



## **Great North Road Solar and Biodiversity Park**

Pre-application Programme Document

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# **Great North Road Solar and Biodiversity Park**

Programme Document

**Planning Inspectorate**

**Guidance: Planning Act 2008: Pre-application stage  
for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Overview

- 1.1 Elements Green Trent Limited (The Applicant) is developing proposals for Great North Road Solar and Biodiversity Park (The Project), which is a proposed new solar and energy storage park located to the northwest of Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire. The Project had previously been introduced as Great North Road Solar Park. The Applicant communicated the updated name for the Project in November 2024.
- 1.2 The Applicant has liaised with the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) in relation to the Project and is advanced into the pre-application process, with an anticipated submission in July 2025 for the application for a development consent order (DCO). The Applicant agreed the Standard tier of service for the application.
- 1.3 The Applicant makes note of PINS document review timescales; at this point in time the Applicant does not intend to submit a draft DCO document, but will utilise precedent drafting. If a review is required, the Applicant will notify PINS within the timeframes.
- 1.4 This Programme Document has been prepared to identify the engagement and application preparation activities that have been carried out by the Applicant during the pre-application process so far, as well as setting out the main steps that the Applicant expects in the remaining pre-application process.
- 1.5 The Applicant will host and maintain this Programme Document on its website and update it as necessary during the remaining pre-application period. A link to this Programme Document can be found on the Applicant's website: <https://www.gnrsolarpark.co.uk/documents>

## 2 PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS

- 2.1 The Applicant sets out below a timetable of main events and dates in relation to its pre-application process. This includes activities undertaken to date as well as the further events that the Applicant anticipates during the remainder of the pre-application process. The Applicant has split this information into two tables, to identify the main events and dates for both consultation and its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

### Consultation

- 2.2 The Applicant's key milestones in respect of consultation activity are set out below:

Event		Date/Period
1	Inception meeting with PINS	April 2023
2	Public introduction to the Project	October 2023
3	Phase One (Non-Statutory) Consultation	January 2024 – February 2024
4	Post-phase one communications (Consultation Summary Report, early design changes, and operational solar farm site visit)	March 2024 – July 2024
5	Preparation of the SoCC	July 2024 – December 2024
6	Publication of the SoCC	December 2024
7	Phase Two (Statutory) Consultation (PEIR)	January 2025 – February 2025
8	Adequacy of Consultation notification	February 2025
9	Preparation of Consultation Report	March – April 2025

#### Public introduction to the Project

- 2.3 The Applicant publicly introduced the Project in October 2023. This project launch phase ran from 27 October 2023 to the launch of Non-Statutory Consultation on 16 January 2024. This phase involved contacting host political and representative stakeholders, such as Members of Parliament, District and County councils, parish councils and meetings, local interest groups and organisations representing potentially seldom heard groups, to introduce the project and provide details of upcoming Non-Statutory Consultation.
- 2.4 The Applicant issued a letter to properties in immediate proximity of land associated with the project (50m from the Red Line Boundary), to ensure they were made aware of the Applicant's early-stage proposals and to invite them to get in touch if they had any questions. The Applicant issued a press release to local and trade media, providing an overview of the project, the associated development process, and the approach to community consultation. During and since this phase, the Applicant has maintained a register of interested parties who have signed up to be kept informed.
- 2.5 At this time, the Applicant published a dedicated project website ([www.gnrsolarpark.co.uk](http://www.gnrsolarpark.co.uk)) and dedicated project communications channels (freephone, email and freepost address). The project community relations team operates the communications channels from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays).
- 2.6 As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report preparation, the Applicant also notified all prescribed consultees under Section 42 of the Planning Act 2008 of the submission of the EIA Scoping Report and the proposed development as part of the project launch activities.

### **Phase One (Non-Statutory) Consultation**

- 2.7 The Applicant's Non-Statutory Consultation ran from 16 January 2024 to 27 February 2024. The purpose of this phase of consultation was to proactively introduce the Applicant and the Project by sharing information about the emerging proposals and provide individuals and interested parties an early opportunity to have their say. The feedback received during this initial phase of consultation has helped to inform and shape the ongoing design of the proposals.
- 2.8 The Applicant's Non-Statutory Consultation involved:
- Distributing a postcard to over 5,800 residential and business properties in the vicinity of the project;
  - Hosting two community webinars and six in-person exhibition events with over 550 attendees;
  - Advertising consultation opportunities in the Newark Advertiser and Nottingham Post;
  - Engaging extensively with key political and representative stakeholders;
  - Inviting feedback through an online and hardcopy feedback form, which was completed 233 times;
  - Publishing all consultation materials online via the dedicated Project website, which was visited over 4,000 times between 16 January 2024 and 27 February 2024; and
  - Hosting free-to-use communications channels for anyone to submit questions and comments to the Applicant.
- 2.9 As part of the Non-Statutory Consultation, the Applicant introduced the NG+ scheme, a community benefit initiative linked to the Project. Subject to consent being granted, NG+ is expected to provide around £1 million annually to support local community projects, with a focus on the environment, education, food security, wellbeing, and energy efficiency.
- 2.10 Since its initial proposal, NG+ has already delivered direct benefits to the community, with approximately £7,000 spent on local initiatives in 2024 and early 2025. These projects include the creation of a living garden at a local college, sponsorship of a youth football team, provision of a flood equipment shed for a village, raised beds for a primary school, and upgrades to community spaces such as new kitchen flooring and newsletter printing facilities for village halls.
- 2.11 Further funding of approximately £20,000 has been allocated for 2025 to expand support across other Great North Road (GNR) areas, with identified projects already in progress. Additionally, the Applicant has funded and completed energy efficiency surveys for residential and community buildings across the GNR region, with over 100 more properties signed up for free energy assessments aimed at identifying potential energy-saving opportunities for households and businesses.
- 2.12 In the education sector, the EG Academy has been established as a dedicated platform for UK-based solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) education, training, and careers. This initiative, founded by Elements Green, provides accessible learning opportunities from primary school level through to university and professional development. The Academy already offers six courses, with 44 enrolments and 28 students pre-launch. The official public launch is scheduled for Spring 2025. EG Academy is also collaborating with Nottingham Trent University on employer-led projects and has

already contributed to academic programmes through guest lectures on energy economics.

2.13 Under NG+, the following areas remain a priority for community benefit delivery:

- **Local environment:** Supporting projects to enhance woodlands, meadows, wetlands, and hedgerows, ensuring species protection and fostering ecological balance. The Applicant is also working with local stakeholders and agencies to develop a flood alleviation strategy to tackle pre-existing flooding.
- **Education:** Collaborating with local educational organisations through education programmes, school visits, and apprenticeships to re-skill the local workforce. This includes the EG Academy, which provides accredited courses, interactive workshops, activity days, and hands-on internships.
- **Food security:** Tackling food poverty by supporting targeted distribution programmes and initiatives to reduce food waste.
- **Wellbeing:** Enhancing local amenities, such as creating new picnic and play areas, and linking new and existing footpaths.
- **Energy efficiency:** Offering grants for energy-related home improvements such as insulation, solar panels, and heat pumps.

2.14 More information on NG+ can be found on the Applicant's dedicated NG+ website.

#### **Post-Phase One Consultation communications**

2.15 Following the close of Non-Statutory Consultation, the Applicant published a Consultation Summary Report to provide an overview of the feedback received and how the Applicant is using this feedback to help shape a strong set of proposals that are sensitive to and respect concerns of local stakeholders and communities. This Consultation Summary Report also detailed the Applicant's engagement activities undertaken during Non-Statutory Consultation.

2.16 The Applicant distributed a postcard to over 5,800 residential and business properties to inform local communities of the publication of the Non-Statutory Consultation Summary Report. The Applicant also proactively engaged with key political and representative stakeholders, as well as interested parties who requested to be kept up to date on the proposals for the Project to inform them of the publication of this document. The Applicant's Non-Statutory Consultation Summary Report is available to view on the dedicated Project website: [www.gnrsolarpark.co.uk/documents](http://www.gnrsolarpark.co.uk/documents).

2.17 In addition to the publication of the Consultation Summary Report, following the close of Non-Statutory Consultation, the Applicant made early design changes to the Project in response to feedback. In most cases this involved panels being removed from the specific areas and, in one case, a substation was relocated. These early design changes were shared with key political and representative stakeholders, as well as interested parties who signed up to the Applicant's keep informed list.

2.18 Shortly following the announcement of the Applicant's early design changes, the Applicant arranged visits to a local operational solar farm within Newark and Sherwood. The Applicant hosted two open days for local residents and interested parties to see what an operational solar farm looks like, giving them the opportunity to witness sustainable, renewable energy in action. The Applicant arranged shuttle buses to take groups to and from the meeting point and the solar farm, and members of the Project team attended the open days to provide information and answer questions. 69 members of the public attended across the two days.

2.19 As part of the Applicant's ongoing engagement following the close of Phase One Consultation, the Applicant organised meetings and conducted visits with several host

parish councils. These took place from the early summer months through to late November 2024.

#### **Preparation of the SoCC**

- 2.20 In July 2024 the Applicant developed a draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), which was informed by experience and feedback from Non-Statutory Consultation. The SoCC sets out how the Applicant intends to undertake their Phase Two Consultation, which will be considered as statutory under Section 47 of the Planning Act 2008.
- 2.21 The Applicant shared a draft of the SoCC with Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Bassetlaw District Council for consultation on Thursday 18 July 2024. The Applicant requested for feedback on the draft to be provided on 27 August 2024, therefore allowing just over five weeks, beyond the 28-day statutory minimum, to review and provide comments on the draft SoCC.
- 2.22 Feedback received from these local authorities has been considered by the Applicant prior to the SoCC being finalised and published. The Applicant has communicated to each local authority how their comments have been considered, including by identifying where this has resulted in a change to the specific wording of the SoCC.

#### **Publication of the SoCC**

- 2.23 The Applicant published the SoCC in December 2024, in advance of statutory consultation commencing in January 2025. The Applicant hosted the SoCC on the dedicated Project website and provided paper copies for collection from specified public venues (Community Access Points).
- 2.24 Section 47 Notices were placed in the Nottingham Post and Newark Advertiser in the week commencing 16 December 2024, to publicise the availability of the SoCC.
- 2.25 The Applicant further publicised the availability of the SoCC by emailing any parties that have registered to be kept informed.

#### **Phase Two (Statutory) Consultation**

- 2.26 The Applicant's Statutory Consultation ran from Thursday 9 January 2025 to 20 February 2025. This statutory phase of consultation was held to consult prescribed consultees, land interests and the community in parallel. The purpose of this phase of Statutory Consultation was to give interested parties the opportunity to comment on the Applicant's updated proposals, as well as the content of the Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) setting out the results of assessments undertaken and associated proposed mitigation measures. Community consultation materials, such as a central booklet and exhibition boards, were published on the day of Statutory Consultation launch to communicate information on the Applicant's updated proposals in a non-technical manner.
- 2.27 The Applicant's Statutory Consultation involved:
- Distributing over 5,900 community consultation postcards to properties and businesses in the vicinity of the project;
  - Welcoming over 500 people across eight in-person information events along with one online webinar;
  - Raising awareness of consultation opportunities through advertisements in local media and active engagement with parish, district, and county councillors, as well as local interest groups and seldom-heard communities;



- Inviting feedback through an online and hardcopy feedback form, which was completed by over 200 participants;
- 2.28 Publishing all consultation materials online via the dedicated Project website, which was visited over 10,000 times between 9 January 2025 and 20 February 2025;
- Created a Virtual Exhibition, presenting all of the exhibition materials in a familiar and simple-to-navigate digital room format, which has been visited by over 50 people; and
  - Hosting free-to-use communications channels for anyone to submit questions and comments to the Applicant.
- 2.29 Further to this Statutory Consultation closing, the Applicant is reviewing the proposals in light of feedback received along with the findings from ongoing assessments to finalise the application.

#### **Preparation of Consultation Report**

- 2.30 A Consultation Report will be submitted as part of the DCO application and will explain, in detail, how the Applicant has complied with statutory, regulatory and policy requirements. The preparation of the Consultation Report will be undertaken between March and April 2025.
- 2.31 Further details on specific stakeholder engagement is set out at Section 4 of this Programme Document.

#### **Adequacy of consultation notification**

- 2.32 The Applicant is cognisant of paragraph 025 of the pre-application guidance setting out an early adequacy of consultation milestone.
- 2.33 The Applicant prepared an early adequacy of consultation milestone document for submission to PINS, following the conclusion of the Applicant's Statutory Consultation and prior to the finalisation of the DCO application.
- 2.34 The Applicant shared the early adequacy of consultation milestone document with host local planning authorities – Newark and Sherwood District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council – on 26 February 2025 to understand their views on the adequacy of consultation undertaken, and for views or material they may provide to be included in the notification.
- 2.35 The Applicant anticipates submitting this notification to PINS in July 2025.

## **Environmental Information**

- 2.36 The Applicant is advanced with its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process and the production of the Environmental Statement that will accompany the DCO application. Key milestones in respect of the production and reporting of relevant environmental information is set out in the table below.

Event		Date/Period
1	Commencement of Environmental Surveys	Spring 2022
2	Submission of Scoping Report	November 2023
3	Receipt of Scoping Opinion	December 2023
4	Publication of PEIR on GNR website	January 2025
5	Design Freeze for Commencement of Environmental Statement	March 2025
6	Negotiation of Statements of Common Ground	Live documents

7	Production of Environmental Statement	March – April 2025
8	Legal and client review of Environmental Statement	April 2025
9	Completion of Environmental Statement	April 2025
10	Submission of DCO Application	July 2025

### 3 MAIN ISSUES

3.1 The Project has developed over time in response to National Grid and technical requirements, environmental considerations, consultation feedback, legal and land ownership discussions.

3.2 The Applicant considers that the main issues that may be the likely subject of discussion and resolution following Statutory Consultation are as set out in the table below:

Issue		Comment	Proposed Action
1	Ecology	Effects on wildlife and areas dedicated for mitigation and enhancement	The Applicant has carried out a wide range of surveys, including Biodiversity Net Gain surveys and has engaged a wide range of consultees such as Natural England and local biodiversity groups to inform the most appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures.
2	Cultural Heritage	Understanding the effects on cultural heritage and how it will be protected	The Applicant has carried out the following studies: Desk study, site walkover, geophysics and trial trenching. The findings of the studies have informed exclusion zones in the developable area.
3	Best & Most Versatile agricultural land (BMV)	Temporary use of agricultural land	The development will temporarily use agricultural land. Grade 1 land has been completely removed from the proposed Order Limits. Grade 2 land has largely been avoided during further design iterations. All surrounding land is of similar grade to the Site. The land will be used temporarily during the operational life of the development, after which it can be returned to previous uses. The Applicant is assessing the possibility of sheep grazing during the operational stage of the development.
4	Flood Risk and Drainage	Use of land which is in Flood Zone 2&3; Impacts of the project on flooding.	The Applicant has avoided areas of high risk flood zones where possible during further design iterations. The Applicant has proposed measures to reduce local flooding through suitable drainage systems based on hydraulic modelling and consultation with the Environment Agency, NSDC and NCC Flood Teams.
6	Landscape and visual	Limited local views of solar PV panels	<p>The site selection has taken account of local receptors including residential properties. Suitable buffers and exclusion zones have been applied to reduce and mitigate visual effects.</p> <p>The Applicant has proposed a significant amount of new tree and hedgerow planting to enhance the screening of the proposed infrastructure.</p>

Issue		Comment	Proposed Action
7	Traffic	Construction traffic management	<p>The Applicant has discussed the relevant scope of survey works with Nottinghamshire County Council Highways Authority. This will inform the construction traffic management measures. The Applicant recognises that this can be a key concern raised by local residents. This has become more evident during the proactive outreach by the Applicant to the host Parish Councils. In response to these concerns, the Applicant has issued Construction Traffic Summary Notes to Parish Councils on request.</p>
8	Economic and Social	Employment changes; Skills & Training Opportunities	<p>The Applicant has made a firm commitment to Skills, Training and Employment opportunities through the Project. These align closely with the latest Government Guidance and address the shortage of skills in the renewable energy industry.</p> <p>The Applicant has created the EG Academy, establishing partnerships with Nottingham Trent University and other educational bodies in order to promote skills and its own free CPD-accredited training courses targeting solar and battery energy storage development.</p> <p>The Applicant has also worked collaboratively with a range of local businesses.</p>

## 4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 As set out in Section 2, the Applicant has undertaken a series of consultation activities, including Statutory Consultation and the preparation and publication of the SoCC (pursuant to section 47 of the Planning Act 2008). The Applicant sought formal feedback from Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, and Bassetlaw District Council (as the authorities whose administrative boundary overlap with the Applicant's consultation zone) between 19 July 2024 and 27 August 2024. The formal comments received were incorporated in the final SoCC, as required in Section 47 (5) of the 2008 Act. The SoCC was published in December 2024 ahead of Statutory Consultation.
- 4.2 The Applicant has also sought to proactively engage with other key stakeholders throughout the pre-application process and will continue to do so during the remainder of the pre-application process and onwards.
- 4.3 During Statutory Consultation, the Applicant received a good level of response from statutory consultees, local planning authorities and parish councils. Below comprises a list of statutory consultees that responded to the Applicant's Statutory Consultation.
- Cadent Gas
  - Canal and River Trust
  - Coal Authority
  - Environment Agency
  - Forestry Commission
  - GTC Infrastructure Limited
  - Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
  - Historic England
  - Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
  - National Grid Electricity Transmission PLC (NGET)
  - National Highways
  - Natural England
  - NATS Safeguarding
  - Nottinghamshire Fire Authority
  - Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
  - Severn Trent
  - RWE
  - Newark and Sherwood District Council
  - North Lincolnshire Council
  - Nottinghamshire County Council
  - West Lindsey District Council
  - Averham, Kelham and Staythorpe Parish Council
  - Bathley Parish Council
  - Caunton Parish Council

- Carlton on Trent Parish Council
  - Eakring Parish Council
  - Egmanton Parish Meeting
  - Grassthorpe Parish Council
  - Kneesall and Kersall Parish Council
  - Laxton and Moorhouse Parish Council
  - North Muskham Parish Council
  - Norwell Parish Council
  - South Muskham and Little Carlton Parish Council
  - Sutton on Trent Parish Council
  - Weston Parish Council
- 4.4 The table below provides a summary of notable stakeholder engagement with statutory consultees and local authorities during the pre-application period as well as relevant agreements that the Applicant is seeking to enter with these stakeholders. The Applicant will continue to engage with each of these stakeholders in order to resolve any outstanding matters.
- 4.5 A record of all comments received from Section 42 consultees, and the Applicant's response to these comments, will be provided in the Consultation Report.
- 4.6 In order to formalise the previous process of discussions and engagement with the host authorities, a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) was signed in 2024 with Newark and Sherwood District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council. This provides a structured approach to resourcing key activities, identifying key project gateways, commitments to review timings, and organising monthly meetings.
- 4.7 In addition, the Applicant is engaged in discussions with various statutory undertakers for the purposes of negotiating bespoke protective provisions and side agreements (as may be required). The Applicant is providing costs undertakings where appropriate to facilitate engagement with these various statutory bodies.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder	Topic of discussion	Proposed Action	Planned Date for Resolution
1 Natural England	The Applicant has engaged with Natural England (NE) using its Design Advice Service and through meetings and email correspondence since July 2023, including meetings to discuss the type and scope of ecology surveys and to agree the soil sampling methodology.	The Applicant is continuing its discussions with NE and both parties are seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground which will include details of the surveys and soil sampling as appropriate.	The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission.
2 Historic England, District and	The Applicant has engaged closely with the County Archaeologist since	The Applicant agreed phase 1 of the trial trenching strategy, that	The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much

Stakeholder	Topic of discussion	Proposed Action	Planned Date for Resolution
County Archaeology Officers	February 2023, and with Historic England (HE) since September 2024, in relation to the strategy for archaeological surveys and fieldwork.	will feed into the PEIR, with phase 2 under negotiation with the County Archaeologist. The Applicant will continue its discussions with HE. The Applicant and HE are seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground on assessment methodology.	as possible prior to submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission.
3 Environment Agency	The Applicant has been meeting with the Environment Agency (EA) since March 2024 to understand and consider impacts of the Project on flood risk, drainage, water quality, biodiversity and environmental capital. The design approach and proposed mitigations are being progressed to suitably accommodate the EA's requirements.	The Applicant is continuing its discussions with the EA and both parties are seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground. The parties are also in discussions around bespoke protective provisions as may be required.	The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission.
4 Host Planning Authorities	The Applicant has engaged closely with the host planning authority on a variety of matters since Autumn 2023, and is working closely with Nottinghamshire County Council in its capacity as local highway authority to agree vehicular access detail and methodology for assessment of traffic and highway effects.  The Applicant has entered into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with the host authorities to facilitate these discussions.	The Applicant is continuing its discussions with the host authority and is seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground.	The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission.
5 Statutory undertakers and local	Meetings have been held between the Applicant and Network Rail.	Engage all identified service providers and seek to work collaboratively to	The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior

Stakeholder	Topic of discussion	Proposed Action	Planned Date for Resolution
network services	The Applicant intends to enter early discussion with service providers who have assets in proximity to or may otherwise be affected by the proposals – in particular where underground cables will cross those assets.	understand the location and nature of their assets and likely requirements for working methods. The Applicant will seek to enter into Statements of Common Ground and agree bespoke protective provisions and side agreements as may be necessary.	to submission and anticipates that negotiations will continue during Examination.
6 National Grid	The Applicant holds regular meetings with National Grid to discuss progress in relation to the Grid Connection Agreement.	The Applicant is continuing its discussions with National Grid.	The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and anticipates that negotiations will continue during Examination.



## 5 PRE-APPLICATION STAGE RISKS

- 5.1 The Applicant is confident that they are able to meet their intended submission date of July 2025. However, the Applicant recognises that there are various factors, outside of their own control, which may influence their ability to achieve the remainder of the pre-application stage in accordance with the intended programme. The below considerations therefore provide a high-level summary of the potential pre-application process risks and how the Applicant intends to manage them:
- **Changes resulting in further targeted consultation** – The Applicant is committed to considering all consultation feedback when refining the Project design prior to DCO submission. The Applicant notes that, should this result in a material change to the proposed application, then a targeted approach to further consultation may be adopted. While further defined phases of consultation (following the Statutory Consultation scheduled for January - February 2025) have not been factored into the Project's pre-application programme, the Applicant will review any such requests and consider the appropriate course of action before submitting an application. The Applicant is cognisant of Paragraph 020 of the pre-application guidance on this matter.
  - **Statements of Common Ground** – The Applicant will continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure any specific requests for further survey / assessment work is completed in a collaborative manner.
  - **Cumulative impacts** – The Applicant is carrying out regular monitoring to identify any proposals that may impact its assessment, to allow the assessment to be updated as soon as cumulative effects are identified.
- 5.2 The Applicant monitors its internal pre-application programme on a regular basis and ensures that there is consistent communication between all disciplines contributing to the DCO application submission. This enables the Applicant to identify and manage any programme risks such that the required pre-application activities can continue towards the intended submission date.