secretary of State must have regard to matters set out in section 104(2), including any Local Impact Report and any matters that are both important and relevant to the decision. Such matters will include the statutory development plan and other important and relevant policy.

6. Policy framework

6.1. The adopted statutory development plan applicable to the Scheme must be given due weight in the decision-making process as a matter that is both 'important and relevant' pursuant to section 104(2)(d) of the PA2008.

6.2. The Secretary of State must also have regard to this LIR when determining the OESF application, which will inherently include regard to the policy set out in this section.

6.3. Both the LIR and the adopted development plan will be important matters to which regard will be had when considering whether the Scheme adverse impacts outweigh its benefits in accordance with section 104(7) of the PA2008.

Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (April 2023)

6.4. The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (Local Plan) forms the adopted development plan for the West Lindsey district.

6.5. The Local Plan forms part of the development plan for West Lindsey (replacing the previous Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, adopted in 2017). The Local Plan was adopted in April 2023 and therefore represents an 'up to date' statutory development plan which should be considered 'important and relevant' for the purposes of section 104 and to which significant weight should be afforded in decision making under section 104 of the PA 2008.

6.6. The most relevant policies to the determination of the Scheme and a brief summary of each are set out below.

Policy	Summary
The Vision for Central Lincolnshire	In delivering the overall vision for Central Lincolnshire to be a prosperous and desirable place to live, work and visit, and key objectives include: Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure - to conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity across Central Lincolnshire by delivering measurable net gain in biodiversity through development and establishing nature recovery networks through planning. To provide opportunities for people to access and appreciate wildlife and the nature environment whilst safeguarding protected sites. Landscape and townscape – to protect and enhance the rich diversity of the character and appearance of Central Lincolnshire's landscape and townscape, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place.
Policy S10: Supporting a Circular Economy	The Joint Committee is aware of the high energy and material use consumed on a daily basis, and, consequently, is fully supportive of the principles of a circular economy. Accordingly, and to complement any policies set out in the Minerals and Waste Development Plan, proposals will be supported, in principle, which demonstrate their compatibility with, or the furthering of, a strong circular economy in the local area (which could include cross-border activity elsewhere in Lincolnshire).
Policy S11: Embodied Carbon	All development should, where practical and viable, take opportunities to reduce the development's embodied carbon content, through the careful choice, use and sourcing of materials.

Policy S12: Water Efficiency and Sustainable Water Management	In relation to water management, other development comprising new buildings with outside hard surfacing, must ensure such surfacing is permeable (unless there are technical and unavoidable reasons for not doing so in certain areas) thereby reducing energy demand on the water recycling network and should consider the potential to incorporate a green roof and/or walls
Policy S14: Renewable energy	All major development proposals should explicitly set out what opportunities to lower a building's embodied carbon content have been considered, and which opportunities, if any, are to be taken forward.
Policy S15: Protecting Renewable Energy Infrastructure	The Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee is committed to supporting the transition to a net zero carbon future and will seek to maximise appropriately located renewable energy generated in Central Lincolnshire (such energy likely being wind and solar based). Proposals for renewable energy schemes, including ancillary development, will be supported where the direct, indirect, individual and cumulative impacts on the following considerations are, or will be made, acceptable. i. The impacts are acceptable having considered the scale, siting and design, and the consequent impacts on landscape character; visual amenity; biodiversity; geodiversity; flood risk; townscape; heritage assets, their settings and the historic landscape; and highway safety and rail safety; and ii. The impacts are acceptable on aviation and defence navigation system/communications; and iii. The impacts are acceptable on the amenity of sensitive neighbouring uses (including local residents) by virtue of matters such as noise, dust, odour, shadow flicker, air quality and traffic. Permitted proposals will be subject to a condition that will require the submission of an End-of-Life Removal Scheme within one year of the facility becoming non-operational, and the implementation of such a scheme within one year of the scheme being approved. Such a scheme should demonstrate how any biodiversity net gain that has arisen on the site will be protected or enhanced further, and how the materials to be removed would, to a practical degree, be re-used or recycled.
Policy S16: Wider Energy Infrastructure	The transition to a net zero carbon future is supported, recognising and supporting in principle the need for significant investment in new and upgraded energy infrastructure. Support will be given to proposals which are necessary for, or form part of, the transition to a net zero carbon sub-region, which could include: energy storage facilities (such as battery storage or thermal storage); and upgraded or new electricity facilities (such as transmission facilities, sub-stations or other electricity infrastructure. However, any such proposals should take all reasonable opportunities to mitigate any harm arising from such proposals and take care to select not only appropriate locations for such facilities, but also design solutions which minimise harm arising.
Policy S17: Carbon Sinks	Where development is proposed on land containing peat soils or other identified carbon sinks, including woodland, trees and scrub; open habitats and farmland; blanket bogs, raised bogs and fens; and rivers, lakes and wetland habitats, the applicant must submit a proportionate evaluation of the impact of the proposal on either the peat soil's carbon content or any other form of identified carbon sink as relevant and in all cases an appropriate management plan must be submitted. There will be a presumption in favour of preservation of peat and other carbon sinks in-situ. Proposals that will result in unavoidable harm to, or loss of, peat soils or other identified carbon sinks will only be permitted if it

	is demonstrated that: a) the site is allocated for development; or b) there is not a less harmful viable option to development of that site.
Policy S21: Flood Risk and Water Resources	All development proposals will be considered against the NPPF, including application of the sequential and, if necessary, the exception test. Development proposals are expected to demonstrate that the proposals don't place themselves or existing land or buildings at an increased risk of flooding; the development will be safe during its lifetime, including climate change, and resilient to flooding and be brought back into use quickly after a flood event. Development should also not affect the integrity of existing flood defences and should have taken a positive approach to reducing overall flood risk to contribute to solutions in the wider area. Developments should have included Sustainable Drainage Systems unless these can be shown to be inappropriate or impractical. Development proposals that are likely to impact on surface or ground water should consider the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. Of relevance to the water environment, development proposals should demonstrate have followed the surface water hierarchy for all proposals: i. surface water runoff is collected for use; ii. discharge into the ground via infiltration; iii. discharge to a watercourse or other surface water body; iv. discharge to a surface water sewer, highway drain or other drainage system, discharging to a watercourse or other surface water body; v. discharge to a combined sewer. Also, development proposals should have no surface water connections are made to the foul system and surface water connections to the combined or surface water system are only made in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that there are no feasible alternatives (this applies to new developments and redevelopments) and where there is no detriment to existing users. Development proposals should ensure that development contributes positively to the water environment and its ecology where possible and does not adversely affect surface and ground water quality in line with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, and that that development with the potential to pose a risk to groundwater resources is not located in sensitive locations to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. Suitable access should safeguarded for the maintenance of watercourses, water resources, flood defences and drainage infrastructure; and that adequate provision is made to safeguard the future maintenance of water bodies to which surface water and foul water treated on the site of the development is discharged, preferably by an appropriate authority (e.g. Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Board, Water Company, the Canal and River Trust or local Council. Development proposals that include or abut a watercourse should ensure no building, structure or immovable landscaping feature is included that will impede access within 8m of a watercourse, or within 16m of a tidal watercourse.
Policy S43: Sustainable Rural Tourism	Development proposals within villages named in the Settlement Hierarchy in Policy S1 that will deliver high quality sustainable visitor facilities including (but not limited to) visitor accommodation, sporting attractions, and also including proposals for temporary permission in support of the promotion of events and festivals.
Policy S47: Accessibility and Transport	Development proposals which contribute towards an efficient and safe transport network that offers a range of transport choices for the movement of people and goods will be supported.

	Any development that has severe transport implications will not be granted planning permission unless deliverable mitigation measures have been identified, and arrangements secured for their implementation, which will make the development acceptable in transport terms.
Policy S53: Design and Amenity	All development, including extensions and alterations to existing buildings, must achieve high quality sustainable design that contributes positively to local character, landscape and townscape, and supports diversity, equality and access for all.
Policy S54: Health and Wellbeing	The potential for achieving positive mental and physical health outcomes will be taken into account when considering all development proposals. Where any potential adverse health impacts are identified, the applicant will be expected to demonstrate how these will be addressed and mitigated.
Policy S57: The Historic Environment	Development proposals should protect, conserve and seek opportunities to enhance the historic environment of Central Lincolnshire.
	Listed Buildings Permission to change the use of a Listed Building or to alter or extend such a building will be granted where the local planning authority is satisfied that the proposal is in the interest of the building's preservation and does not involve activities or alterations prejudicial to the special architectural or historic interest of the Listed Building or its setting.
	Conservation Areas Development within, affecting the setting of, or affecting views into or out of, a Conservation Area should preserve (and enhance or reinforce it, as appropriate) features that contribute positively to the area's character, appearance and setting.
	Archaeology Development affecting archaeological remains, whether known or potential, designated or undesignated, should take every practical and reasonable step to protect and, where possible, enhance their significance.
Policy S60: Protecting Biodiversity and Geodiversity	All development should: a) protect, manage, enhance and extend the ecological network of habitats, species and sites of international, national and local importance (statutory and non-statutory), including sites that meet the criteria for selection as a Local Site; b) minimise impacts on biodiversity and features of geodiversity value; c) deliver measurable and proportionate net gains in biodiversity in accordance with Policy S61; and d) protect and enhance the aquatic environment within or adjoining the site, including water quality and habitat. Mitigation of Potential Adverse Impacts Development should avoid adverse impact on existing biodiversity and geodiversity features as a first principle, in line with the mitigation hierarchy. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, they must be adequately and proportionately mitigated. If full mitigation cannot be provided, compensation will be required as a last resort where there is no alternative. Development will only be supported where the proposed measures for mitigation and/or compensation along with details of net gain are acceptable to the Local Planning Authority in terms of design and location and are secured for the lifetime of the development with appropriate funding mechanisms that are capable of being secured by condition and/or legal agreement.

	If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission will be refused.
Policy S61: Biodiversity Opportunity and Delivering Measurable Net Gains	Following application of the mitigation hierarchy, all development proposals should ensure opportunities are taken to retain, protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity features proportionate to their scale, through site layout, design of new buildings and proposals for existing buildings with consideration to the construction phase and ongoing site management.
	Biodiversity Net Gain The following part of the policy applies unless, and until, subsequently superseded, in whole or part, by national regulations or Government policy associated with the delivery of mandatory biodiversity net gain arising from the Environment Act 2021. Where conflict between the policy below and the provisions of Government regulations or national policy arises, then the latter should prevail.
Policy S66: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows	Development proposals should be prepared based on the overriding principle that: • the existing tree and woodland cover is maintained, improved and expanded; and opportunities for expanding woodland are actively considered and implemented where practical and appropriate to do so.
	Hedgerows Proposals for new development will be expected to retain existing hedgerows where appropriate and integrate them fully into the design having regard to their management requirements. Proposals for new development will not be supported that would result in the loss of hedges of high landscape, heritage, amenity or biodiversity value unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh the loss, and this loss can be clearly demonstrated to be unavoidable. Development requiring the loss of a hedgerow protected under The Hedgerow Regulations will only be supported where it would allow for a substantially improved overall approach to the design and landscaping of the development that would outweigh the loss of the hedgerow. Where any hedges are lost, suitable replacement planting or restoration of existing hedges, will be required within the site or the locality, including appropriate provision for maintenance and management.
Policy S67: Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land	Proposals should protect the best and most versatile agricultural land so as to protect opportunities for food production and the continuance of the agricultural economy.

National Policy

6.7. National policy governing the principle of development for renewable energy proposals within its scope is the National Policy Statement (NPS) for renewables EN-3, which should be read together with the Overarching NPS for Energy, EN-1.

6.8. The energy NPSs were updated and designated in January 2024. The effect of the updated policy was the extension of coverage to include solar energy generation and the provision of explicit support for large scale, ground mounted solar generating stations.

6.9. The NPSs play a significant role in decision making on NSIPs. As NPSs that are relevant to solar energy development are adopted, the OESF will be determined in accordance with section 104 of the Planning Act 2008

NPS EN-1 – Overarching Policy Statement for Energy

6.10. NPS EN-1 (January 2024) sets out the government's commitment to increasing renewable generation capacity. EN-1 establishes general principles relating to the need for all energy infrastructure, noting that there is an urgent need for new electricity generating capacity. This urgent need is expressed clearly in that "…a secure, reliable, affordable, Net Zero consistent system in 2050 is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar".

6.11. NPS EN-1 recognises the strategic national importance of solar generation in the UK's energy generation 'mix' of technologies, requiring a sustained growth in the capacity of solar generation in the next decade. Solar generation is explicitly included with the scope of technologies as being required to mee the defined 'urgent need', and it recognises the contribution solar can make to achieving net zero, providing security of electricity supply and an affordable, reliable system.

NPS EN-3 – National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure

6.12. NPS EN-3 (January 2024) provides further policy specific to renewable electricity generating technologies.

6.13. NPS EN-3 provides technology specific policy relating to solar generating stations. It states the Government's commitment to sustained growth in solar development, including the benefits of the technology in relation to cost and speed of delivery.

6.14. The impacts of the scale of NSIP solar development in rural areas is recognised, and it sets out the key policy consideration such as irradiance, site topography, proximity to dwellings, capacity and the importance of a grid connection on the commercial viability of projects being promoted.

NPS EN-5 – National Policy Statement for Networks

6.15. Whilst providing policy for long-distance transmission systems (400kv and 275kv lines), NPS EN-5 (July 2011 and November 2023) also cover associated infrastructure such as substations and converter stations.

6.16. Due to the scope of the proposed development, WLDC consider NPS EN-5 to be an important and relevant matter with regard to the relevant associated development of the proposed application.

The National Planning Policy Framework

6.17. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the governments planning policies for England. The NPPF does not include policies specific to NSIPs.

6.18. The NPPF nonetheless provides guidance on the requirement for good design, promoting healthier communities, conserving the historic environment, conserving the natural environment, sustainable transport, flood risk and meeting the challenges of climate change. With due regard to the scope of the policy at a national level, WLDC consider the NPPF to be an important and relevant matter for the determination of the application under section 104 of the PA2008.

6.19. In relation to the delivery of renewable energy, the NPPF states (paragraph 160) that to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, (development) plans should:

- *"provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, and their future re-powering and life extension, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts)";*
- *"consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and "*
- *"identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers."*

6.20. Section 15 of the NPPF provides key policy on 'Conserving and enhancing the natural environment'. It states that (para. 180) that "*planning…decisions should contribute to the and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

a) Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)".

Other Relevant Policy

6.21. In addition to the above, WLDC consider the following policy to also be relevant and important for the determination of the application under section 104 of the PA2008:

UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy (2025)

6.22. UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy (2025) was published in June 2025 by HM Treasury and the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority and outlines a long-term plan to boost economic growth and living standards across the UK, improve housing, transport, energy, digital, and social infrastructure and enhance resilience in response to global and domestic challenges.

6.23. Inter alia its core objectives include improving transport, energy, and digital networks and supporting clean energy and climate resilience. The government has set itself the mission of making the UK a clean energy superpower, delivering a clean power system by 2030 and then accelerating to net zero.

6.24. This is intended to:

- Support good jobs across the UK through investment in the green economy;
- Improve energy security and protect consumers from future price volatility;
- Improve air quality, creating wider health and social benefits; and
- Protecting the natural environment from the consequences of further climate change and degradation.

Solar Roadmap: United Kingdom Powered by Solar (2025)

6.25. The UK Solar Roadmap, published in June 2025, sets out the UK Government's strategy and plan of action to achieve significant increases in solar deployment to support the delivery of clear power by 2030.

6.26. The roadmap outlines the actions for the industry and government to overcomes challenges to delivering the ambition set out in the Clean Power Action Plan; which seeks the deployment of 45-47GW by 2030. The roadmap also sets out the aspirations for longer-term growth beyond 2030.

Clean Power Action Plan 2030 (2024)

6.27. Clean Power Action Plan 2030 (CPAP) was published in 2024 and is the UK Government's roadmap to decarbonise the electricity system by 2030. It aims to deliver energy security, affordability, and climate resilience through a rapid transition to clean, homegrown power.

6.28. The CPAP sets clean energy capacity targets, with the target for solar power being 45-47 GW and battery storage being 23-27 GW.

Powering up Britain (March 2023)

6.29. This document published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero aims to quintuple the UK's current solar power capacity to 70GW by 2035, as part of ambitions to full decarbonise the power sector by this date. The plan emphasises ground-mounted solar schemes, given it is "one of the cheapest forms of electricity generation and is readily deployable at scale". The plan seeks large scale solar deployment across the UK, looking for development mainly on brownfield, industrial and low/medium grade agricultural land.

6.30. Solar and farming can be complementary, supporting each other financially, environmentally and through shared use of land. We consider that meeting energy security and climate change goals is urgent and of critical importance to the country, and that these goals can be achieved together with maintaining food security for the UK. We encourage deployment of solar technology that delivers environmental benefits, with consideration for ongoing food production or environmental improvement.

6.31. The Powering up Britain plan recognises that as with any new development, solar projects may impact on communities and the environment. The planning system allows all views to be taken into account when decision makers balance local impacts with national need.

The British Energy Security Strategy (2022)

6.32. The British Energy Security Strategy sets out the immediate need to manage the financial implications of soaring commodity prices in the near term, on households and businesses which are already feeling economic pain as the post-Covid cost of living has risen: "*The first step is to improve energy efficiency, reducing the amount of energy that households and businesses need*." (p5).

6.33. In the near-term, the strategy sets out a high-level action plan to upgrade the energy efficiency of at least 700,000 homes in the UK by 2025, and to ensure that by 2050 all UK buildings will be energy efficient with low-carbon heating. Further, the strategy sets out an intent to phase out the sale of new and replacement gas boilers by 2035 (p12).

6.34. The Strategy aims to:

- Cut planning consent process time by over half through, among other measures, strengthening the Renewable National Policy Statements (EN-3) to reflect the importance of energy security and net zero;
- Increase the pace of deployment of Offshore Wind by 25% to deliver up to 50GW by 2030, including up to 5GW of innovative floating wind. Wind will contribute over half the UK's renewable generation capacity by 2030. (p16);
- Consider all options including Onshore Wind through the improvement of national electricity network infrastructure and support of a number of new English projects with strong local backing, so prioritising "putting local communities in control" of local onshore solutions. Repowering of existing onshore wind sites is also under consideration. (p18);
- Support a 5-fold increase in deployment of solar technology by 2035, recognising the abundant source of solar energy in the UK and an 85% reduction in cost over the last ten years of solar power. For ground-mounted solar, the strategy indicates a future consultation on planning rules to strengthen policy in favour of development on non-protected land, while ensuring communities continue to have a say and environmental protections remain in place. (p19);
- Increase UK plans for deployment of civil nuclear to up to 24GW by 2050 – three times more than operational capacity in 2022 and representing up to 25% of our projected electricity demand. This includes the intention to take one project (Sizewell C) to FID during the current Parliament, and two projects to FID in the next Parliament, including Small Modular Reactors, subject to value for money and relevant approvals. (p21). The selection process for further UK projects is anticipated to be initiated in 2023 (p22); and
- Double the UK ambition for hydrogen production to up to 10GW by 2030, with at least half of this from electrolytic hydrogen (p22), facilitated by bringing forwards up to 1GW of electrolytic hydrogen into construction or operational status by 2025.

The National Infrastructure Strategy (2020)

6.35. The National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) published in November 2020 sets out plans to transform the UK's infrastructure. The Strategy is the Government's response to recommendations made by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), which was set up to provide impartial, expert advice to the government on long-term infrastructure priorities. In July 2018, the NIC published a National Infrastructure Assessment which provided the foundation for many of the measures included within the NIS.

6.36. One of the aims of the NIS is to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The Government acknowledges in the NIS that to deliver net zero, the share of generation from renewables needs to dramatically increase. It identifies that this can be achieved by the provision of greater generation capacity from onshore wind and solar. As recommended by the NIC, the NIS sets out plans to include solar PV in the next auction round (2022) for Contracts for Difference (CfD), which is the Government's main mechanism for supporting low-carbon electricity generation. This incentivises investment in renewable energy by providing developers of projects with high upfront costs and long lifetimes with direct protection from volatile wholesale prices, and they protect consumers from paying increased support costs when electricity prices are high.

6.37. The NIS demonstrates the Government's commitment, including a financial commitment, to supporting solar generation now.

The Energy White Paper: Powering our Net Zero Future (2020)

6.38. The Energy White Paper published in December 2020 is one of the more recent Government policies setting out how the UK will reach net zero emissions by 2050.

6.39. The Paper explains that it is likely that overall demand for electricity will double by 2050 due to the electrification of other sectors such as transport heating. On page 42, it states that meeting this demand by 2050 would require "a fourfold increase in clean electricity generation with the decarbonisation of electricity increasingly underpinning the delivery of our net zero target".

6.40. It identifies the Government's aim for a fully decarbonised, reliable and low-cost power system by 2050 and that market conditions will determine the best solutions for very low emissions and reliable supply, at a low cost to consumers.

6.41. The Paper explains that the government is not targeting a particular generation mix but commits the government to maintaining the market conditions which stimulate the cost reductions that have been seen in the renewable energy market over the last five years. It does, however, state that it is possible to determine key characteristics of the future generation mix at this stage identifying on page 43 that a "low-cost, net zero consistent system is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar". It highlights that this will need to be complemented by technologies which provide power, or reduce demand, to manage intermittency. It states that currently this includes "nuclear, gas with carbon capture and storage and flexibility provided by batteries, demand side response, interconnectors and short-term dispatchable generation providing peaking capacity, which can be flexed as required", thereby also highlighting the role of battery storage in the energy mix.

6.42. This Paper highlights the government's commitment to solar to achieve net zero targets and the need to provide this urgently

A Green Future: Our 25-year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)

6.43. The 25 Year Environment Plan published in 2018 sets out the government's 25-year plan to improve the environment within a generation.

6.44. It sets out 10 goals which include the achievement of: clean air; clean and plentiful water; thriving plants and wildlife; reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards like flooding and drought; the more sustainable and efficient use of resources from nature; enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment; mitigation and adaption to climate change; minimisation of waste; management of exposure to chemicals; and enhanced biosecurity.

6.45. Six key areas of policy are set out in the plan and include:

- Using and managing land sustainably (including embedding an 'environmental net gain' principle for developing and measuring natural capital and reducing flood risk).
- Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes (including developing a Nature Recovery Network and reviewing National Parks and AONBs).

- Connecting people (including children) with the environment to improve health and wellbeing (including encouraging children to be close to nature, both in and out of school and greening out cities).
- Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste (including achieving zero avoidable plastic waste by end of 2042).
- Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans (including a post Brexit new sustainable fisheries policy).
- Protecting and improving the global environment (including providing 'international leadership and leading by example' and 'leaving a lighter footprint on the global environment).

6.46. This plan highlights the Government's support for the reduction in the UK's carbon footprint; protection and enhancement of the natural environment; and ensuring land is managed with environmental gains which is of relevance to the Scheme.

7. Key Impacts – cumulative

7.1. WLDCs key concerns and objections to the OESF relate to its cumulative impact with other NSIP solar electricity generating stations that have either been consented or are awaiting decision.

7.2. There are four other NSIP solar schemes to which the OESF will add further significant impacts to the West Lindsey District:

- Gate Burton Energy Park (531MW) (Order Limits: 824ha approx.) – Consented 12/07/2024
- Cottam Solar Project (600MW) (Order Limits: 1,450ha approx.) – Consented 05/09/2024
- West Burton Solar Project (480MW) (Order Limits: 886ha approx.) – Consented 24/01/2025
- Tillbridge Solar Project (500MW) – (Order Limits: 1,670ha approx.) - Recommendation stage (decision due by October 2025)

7.3. The OESF Order Limits extend to approximately 1,414ha (14.14km2) and would add a further 750MW of solar development to the existing cumulative baseline. This would result in a total cumulative Order Limits land take of approximately 6,244ha / 62.44km^2 and total generation of 2,861MW / 2.861GW.

7.4. This amount of solar development within a close geographical area is unprecedented and gives rise to significant adverse impacts that have not been experienced on a cumulative basis in England.

7.5. From the commencement of the examination of the first NSIP solar application, WLDC have raised significant concerns regarding the cumulative impacts of all of the projects and the approach to decision making. Whilst NSIP applications are examined and determined on an individual basis with cumulative impacts extending only to recognition that such assessments have been carried out in an ES, WLDCs consistent view is that the applications should have been determined on the basis of their acceptability as a group of projects. The impacts of all of the NSIPs against the baseline of a rural agricultural environment will be significant and harmful, including the construction phase.

7.6. The overarching policy context for the consideration of cumulative impacts are set out in the relevant NPSs. NPS EN-1 requires the Secretary of State, when considering any proposed development and weighing its adverse impacts against its benefits, to take into account" its *potential adverse impacts…including any long-term and cumulative adverse impacts*" (NPS EN-1 para. 4.1.5).

7.7. Applicants are required to set out how residual impacts will be compensated for as far as possible, setting out how any mitigation or compensation will be monitored and agreed to ensure success and that action is taken (including adaptive management). Cumulative impacts of multiple developments with residual impacts must also be considered (NPS EN-1 para, 4.2.12).

7.8. WLDC's concerns around the potential cumulative construction period is derived from the lifespan of the DCOs that have been granted or sought, and the estimated construction periods cited in the respective project ESs.

7.9. The DCO lifespan being sought for projects is 5 years and the estimated construction period is 24 months, aside from the Gate Burton Energy Park which cites a period of 24-36 months.

7.10. Based upon these parameters for the 4 NSIPs either consented, or at decision stage, plus the OESF as the fifth NSIP, a simple 'staggering' of development periods within the 5-year validity periods for each consent could lead to construction activity occurring up to 2033. There is no control

over the commencement of construction aside from that it must do so within 5 years of the Orders coming into force.

7.11. The table below helps demonstrate this potential scenario.

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL
NSIP SOLAR FARMS
POTENTIAL PROGNOSIS OF CONSTRUCTION
**24 month construction period assumption*

Key:

DCO granted
Expected decision date
Decision estimated
Construction period

			YEAR											
PROJECT	**DCO into force**	**Est. Construction period (longest**	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Gate Burton Energy Park	Aug-24	36 months												
Cottam Solar Project	Sep-24	24 months												
West Burton Solar Project	Jan-25	24 months												
Tillbridge Solar Project	Oct-25	24 months												
One Earth Solar Farm	Dec-26	24 months												

7.12. WLDC have concerns that the cumulative effects of these NSIP solar schemes in particular have not been carried through adequately to the cumulative assessment, in particular in relation to traffic impacts. For example, the table at Appendix A.18.2 [APP-146] indicates that the Tillbridge solar DCO scheme has not been taken forward to the cumulative assessment.

7.13. However, as indicated in the table above the reported temporal scopes overlap. From an analysis of Figure 6 of the OESF Transport Assessment [APP-136] and Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix B of the Tillbridge Framework Constriction Traffic Management Plan [Tillbridge REP5-020] the general construction traffic routes appear to overlap on the A57, as do abnormal indivisible load (AIL) routes. The AIL routes also coincide, particularly along the A15. This is one example which indicates that there may be discrepancies in the cumulative assessment. As a result, WLDC would like to request the applicant reviews the cumulative assessment and further justifies the exclusion of the 4 solar schemes listed above from cumulative assessments.

7.14. WLDC consider this period to be a significant length of time for residents to endure and highlight this impact as one that should be considered negatively in the planning balance.

7.15. The further specific impacts are discussed below in more detail.

Lifespan of the project and its impacts

7.16. WLDC notes that the lifespan of the project is proposed to be for a period of 60 years. This reflects the lifespan of the other four NSIP solar schemes in the district, who have either secured or are seeking a consent for this period of time.

7.17. WLDC notes that the applicant considers the Scheme to constitute a ‘temporary’ development and have treated it as such in their EIA. This has resulted in the assessed impact being derived on the basis that the impacts will be ‘temporary’.

7.18. WLDC consider a 60-year timescale to have the effect of permanent impacts. Whilst the infrastructure can be removed at the end of the consent lifespan, this period is significant and will be experienced over several generations.

7.19. To reduce or downgrade impacts on the basis that 60 years is 'temporary' is considered to be an unrealistic approach. All assessments should have been carried out on the basis that the impacts would be permanent to reflect the time period over which they would be experienced. This would potentially be beyond the year 2090 based on the lifespan of development consents being granted.

7.20. WLDC considers that the decision maker should determine the application on the basis that the impacts are 'permanent' in terms of their impact on communities and the environment.

Landscape and visual

7.21. WLDC raises objections to the Scheme due to its cumulative impact, alongside other NSIP solar projects, on landscape character and the visual effects people will experience in the district.

7.22. WLDC notes that the applicant has provided a drawing that identified the approximate location of other projects through numbered circles (Figure 18.9 / Drawing Number EN10159/APP/6.20/18.9). Whilst serving as a useful reference, WLDC wishes to see a drawing that shows the true extent of solar farm area coverage in the District and surrounds, including solar NSIPs and any large scale (49.9MW) schemes consented or proposed to be consented under the Town and Country Planning Act. Were such a drawing produced with, for example, the Order Limits/red-line boundaries of other projects shown, the extend of land lost to solar farm development and the proximity to each other would be revealed. WLDC considers that this exercise is required in order for the cumulative impacts of the OESF project to be properly considered. WLDC request that proposed large vehicle and AIL routes are included in this drawing or set of drawings, along with context background mapping showing flood risk zones and agricultural land classification.

Landscape Character

7.23. WLDC consider that it is essential that, when considering the acceptability of the Scheme, it must be done so with regard to the cumulative impact with other solar NSIP projects either consented or awaiting decision in the district.

7.24. NPS EN-3 (paragraph 2.10.257) states that the Secretary of State will consider the landscape and visual impact of any proposed solar PV farm, taking account of the effect of the development on landscape character, together with the possible cumulative effect with any existing or proposed development

7.25. WLDC notes that Landscape and Visual assessment in the ES does not carry out a cumulative assessment against the projects listed in paragraph 7.2 above. This is due to a 2km study area buffer being applied, which excludes the other projects.

7.26. Whilst this approach may reflect typical methodology, it results in there being no assessment of the total impact of all of the projects on the landscape character of West Lindsey and the significant magnitude of change that its character will endure as a consequence of solar farm development cumulatively.

7.27. As explained in section 4 above, the landscape of West Lindsey is characterised by the large, open agricultural fields. In planning policy terms Local Plan Policy S1 determines that the entire Order Limits within WLDC are in "Countryside". The implementation of the cumulative solar farm projects will have a marked change on that landscape character area, being wholly contrary to the defining and valued character of the Till Vale landscape character area. This proposal would continue on from that development and now expand it into the Trent Valley LCA in addition to that already committed and soon to take place within the Till Vale LCA.

7.28. The erosion of this landscape through the quantum of development being imposed is unprecedented and will cause material harm for over 60 years.

Visual effects

7.29. The cumulative visual impact of the OESF is not simply limited to a consideration of whether more than one project has such an impact from a single viewpoint or viewpoints.

7.30. WLDCs concern relates to the visual effects that people will experience when travelling through the landscape. Cumulatively, the Scheme will be the first project a person would experience when travelling into the district from the south-east, following which the spread of solar farm development extends up to and beyond Gainsborough to the northern extent of the Cottam Solar Project (a distance of circa. 24km/15 miles).

7.31. The sequential experience through the landscape will be materially harmed with travellers experiencing a feeling of solar farm "fatigue". The OESF will add to the existing impacts that the project cited above will have, extending the area within which people will experience alien solar farm development, predominantly within the Till Valley landscape character area.

7.32. The impacts are materially harmful, with a significant area offering limited relief from solar farm development for communities and visitors.

7.33. WLDC consider these visual effects to be unacceptable when assessed against policy. Whilst NSIP proposals appear to only be determined on their own impacts, WLDC state again that it is the cumulative impacts that require robust consideration and explanation of conclusions.

7.34. WLDCs position is that there must be a tipping-point at which the landscape character is unable to reasonably accommodate further change as a consequence of solar farm development. The addition of the OESF to the baseline of other NSIP solar project clearly breaches that tipping-point. This would be contrary to Local Plan Policy S53.

Construction Traffic

7.35. The impact and management of cumulative construction traffic has been an issue that WLDC has consistently raised as a significant concern.

7.36. The Scheme proposes two construction vehicle access routes to the site (APP-136, 6.21 Appendix 12.2 Transport Assessment, Figures 3-1 and 3-2):

Proposed Access Route 1 - from ABP Immingham to the eastern site access junctions

- Depart ABP Immingham through the west gate proceeding west on Humber Road;
- Travel onto A160 at Manby roundabout proceeding west towards A180;
- Proceeds west from at A180, merging into M180;
- Turns southwards to travel along A15 to Lincoln;
- Proceeds west on A46 at Riseholme roundabout, Lincoln;
- Proceeds north on the A57 at Carholme roundabout, Lincoln;
- Turns southwards onto A1133 at Newton on Trent to the site entrance.

Proposed Access Route 2 – from Goole Docks to the western site access junction

- Depart Goole Docks onto A161 proceeding west;
- Proceed west at the M62 junction 36;
- Proceed south onto M18 at junction 35;
- Proceed south on A1(M), merging to A1, At M18 junction 2;
- Exist the A1 at Markham Moor Interchange and proceed eastwards on the A57

- Proceed eastwards and turn right into the western site access.

7.37. The cumulative projects Gate Burton, Cottam, West Burton and Tillbridge solar farm NSIPs all utilise the A15 for the delivery of construction traffic.

7.38. The OESF project specifically excludes consideration and assessment the addition of construction traffic generated by the project to the already significant traffic generated by other cumulative projects. This includes the use of A15, which each project proposes to use. The OESF, Gate Burton, West Burton, Cottam and Tillbridge solar projects will all be utilising the A57 for construction traffic.

7.39. The OESF Transport Assessment states that the Cottam Solar project has not been included in the cumulative assessment as it would not coincide with the OESF construction period. It also omits the Tillbridge Solar Project from the assessment for the same reasons.

7.40. WLDC contends that this is an incorrect assumption to make as the Cottam project has a 5-year consent lifespan, which has yet to commence development (or submit details to discharge DCO 'requirements'). There is therefore a strong likelihood that construction activity and associated travel movement could occur at the same time using the same roads for five solar NSIP projects concurrently.

7.41. WLDC considers that, as all the traffic data for each project is in the public domain, the OESF should assess the likely cumulative construction traffic impacts.

7.42. The OESF assesses and proposes two construction traffic route options. As both options have been demonstrated to be viable by the applicant, WLDC considers that there is no compelling reason to propose both routes, and that the 'Proposed Access Route 2', using the M18 to access the site from the west, should be the only option used. This would avoid potential significant cumulative construction traffic impacts along the A15, the A46 Lincoln bypass and the A57 from Lincoln to the site.

7.43. The avoidance of 'Proposed Access Route 1' would minimise the impacts upon communities in terms of disruption, noise and air quality impacts, and additional traffic management that could extend for a period of 5-10 years should all five NSIP projects overlap/stagger their construction phases.

7.44. It is also noted by WLDC that the OESF project has not engaged collaboratively with other cumulative projects with regard to traffic management. The other solar NSIP project of Gate Burton, Cottam, West Burton and Tillbridge have all worked together to produce a 'Joint Report on Interrelationships', which brings together the key cumulative impacts of the projects and identifies areas where impacts could be minimised/mitigated. This report was produced and submitted as part of the respective applications and was updated as required during examination phases.

7.45. WLDC considers it unfortunate that the OESF has chosen not to collaborate with other projects in the manner that they have done to minimise impacts on local communities contrary to NPS EN-1 and Local Plan Policy S47.

Tourism

7.46. WLDC considers that there is potential for the proposal to have a negative impact upon the tourism economy within the West Lindsey District.

7.47. WLDCs concern relates to potential cumulative impact of the OESF and the other solar developments within the district with regard to the use of tourist accommodation in the West Lindsey District to accommodate construction workers. The ES does not provide any assessment of the likely impact specifically within the West Lindsey District; it only assesses capacity within the much wider study area.

7.48. If the cumulative impacts result in much of the accommodation available within West Lindsey being used to accommodate construction workers, WLDC has concerns that this would have an adverse impact upon the tourism sector. Should there be a significant reduction in the availability of accommodation for tourists, it can be assumed that visitors will look elsewhere beyond the District. Due to the potential lengthy cumulative construction period of a number of years, the ability for tourist accommodation businesses to recover once construction is complete is unknown and it is feared it would take significant time to do so. The tourist industry is already seeking to re-establish growth post-COVID, and eliminating accommodation for visitors could prolong this recovery.

7.49. WLDC notes that the applicant states that the influx of workers to be positive to the tourism sector, however this does not appear to take account of the wider linked-industry benefits that tourism has. In visiting an area, tourists will naturally visit attractions in the area and spend within other hospitality and leisure facilities during their stay.

7.50. Should the cumulative impact upon the availability of tourist accommodation for visitors be significantly reduced, and the cumulative construction period enduring for longer than 5 years, it may be concluded that such effects could be adverse and long term.

7.51. With construction traffic and associated works being carried out during the summer months and clashing with peak agricultural traffic (harvest) and the Lincolnshire Show, visitors and tourists will experience considerable frustration particularly those using the A15 and the nearby highway network.

Agricultural land

7.52. There will be significant impacts caused by the cumulative loss of agricultural land available for the production of food as a consequence of the Scheme.

7.53. Policy S67: Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land of the CLLP 2023 states that significant development resulting in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land will only be supported if:

- The need is clearly established;
- The benefits outweigh the need to protect such land, when taking into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land;
- The impacts of the proposal upon ongoing agricultural operations have been minimised through the use of appropriate design solutions; and
- Once the development has ceased its useful life then the land should be returned to its former use.

7.54. The council expects all these tests to be met, particularly in relation to the economic value of the land to WLDC and its inhabitants which is in line with national policy. Moreover, it is expected that the land would be restored to its former use. This is particularly important as the agricultural land is an important contributor to the local economy and culture of the region.

7.55. Paragraph 5.11.12 of the NPS (EN-1) outlines that applicants should "*seek to minimise impacts on the best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification) and preferably use land in areas of poorer quality (grades 3b, 4 and 5) except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations*".

7.56. Under Paragraph 5.11.34 of the NPS (EN-1), the decision maker should ensure that 'applicants do not site their scheme on the best and most versatile agricultural land without justification The SoS should also 'take into account the economic and other benefits of that land'.

7.57. The NPPF also states that BMV is land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification and recognises the economic and other benefits of such land (para. 187). Footnote 65 states that

where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality.

7.58. In view of the above, it is expected that the loss of both BMV and poorer quality land should be taken into account. This is particularly true given the agriculture lands contribution to the quality and character of the environment or the local economy.

7.59. Both national and local planning policy requires the protection of valuable agricultural land, including specifically for the production of food. Whilst it is understood that the grazing of livestock alongside solar panels falls within the category of 'food production', to rely upon this to demonstrate compliance with policy, it must be demonstrated that land will genuinely be 'available' for tenants. Simply stating that land 'could' be available does not go far enough to contend that land for the production of food will not be 'lost' for the 60-year lifespan of the project.

7.60. The part of OESF located within the West Lindsey District is located on agricultural land classified as Class 2 and 3a (Figure 8.6 Drawing Number EN10159/APP/6.20/8.6 Rev. C02 [APP-053]), the land taken with Class 3b being less than the other two classifications combined. The area of land classified as 2 and 3a is to be lost to accommodate solar panels, substation and BESS.

7.61. The Scheme has therefore failed to avoid the Best and Most Versatile land and has furthermore sited development that has greater direct impacts upon the quality of that land upon classification 2 and 2a.

7.62. As set out above, national and local policy requires solar projects to avoid class 1, 2 and 3a land as a preference. Unlike the four other NSIP projects, which either wholly or largely avoided these agricultural land classifications, the OESF has given less concern to this policy requirement and proposed to remove Best and Most Versatile land (3a) from being available for food production to accommodate the Scheme.

7.63. The cumulative loss of significant areas of land available for the production of food is a clear and significant negative impact and is an unacceptable impact in WLDCs view.

Maintenance and replacement

7.64. WLDC is concerned about the unassessed likely potential impacts that could occur from the waste and recycling of infrastructure components replaced under the broad 'maintenance' clause in the dDCO.

7.65. The concern relates to the approach to 'maintenance' as a power conferred by the draft DCO. The OESF project (individually and cumulatively with other NSIP solar projects) have the ability to replace panels on a piecemeal basis across the 60-year lifetime of the project. Whilst keeping below the EIA thresholds for an individual replacement 'event' these can be repeated throughout the whole application lifespan.

7.66. WLDC's understanding is that panels could require replacement from approximately 20 years of use, and the BESS will also require a full replacement. It is also understood that there is insufficient capacity in West Lindsey, Lincolnshire or even the UK to recycle this material at the current time.

7.67. The application documents do not provide any clarity on how replaced infrastructure will be dealt with. In the absence of any information relating to what recycling facilities may be delivered in the future, WLDC would welcome clarity on what the approach would be against the existing baseline.

7.68. As all of the cumulative solar NSIPs are able to replace substantial amounts of solar panels and the BESS without any control or understanding of the potential impacts, WLDC maintain a significant concern that such activities could give rise to adverse environmental impacts and impacts on communities.

8. Key Impacts – project specific

8.1. As set out in Section above, WLDC contends that the OESF project must be determined in the context of it cumulative impacts with other projects in the district, and that these impacts are materially harmful.

8.2. Notwithstanding this position, this section sets out the key impacts that the project individually 'in solus' will have on communities and the environment.

Need case

8.3. WLDC acknowledges the urgent need to deploy infrastructure for the generation of electricity from renewable sources as set out in NPSs EN-1 and EN-3.

8.4. The principle of deploying renewable energy generation infrastructure is also supported by policy S14 of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan 2023.

8.5. WLDC recognizes the OESF as a 'Critical National Priority' (CNP) under NPS EN-1, which typically means the need for such projects outweighs residual effects. However, WLDC argues that the cumulative impacts of this project, combined with four other NSIP solar projects in West Lindsey, are 'exceptional'. These impacts will last at least 60 years and significantly alter the district's landscape character, creating a solar farm landscape throughout the district that will be experienced by residents and visitors. WLDC emphasises that this situation is unprecedented, with no other DCO decision having to consider such extensive cumulative impacts during construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning. The eradication of the existing landscape character over such a large area is deemed 'exceptional' by WLDC, and we believe this must be taken into account when assessing the project's acceptability against policy, particularly due to its unique and significant cumulative impacts on the landscape.

Project design

8.6. The OESF application includes documents explaining the approach taken to design; most notably 'Design Approach Document' [APP-171] and 'Outline Design Parameters' [APP-172].

8.7. NPS EN-1 (para. 4.7.3) provides policy on the purpose of 'good design' and usefully refers to the being the "*means by which many policy objectives…can be met, for example…. In terms of siting and use of appropriate technologies, can help mitigate adverse impacts...*".

8.8. Local Plan policy S14 aligns with national policy in requiring proposals for renewable energy schemes, including ancillary development, to be considered acceptable where the impacts on landscape character and visual amenity to be considered acceptable.

8.9. Whilst recognising the general locations and site characteristics favoured by solar farm development, WLDCs view is that policy requires applicants to minimise impacts a far as possible. The design approach adopted by the OESF project has, however, resulted in solar panels being sited up to field boundaries in highly visible locations. Additionally, associated development such as the BESS and substation, up to 13.5m high, according to the height parameter plans [APP-016], has also been located in a location is highly visible with open views into the site from area within West Lindsey and adjacent to the south from within Newark and Sherwood District Council administrative area.

8.10. The location of panels, BESS and substation in the large open field to the east of the A1133 represents a highly visible and conspicuous part of the OESF project and WLDC does not understand from the application how, integrating policy requirements on 'good design' has resulted in a methodology that has resulted in this area being selected as the optimal location for this type of development.

8.11. WLDC contends that the location of this infrastructure on open, visible land upon agricultural land classifications that policy states should be avoided, demonstrates a flawed approach to project design. The resulting impacts are significant and adverse to the communities and environment within the West Lindsey District.

8.12. In WLDCs view, appropriate design objectives would have involved the avoidance of locating infrastructure with the greatest bulk and height (the substation and BESS) within such conspicuous locations where their impacts are greater than had more appropriate locations been selected (e.g. smaller scale landscapes, utilising existing environment features to screen and increase distance from public rights of way/highways).

8.13. With regard to the general site layout arrangements, the siting of solar panel up to the edges of field boundaries creates a 'hard' boundary to the site, with panels being readily visible from public viewpoint. WLDC would expect design principles to establish an effective buffer between field boundaries and the solar panel in the interest of integrating the panel into the existing landscape in a manner that retains the prominence of field boundaries. This negative impact is particularly experienced from the A1133 and the public right of way to the west of the site (north of North Clifton).

8.14. Such a design approach would have been more effective in attempts to minimise the impacts of the Scheme on landscape character and visual amenity.

Landscape and visual

8.15. The impact of large-scale solar farm development within the landscape is a key concern for WLDC. The OESF will have significant and adverse impacts upon landscape character and visual effects on communities and visitors to the district.

8.16. In considering the landscape character and visual impact of the project, WLDC have had regard to the policy requirements of NPS EN-1 and EN-2, along with the relevant policies in the adopted Local Plan.

8.17. NPS EN1 notes that virtually all nationally significant infrastructure projects will have adverse effects on the landscape, but that there may also be beneficial landscape character impacts arising from the proposal (para. 5.10.5). Notwithstanding the above, it further requires project to be 'designed carefully', taking account of the potential impact on the landscape. This includes having regard to the siting, operational and other relevant constraints to minimise harm to the landscape, providing reasonable mitigation where possible and appropriate (para. 5.10.6).

8.18. In decision making, NPS EN-1 requires the Secretary of State to 'consider whether the project has been designed carefully, taking account of environmental effects on the landscape and siting, operational and other relevant constraints, to minimise harm to the landscape, including by mitigation' (para. 5.10.37).

8.19. Local Plan policy S14 requires proposals for renewable energy schemes, including ancillary development, to ensure that direct, indirect individual and cumulative impacts are, or will be made, acceptable. To determine the acceptability of those impacts, the following tests are to be applied (relevant test for landscape and visual impacts cited below):

i. The impacts are acceptable having considered the scale, siting and design, and the consequent impacts on landscape character, visual amenity…;

8.20. Testing compliance with the above criteria is via applicable policies elsewhere in the local plan, which includes the 'Vision' for the Central Lincolnshire area with the objectives to protect and enhance the diversity of the character of the area and maintain and strengthen local distinctiveness.

8.21. As explained above, the design approach applied to the OESF project has resulted in the siting of large-scale infrastructure in the form of the substation and BESS being located in conspicuous and highly visible location within the West Lindsey District. The eastern BESS area is identified on the height parameter plans [APP-016] as having a maximum height of 13.5m. It should be noted that,

according to plans submitted by Anglian Water for the works currently being undertaken at the Hall Water Treatment Works, immediately northwest of and adjacent to the eastern BESS area, the current main (and highest) building on the water treatment works site is approximately 10m in height to its ridge. This is currently the highest structure for some considerable distance. Assuming the 13.5m maximum height indicated on the plans will extend across the majority of the BESS area, the BESS area would be a major new element in the countryside, akin to distribution warehousing.

8.22. The solar panel arrays also extend close to field boundaries, including those adjacent to public highways. The impact of this design and layout results in the proposed infrastructure being highly visible and causing significant adverse harm to both landscape character and visual amenity.

8.23. Viewpoint location 2a is from a public right of way (footpath) located on higher ground to the west of the application site. From this viewpoint, panels will be readily visible as a conspicuous element in the landscape, located 'underneath' and interrupting a long distance view toward Lincoln Cathedral (Grade 1 Listed). Given the height parameter plans [APP-016] indicate that the height of development within the BESS area could be up to 13.5m, this would be a substantive impact on the view towards Lincoln Cathedral from this viewpoint contrary to Policy S53.

8.24. We would note that the photomontages showing the view from viewpoint 2a (figures 11.13.2A and 11.13.2B in [AS-037] and 11.14.2 and 11.14.2A in [AS-041]) do not appear to reflect the 13.5m maximum height parameter shown on the height parameter plans [APP-016].

8.25. Viewpoint 4 is from a proposed site entrance on the A1133. The 'Year 1' image (Figure 11.13.4A) shows the presence of a solid wooden close boarded-type fence to be located around the perimeter of the site adjacent to the A1133. The design and character of this fence is wholly contrary to the rural character of the area, introduce a crude structure, typically found in urban areas, for the construction period over several years. WLDC finds this fence to be wholly unacceptable in such a location regardless of its 'temporary' purpose.

8.26. The landscape character experienced from this viewpoint is that of large open agricultural fields. The introduction of the alien features of solar PV panes, substation and BESS will significantly erode this character, reduce the openness and prevailing agricultural character. The colouring of the solar panel will create a solid dark blanked effect that will be experienced along the A1133 and the public right of way to the west. The adverse visual impacts will be experienced along the A1133 when travelling into and out of the West Lindsey District (reference action point 44, on the Actions arising from the ISH1 held on the 9 July 2025.

8.27. Viewpoint 24 looks northwards along the Trent Valley LCA. As the Landscape Character Assessment indicates (page 19) development on the low lying west of the A1133 would be prominent and not easily accommodated without detracting from the gentle transition to the open, flat farmland on the banks of the River Trent. WLDC is of the view that the proposal will create such a prominent development feature which would be clearly visible in the landscape.

8.28. WLDC deems the impact of the OESF upon landscape character and visual effects within the district to be significant and adverse. It is not understood why the Scheme has been designed in a manner that does not seek to minimising effects by siting large scale infrastructure in such a prominent location, clearly visible from public rights of way upon the only raised ground in the nearby landscape.

8.29. Having considered the nature of these impacts, WLDC considers that the impacts on the landscape could be minimised further, as required by Policy S53 through the consideration of:

- Increasing the set-back of solar PV panels from the site boundary with the A1133.
- Siting the substation and BESS further to the east (away from the A1133 and the public right of way) to sit on lower topography and be viewed against the backdrop of existing woodland.
- Reinforce and increase the height of the western site boundary adjacent to the A1133 with further tree and hedgerow planting with appropriate species such as maple, hawthorn, ash and

oak. Deliver such planting through the Landscape Environmental Management Plan (LEMP) (APP-179), ensuring that there are no breaks along the highway (e.g. reinforce the gaps near to the layby to the south of the site entrance which offers clear views of the site).

Agricultural land

8.30. WLDC raises significant objections to the impact of the OESF on the loss of currently available agricultural land for the production of food, much of which is classified as Best and Most Versatile Land (Agricultural Land Classifications 2, and 3a).

8.31. NPS EN-3 requires solar electricity generating station projects to prefer poorer quality land to higher quality land, avoiding the use of 'Best and Most Versatile' (BMV) land where possible (para. 2.10.29. BMV land is defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.

8.32. Local Plan policy S14 applies a presumption in favour for proposal for ground-based photovoltaics and associated infrastructure, unless the 'proposal is (following a specific soil assessment) to take place on Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land and does not meet the requirements of Policy S67.

8.33. Local Plan policy S67 requires all development proposals to 'protect the best and most versatile land so as to protect opportunities for food production and the continuance of the agricultural economy'. It states that significant development resulting in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land will only be supported if:

a. The need for the proposed development has been clearly established and there is insufficient lower grade land available (unless such lower grade land would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations);
b. The benefits and/or sustainability considerations outweigh the need to protect such land, when taking into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land; and
c. The impacts of the proposal upon ongoing agricultural operations have been minimised through the use of appropriate design solutions; and
d. Where feasible, once any development which is supported has ceased its useful life the land will be restored to its former use (to be secured by a planning condition where appropriate).

8.34. WLDC considers that the application does not adequately justify the loss of BMV land (APP-053 Figure 8.6.) The OESF proposed the loss of approximately 660.9ha of BMV land (APP-168 Planning Statement para. 22.3.9) and the justification appears to extend to the need for renewable energy generation project and the temporary 60-year project lifespan as matters that override this impact.

8.35. WLDC disagrees with the justifications provided by the applicant. A significant amount of BMV land is purposed to be lost without sufficient justification as to way the design approach has not avoided its use as part of the scheme. To locate infrastructure such as the BESS on BMV land has not been adequately justified, especially where there are lower grades of land nearby that could accommodate these Scheme components.

8.36. The applicant's reliance on the loss of BMV land being 'temporary' is, in WLDCs view, flawed given the 60-year lifespan that the OESF seeks development consent for. This is a significant period of time, akin to permanent development, where land would not be available across the whole Scheme for the production of food. The total land and over 660ha of BMV land will be lost to the agricultural sector for the production of food for several generations. This is an impact that is significant and adverse.

8.37. WLDC considers that the Scheme could have readily been better designed to avoid the loss of such land, without materially compromising the delivery of the national need for renewable energy generation projects and nor the contribution the OESF would make towards that policy aim.

Flood risk and the water environment

8.38. WLDC are concerned that the proposal within the administrative area falls into Flood Zone 3 in two major locations. The first location is the area between the River Trent and the Hall Water Reservoir. Although detailed information of what is proposed at this location have not been provided, it appears that this area will be used for the horizontal directional drilling to provide for the export cables to cross under the River Trent.

8.39. The second location where the project falls within Flood Zone 3 is east of the A1133. This area is east of Southmoor Lane and extends either side of the Sewer Drain watercourse.

8.40. The proposed development is classed by the Government in Annex 3 of the NPPF as 'Essential Infrastructure' and development within Flood Zone 3 requires both the sequential test and, if the sequential test is met, then the exception test is required. This approach is reflected at paragraph 5.8.9 of En-1.

8.41. EN-1 makes clear at paragraph 5.8.7 that new energy infrastructure with flood risk areas should be exceptional: *"Where new energy infrastructure is, **exceptionally**, necessary in flood risk areas (for example where there are no reasonably available sites in areas at lower risk), policy aims to make it safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere and, where possible, by reducing flood risk overall. It should also be designed and constructed to remain operational in times of flood."*

8.42. The applicant has undertaken a site search and considered alternatives in a 10km radius around High Marnham (paragraph 3.2.10 of the Planning Statement [APP-168]. Table 4.1of the Planning Statement indicates that "*Approximately half of the Order Limits is located in Flood Zone 1 and the remainder is located within Flood Zone 2 and Flood Zone 3*". However, when considering the Order Limits east of the River Trent, as shown on Environmental Statement Figure 7.3 [AS-055], approximately 50% of this area is in Flood Zone 3.

8.43. The applicant has undertaken a search within a 10km radius of High Marnham, which according to paragraph 10.1.15 of the Planning Statement [APP-168]. However, this is not justified beyond "the desire to be as close to the point of connection as possible". It is not clear why other radii, such as 12km or 15km did not also fulfil that requirement, nor whether such a search would have identified sites outwith Flood Zone 3. It is also the case that, given the compulsory purchase powers available with a DCO, WLDC do not consider that the sequential test needs to be restricted by sites which are "reasonable available".

8.44. A significant proportion of the panels located in WLDC will be in Flood Zone 3 and may be submerged by up to 600mm, even though they are raised significantly with the bottom of the panels being 1.1m compared to the panels not in flood zone 3. Additionally, the top of the panels in flood zone 3 is 300mm higher than those panels not in Flood Zone 3. Overall, this raises the height of the development in an area designated as countryside in the Local Plan.

8.45. The proposal adds infrastructure to Flood Zone 3. Whilst ES Chapter 7: Hydrology and Hydrogeology [APP-036] indicates at paragraph 7.5.11 that the modules will be strong enough to withstand debris impact, there does not appear to be an assessment of the implications for downstream receptors of a catastrophic failure of a proportion of the modules, in terms of increasing the risk to others. This would seem especially relevant where the flood height is forecast in assessment to be higher than the 1.8m raised base of the panels. This also applies to construction period where it is not apparent that any assessment has been undertaken of the associated flood risks. Local Plan Policy S21 requires a demonstration by applicants that development will be safe during its lifetime. National Policy Statement EN1 requires at paragraph 5.8.11 that it should be demonstrated that "the project will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible will reduce flood risk overall".

8.46. WLDC note that the proposal does not show provision for an 8m area either side of watercourses. This has the potential to restrict access for maintenance of the watercourse and thus the potential to increase flood risk elsewhere. This is contrary to Local Plan Policy S21.

8.47. It is not apparent that the applicant has engaged with the Trent Valley Internal Drainage Board, particularly with reference to the 'Sewer Drain' watercourse that runs north south through the eastern part of the NSIP development boundary (referred to in ES Chapter 7: Hydrology and Hydrogeology [APP-036] as the "Unnamed Eastern Ordinary Watercourse"). WLDC request that the applicant submits a Statement of Common Ground into the examination covering this party.

Traffic and transport

8.48. WLDC raises significant concerns regarding the impacts of construction traffic on its communities and environment.

8.49. As discussed above, the cumulative impact of the addition of construction traffic generated by the OESF to the same highway network being used by four other NSIP solar projects will give rise to significant traffic management, delay and frustration over a period that could stretch between five and ten years.

8.50. WLDC considers the use of the 'Proposed Access Route 1' which begins at ABP Immingham, progresses on the A180/M180 onto the A15 south, and then to A46 at Lincoln and using the A57 to the site, to give rise to significant impacts. This is both in terms of the impacts cumulatively, and the impacts of the OESF individually in using local roads through the West Lindsey district to access the site in it south-western corner.

8.51. WLDC considers that the Scheme should use 'Proposed Access Route 2' as a route for construction traffic. Such an approach would utilise major motorway and A-class roads, minimising the use of local roads to access the site,

8.52. WLDC also question why the Scheme appears to propose on the Indicative Layout (EN010159/APP/2.9 rev 1) two construction access points in close proximity to each other from the A1133 into the eastern part of the site. There does not appear to be a compelling reason to remove hedgerows forming the field boundary to create this access. The use of a single access would minimise the environmental harm caused and WLDC would welcome such an amendment to the OESF project. The Transport Assessment (Appendix 12.2 EN010159-000179-6.21) identifies the northernmost access as "Gate F", but the access immediately adjacent the Anglian Water Works is not shown. WLDC considers this needs to be clarified.

8.53. WLDC also note that construction access Gate G is the only access to works east of the River Trent and west of the A1133. These works include the installation of 13 hectares of solar panels and the horizontal directional drilling for the export cable to run under the River Trent. The application documents do not appear to have specified the expected vehicle numbers using this access. However the access is directly on to a main A class road, which has a national speed limit of 60 miles per hour.

8.54. The Gate G access is directly opposite the existing access for the Anglian Water Hall Water Treatment Works. Given a maximum 6 metre width without removing the field boundary hedgerow there does not appear to be enough width for two large goods vehicles to pass each other on the access road. This has the potential, if a large goods vehicle is leaving the site, for the need to an incoming vehicle to need to wait on the carriageway of the single carriageway A class road with a 60 miles per hour national speed limit for the vehicle to exit.

8.55. The transport assessment indicates in Table 5 that HGV traffic on the A1133 north of north Clifton will increase during the project construction phase by 9.9%.

8.56. It should also be noted that, although the road appears generally level, there is in fact a significant dip in the road with the dip reaching its nadir around Gate G. This dip obscures the view from traffic approaching from the south. There is also a right-hand bend in the road approximately 350m north of Gate G which also has the potential to obscure traffic waiting on the A1133 in the vicinity of Gate G. Additionally southbound traffic will have passed Gate F immediately to the north of this bend.

8.57. Local Plan Policy S47 states that any development that has severe transport implications will not be granted planning permission unless deliverable mitigation measures have been identified, and arrangements secured for their implementation, which will make the development acceptable in transport terms.

Tourism

8.58. WLDC identifies significant potential impacts on the tourism sector within the district as a consequence of the scheme. WLDC considers that there will be a long-term impact on tourism as a result of the Scheme during the construction phase.

8.59. The influx of construction workers will materially decrease the availability of tourist accommodation, which will be further exacerbated on a cumulative basis with other DCO solar projects within West Lindsey.

8.60. The significant reduction in the availability of tourist accommodation will, in WLDC's view, result in visitors seeking accommodation in different parts of the region, which will have a direct and indirect effect on tourism in the district.

8.61. Once the construction period for all projects is complete (which will occur for a number of years), there is no certainty that the tourism sector will recover to its former level and, if so, how long this would take.

Cultural heritage

8.62. WLDC notes that the Royal Observer Corps Roman Fort Scheduled Monument (List Entry Number 1003608) is located to the west of the OESF Order Limits. The Scheduled Monument is a 1st century Roman vexillation fortress sitting upon the ridge to the east of the River Trent. To the south lies the remains of two Romand marching camps and, immediately to the north, lies a Royal Observer Corps Monitoring Post.

8.63. The monument is designated for the following reasons:

Period: the fortress and camps date from the 1st century AD, during the military conquest of Britannia by the Roman Army, and are highly representative of this initial phase of the Roman conquest and occupation of Britain;

Rarity: Vexillation fortresses form a rare subset of Roman defensive sites;

Survival: Three sides of the fortress survive, complete with outworks and internal features. The two camps survive as the northern arm of the defensive circuit;

Potential: The fortress and camps remain unexcavated and contain considerable potential to inform on the nature of the Roman Army in the early days of the occupation of Britannia.

8.64. WLDC note the applicant's assessment regarding the impact of the project upon the Scheduled Monument, concluding that there would be a very low magnitude of impacts to the wider setting of the Scheduled Monument, which is a minor neutral effect (not significant) in the short and medium term. This conclusion is reached due to the assessment view that the solar arrays would be low-lying and the strategic role of the asset in the landscape would remain.

8.65. Notwithstanding the applicant's assessment, WLDCs view is that the OESF would be readily visible from the Scheduled Monument from views eastwards looking out and down onto the wider large-scale landscape. WLDC notes the Relevant Representation submitted by Historic England, suggesting that the viewpoint from the Scheduled Monument should be from the observer corps. post,

as it represents a designated viewpoint that utilises the same topography as the fort, contributing to its significance.

8.66. WLDC supports this suggestion and would welcome the submission of this additional viewpoint to inform the assessment of the impacts upon the Scheduled Monument.

Maintenance, replacement and decommissioning

8.67. It is not clear to WLDC how the replacement of infrastructure (project components) has been accounted for in the assessment. The assessment does not justify or reason the degradation rates or whether degradation could be accelerated by climate change.

8.68. Being unable to identify the likely failure rate of panels and the requirement to replace BESS and substation infrastructure during the lifespan of the consent, leaves the potential likely impacts during the operational phase unclear.

8.69. The wide scope of the definition of 'maintenance' in the dDCO has the effect of allowing a developer to replace a whole NSIP project over its lifespan. The application states that panels, BESS and other associated development will need to be replaced at least once during the project, which have the potential for significant adverse environmental effects. This will be exacerbated when the need to re-place and re-construct applies to all four NSIPs cumulatively.

8.70. WLDC note that in the Solar Road Map (2025) the Government commits to "*hold a roundtable bringing together academia, the solar industry, waste sector and relevant government departments and organisations to gain a greater understanding of the decommissioning dates for current UK solar panels and likely availability of current conventional and emerging innovative solar panel recycling practices*". However, the OESF development likely to undertake replacement of equipment on a cycle that predates substantive action by Government. Therefore, the issues associated with recycling need to be considered as part of the consideration of this application.

8.71. There remains no mechanism for WLDC to consider the impacts of 'maintenance' and place any controls on what will be decommissioning and construction activity throughout the operations phase of the Scheme. The application is unclear in providing details on the approach to managing waste from 'maintenance' activities.

8.72. The current proposals for decommissioning include the retention in the ground of the majority of the export cables. WLDC requests further information on the assessment of the environmental effects of cable retention in perpetuity, including the deposition and migration of microplastics.

8.73. Local Plan Policy S10 states that proposals will be supported where they demonstrate their compatibility with, or the furthering of, a strong circular economy in the local area (which could include cross-border activity elsewhere in Lincolnshire) will be supported. It is not considered that this proposal does that at present.

BESS & fire safety

8.74. WLDC acknowledges the Outline Battery Safety Management Plan [APP-183] submitted as part of the application to identify the fire safety risks associated with the BESS and to explain the measures proposed to mitigate those risks.

8.75. WLDC maintains concerns regarding the risk of fire from BESS infrastructure and the effectiveness of processes to ensure that events are avoided and/or dealt with in a manner that provides a high level of protection to communities and the environment.

8.76. WLDC expects the applicant to work closely with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service to provide all necessary information regarding the installation of the Scheme, including site design features, to facilitate hazard and risk analysis studies. Such engagement should also ensure that comprehensive risk management and emergency response plans are developed, to be achieved through the sharing of detailed site designs at as early a stage as possible.

8.77. Due to the importance of this risk to the communities and environment in the district, WLDC requests that it is included as a consultee body in the approval of the dDCO requirement number 7 ‘Battery safety management plan’.

8.78. WLDC would note that there does not appear to be any information setting out the capacity of the BESS included in the application documents.

Operational land and permitted development

8.79. With reference to action point 4 on the Actions arising from the ISH1 held on the 9 July 2025, WLDC does not consider that the article of the DCO which grants ‘operational land’ status to the full extent of the development included in the DCO for the duration of the 60 year life of the project (article 38) is necessary or justified. There is no justification for this definition to encompass any land identified for Work 8 - works to create, enhance and maintain green infrastructure and mitigation.

8.80. WLDC also considers that operational land status is not appropriate for land outwith land used for the solar panel, substation or BESS. This is because, once complete, the export cable will be underground and without any above ground infrastructure. Current permitted development rights for electricity undertakers (Class B of Part 15 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015) include erection of plant and machinery up to 15 metres in height. This would allow the expansion of the OSEF into other areas within the DCO boundary with no further recourse to the local planning authorities.

8.81. WLDC do not consider this to be appropriate in otherwise open land and that development of this nature on operational land in countryside locations would be contrary to Policy S1 of the Local Plan.

9. Summary and conclusions

9.1. The section below provides a summary of the key impacts of the project identified by WLDC. The impacts are categorised as 'Positive', 'Negative', and 'Neutral', with the phase(s) of the project to which they relate also specified.

Positive impacts

- EN-1 delivery of low carbon electricity generation (in solus) (operation)
- Aligns with strategic policy (in solus) (operation)
- Mitigation delivered through the LEMP (in solus) (construction and operation)
- Carbon benefits over the lifespan (in solus) (operation)
- Additional permissive rights of way (in solus) (operation)

Negative impacts

- Landscape and visual – impacts on landscape character (cumulative and in solus) (construction and operation)
- Sequential effects through the landscape (cumulative) (construction and operation)
- Design up against field boundaries (in solus) (operation)
- Visible and conspicuous BESS/SS – including from the prominent PROW in area (in solus) (construction and operation)
- Hydrology (development in Flood Zone 3) (in solus) (construction and operation)
- Loss of BMV land (in solus) (construction and operation)
- Strategic construction traffic (cumulative and in solus) (construction)
- Access points – numbers (in solus) (construction)
- Tourism (cumulative and in solus) (construction)
- Impacts of construction cumulatively with other projects with a lack of co-ordination during construction (cumulative) (construction)
- Scope of 'maintenance' powers enabling significant replacement / re-powering and waste/recycling (cumulative and in solus) (operation)

Neutral impacts

- Biodiversity (cumulative and in solus) (construction and operation)

- Glint and glare (cumulative and in solus) (construction and operation)
- Buried heritage (cumulative and in solus) (construction and operation)
- Air quality (cumulative and in solus) (construction and operation)
- Noise and vibration (cumulative and in solus) (construction and operation)

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