

## **Great North Road Solar and Biodiversity Park – Issue Specific Hearing 1 (ISH1)**

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

### **Summary of Verbal Representations from Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC)**

The following comprises a summary of the verbal representations of NSDC at ISH1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> November 2025. It is supplemented by additional comments as appropriate, where NSDC had further points to raise, but insufficient time was available within the hearings.

### **Site Selection and Design Evolution (Item 3.1 of the Agenda)**

#### **Consideration of alternatives**

1. NSDC noted the content of the EIA Regulations<sup>1</sup> and the regulatory requirement under those regulations to consider ‘reasonable’ alternatives and the obligation of Elements Green Trent Limited (the Applicant) to explain the ‘main’ reasons for the option chosen and the importance of this being clearly explained by the Applicant.
2. NSDC explained their view that Chapter 4 of the Environmental Statement (ES) and supporting information appears to focus on the constraints that the scheme was designed within and the approach to finalising the scheme design, but that the spatial presentation of genuine alternatives is not clear within the application submission.
3. NSDC further noted that the figures associated with Chapter 4 of the ES (for example ‘heat’ maps) show broad locations of preferred areas only. Accordingly, NSDC confirmed their view that any alternate areas of land that may have been considered and discounted was not clear, in the application submission. NSDC further noted the importance of being transparent on the choices taken which led to the proposed development, to promote community understanding on this issue, which is perhaps more important given the wide geographical spread of the Order Limits.

#### **Best and Most Versatile Land (BMV)**

4. On the issue of BMV land, NSDC set the context of its points with reference to the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN1)<sup>2</sup> which states at Paragraph 5.11.12

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<sup>1</sup> [The Infrastructure Planning \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) Regulations 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> [EN-1 Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy](#)

which confirms that 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).'

5. NSDC also made reference to the National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy (EN-3) which confirms at Paragraph 2.10.29 that 'Where the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to higher quality land avoiding the use of "Best and Most Versatile" agricultural land where possible.'
6. NSDC confirmed their view that within the national policy context for NSIPs, there is a clear preference for the use of poorer quality BMV land and the use of higher value BMV land should be avoided, wherever possible. NSDC stated that they had expressed concern on the issue of impact on BMV land since the pre-submission consultation stage and that continued to be concerned that a total of 62% of BMV land would be impacted, of which 8% is Grade 2 land, which is considered a considerable amount in the context of the size of the scheme.
7. NSDC raised the question as to whether other areas of land could have been considered that involved less amount of BMV land, particularly with reference to the Grade 2 land impacted by the proposed development, noting that Chapter 4 of the ES also offers no detailed analysis on alternatives in this respect.
8. During the ISH1, NSDC made reference to Figure 17.4 (Likelihood of Best and Most Versatile Land – Wider Area) which was displayed on screen and noted the large areas of moderate and low likelihood of BMV land within the inner areas of the Order Limits area, which suggests a clear alternative exists to the use of as a minimum Grade 2 BMV land and would likely reduce the overall amount of BMV impacted.
9. NSDC made this comment noting that based on the Applicant's own estimates discussed during ISH1, the NSDC district comprises an average of approximately 48% of BMV land, yet the Applicant proposes to build on a higher amount of BMV land than the average, which suggests a failure to comply with the policy position of EN1 and EN3 which seeks to minimise and avoid wherever possible impacts on BMV land.
10. NSDC also noted that the Applicant confirmed an error in their calculations during ISH1 on the extent of BMV impacted. NSDC look forward to reviewing the Applicant's submissions made at Deadline 1 in this regard, with a view to making further comments at Deadline 2.

### Climate and Sustainability (Item 3.2 of the Agenda)

11. NSDC noted in discussion on this item that the more significant carbon impacts associated with the proposed development would occur during the construction phase of development and whilst the Applicant's assessment confirms an overall net benefit in carbon savings due to the positive operational benefits, construction based impacts are still significant in their own right.
12. NSDC noted the Applicant's response to NSDC's Relevant Representations (RR's) that further specific emission reduction opportunities will be considered at the detailed design stage. Whilst noting this point, NSDC challenged the Applicant to provide a greater commitment to carbon reduction measures during the examination stage, particularly where localised economic benefits would be enhanced as part of the delivery of these options.

### Biodiversity and Ecology (Item 3.3 of the Agenda)

13. NSDC confirmed support to the Applicant's approach to minimise impacts as far as possible and the provision of large areas of land that are dedicated towards mitigation. Although we did not state at the time, we agree with the ExA that it is not clear whether these areas, which comprises nearly a third of the order limits, are for mitigation and/or enhancement. The isolated areas in the south-east of the Order Limits are for farmland bird mitigation. We agree with the Applicant that these areas can contribute up to no net loss of biodiversity within the context of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment, but it should be clear what areas are 'additional' that contribute towards the uplift in biodiversity value.
14. NSDC confirmed support to the Applicant's proposal that mitigation areas are to be retained and protected within the decommissioning plan.
15. NSDC had no further queries or comments following the Applicant's response to the question regarding the oLEMP and who would be responsible for the long-term management.
16. NSDC raised the point that the application of Biodiversity Net Gain assessments was not designed to be scaled up to projects of this size and that the focus should not be on the percentage gains, which can become heavily skewed and instead on the number of biodiversity units being generated. NSDC commended the large number of habitat units proposed and reiterated the Applicants' comments that biodiversity enhancement should be targeted at a local level rather than focussing solely on maximising the number of units. NSDC further highlighted those potential opportunities that had been missed as detailed in our RR response and in relation to watercourses and that there is currently no intention to directly

enhance the condition of watercourse themselves, only to improve their condition indirectly through reduced encroachment.

17. NSDC agreed with the Applicant that the technical issues raised in relation to the BNG assessment should be resolved via further correspondence outside of the ISH.
18. During ISH1 NSDC had no additional comments on the Applicant's response to the ExA's question regarding the risk of a different outcome in the BNG assessment at the detailed design stage. The Applicant remains confident in the current assessment, anticipating only minor changes and noting that flexibility has been incorporated into the scheme's design. However, NSDC considers there is a risk to achieving the percentage gains outlined under Requirement 8 of the draft DCO, primarily due to the limited sampling coverage of baseline habitats. An updated baseline survey will be undertaken to inform the revised BNG assessment at the detailed design stage.
19. If the baseline value of the site increases or the feasibility of creating or enhancing new habitats decreases, this could result in a lower percentage uplift than what is secured. We agree with the concerns raised by the Environment Agency regarding the number of ditches surveyed to inform the baseline value of the Order Limits. We would also like to raise that detailed condition assessments were undertaken in August and September and whilst these were within the appropriate survey period for habitat surveys, they were outside of the optimal period for grassland which runs between May and July. Without a copy of the condition assessments to review we are unable to comment whether the survey data is reliable.

#### Cumulative Environmental Effects (Item 3.4 of the Agenda)

##### *Landscape Effects*

20. NSDC noted that it is a 'host' authority for two significant NSIP scale solar farms comprising the Great North Road project and the One Earth Solar project. As such, we noted that whilst the projects are not immediately adjacent, they will (if consented) bring about a significant change in land use from agricultural land to that of infrastructure and they will comprise significant features in a changing landscape in the eastern portion of the district, running from the north of Newark to the north eastern corner of the district.
21. In respect of the assessment of landscape effects NSDC confirmed the assessment process is understood and 'in principle' agreed in the consideration of locally consented schemes as set out within section 7.5.4 of the LVIA. NSDC noted that in the wider locality, the schemes considered in the Cumulative Assessment are set out on Figure A2.1.1d however the narrative

in the LVIA only considers the immediate receiving and directly adjacent landscape character areas. It does not consider the potential impacts of the wider landscape character across the relevant areas of Nottingham and Lincolnshire. There are now a significant number of large solar schemes including One Earth being considered for consent, in some form, within a close time frame to each other and within close proximity.

22. NSDC noted that the impact of these developments cumulatively threatens the inherent rural character of this part of the country. For example, Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands LCA sets out that: *‘Large-scale new development has been relatively well controlled so that the region’s rural character, and the historic settlement pattern of small red brick villages, is still intact.’*
23. NSDC noted that the power generating industry warrants separate consideration due to its enormous impact on the landscape of the region and that it is critical to now understand the wider implications of these schemes cumulatively on the landscape as there is the risk that large tracts of the countryside will be altered permanently.
24. NSDC noted that visually, there is also no (within the Applicant’s assessment) wider consideration to the movement of people across the wider landscape. By nature, the greater number of sensitive visual receptors are transients, using PRoWs and local roads, but equally as residents they are living, working and moving around their landscape. Therefore, NSDC contended that it is an obligation of the Applicant to understand and assess the implications for visual receptors who are moving relatively small distances (say 4km) across the landscape and will be travelling through more than one solar development.
25. The Applicant claimed in oral evidence that it is not possible to physically and in a narrative, to set out the predicted impacts on the visual receptors in this wider landscape. However, as professionals, experienced in landscape and visual assessments of this scale, NSDC do not accept that they cannot form a reasonable judgment based on the work they have done to date, in the field, in combination with a desk based review of the relevant reports supporting the other relevant schemes and their professional experience.
26. It should be noted that the approach to cumulative assessment has also been raised by the Landscape Architects representing NSDC in the One Earth Application and has been set out by the ExA as Technical Memorandum (AAH TM07) One Earth Solar Farm: Issue Specific Hearing Action; Clarification of Landscape Character Assessment and Cumulative Effects alongside the Examining Authority’s Report of Findings and Conclusions and

Recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, 14 July 2025  
(Tilbridge Solar Farm).

*BMV Land (cumulative)*

27. NSDC noted with concern (as also confirmed by the Applicant) that in table 17.21 of the Agricultural Land Classification Report, the One Earth Solar scheme was not included within the cumulative assessment. NSDC reaffirmed their concern in respect of the cumulative loss of BMV land in the district, particularly as a result of NSIP scale projects.
28. NSDC commented that the Applicant's presentation of the impact upon BMV land within the context of all such land presents a favourable impression of the impacts as a 'top down' approach. NSDC advocated for a 'bottom up' approach whereby calculating the impacts on BMV land is first considered at the district level, before considering the information at the county and wider regional scale.
29. NSDC clarified that they are concerned that the district is being disproportionately affected, referring to a similar breakdown that was provided by the Applicant within the One Earth Solar Farm examination following ISH2. This data showed that NSDC (based on NSIPs alone) had nearly twice the amount of BMV land impacted, than West Lindsey District Council and Bassetlaw District Council combined. This information is contained on page 15 of the Written Summary of the Applicant's Oral Submissions at ISH2 and was presented in that document as Table 5.1 (Breakdown on Agricultural Loss at a District Level).