



## Hearing Transcript

<b>Project:</b>	The Droves Solar Farm
<b>Hearing:</b>	Recording of Open Floor Hearing
<b>Date:</b>	6 May 2026

**Please note:** This document is intended to assist Interested Parties.

It is not a verbatim text of what was said at the above hearing. The content was produced using artificial intelligence voice to text software. It may, therefore, include errors and should be assumed to be unedited.

The video recording published on the Planning Inspectorate project page is the primary record of the hearing.

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1

00:00:02.700 --> 00:00:03.460

Good afternoon.

2

00:00:06.760 --> 00:00:09.780

It's now 2:00 o'clock and time for this hearing to begin.

3

00:00:09.900 --> 00:00:13.740

I would like to welcome you all to this open floor hearing for Drove Solar Farm

4

00:00:13.900 --> 00:00:14.440

project.

5

00:00:15.600 --> 00:00:18.099

Can I just confirm that everyone can hear me clearly?

6

00:00:19.720 --> 00:00:21.760

I'm getting nods from the back of the room.

7

00:00:22.740 --> 00:00:25.439

Also online, could you raise your hand if you could hear me, please?

8

00:00:30.700 --> 00:00:31.180

Thank you.

9

00:00:34.120 --> 00:00:38.020

Can I also confirm with Sarah Norris that the live streaming and recording of

10

00:00:38.060 --> 00:00:39.340

this event has commenced?

11

00:00:41.060 --> 00:00:41.420

Thank you.

12

00:00:42.390 --> 00:00:46.370

My name is Anthony Johnson. I'm a chartered civil engineer, and I've

13

00:00:46.400 --> 00:00:50.290

been appointed by the Secretary of State as the single examining

14

00:00:50.320 --> 00:00:52.880

inspector to examine this application.

15

00:00:53.620 --> 00:00:57.140

You will also hear me referred to as the examining authority.

16

00:00:58.500 --> 00:01:02.180

The case manager is Sarah Norris. She's supported here today by Emma

17

00:01:02.220 --> 00:01:05.940

Smith, and Tim Hole is providing support remotely.

18

00:01:08.280 --> 00:01:11.580

As well as the planning inspectorate case team, we're joined today by another

19

00:01:11.600 --> 00:01:15.460

inspector, Carl Pelling, who is observing the hearing for training

20

00:01:15.640 --> 00:01:16.160

purposes.

21

00:01:17.960 --> 00:01:21.500

I'll now deal with a few housekeeping matters for those attending in person.

22

00:01:22.460 --> 00:01:25.760

Can everybody please set all devices and phones to silent?

23

00:01:27.900 --> 00:01:30.240

The toilets are located at the back of the room.

24

00:01:30.980 --> 00:01:34.880

There is no fire alarm drill scheduled today, so should the fire

25

00:01:34.920 --> 00:01:37.220

alarm sound, please treat it as real.

26

00:01:37.560 --> 00:01:40.520

Fire exits are at the back of the room and the front of the room.

27

00:01:42.400 --> 00:01:45.080

The fire assembly point is in the car park

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00:01:46.100 --> 00:01:50.080

just outside the fire exits. Please wait there for further

29

00:01:50.120 --> 00:01:50.720

instruction.

30

00:01:52.760 --> 00:01:56.720

There'll be a short mid-afternoon break around 3:30 if the hearing

31

00:01:56.760 --> 00:01:58.420

is not concluded by that time.

32

00:02:01.040 --> 00:02:04.980

In terms of the agenda and logistics, this meeting will follow the agenda

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00:02:05.080 --> 00:02:08.581

published on the National Infrastructure Planning website on the

34

00:02:08.759 --> 00:02:12.040

27th of April, examination library reference

35

00:02:12.080 --> 00:02:16.060

EV2-002. It would be helpful if you

36

00:02:16.100 --> 00:02:17.720

had a copy of this in front of you.

37

00:02:19.500 --> 00:02:22.880

Could this also be displayed on the screen as well? Thank you.

38

00:02:25.380 --> 00:02:29.109

I understand that there are representatives of the media here today, and that

39

00:02:29.140 --> 00:02:31.240

you've made yourselves known to the case team.

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00:02:33.960 --> 00:02:37.930

Today, I will hear the representations of interested parties who have registered

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00:02:37.980 --> 00:02:41.580

to make oral representations elaborating

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00:02:42.100 --> 00:02:44.080

on their written representation to date.

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00:02:45.480 --> 00:02:49.380

I will conclude the hearing as soon as all relevant contributions have been

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00:02:49.460 --> 00:02:52.520

made and any questions asked and responded to.

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00:02:54.420 --> 00:02:57.580

Today's hearing is being undertaken in a hybrid or blended way,

46

00:02:58.200 --> 00:03:02.000

meaning some of you are present with us at the hearing venue, and

47

00:03:02.060 --> 00:03:05.400

some of you are joining us virtually using Microsoft Teams.

48

00:03:06.440 --> 00:03:10.300

I will make sure that however you have decided to attend today, you will be given a

49

00:03:10.340 --> 00:03:12.600

fair opportunity to participate.

50

00:03:14.980 --> 00:03:18.540

A recording of today's hearing will be made available on the Drove Solar Farm

51

00:03:18.620 --> 00:03:22.180

section of the National Infrastructure Planning website as soon as

52

00:03:22.240 --> 00:03:24.680

practicable after the meeting has finished.

53

00:03:26.220 --> 00:03:30.100

With this in mind, please ensure that you speak clearly into a microphone, stating

54

00:03:30.140 --> 00:03:33.420

your name and who you are representing each time that you speak.

55

00:03:36.340 --> 00:03:40.080

To use the microphone, so just press the button until the light goes

56

00:03:40.140 --> 00:03:44.109

green, and then when you're finished speaking, press the button again so that it

57

00:03:44.140 --> 00:03:48.060

changes to red. If you're not at a table

58

00:03:48.100 --> 00:03:51.890

with a microphone, there is a roving microphone, so please wait for one of

59

00:03:51.960 --> 00:03:54.240

these to be brought to you before you speak.

60

00:03:57.960 --> 00:04:01.500

If any individual group wishes to use social media, report,

61

00:04:01.760 --> 00:04:05.480

film, or record during today's or any subsequent hearing,

62

00:04:05.780 --> 00:04:07.020

then they are free to do so.

63

00:04:08.180 --> 00:04:11.960

But please do so responsibly and with proper consideration for other

64

00:04:12.000 --> 00:04:12.480

parties.

65

00:04:13.620 --> 00:04:17.519

This must not be disruptive and the material must not be misused.

66

00:04:18.320 --> 00:04:22.050

The definitive recording is the one that is being made by the audio visual

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00:04:22.180 --> 00:04:25.560

company and will be published on the National Infrastructure

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00:04:26.020 --> 00:04:29.790

Planning website. Does anyone have any questions on

69

00:04:29.840 --> 00:04:30.340

this matter?

70

00:04:38.280 --> 00:04:41.590

A link to the planning inspectorate's privacy notice was provided in the

71

00:04:41.640 --> 00:04:44.680

notification for this hearing in the Rule 6 letter,

72

00:04:45.420 --> 00:04:47.720

dated 8th of April 2026,

73

00:04:48.640 --> 00:04:51.380

reference PD-006.

74

00:04:52.580 --> 00:04:56.340

I assume that everybody here today has familiarized themselves with this document,

75

00:04:56.760 --> 00:05:00.390

which establishes how the personal data of our customers is

76

00:05:00.480 --> 00:05:04.100

handled in accordance with the principles set out in data

77

00:05:04.180 --> 00:05:05.140

protection laws.

78

00:05:06.060 --> 00:05:09.960

So please speak to Sarah Norris if you have any questions about this.

79

00:05:12.620 --> 00:05:15.000

I'll now move on to agenda item two,

80

00:05:16.040 --> 00:05:17.140

the purpose of the hearing.

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00:05:18.540 --> 00:05:21.410

Let me briefly explain the purpose of this open floor hearing.

82

00:05:23.240 --> 00:05:26.860

Open floor hearings are your opportunity to raise anything directly to the

83

00:05:26.880 --> 00:05:27.940

examining authority

84

00:05:28.780 --> 00:05:32.400

that is important and relevant and that you think I should know about and

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00:05:32.520 --> 00:05:32.960

consider.

86

00:05:34.010 --> 00:05:36.780

They are not about a particular location or topic.

87

00:05:37.700 --> 00:05:39.600

The topic of your representations

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00:05:41.380 --> 00:05:44.040

about the proposals is therefore up to you.

89

00:05:44.960 --> 00:05:48.340

Please note that this hearing is not to be used as a platform to make

90

00:05:48.380 --> 00:05:52.100

electioneering points, and any attempt to do so will not be

91

00:05:52.140 --> 00:05:52.820

tolerated.

92

00:05:54.040 --> 00:05:57.580

However, may I remind everyone that oral submissions should be based on

93

00:05:57.620 --> 00:06:01.320

representations previously made in writing by the particular

94

00:06:01.400 --> 00:06:04.540

participantHaving said that, the

95

00:06:04.560 --> 00:06:08.400

representation should not simply repeat matters previously covered in a

96

00:06:08.420 --> 00:06:12.080

written submission, but rather provide further detail,

97

00:06:13.020 --> 00:06:16.980

explanation, and evidential corroboration to help inform

98

00:06:17.020 --> 00:06:18.239

the examining authority.

99

00:06:20.260 --> 00:06:23.520

Additionally, I may refuse to hear evidence which is, in my view,

100

00:06:23.980 --> 00:06:27.020

irrelevant, vexatious, or frivolous,

101

00:06:28.020 --> 00:06:31.820

relates to the merits of a national policy statement, repeats

102

00:06:31.920 --> 00:06:35.300

other representations already made, or relates to

103

00:06:35.340 --> 00:06:38.800

compensation for compulsory acquisition of land or an

104

00:06:38.880 --> 00:06:40.540

interest in or over land.

105

00:06:42.160 --> 00:06:45.980

Additionally, I may request any person behaving in a disruptive manner to leave the

106

00:06:46.020 --> 00:06:49.540

hearing, or to remain only if that person complies with

107

00:06:49.580 --> 00:06:50.920

specific conditions.

108

00:06:53.060 --> 00:06:56.900

Due to the number of parties wishing to speak today, I don't intend

109

00:06:57.080 --> 00:07:00.880

to set a strict time limit. But to make efficient use of the

110

00:07:00.920 --> 00:07:04.680

hearing, I would ask that your submissions are concise and to be

111

00:07:04.780 --> 00:07:08.719

concluded within about 10 minutes for individuals, and 15

112

00:07:08.780 --> 00:07:12.440

minutes for those speaking on behalf of organizations, groups, or

113

00:07:12.500 --> 00:07:15.880

anyone representing a number of individual interested

114

00:07:16.100 --> 00:07:16.940

parties.

115

00:07:18.380 --> 00:07:21.040

Once you have spoken, I may wish to ask questions.

116

00:07:21.900 --> 00:07:25.740

Finally, the applicant will be given an opportunity to respond to any matters

117

00:07:25.820 --> 00:07:28.180

raised once all speakers have been heard,

118

00:07:29.300 --> 00:07:32.340

either orally today or in writing by deadline one.

119

00:07:40.840 --> 00:07:44.720

Confirmation of those who have notified the examining authority of a wish to be

120

00:07:44.800 --> 00:07:45.480

heard at the hearing.

121

00:07:46.360 --> 00:07:49.900

I'll now move on to agenda item three and run through the list of

122

00:07:49.920 --> 00:07:53.560

interested parties or other parties who have

123

00:07:53.600 --> 00:07:56.940

notified me in advance that they wish to speak.

124

00:07:56.980 --> 00:08:00.760

The following persons or organizations have notified me that they wish to

125

00:08:00.840 --> 00:08:01.160

speak.

126

00:08:02.900 --> 00:08:05.840

Could I start with Simon Wood? Is that correct?

127

00:08:07.820 --> 00:08:10.440

Yes, sir. And I no longer wish to speak.

128

00:08:10.700 --> 00:08:10.960

Okay.

129

00:08:11.100 --> 00:08:11.400

Thank you.

130

00:08:13.120 --> 00:08:13.520

Thank you.

131

00:08:15.380 --> 00:08:16.580

Councillor Mark Morris?

132

00:08:20.200 --> 00:08:23.140

Councillor Kittle Morris is unable to be here today, sir. Thank you.

133

00:08:23.820 --> 00:08:26.660

Okay. Thank you. Councillor Paul Darby?

134

00:08:32.600 --> 00:08:36.060

Yeah. Sorry I couldn't make it this morning, but I know a lot of things what I was

135

00:08:36.100 --> 00:08:38.660

going to say have already been said, so I won't go through them again.

136

00:08:38.720 --> 00:08:42.180

But one of my biggest problem in Swaffham

137

00:08:42.800 --> 00:08:44.010

is right on the route of the-

138

00:08:44.060 --> 00:08:47.760

Okay. Sorry, before you go any further, this is just to confirm you want to speak,

139

00:08:47.820 --> 00:08:47.980

and then-

140

00:08:48.260 --> 00:08:48.370

Oh, yes

141

00:08:48.370 --> 00:08:50.280

... you'll be allowed the opportunity to give-

142

00:08:50.340 --> 00:08:50.780

Sorry.

143

00:08:50.820 --> 00:08:52.660

Yeah. So do you wish to speak later?

144

00:08:52.750 --> 00:08:53.020

Yes, please.

145

00:08:53.210 --> 00:08:53.760

Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

146

00:08:56.880 --> 00:08:58.100

Dr. Mark Holmes?

147

00:08:59.340 --> 00:08:59.540

Yes.

148

00:09:00.920 --> 00:09:01.460

Okay. Thank you.

149

00:09:05.920 --> 00:09:08.770

Okay. Is there anyone else in the room who would like to speak today?

150

00:09:11.480 --> 00:09:12.740

Could you just remind me your name?

151

00:09:12.860 --> 00:09:15.440

Yes. Tim Hubbard, Castle Acre Parish Council.

152

00:09:16.540 --> 00:09:17.540

I should have been on the list.

153

00:09:20.320 --> 00:09:22.340

Okay. And the other hand?

154

00:09:22.440 --> 00:09:26.020

And Dr. Ilga Chakrabarti, also parish councilor

155

00:09:26.500 --> 00:09:27.180

and resident.

156

00:09:36.280 --> 00:09:37.740

Thank you. Anyone else in the room?

157

00:09:41.880 --> 00:09:45.860

No. Okay. Can we move online, then? Is there anybody online who wishes to speak?

158

00:09:49.140 --> 00:09:51.220

I'm not seeing any hands online.

159

00:10:00.020 --> 00:10:02.380

Okay, I'll now move on to item four.

160

00:10:02.580 --> 00:10:05.880

So oral representations from interested parties and any

161

00:10:05.960 --> 00:10:07.200

non-interested parties.

162

00:10:09.500 --> 00:10:13.360

So we'll start with Councillor Paul Darby from Swaffham Town

163

00:10:13.440 --> 00:10:13.800

Council.

164

00:10:15.480 --> 00:10:15.820

Thank you.

165

00:10:17.100 --> 00:10:21.060

I missed this morning, but one of my big things is, and I think it

166

00:10:21.100 --> 00:10:24.859

did come up this morning, was to look at this as a whole, not just on the

167

00:10:24.880 --> 00:10:28.740

Drove one, but the RWE one and whole of the

168

00:10:28.860 --> 00:10:32.680

area what's going to be taken. My biggest problem

169

00:10:32.760 --> 00:10:36.480

is with tourism. Swaffham is known as a tourist town,

170

00:10:36.860 --> 00:10:40.780

and we get a lot of tourists in. And with solar panels right

171

00:10:40.820 --> 00:10:44.160

the way along the 1065, it's going to be a nightmare trying to

172

00:10:44.760 --> 00:10:48.720

attract tourism into the town. And the extra volume of

173

00:10:48.840 --> 00:10:52.140

traffic which is going to be laid on us by

174

00:10:52.300 --> 00:10:55.200

these lorries coming through with the

175

00:10:56.500 --> 00:10:59.840

panels or whatever they've got to bring is going to be a nightmare.

176

00:10:59.880 --> 00:11:02.360

The town is chock-a-block with traffic now.

177

00:11:02.840 --> 00:11:06.800

We need some sort of routing or some sort of

178

00:11:07.880 --> 00:11:11.700

plan of action for how they bring them through the town.

179

00:11:11.740 --> 00:11:15.580

Because if they're coming up from the south, which I expect they will do,

180

00:11:16.220 --> 00:11:18.360

it's going to be a nightmare in Swaffham.

181

00:11:18.540 --> 00:11:22.480

And we want to keep our town going. We don't want to be chockered

182

00:11:22.820 --> 00:11:26.439

with this and people not being able to do their daily

183

00:11:26.520 --> 00:11:27.100

routine.

184

00:11:28.280 --> 00:11:28.620

Thank you.

185

00:11:32.860 --> 00:11:34.460

Thank you, Councillor Darby.

186

00:11:43.080 --> 00:11:44.520

Dr. Mark Holmes.

187

00:11:47.060 --> 00:11:47.740

Thank you very much.

188

00:11:49.040 --> 00:11:52.600

I have a six to seven-minute expanded, updated

189

00:11:52.720 --> 00:11:56.340

submission regarding stone curlews and biodiversity

190

00:11:56.960 --> 00:11:58.240

issues affecting the site.

191

00:11:59.060 --> 00:12:02.820

So my name is Dr. Mark Holmes. I'm a recently retired medical doctor with a

192

00:12:02.880 --> 00:12:05.720

lifelong involvement in nature conservation.

193

00:12:06.320 --> 00:12:10.160

I'm a fellow of the Linnean Natural History Society of London and also a

194

00:12:10.200 --> 00:12:12.820  
trustee of the Swallowtail and Birdwing Butterfly Trust.

195  
00:12:13.560 --> 00:12:17.210  
I've lived locally in South Acre for 30 years, so I have a

196  
00:12:17.260 --> 00:12:21.040  
first-hand knowledge of the amazing natural history and

197  
00:12:21.060 --> 00:12:24.820  
biodiversity of this area, an area consisting of

198  
00:12:24.980 --> 00:12:28.800  
unique Breckland habitat and the internationally important

199  
00:12:28.940 --> 00:12:32.876  
River Nar Chalkstream Triple SI. I want

200  
00:12:32.896 --> 00:12:36.536  
to clarify that this proposed industrial-scale Drovers Solar

201  
00:12:36.636 --> 00:12:40.265  
Farm has the potential to seriously damage this very

202  
00:12:40.416 --> 00:12:44.296  
same area of sensitive and highly important habitats

203  
00:12:44.716 --> 00:12:48.356  
that is both continuous with and functionally linked

204  
00:12:48.736 --> 00:12:52.706  
to the nearby Breckland Special Protection Area.

205  
00:12:53.596 --> 00:12:57.536  
The two very strong and legitimate objections against the

206  
00:12:57.576 --> 00:13:01.416  
Drovers Solar project that I would like to brief you on and update  
you on

207  
00:13:01.496 --> 00:13:05.356

today are one, the stone curlew. The presence of this

208

00:13:05.416 --> 00:13:08.096

very rare and fully protected bird species

209

00:13:08.636 --> 00:13:11.996

is already recorded here in both

210

00:13:12.156 --> 00:13:15.956

2024 and 2025 on the proposed

211

00:13:16.036 --> 00:13:19.766

solar farm site. And two, the already impressively

212

00:13:19.976 --> 00:13:23.826

high biodiversity of this area, which is actually increasing

213

00:13:23.896 --> 00:13:26.916

year on year, plus future biodiversity

214

00:13:27.036 --> 00:13:30.516

potential of this site, which could be irreparably

215

00:13:30.556 --> 00:13:33.656

damaged by this solar farm project.

216

00:13:34.696 --> 00:13:38.196

I'll just now aim to talk succinctly about stone

217

00:13:38.276 --> 00:13:41.106

curlews, followed by biodiversity issues.

218

00:13:41.876 --> 00:13:45.476

So firstly, regarding stone curlews, this extremely rare

219

00:13:45.536 --> 00:13:46.436

bird with a

220

00:13:48.156 --> 00:13:50.816

UK breeding population of 300 pairs,

221

00:13:51.716 --> 00:13:52.376  
approximately,

222

00:13:53.216 --> 00:13:56.216  
is a fully protected Schedule One British

223

00:13:59.456 --> 00:14:03.196  
breeding bird, protected under the Countryside and Wildlife Act of

224

00:14:03.256 --> 00:14:04.256  
1981.

225

00:14:05.176 --> 00:14:08.776  
So multiple sightings of stone curlews have now been made in the

226

00:14:09.076 --> 00:14:12.986  
Droves Solar Farm project area in 2024 and

227

00:14:13.216 --> 00:14:16.436  
2025. And I point out that the ecological

228

00:14:16.476 --> 00:14:20.176  
survey work that I'm aware of finished back in November

229

00:14:20.316 --> 00:14:23.136  
2024, so is well out of

230

00:14:24.636 --> 00:14:26.156  
timeframe that we're talking about.

231

00:14:26.896 --> 00:14:30.696  
So in 2025, a pair of adult birds were

232

00:14:30.756 --> 00:14:34.656  
seen in the spring, and then an apparent family party of four

233

00:14:34.736 --> 00:14:38.076  
birds were seen that autumn. So this is consistent with a

234

00:14:38.116 --> 00:14:42.075

successful breeding of a bird species that is known to be very

235

00:14:42.116 --> 00:14:42.756

elusive.

236

00:14:44.056 --> 00:14:47.776

Terry Jermy, our MP for South West Norfolk, in his excellent submission,

237

00:14:48.236 --> 00:14:52.036

pointed out that because of crop rotation, birds may

238

00:14:52.096 --> 00:14:55.856

move with this rotation and hence only be recorded at a

239

00:14:55.876 --> 00:14:58.576

particular site every four or five years.

240

00:14:59.156 --> 00:15:02.676

So indeed, our stone curlews may well be moving between the Drovers

241

00:15:02.796 --> 00:15:06.656

project area and the nearby Breckland Special Protection

242

00:15:06.776 --> 00:15:10.216

Area, which obviously people will be aware of has special

243

00:15:10.656 --> 00:15:11.756

protection, hence its name.

244

00:15:12.876 --> 00:15:16.645

I would therefore propose that for stone curlews for the Drovers

245

00:15:16.716 --> 00:15:20.186

site, a minimum of five years of professional and

246

00:15:20.236 --> 00:15:24.156

licensed, because of it being a Schedule One bird, licensed stone

247

00:15:24.256 --> 00:15:27.896

curlew recording work is carried out to confirm or

248

00:15:27.936 --> 00:15:30.976

exclude stone curlew breeding on this site

249

00:15:31.396 --> 00:15:35.336

before any final decision is made on the Drovers Solar project

250

00:15:35.416 --> 00:15:38.956

proceeding. I now come on to secondly, my points about

251

00:15:39.036 --> 00:15:39.976

biodiversity.

252

00:15:41.816 --> 00:15:45.676

I would like to comment regarding the already high and increasing

253

00:15:45.736 --> 00:15:49.656

levels of biodiversity at this proposed

254

00:15:49.716 --> 00:15:53.316

solar farm site. The combination at this site of both

255

00:15:53.436 --> 00:15:56.196

important Breckland habitat, which is

256

00:15:56.256 --> 00:15:59.916

functionally linked to the nearby Breckland Special

257

00:15:59.996 --> 00:16:03.916

Protection Area, plus the proximity of and continuity

258

00:16:03.936 --> 00:16:07.756

with the River Nar SSSI ensures that there is an

259

00:16:07.796 --> 00:16:11.156

outstanding level of biodiversity in this area

260

00:16:12.036 --> 00:16:15.716

of the solar farm site. In fact, the whole Breckland area is of

261

00:16:15.776 --> 00:16:19.296  
course well-known to be a biodiversity hotspot

262  
00:16:19.336 --> 00:16:20.856  
for the United Kingdom.

263  
00:16:22.116 --> 00:16:22.416  
So

264  
00:16:23.516 --> 00:16:26.916  
in addition to stone curlews, many protected and scarcer species  
have been

265  
00:16:26.936 --> 00:16:30.636  
recorded in the immediate area of the planned Drovers Solar

266  
00:16:30.696 --> 00:16:34.365  
project. Mammals include red deer, otters,

267  
00:16:34.896 --> 00:16:38.776  
polecats, which are a protected species which has arrived in the

268  
00:16:38.836 --> 00:16:42.616  
last five years in the area, harvest mice, water

269  
00:16:42.636 --> 00:16:46.516  
voles, hares, badgers, and more. As well as,

270  
00:16:46.896 --> 00:16:49.435  
as I said, the stone curlews, bird-wise,

271  
00:16:51.376 --> 00:16:54.806  
have been recorded the larger Eurasian curlew,

272  
00:16:55.636 --> 00:16:59.576  
Breckland being one of the most important lowland breeding  
strongholds of this

273  
00:16:59.656 --> 00:17:00.856  
species in the UK.

274

00:17:01.956 --> 00:17:05.416

In addition, lapwings, cuckoos, spotted flycatchers, barn owls,

275

00:17:05.777 --> 00:17:09.636

quail, goshawks, kingfishers, which breed locally on the River

276

00:17:09.676 --> 00:17:13.576

Nar, and green sandpipers and crossbills, to name but a

277

00:17:13.616 --> 00:17:13.836

few.

278

00:17:15.096 --> 00:17:18.456

Butterfly-wise, 31 species of butterfly have been

279

00:17:18.497 --> 00:17:22.257

recorded in the Southacre area. This is more than half

280

00:17:22.396 --> 00:17:26.286

the British list of butterflies. An incredible diversity.

281

00:17:26.826 --> 00:17:30.676

And recently there has been the arrival of the very rare purple emperor

282

00:17:30.696 --> 00:17:34.196

butterfly, which is almost definitely breeding in the Nar Valley and has been

283

00:17:34.236 --> 00:17:37.476

recorded on two occasions in Southacre in the last three years.

284

00:17:38.876 --> 00:17:42.626

Other insects include the localized green tiger beetle and many

285

00:17:42.716 --> 00:17:46.196

species of solitary bee, solitary bees being very important pollinators,

286

00:17:46.816 --> 00:17:50.716

and at least two species of solitary bee have only recently arrived in

287

00:17:50.756 --> 00:17:54.716

Southacre, again in the last five years or so, and formed large

288

00:17:54.736 --> 00:17:55.636

breeding colonies.

289

00:17:56.956 --> 00:17:59.646

I believe the flora of the area is understudied,

290

00:18:00.496 --> 00:18:03.956

with there being at least four orchid species occurring in the

291

00:18:04.196 --> 00:18:07.516

immediate vicinity of the Drovers planned site.

292

00:18:07.856 --> 00:18:11.376

The bee orchid, pyramidal orchid, common spotted, and southern marsh orchids.

293

00:18:12.656 --> 00:18:14.416

So as I come to conclude,

294

00:18:15.156 --> 00:18:17.976

there is one other point I wanted to make.

295

00:18:18.016 --> 00:18:21.656

The high biodiversity and biodiversity potential of the

296

00:18:21.716 --> 00:18:24.896

whole Nar Valley area is one of the reasons why a

297

00:18:24.956 --> 00:18:28.816

large-scale rewilding project has been funded just

298

00:18:28.856 --> 00:18:30.496

downstream from us at Westacre,

299

00:18:31.416 --> 00:18:35.156

and we obviously continuous with that same areaSo

300

00:18:35.196 --> 00:18:38.176

finally, in closing, with view to biodiversity,

301

00:18:39.176 --> 00:18:42.835

I would therefore propose more extensive

302

00:18:42.936 --> 00:18:46.746

habitat regulations assessments are required over the

303

00:18:46.836 --> 00:18:50.736

next couple of years by multiple experts who specialize in the

304

00:18:50.776 --> 00:18:54.616

various groups of fauna and flora before any final

305

00:18:54.626 --> 00:18:58.616

decisions are made on this massive solar project, a project which could have

306

00:18:58.696 --> 00:19:02.676

serious immediate and long-term negative consequences for this area of

307

00:19:02.776 --> 00:19:05.576

high and increasing biodiversity.

308

00:19:06.716 --> 00:19:10.316

Thank you for your attention. My final question would be, what is going to be done

309

00:19:10.356 --> 00:19:13.956

now as the previous ecological survey work from November

310

00:19:14.096 --> 00:19:17.456

2024 is frankly inadequate,

311

00:19:18.496 --> 00:19:21.496

as you can see from what I've recorded? Thank you.

312

00:19:30.216 --> 00:19:31.836

Thank you, Dr. Mark Holmes.

313

00:19:34.396 --> 00:19:34.636

Thank you.

314

00:19:44.496 --> 00:19:48.236

Okay, we'll continue to hear from those in the room.

315

00:19:50.396 --> 00:19:54.176

So from Castle Acre Parish Council, who would like to

316

00:19:54.256 --> 00:19:54.896

speak first?

317

00:20:00.256 --> 00:20:02.136

Good afternoon, sir. My name is Tim Hubbard.

318

00:20:03.616 --> 00:20:07.496

I hope you will accept that there will be a degree of repetition

319

00:20:07.556 --> 00:20:10.456

in some of our representations.

320

00:20:11.476 --> 00:20:13.436

I am chair of Castle Acre Parish Council.

321

00:20:13.736 --> 00:20:17.656

I have been a resident of Castle Acre for the last 27 years and

322

00:20:17.696 --> 00:20:21.616

have personally worked in Norfolk's agricultural industry

323

00:20:22.056 --> 00:20:25.756

for over 50 years. I am here to represent Castle Acre

324

00:20:25.856 --> 00:20:29.376

and some residents of South Acre, as they have no council.

325

00:20:30.456 --> 00:20:34.316

In this brief, I am confirming the continued objection from both

326

00:20:34.336 --> 00:20:37.786  
communities to the proposed Drove solar farm complex and

327  
00:20:37.896 --> 00:20:41.816  
substation, as laid out in our representation made to the planning

328  
00:20:41.876 --> 00:20:45.696  
inspectorate on the 24th of February 2026.

329  
00:20:46.896 --> 00:20:49.716  
The proposed site, which would be situated west of the

330  
00:20:49.756 --> 00:20:53.376  
A1065, north of the Breckland SPA and the

331  
00:20:53.396 --> 00:20:56.776  
historic market town of Swaffham, south of the River Nar

332  
00:20:56.856 --> 00:21:00.396  
SSSI and the historic conservation village of Castle

333  
00:21:00.436 --> 00:21:04.356  
Acre and the village of South Acre, all areas of natural

334  
00:21:04.376 --> 00:21:07.976  
beauty. We are not opposed to renewable

335  
00:21:08.016 --> 00:21:11.856  
energy. We are, however, strongly opposed to and

336  
00:21:11.916 --> 00:21:15.596  
deeply concerned about the inappropriate location for the Drove  
solar

337  
00:21:15.656 --> 00:21:19.336  
complex and the overwhelming negative impact it,

338  
00:21:19.696 --> 00:21:23.436  
along with the potential hydro site, if approved, will have on the

339  
00:21:23.496 --> 00:21:27.116

local area and communities for the next 60 years.

340

00:21:28.536 --> 00:21:32.136

As we understand, solar generation is only 10% to 15%

341

00:21:32.196 --> 00:21:35.616

efficient and has to be highly subsidized by the

342

00:21:35.656 --> 00:21:39.256

taxpayer for it even to be considered as a commercial energy

343

00:21:39.316 --> 00:21:39.686

source.

344

00:21:40.696 --> 00:21:44.496

Surely, renewable energy should not be delivered at any cost.

345

00:21:45.776 --> 00:21:49.316

Further to our representation, which you will have read, I would like to

346

00:21:49.356 --> 00:21:52.836

briefly summarize and highlight some of its

347

00:21:52.876 --> 00:21:53.476

contents.

348

00:21:54.576 --> 00:21:54.665

The

349

00:21:56.016 --> 00:21:59.696

Drove solar complex will harm the setting of an exceptional

350

00:21:59.796 --> 00:22:03.456

heritage cluster sited along the A1065,

351

00:22:03.916 --> 00:22:07.356

a major gateway route for most

352

00:22:07.436 --> 00:22:11.016

visitors to North Norfolk. The development will introduce

353

00:22:11.136 --> 00:22:14.776

large-scale industrial infrastructure into the open

354

00:22:14.876 --> 00:22:18.636

rural landscape that forms the historic and experiential

355

00:22:18.716 --> 00:22:22.256

gateway to our unique villages and the local area,

356

00:22:23.256 --> 00:22:25.736

all of which is fundamental to their identity.

357

00:22:26.776 --> 00:22:30.356

It will directly impact the setting of scheduled

358

00:22:30.416 --> 00:22:34.136

monuments and Grade I listed buildings at,

359

00:22:34.356 --> 00:22:38.136

for example, the Borough Council, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk's suggested site

360

00:22:38.196 --> 00:22:41.676

inspection document, 22nd of April 2026,

361

00:22:42.016 --> 00:22:43.216

location seven,

362

00:22:44.076 --> 00:22:45.216

A1065,

363

00:22:46.116 --> 00:22:50.056

will undermine the attractiveness and amenity value of the

364

00:22:50.096 --> 00:22:52.635

local area to communities and tourists alike.

365

00:22:53.246 --> 00:22:57.016

This surely conflicts with local plan policies that seek to

366

00:22:57.036 --> 00:23:00.456

safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

367

00:23:02.336 --> 00:23:05.736

Impact on strategy and heritage assets and their setting.

368

00:23:06.446 --> 00:23:10.256

The proposed solar farm lies within the setting of multiple designated

369

00:23:10.316 --> 00:23:13.836

heritage assets, all listed in our representation,

370

00:23:14.596 --> 00:23:18.336

five being scheduled monuments. While the applicant

371

00:23:18.476 --> 00:23:22.176

may characterize the development as temporary, the visual and

372

00:23:22.216 --> 00:23:25.556

experiential harm caused by the scale, fencing,

373

00:23:25.676 --> 00:23:29.536

permanence of substations, additional pylons, BESS, and

374

00:23:29.716 --> 00:23:31.776

all associated grid infrastructure

375

00:23:32.636 --> 00:23:36.376

of the proposal, along with ground disturbance and long

376

00:23:36.496 --> 00:23:40.356

operational lifespan, mean the impact on landscape

377

00:23:40.456 --> 00:23:44.256

character, archaeology, soil,

378

00:23:44.556 --> 00:23:48.416

and heritage setting will be significant, enduring, and in

379

00:23:48.556 --> 00:23:52.166  
many respects, irreversible, compromising the cultural

380  
00:23:52.236 --> 00:23:56.026  
landscape around one of Norfolk's most important heritage clusters.

381  
00:23:57.496 --> 00:24:00.596  
The landscape and visual assessments, we believe,

382  
00:24:00.736 --> 00:24:04.616  
underestimate the magnitude of harm by treating the landscape

383  
00:24:04.676 --> 00:24:08.016  
as visually containable through screening and planting,

384  
00:24:08.516 --> 00:24:12.156  
which in themselves will change the character of the historic  
landscape.

385  
00:24:12.816 --> 00:24:16.756  
The application fails to fully assess the cumulative

386  
00:24:16.796 --> 00:24:20.786  
and sequential impacts of all multiple existing,

387  
00:24:21.176 --> 00:24:25.116  
consented, and proposed developments, resulting in progressive

388  
00:24:25.156 --> 00:24:28.866  
industrialization of the historic Nar Valley and

389  
00:24:28.916 --> 00:24:31.476  
surrounding visually sensitive landscape.

390  
00:24:33.156 --> 00:24:36.436  
Impact on the Breckland SPA, River Nar SSSI,

391  
00:24:36.556 --> 00:24:40.156  
biodiversity, and local nature recovery goals. The

392  
00:24:40.196 --> 00:24:44.036

site lies within the catchment of the River Nar, a chalk stream

393

00:24:44.096 --> 00:24:46.856

designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

394

00:24:47.556 --> 00:24:51.396

Chalk streams are globally rare, with approximately

395

00:24:51.456 --> 00:24:53.196

two hundred and eighty worldwide.

396

00:24:53.996 --> 00:24:57.256

The River Nar and Valley have a range of important

397

00:24:57.336 --> 00:25:01.116

biodiversity action plan habitats, including chalk stream

398

00:25:01.196 --> 00:25:05.176

areas, fens, wet meadows, and woodlands, described by

399

00:25:05.236 --> 00:25:09.216

the Norfolk Rivers Trust as arguably Norfolk's most unspoiled

400

00:25:09.336 --> 00:25:10.636

and beautiful example.

401

00:25:11.656 --> 00:25:15.336

The bird surveys submitted appear to be insufficiently comprehensive

402

00:25:15.776 --> 00:25:19.556

to provide us with confidence that all protected and red-listed species,

403

00:25:19.956 --> 00:25:23.896

namely stone curlew, which have previously been recorded on the proposed

404

00:25:23.956 --> 00:25:27.896

site and in the surrounding area, have been properly identified and

405

00:25:27.936 --> 00:25:31.696

accounted for. Loss of

406

00:25:31.736 --> 00:25:35.416

best and most versatile agricultural land, BMV.

407

00:25:36.256 --> 00:25:40.136

There is a critical need for agricultural land to be maintained

408

00:25:40.176 --> 00:25:43.955

for domestic food production, supporting future

409

00:25:44.396 --> 00:25:48.336

UK food security. The use of BMV land

410

00:25:48.396 --> 00:25:51.996

is under increasing pressure from development, housing,

411

00:25:52.356 --> 00:25:55.556

and renewable energy production,

412

00:25:56.356 --> 00:25:58.616

infrastructure, and energy crops.

413

00:25:59.536 --> 00:26:03.376

Surely, now is not the time to facilitate the destruction

414

00:26:03.476 --> 00:26:06.556

of valued irreplaceable asset, land,

415

00:26:07.796 --> 00:26:11.656

when there are obvious alternative locations for energy generation,

416

00:26:12.436 --> 00:26:15.316

brownfield sites, and rooftop, among others.

417

00:26:16.256 --> 00:26:20.096

This proposal, well over 2,000 acres, along with

418

00:26:20.136 --> 00:26:23.916

others soon to come forward, will represent resource

419

00:26:23.976 --> 00:26:27.256

destruction on an industrial scale, spanning over

420

00:26:27.336 --> 00:26:28.116

generations.

421

00:26:28.956 --> 00:26:31.856

East Anglia is the breadbasket of England.

422

00:26:32.696 --> 00:26:36.556

The application fails to appreciate the ability of lower

423

00:26:36.616 --> 00:26:40.206

grade soils to be highly productive and versatile,

424

00:26:41.736 --> 00:26:44.946

for example, when irrigation is introduced,

425

00:26:45.636 --> 00:26:49.476

which is already available on some parts of the proposed site, for

426

00:26:49.496 --> 00:26:53.156

growing specialist crops such as carrots, parsnips, and potatoes.

427

00:26:53.876 --> 00:26:57.156

Removing this land from agriculture for six

428

00:26:57.196 --> 00:27:00.536

decades undermines sustainability objectives

429

00:27:00.976 --> 00:27:04.676

which support continued agricultural

430

00:27:04.796 --> 00:27:06.296

use and rural character.

431

00:27:07.836 --> 00:27:10.476

Public rights of way and national trail impact.

432

00:27:11.066 --> 00:27:14.636

The Peddars Way, a national trail, and the Nar Valley Way

433

00:27:15.136 --> 00:27:18.936

would be significantly affected by the proposed development, impacting the

434

00:27:19.016 --> 00:27:20.896

amenity experience of users.

435

00:27:21.816 --> 00:27:25.516

The Peddars Way is a nationally designated route of historic,

436

00:27:25.796 --> 00:27:29.536

recreational, and tourism importance, following the

437

00:27:29.576 --> 00:27:33.196

route of the Roman Road and later medieval pilgrimage

438

00:27:33.256 --> 00:27:33.666

trail.

439

00:27:35.216 --> 00:27:38.456

Impact on our dark skies. The impact of

440

00:27:38.516 --> 00:27:41.996

operational and security lighting from the proposed

441

00:27:42.636 --> 00:27:45.676

solar farm, regardless of mitigation,

442

00:27:46.416 --> 00:27:49.976

in our near-dark skies is an additional

443

00:27:50.036 --> 00:27:53.566

concern, adversely affecting their quality and their

444

00:27:53.676 --> 00:27:55.476

value to nocturnal wildlife.

445

00:27:56.996 --> 00:28:00.806

Noise pollution. Though we recognize that the solar panels

446

00:28:00.896 --> 00:28:04.786

themselves do not emit noise, the infrastructure surrounding the

447

00:28:04.896 --> 00:28:08.876

solar farm, once built, will generate operational noise,

448

00:28:09.516 --> 00:28:13.066

particularly the substation and battery storage inverters and

449

00:28:13.176 --> 00:28:13.656

fans.

450

00:28:14.916 --> 00:28:18.236

During the construction period, noise generated by piling

451

00:28:18.416 --> 00:28:22.196

for the panel

452

00:28:22.256 --> 00:28:25.936

supports, the installation of associated infrastructure,

453

00:28:26.256 --> 00:28:29.756

and construction traffic on local roads in this rural and

454

00:28:29.856 --> 00:28:33.756

tranquil landscape will all be intrusive, constantly

455

00:28:33.796 --> 00:28:37.736

affecting the quality of life for residents and all those using the

456

00:28:37.776 --> 00:28:41.436

public rights of way and footpaths on or near the solar

457

00:28:41.516 --> 00:28:45.056

installations, as well as being damaging to local

458

00:28:45.136 --> 00:28:45.716

wildlife.

459

00:28:47.076 --> 00:28:50.336  
The application does not adequately assess the

460  
00:28:50.416 --> 00:28:54.376  
cumulative impacts of construction traffic on highway

461  
00:28:54.516 --> 00:28:58.306  
safety, residential amenity, tourist activity,

462  
00:28:58.815 --> 00:29:02.756  
and the tranquility character of the area, particularly

463  
00:29:02.816 --> 00:29:04.716  
during peak visitor seasons.

464  
00:29:06.166 --> 00:29:09.836  
The cumulation impact, more than 3,800

465  
00:29:09.856 --> 00:29:13.656  
hectares of solar developments proposed across Norfolk,

466  
00:29:14.116 --> 00:29:16.776  
including the neighboring High Grove proposal.

467  
00:29:17.836 --> 00:29:20.616  
The cumulative impact on landscape character,

468  
00:29:21.236 --> 00:29:24.876  
biodiversity, and heritage must surely be assessed

469  
00:29:25.216 --> 00:29:28.896  
at a strategic level, considering the legal requirements

470  
00:29:28.996 --> 00:29:29.316  
to

471  
00:29:30.196 --> 00:29:34.086  
protect designated and non-designated heritage assets and

472  
00:29:34.116 --> 00:29:34.696  
their setting,

473

00:29:35.636 --> 00:29:39.276

conserve ecological networks and sensitive habitats,

474

00:29:40.136 --> 00:29:43.896

avoid inappropriate development in open countryside and

475

00:29:44.016 --> 00:29:45.076

rural landscapes.

476

00:29:46.256 --> 00:29:49.996

The application relies on generic national need for

477

00:29:50.036 --> 00:29:53.536

renewable energy but fails to demonstrate why

478

00:29:53.696 --> 00:29:56.856

this particular sensitive site with an

479

00:29:56.936 --> 00:30:00.396

exceptional heritage and ecological

480

00:30:00.456 --> 00:30:04.316

landscape and with its natural beauty is necessary to

481

00:30:04.376 --> 00:30:05.136

meet that need.

482

00:30:06.596 --> 00:30:09.316

In conclusion, Castle Acre Parish Council

483

00:30:10.036 --> 00:30:13.796

concludes that the Drove Solar Farm

484

00:30:13.856 --> 00:30:17.636

proposal, alongside that of High Grove Solar Farms,

485

00:30:18.296 --> 00:30:21.756

would result in significant and enduring harm to the local

486

00:30:21.796 --> 00:30:25.776  
landscape character, the historic villages of Castle Acre and

487  
00:30:25.896 --> 00:30:29.816  
South Acre and their heritage assets, archaeological

488  
00:30:29.916 --> 00:30:33.396  
resource, biodiversity, and protected species,

489  
00:30:34.116 --> 00:30:37.916  
BMV agricultural land, public enjoyment, and

490  
00:30:37.956 --> 00:30:41.556  
amenity use of the Nar Valley and its nationally important

491  
00:30:41.656 --> 00:30:45.264  
heritage setting. While national policy supports

492  
00:30:45.304 --> 00:30:48.964  
renewable energy development, that support is

493  
00:30:49.024 --> 00:30:52.584  
explicitly conditional upon the avoidance of, or

494  
00:30:52.764 --> 00:30:56.104  
clear justification of harm to designated heritage

495  
00:30:56.324 --> 00:30:59.884  
assets and their setting. Best and most versatile

496  
00:30:59.964 --> 00:31:03.744  
agricultural land, valued landscapes, ecological

497  
00:31:03.784 --> 00:31:05.984  
networks, and rural amenity.

498  
00:31:06.944 --> 00:31:10.844  
In this case, we believe the application fails to demonstrate that

499  
00:31:10.904 --> 00:31:14.664  
such harm has been adequately avoided, minimized, or

500

00:31:14.764 --> 00:31:18.424

convincingly justified, hence our community's

501

00:31:18.504 --> 00:31:20.664

continued objection to the proposal.

502

00:31:21.684 --> 00:31:23.264

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

503

00:31:31.704 --> 00:31:32.884

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Hubbard.

504

00:31:35.224 --> 00:31:35.324

Dr.

505

00:31:36.164 --> 00:31:37.644

Ilga Chakrabarti.

506

00:31:39.664 --> 00:31:43.304

Hello, I'm Ilga Chakrabarti, a retired local

507

00:31:43.364 --> 00:31:47.244

GP, a resident of Castle Acre for 26 years, and a

508

00:31:47.284 --> 00:31:48.044

parish councilor.

509

00:31:49.044 --> 00:31:52.994

I'm part of the parish council representation, but I also represent myself and

510

00:31:53.024 --> 00:31:54.644

my family as a local resident.

511

00:31:55.714 --> 00:31:59.004

I object to the Doves project, what the applicants

512

00:32:00.424 --> 00:32:04.384

call a solar farm, but it is in effect a massive industrial complex

513

00:32:04.504 --> 00:32:05.884

proposed in a rural setting,

514

00:32:06.724 --> 00:32:10.644

backing immediately onto the edges of Swaffham, our nearest market

515

00:32:10.704 --> 00:32:14.304

town, and the villages of Castle Acre, South Acre, and West

516

00:32:14.344 --> 00:32:14.724

Acre.

517

00:32:15.804 --> 00:32:18.504

I fully support the objections just read out,

518

00:32:20.144 --> 00:32:22.784

but I particularly want to also just

519

00:32:24.004 --> 00:32:27.404

look at the issue of scale on the impact on the local

520

00:32:27.464 --> 00:32:31.064

population and visitors, and the timeframe of the proposed

521

00:32:31.144 --> 00:32:34.364

license. The sheer size is stunning and

522

00:32:34.444 --> 00:32:38.084

unreasonable. To put this into perspective, the whole

523

00:32:38.164 --> 00:32:41.984

industrial site of the Drovers would be

524

00:32:42.224 --> 00:32:45.524

1,133 hectares, which is

525

00:32:46.644 --> 00:32:50.144

similar to eight Hyde Parks placed side by

526

00:32:50.324 --> 00:32:53.664

side, covered with all the hardware, or

527

00:32:53.724 --> 00:32:57.564

1,500 football pitches. The residents of London or

528

00:32:57.604 --> 00:33:00.904

Wembley would not accept this proposal, but we are meant to do so.

529

00:33:02.084 --> 00:33:05.604

The site is over an undulating rural landscape,

530

00:33:06.104 --> 00:33:09.984

which is not obvious from basic site map, so there

531

00:33:10.024 --> 00:33:13.724

is no chance of it being hidden from view by some trees and

532

00:33:13.804 --> 00:33:15.184

hedges at the peripheries.

533

00:33:16.284 --> 00:33:20.224

The scale of the building structures, let alone the solar panel

534

00:33:20.324 --> 00:33:24.064

fields, are considerable. The proposal lists the need

535

00:33:24.144 --> 00:33:28.004

for, number one, a customer substation, which would take up

536

00:33:28.084 --> 00:33:28.944

four hectares,

537

00:33:30.284 --> 00:33:34.224

in effect five to six football pitches size, and at a

538

00:33:34.244 --> 00:33:38.104

height of up to 14 meters, which would be the

539

00:33:38.144 --> 00:33:40.864

height of a four to five story apartment building.

540

00:33:42.024 --> 00:33:45.644

A national grid substation would also be required, which is

541

00:33:45.704 --> 00:33:48.904

another four hectares with a height up to 15 meters.

542

00:33:49.884 --> 00:33:53.533

There would be ancillary buildings and car parking, access roads,

543

00:33:53.964 --> 00:33:57.584

and a connection from the substation to the grid, another half

544

00:33:57.644 --> 00:34:01.484

hectare at 15 meters height. And then there is the

545

00:34:01.544 --> 00:34:04.464

BESS, the battery energy storage system.

546

00:34:04.984 --> 00:34:08.544

Ten and a half hectares of multiple containers

547

00:34:09.044 --> 00:34:11.124

with a three-meter palisade fence.

548

00:34:11.624 --> 00:34:15.504

That's like 14.7 football pitches side

549

00:34:15.584 --> 00:34:19.564

by side, or 8.7 Trafalgar

550

00:34:19.685 --> 00:34:21.765

Squares side by side.

551

00:34:22.584 --> 00:34:26.304

And finally, the construction hub for delivery and storage of materials.

552

00:34:27.464 --> 00:34:30.924

None of these proposed structures will be tucked

553

00:34:31.004 --> 00:34:34.584  
away or out of sight or unimpeding local

554  
00:34:34.705 --> 00:34:35.984  
activities and traffic.

555  
00:34:37.104 --> 00:34:40.915  
The construction of this industrial mega complex would

556  
00:34:40.984 --> 00:34:43.745  
require two years on the current estimate

557  
00:34:44.745 --> 00:34:48.344  
by the applicant. This would involve heavy traffic and noise

558  
00:34:48.804 --> 00:34:52.694  
from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. weekdays, and 8:00

559  
00:34:52.765 --> 00:34:56.185  
a.m. to 1:30 on Saturdays, as well as some

560  
00:34:56.205 --> 00:34:59.573  
nighttime and extended hours for certain procedures and

561  
00:34:59.664 --> 00:35:00.344  
transports.

562  
00:35:01.184 --> 00:35:04.924  
Two years of this, which would be preceded by roadwork

563  
00:35:05.063 --> 00:35:08.744  
chaos beforehand to widen, add, and extend the

564  
00:35:08.784 --> 00:35:12.664  
current A1065 to accommodate the construction

565  
00:35:12.744 --> 00:35:15.644  
work. This is a non-dualed road, the

566  
00:35:15.684 --> 00:35:19.354  
A1065, used by residents on a daily

567

00:35:19.464 --> 00:35:23.344

basis to get into town and back, and the gateway to

568

00:35:23.404 --> 00:35:25.984

our historic villages and the North Norfolk coast.

569

00:35:26.694 --> 00:35:29.764

It is not suitable for such a project to be placed here.

570

00:35:31.024 --> 00:35:34.934

Industrializing our countryside in this particular area for over 60

571

00:35:35.124 --> 00:35:38.744

years, that's at least two generations of residents and

572

00:35:38.784 --> 00:35:42.604

visitors, if any remained. This is to force a

573

00:35:42.664 --> 00:35:46.144

fundamental alteration to the rural experience

574

00:35:46.484 --> 00:35:47.784

that defines this region.

575

00:35:48.684 --> 00:35:52.624

People are born here and have moved here for what we have now,

576

00:35:53.084 --> 00:35:55.264

not to live in an industrial zone.

577

00:35:56.444 --> 00:36:00.244

This application threatens the vitality of our local communities.

578

00:36:01.124 --> 00:36:04.824

The 1065 between Swaffham and Castle Acre will be a

579

00:36:04.844 --> 00:36:08.204

bottleneck, already busy with seasonal visitors.

580

00:36:08.904 --> 00:36:12.864

Local businesses, as well as those up towards the coast, will be

581

00:36:12.924 --> 00:36:16.884

harmed by the reputation of congestion and the eyesore

582

00:36:16.924 --> 00:36:19.564

of this massive solar industrial complex.

583

00:36:21.124 --> 00:36:24.884

The risk to deterioration in mental and physical health of

584

00:36:24.904 --> 00:36:28.524

residents needs to be considered if such a massive

585

00:36:28.564 --> 00:36:30.444

change happens on their doorstep.

586

00:36:31.664 --> 00:36:35.564

Noise pollution, dust, traffic, and the daily presence

587

00:36:35.664 --> 00:36:39.264

of the structures will erode residents' quality of life

588

00:36:39.764 --> 00:36:43.364

for two generations, let alone the nature currently

589

00:36:43.464 --> 00:36:47.376

around them. The questionable energy efficiency

590

00:36:47.436 --> 00:36:48.756

has also been mentioned.

591

00:36:49.896 --> 00:36:53.636

But if only 10% of the structures

592

00:36:53.676 --> 00:36:55.166

produces electricity,

593

00:36:56.116 --> 00:36:59.696

it will affect 100% of the land it is placed on.

594

00:37:01.036 --> 00:37:04.756

We would also be lumbered with one technological setup for decades,

595

00:37:05.196 --> 00:37:08.756

despite technology changing and improving at a much faster

596

00:37:08.856 --> 00:37:12.036

pace. Indeed, solar technology may become

597

00:37:12.416 --> 00:37:16.116

defunct in its current form, yet local residents will

598

00:37:16.156 --> 00:37:20.136

still be facing the hardware on a daily basis if this project gets

599

00:37:20.176 --> 00:37:21.856

approval for its 60 years.

600

00:37:23.436 --> 00:37:27.396

This application needs to be considered not only as it is proposed

601

00:37:27.456 --> 00:37:31.396

now, but whether it will suit for the next 60 years

602

00:37:31.436 --> 00:37:35.216

in its current form. Local residents will live with the

603

00:37:35.256 --> 00:37:38.756

consequences long after the developers and planners have moved

604

00:37:38.836 --> 00:37:42.696

on. The risks and impacts are simply too great to

605

00:37:42.756 --> 00:37:45.796

justify this project in this site. Thank you.

606

00:37:53.436 --> 00:37:53.816

Thank you.

607

00:37:56.296 --> 00:37:58.596

Is there anybody else in the room that wishes to speak

608

00:37:59.816 --> 00:38:00.976

today?

609

00:38:03.796 --> 00:38:04.236

Okay.

610

00:38:05.256 --> 00:38:07.676

Don't see that we've got any hands online.

611

00:38:12.836 --> 00:38:16.156

In that case, we've heard from everyone, and I'll now move to

612

00:38:16.176 --> 00:38:18.556

agenda item five,

613

00:38:19.476 --> 00:38:22.236

responses by the applicant.

614

00:38:38.716 --> 00:38:42.416

Good afternoon, sir. Alex Tresadern again for Pinsent Masons

615

00:38:42.496 --> 00:38:46.396

LLP, on behalf of the applicant. I'd like to start by

616

00:38:46.816 --> 00:38:50.316

thank everybody for coming today, both in person and online,

617

00:38:51.536 --> 00:38:55.336

and raising their points, which we will respond to in full in

618

00:38:55.356 --> 00:38:55.736

writing,

619

00:38:56.796 --> 00:38:59.916

including indeed to all relevant representations that have been made

620

00:39:00.496 --> 00:39:02.616

throughout the course of the process so far.

621

00:39:03.476 --> 00:39:07.356

I also note that some of the topics that have been discussed today will come up as

622

00:39:07.376 --> 00:39:10.816

detailed agenda items in the issue specific hearing one tomorrow.

623

00:39:11.916 --> 00:39:15.636

That being said, I'm going to make some points immediately in

624

00:39:15.676 --> 00:39:17.436

response, which will hopefully help the process.

625

00:39:18.256 --> 00:39:22.116

I'll start with the need and location of the

626

00:39:22.176 --> 00:39:25.936

scheme, including the size and scale of the proposed 60-year

627

00:39:25.996 --> 00:39:29.566

development, which is a well-precedented timeframe amongst recently

628

00:39:29.636 --> 00:39:31.616

consented solar projects.

629

00:39:33.636 --> 00:39:37.346

National Policy Statement EN1 of 2023, which is the part of the

630

00:39:37.396 --> 00:39:40.916

suite of national policy statements within which this project is being

631

00:39:40.956 --> 00:39:44.796

examined, states at paragraph 2.3.3 that the government's

632

00:39:44.816 --> 00:39:48.556

policy objectives for the energy system are to ensure our supply of energy

633

00:39:48.636 --> 00:39:52.446

always remains secure, reliable, affordable, and consistent with meeting our

634

00:39:52.476 --> 00:39:56.136

target to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

635

00:39:56.676 --> 00:40:00.336

And the 2025 National Policy Statement, which is a material and relevant

636

00:40:00.396 --> 00:40:04.196

consideration in this examination, maintains the same wording at

637

00:40:04.256 --> 00:40:05.616

paragraph 2.3.3.

638

00:40:06.796 --> 00:40:10.696

Meeting this objective requires a rapid deployment of low-carbon

639

00:40:10.756 --> 00:40:14.685

generation flexibility infrastructure and electricity transmission

640

00:40:14.716 --> 00:40:18.336

infrastructure, per paragraph 2.3.5 of NPS

641

00:40:18.356 --> 00:40:19.816

EN1 2025.

642

00:40:20.836 --> 00:40:24.716

Further, the 2025 National Policy Statement EN3 states at

643

00:40:24.736 --> 00:40:28.506

paragraph 2.10.2 that solar energy is at the heart of our Clean Power

644

00:40:29.116 --> 00:40:33.056

2030 mission, and at paragraph 2.10.5 that solar farms are one

645

00:40:33.076 --> 00:40:36.756

of the most established renewable electricity technologies in the UK and the

646

00:40:36.816 --> 00:40:39.076

cheapest form of electricity generation.

647

00:40:39.836 --> 00:40:42.936

Now, the applicant's statement of need, which is document reference

648

00:40:43.016 --> 00:40:46.745

APP042, explains that there is a critical

649

00:40:46.776 --> 00:40:50.656

national priority for the delivery of large-scale solar generation projects

650

00:40:50.696 --> 00:40:53.976

such as this scheme, and that large-scale projects are needed alongside

651

00:40:54.056 --> 00:40:57.576

smaller-scale projects, such as rooftop schemes, for example, to meet the

652

00:40:57.616 --> 00:41:00.936

government's aim for a clean power system from 2030.

653

00:41:01.716 --> 00:41:05.696

Further information about the need for both large scale and smaller schemes

654

00:41:05.716 --> 00:41:09.676

are addressed at sections 6.2 and 6.3 of the applicant's

655

00:41:09.716 --> 00:41:13.276

statement of need. And I also refer to section five of the planning statement in

656

00:41:13.316 --> 00:41:16.356

this regard, which I won't repeat, but just for reference.

657

00:41:17.496 --> 00:41:21.166

As for alternatives, ES, chapter four, which is Reasonable

658

00:41:21.166 --> 00:41:23.616

Alternatives and Design Evolution, which is reference

659

00:41:23.736 --> 00:41:27.616

APP-053, explains the legal and policy

660

00:41:27.696 --> 00:41:31.616

background relevant to the consideration of alternatives and the design development

661

00:41:31.656 --> 00:41:35.296

of the order limits for the scheme and covers the evolution of the design of the

662

00:41:35.316 --> 00:41:39.096

scheme from the identification of the initial order limits through to the

663

00:41:39.156 --> 00:41:40.316

scheme's final design.

664

00:41:41.216 --> 00:41:44.896

And appendix one of the applicant's planning statement contains the site evaluation

665

00:41:44.936 --> 00:41:48.356

report, which again details the process followed in selecting the site

666

00:41:48.396 --> 00:41:52.256

location. The applicant followed a stage approach to assessment,

667

00:41:52.336 --> 00:41:56.196

taking into consideration a range of planning, environmental, and

668

00:41:56.316 --> 00:42:00.036

operational factors, including consideration of designated international

669

00:42:00.536 --> 00:42:04.196

and national ecological and geological sites, nationally designated

670

00:42:04.236 --> 00:42:07.816  
landscapes, ancient woodland, flooding, and heritage and

671  
00:42:07.876 --> 00:42:11.606  
archeological concerns. And as I say, chapter four of the

672  
00:42:11.636 --> 00:42:15.436  
environmental statement and appendix one of the planning statement  
also explain the

673  
00:42:15.476 --> 00:42:19.216  
methodology that's been applied when identifying and evaluating  
potential

674  
00:42:19.296 --> 00:42:20.676  
sites for the scheme.

675  
00:42:21.856 --> 00:42:25.696  
Section 6.7 of the applicant's statement of need explains that

676  
00:42:25.776 --> 00:42:29.396  
the illustrative design for the scheme lies within the range of land  
typically

677  
00:42:29.436 --> 00:42:33.356  
required per megawatt output, in accordance with

678  
00:42:33.416 --> 00:42:36.876  
National Policy Statement EN3 of the 2023 suite, paragraph

679  
00:42:37.076 --> 00:42:40.916  
2.10.17. It also demonstrates that the scheme will

680  
00:42:40.936 --> 00:42:42.356  
produce no lesser

681  
00:42:43.196 --> 00:42:46.576  
a quantity of low-carbon energy per acre than any other

682  
00:42:46.616 --> 00:42:50.224  
technology which would be technically deliverable at the proposed

683

00:42:50.244 --> 00:42:54.204

location. And the 2025 NPS maintains the same wording in this

684

00:42:54.244 --> 00:42:58.144

regard at paragraph 2.10.9, which further supports our position as

685

00:42:58.184 --> 00:43:00.724

the policies remain consistent in this regard.

686

00:43:01.264 --> 00:43:04.944

And it's in the context of that urgent requirement for an unprecedented

687

00:43:04.984 --> 00:43:08.824

capacity of new solar schemes to come forward that the applicant is bringing

688

00:43:08.884 --> 00:43:09.904

forward the scheme.

689

00:43:14.984 --> 00:43:18.784

In addition, the proposed location is appropriate for large-scale solar because of

690

00:43:18.824 --> 00:43:22.404

the existence of grid infrastructure with the capacity available to

691

00:43:22.444 --> 00:43:26.224

transmit the low carbon energy generated by the scheme to

692

00:43:26.264 --> 00:43:29.844

local and national customers in time frames compatible with the government's aims,

693

00:43:30.204 --> 00:43:34.084

coupled with sufficient solar irradiance and a suitable area of secured

694

00:43:34.124 --> 00:43:36.684

land for the proposed solar and BESS.

695

00:43:38.324 --> 00:43:41.184  
Now, just turning to the size and scale.

696  
00:43:41.384 --> 00:43:44.844  
Again, I'll reference the applicant's statement of need at section 2.9, which

697  
00:43:44.864 --> 00:43:48.564  
describes the government's clean power capacity ranges, which

698  
00:43:48.664 --> 00:43:52.044  
demonstrate that an unprecedented new capacity of all low carbon

699  
00:43:52.404 --> 00:43:56.244  
generation technologies urgently required to achieve the government's aim to

700  
00:43:56.484 --> 00:44:00.104  
deliver a clean power system by 2030 and keep it clean thereafter.

701  
00:44:01.004 --> 00:44:04.904  
Therefore, the potential for new capacities of other technologies in this

702  
00:44:04.984 --> 00:44:08.744  
or other locations cannot be considered as alternative approaches to deliver

703  
00:44:08.784 --> 00:44:12.604  
carbon reductions, because any such capacities are also likely to be needed.

704  
00:44:13.464 --> 00:44:17.264  
The applicant is a solar developer and therefore the scheme is

705  
00:44:17.304 --> 00:44:19.124  
therefore a large-scale solar scheme.

706  
00:44:20.564 --> 00:44:24.534  
The scale of the scheme has been carefully considered, balancing the need to

707

00:44:24.604 --> 00:44:28.424  
maximize the grid capacity in line with government policy, whilst

708

00:44:28.504 --> 00:44:32.064  
also making the most efficient use of the land and avoiding impacts.

709

00:44:32.944 --> 00:44:35.754  
And as I've referenced, the planning statement and statement of  
need, which are

710

00:44:35.804 --> 00:44:39.364  
document reference APP043 and 042

711

00:44:39.404 --> 00:44:43.204  
respectively, set out the justification for the scheme and its  
proposed scale

712

00:44:43.524 --> 00:44:47.104  
within the context of that urgent and clear national need for low  
carbon

713

00:44:47.844 --> 00:44:51.644  
energy generation. And to maintain flexibility in the design and

714

00:44:51.684 --> 00:44:55.264  
layout at this stage in the process, and to ensure the maximum  
effects

715

00:44:55.624 --> 00:44:58.753  
are assessed in the environmental impact assessment and considered  
by the Secretary

716

00:44:58.784 --> 00:45:02.704  
of State, the scheme has adopted the commonly practiced Rochdale

717

00:45:02.724 --> 00:45:06.714  
envelope approach, which involves specifying parameter ranges,

718

00:45:06.744 --> 00:45:10.033  
including details of the maximum and, where relevant, minimum size,

719

00:45:11.024 --> 00:45:14.634

footprint, technology, and locations of the different elements of the scheme where

720

00:45:14.704 --> 00:45:18.324  
flexibility needs to be retained.

721

00:45:18.384 --> 00:45:22.264  
Cumulative impacts were mentioned this morning and indeed again this

722

00:45:22.364 --> 00:45:26.304  
afternoon. Again, I note that's a topic specifically

723

00:45:26.384 --> 00:45:30.144  
for tomorrow's issue-specific hearing, and no doubt it will be

724

00:45:30.164 --> 00:45:33.604  
discussed in detail there. But just to say on that matter, the

725

00:45:33.644 --> 00:45:37.144  
assessment of cumulative effects by the applicant has been undertaken in line

726

00:45:37.204 --> 00:45:40.544  
with the requirements of the EIA regulations and the Planning

727

00:45:40.584 --> 00:45:43.184  
Inspectorate's advice note on cumulative effects assessment.

728

00:45:43.864 --> 00:45:47.784  
That approach to cumulative assessment is detailed in ES chapter two, which

729

00:45:47.824 --> 00:45:51.284  
is reference APP051, and also ES

730

00:45:51.364 --> 00:45:54.584  
appendix 2.4, which is APP136.

731

00:45:55.084 --> 00:45:58.864  
Cumulative effects within each of the technical topic chapters have been undertaken

732

00:45:58.904 --> 00:46:02.884

in accordance with the relevant topic-specific guidance and best practice

733

00:46:02.924 --> 00:46:06.444

approach, assessing a reasonable worst-case scenario.

734

00:46:06.524 --> 00:46:10.184

And the scheme adopts a mitigation hierarchy to minimize

735

00:46:10.224 --> 00:46:13.144

cumulative impacts as far as reasonably practical.

736

00:46:13.844 --> 00:46:17.764

Through site evaluation and iterative design, sensitive environmental

737

00:46:17.804 --> 00:46:21.584

receptors are avoided as much as possible, reducing the potential

738

00:46:21.624 --> 00:46:24.074

for in-combination effects with other developments.

739

00:46:24.564 --> 00:46:28.284

And this approach is reinforced by embedding mitigation directly into the scheme,

740

00:46:29.104 --> 00:46:32.544

including the strategic positioning of infrastructure away from the receptors,

741

00:46:33.704 --> 00:46:37.644

layouts being used to inform the limit of use of grades one

742

00:46:37.664 --> 00:46:40.914

and two agricultural land, and the incorporation of buffers and green

743

00:46:41.004 --> 00:46:44.844

infrastructure. And that appendix 2.4 that I referenced presents the

744

00:46:44.884 --> 00:46:48.824  
methodology for selecting the cumulative schemes, as well as  
presenting the schemes

745  
00:46:48.864 --> 00:46:52.184  
considered for assessment as part of that cumulative effects  
assessment within the

746  
00:46:52.224 --> 00:46:56.064  
environmental statement. Table 2.3 of that appendix contains the

747  
00:46:56.104 --> 00:46:59.704  
details of the selected schemes, which includes high gross solar, as  
has been

748  
00:46:59.744 --> 00:47:03.584  
mentioned several times. All cumulative schemes have been considered  
as

749  
00:47:03.624 --> 00:47:07.013  
relevant and appropriate in the technical chapters of the ES and

750  
00:47:07.024 --> 00:47:10.954  
developments, as was touched on earlier, that are built out and  
operational and

751  
00:47:10.954 --> 00:47:14.144  
not considered as part of the cumulative assessment in line with the  
methodology

752  
00:47:14.164 --> 00:47:18.014  
presented, because they form part of the existing baseline against

753  
00:47:18.044 --> 00:47:21.024  
which the effects of the scheme in isolation have been assessed.

754  
00:47:21.054 --> 00:47:21.324  
And

755  
00:47:22.464 --> 00:47:26.424  
just lastly on cumulatives, the Gnar Valley and the sensitive  
receptors

756

00:47:26.464 --> 00:47:30.364

within the Gnar Valley have been identified and assessed as part of that assessment

757

00:47:30.424 --> 00:47:34.254

in ES chapter six, which is the landscape and visual chapter,

758

00:47:34.444 --> 00:47:38.204

document reference AS-016, and also in the

759

00:47:38.264 --> 00:47:42.144

heritage ES chapter, which is chapter eight, and that's APP057.

760

00:47:42.544 --> 00:47:46.284

And those chapters and associated documents therewith conclude

761

00:47:46.344 --> 00:47:50.144

that with embedded and additional mitigation measures in place, there are

762

00:47:50.324 --> 00:47:54.264

no significant EIA residual adverse effects for landscape

763

00:47:54.284 --> 00:47:57.694

and visual, and all residual adverse effects for heritage

764

00:47:57.804 --> 00:47:59.644

constitute less than substantial harm.

765

00:48:03.344 --> 00:48:07.294

I'll move now to stone curlew and Eurasian curlew, which was

766

00:48:07.324 --> 00:48:11.204

referenced earlier. So potential impacts on ground-nesting birds,

767

00:48:11.324 --> 00:48:14.634

including curlew, are fully assessed in ES chapter seven, which is

768

00:48:14.664 --> 00:48:18.024

ecology and biodiversity, and that concludes that following the

769

00:48:18.064 --> 00:48:21.764

implementation of the embedded mitigation, for example, clearance of

770

00:48:21.824 --> 00:48:25.584

potential bird nesting habitat outside of bird nesting season and the

771

00:48:25.624 --> 00:48:29.484

additional mitigation proposed, there will be no adverse likely significant

772

00:48:29.524 --> 00:48:33.244

effects, and indeed, no offense under the legislation

773

00:48:33.344 --> 00:48:37.024

required for this species. A ground-nesting bird strategy has been prepared to

774

00:48:37.084 --> 00:48:40.044

fully mitigate potential impacts for these species.

775

00:48:40.204 --> 00:48:43.753

That's EX appendixAppendix 7.3, which is the proposed

776

00:48:44.124 --> 00:48:48.004

mitigation strategy for ground nesting birds requiring open habitats, document

777

00:48:48.044 --> 00:48:52.024

reference APP149, and that identifies measures and habitat provision

778

00:48:52.064 --> 00:48:55.864

to address potential impacts on these species, including the

779

00:48:55.884 --> 00:48:59.324

Eurasian curlew, which was mentioned earlier, with such use dependent on the

780

00:48:59.344 --> 00:49:02.844

presence and specific location of suitable cropping, which, as touched upon, would

781

00:49:02.884 --> 00:49:06.784

vary from year to year. So as such, the scheme will not result in the loss

782

00:49:06.844 --> 00:49:10.044

of significant areas of habitat used by this species.

783

00:49:10.864 --> 00:49:14.604

To ensure that sensitive ecological receptors are protected through the

784

00:49:14.624 --> 00:49:18.484

construction of the scheme, measures to be adhered to by the applicant are set

785

00:49:18.564 --> 00:49:22.384

out within the outline construction environmental management plan, and those

786

00:49:22.404 --> 00:49:26.164

include, but are not limited to, measures to control noise, light, and

787

00:49:26.184 --> 00:49:28.704

pollution, all of which were touched on earlier.

788

00:49:29.224 --> 00:49:32.833

The design principles adopted by the applicant also seek to retain and

789

00:49:32.884 --> 00:49:36.444

enhance the connectivity of habitat through hedgerow planting, for

790

00:49:36.484 --> 00:49:40.174

example, alongside the retention and enhancement of mile

791

00:49:40.264 --> 00:49:44.064

pits, ponds, and large areas of curlew and skylark mitigation

792

00:49:44.124 --> 00:49:48.024

land, which is all secured in the outline landscape and ecological management

793

00:49:48.104 --> 00:49:51.764

plan. New habitat creation will include grassland, scrub,

794

00:49:51.954 --> 00:49:53.704

and attenuation features as well.

795

00:49:55.004 --> 00:49:58.984

Turning to SSIS, so Sites of Special Scientific Interest,

796

00:49:59.364 --> 00:50:03.074

a full assessment of potential impacts to those sites and  
irreplaceable

797

00:50:03.104 --> 00:50:07.044

habitats has been undertaken in sections 7.7 and 7.8

798

00:50:07.584 --> 00:50:10.864

of chapter seven of the ES, which is the ecology and biodiversity  
chapter.

799

00:50:11.244 --> 00:50:14.184

And again, that concludes that following the implementation of the  
embedded

800

00:50:14.244 --> 00:50:17.924

mitigation and additional mitigation proposed, there will be no  
adverse

801

00:50:18.004 --> 00:50:19.224

likely significant effects.

802

00:50:20.104 --> 00:50:23.744

Embedded mitigation measures to safeguard the River Nare, such as

803

00:50:23.784 --> 00:50:27.664

specific measures to stop spillages entering the watercourse, are  
secured through

804

00:50:27.724 --> 00:50:31.674

the outline construction environmental management plan, the outline  
operational

805

00:50:31.824 --> 00:50:34.804

environmental management plan, and the outline decommissioning strategy.

806

00:50:34.844 --> 00:50:38.774

And all of those outline management plans that I'm referencing are secured by

807

00:50:38.804 --> 00:50:42.024

the corresponding requirements in Schedule 2 of the draft DC0.

808

00:50:43.424 --> 00:50:47.304

Impacts of the scheme on priority habitats and species have been fully considered

809

00:50:47.324 --> 00:50:51.264

within Section 7.8 of the same ES, chapter seven, which

810

00:50:51.324 --> 00:50:54.464

again concludes that following the implementation of those mitigation measures I've

811

00:50:54.504 --> 00:50:56.944

touched upon, there will be no likely adverse

812

00:50:58.164 --> 00:51:02.073

significant effects. And I would also note that the level of survey work undertaken

813

00:51:02.104 --> 00:51:06.064

at the site in relation to curlew has been accepted by the statutory

814

00:51:06.124 --> 00:51:09.984

body, being Natural England, who state in their relevant representation,

815

00:51:10.064 --> 00:51:13.624

and I'll just quote here, "We concur with the conclusion of the Shadow Habitats

816

00:51:13.684 --> 00:51:17.164

Regulations Assessment that likely significant effects on European sites can be

817

00:51:17.204 --> 00:51:21.144

ruled out either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and that

818

00:51:21.204 --> 00:51:25.184

there is therefore no need to progress to a stage two appropriate assessment."

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00:51:25.264 --> 00:51:29.204

So given that conclusion, the applicant is confident that further survey work

820

00:51:29.244 --> 00:51:32.584

is no longer required. Heritage

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00:51:32.744 --> 00:51:36.454

impacts were also touched upon, so I'll just address those

822

00:51:36.484 --> 00:51:40.224

briefly now. The impact of the scheme on heritage

823

00:51:40.264 --> 00:51:44.104

receptors within the Nare Valley and Castle Acre have been assessed from a

824

00:51:44.114 --> 00:51:47.284

heritage perspective in the corresponding ES chapter, which is chapter eight.

825

00:51:48.544 --> 00:51:52.534

Castle Acre Conservation Area, South Acre Conservation Area, Castle Acre

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00:51:52.564 --> 00:51:56.454

Castle, Castle Acre Priory, Church of St. George, and the Church of St.

827

00:51:56.644 --> 00:52:00.484

James have all been assessed as sensitive receptors in that area,

828

00:52:00.504 --> 00:52:04.264

and no significant effects as a result of the scheme have been concluded in

829

00:52:04.304 --> 00:52:06.964

accordance with the methodology adopted for those receptors.

830

00:52:07.604 --> 00:52:11.524

The same chapter concludes that with embedded and additional measures in place,

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00:52:11.624 --> 00:52:15.044

there are no significant, in EIA terms, residual adverse

832

00:52:15.084 --> 00:52:19.034

effects. The chapter outlines that substantial harm is afforded

833

00:52:19.084 --> 00:52:23.004

to any adverse effect that is of a major magnitude, whilst

834

00:52:23.384 --> 00:52:27.324

moderate, minor, or negligible adverse effects represent effects that are less than

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00:52:27.384 --> 00:52:30.544

substantial harm in nature. However, as I've said, there's no

836

00:52:30.884 --> 00:52:34.844

anticipated substantial harm or total loss of any designated

837

00:52:34.864 --> 00:52:37.724

heritage asset significance as a result of the scheme.

838

00:52:38.464 --> 00:52:42.084

Therefore, all of those residual adverse effects constitute less than substantial

839

00:52:42.144 --> 00:52:45.774

harm, and those residual effects would be temporary and

840

00:52:45.784 --> 00:52:49.774

reversible. So after decommissioning, several impacts on

841

00:52:49.804 --> 00:52:53.564

designated heritage assets resulting from the operational phase of the scheme would

842

00:52:53.604 --> 00:52:57.584

be reversed, specifically the removal of solar arrays and the

843

00:52:57.624 --> 00:53:00.584

possibility of returning the land to an agricultural function.

844

00:53:00.944 --> 00:53:04.424

The exception to that is the grid connection infrastructure and National Grid

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00:53:04.764 --> 00:53:08.624

substation, both of which will remain extant and not be decommissioned.

846

00:53:08.764 --> 00:53:12.104

But as assessed, the continued use of those elements of the

847

00:53:12.124 --> 00:53:15.834

scheme will not cause any additional impacts to those identified during

848

00:53:15.864 --> 00:53:19.624

the operational phase. So turning to the planning balance, the

849

00:53:19.684 --> 00:53:23.464

scheme is not likely to result in any significant effects on cultural heritage, and

850

00:53:23.484 --> 00:53:27.304

the scheme's design development has sensitively considered the

851

00:53:27.364 --> 00:53:31.104

key heritage and archaeological receptors throughout, and appropriate mitigation

852

00:53:31.124 --> 00:53:33.164

measures are embedded into the scheme's design.

853

00:53:33.213 --> 00:53:37.064

So by implementing good design at the early stages of the process, the

854

00:53:37.124 --> 00:53:40.404

scheme has avoided and minimized conflict with designated and

855

00:53:40.764 --> 00:53:42.844

non-designated heritage assets.

856

00:53:43.404 --> 00:53:46.684

Through the implementation of those mitigation measures that I've touched upon, all

857

00:53:46.724 --> 00:53:50.324

residual effects are assessed as being not significant and therefore equate

858

00:53:50.364 --> 00:53:53.964

to no more than less than substantial harm on all those assets

859

00:53:54.044 --> 00:53:56.964

impacted by the scheme, and that's in accordance with paragraph

860

00:53:57.204 --> 00:54:01.104

5.9.32 of NPS EN1 2023 and

861

00:54:01.184 --> 00:54:04.783

paragraph 209 of the National Planning Policy Framework, respectively.

862

00:54:06.664 --> 00:54:10.014

In accordance with that National Planning Policy Statement, EN1,

863

00:54:11.564 --> 00:54:15.464

the substantial public benefits and need for the scheme, as set out in

864

00:54:15.484 --> 00:54:19.094

sections three and six of the planning statement, including the

delivery of

865

00:54:19.184 --> 00:54:22.903

critical national priority infrastructure to contribute towards meeting

866

00:54:23.304 --> 00:54:26.884

national energy security objectives and carbon reduction commitments, which I've

867

00:54:26.924 --> 00:54:30.784

touched upon earlier, clearly and demonstrably outweigh the less than substantial

868

00:54:30.844 --> 00:54:34.764

harm to designated heritage assets, particularly so as the policy

869

00:54:34.784 --> 00:54:37.284

tests relating to substantial harm are not triggered.

870

00:54:37.364 --> 00:54:41.254

So overall, it's comfortably the applicant's position that the scheme complies with

871

00:54:41.264 --> 00:54:44.104

the relevant policies in relation to the historic environment, and

872

00:54:45.404 --> 00:54:47.764

no residual significant effects are anticipated.

873

00:54:47.844 --> 00:54:51.604

So it's therefore considered that the historic environment should be given neutral

874

00:54:51.664 --> 00:54:55.544

weight in the planning balance. Just a couple of

875

00:54:55.564 --> 00:54:59.114

further topics to touch upon. Food production was

876

00:54:59.144 --> 00:55:02.494

mentioned, so looking at impacts from the scheme directly,

877

00:55:02.824 --> 00:55:05.174  
chapter 11 of the environmental

878

00:55:06.184 --> 00:55:09.244  
statement, which is soils and agriculture, document reference

879

00:55:09.384 --> 00:55:12.894  
AS018 concludes that, again, with embedded and additional

880

00:55:13.244 --> 00:55:17.024  
mitigation measures in place, the scheme itself will not result in  
any

881

00:55:17.064 --> 00:55:21.044  
significant adverse effects on soil or agricultural land resources  
throughout

882

00:55:21.424 --> 00:55:24.864  
its life cycle. There will be some permanent land take, as I touched  
upon,

883

00:55:24.884 --> 00:55:28.693  
associated with the National Grid substation and Grid connection  
infrastructure,

884

00:55:29.104 --> 00:55:32.784  
but this will amount to less than five hectares of BMV land,

885

00:55:33.184 --> 00:55:37.134  
as set out in table 11-7 of chapter 11 of the environmental

886

00:55:37.164 --> 00:55:41.154  
statement. And that same chapter concludes that the implications of  
the change from

887

00:55:41.184 --> 00:55:44.934  
current farming practices will have minor or negligible effects

888

00:55:45.364 --> 00:55:48.864  
on the local and national landscape-based economy and food  
production.

889

00:55:50.684 --> 00:55:54.084

Peddars Way was also mentioned. So mitigation measures have been

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00:55:54.124 --> 00:55:58.104

embedded within the scheme's design to limit potentially adverse effects

891

00:55:58.144 --> 00:56:01.884

on the landscape and visual amenity, including measures to respond to the

892

00:56:01.904 --> 00:56:04.984

impacts on the Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path.

893

00:56:05.544 --> 00:56:09.344

Such measures include offsets to new development areas from Peddars Way

894

00:56:09.404 --> 00:56:13.184

and that Norfolk Coast Path, retention of existing landscape features within the

895

00:56:13.204 --> 00:56:16.684

Ord limits, and also extensive new hedgerow, tree, and woodland

896

00:56:16.744 --> 00:56:18.604

planting throughout the site for the scheme.

897

00:56:19.414 --> 00:56:23.324

Potential visual effects of the scheme on the public right of way users

898

00:56:23.384 --> 00:56:26.964

of that Peddars Way and the Coastal Path have been assessed in

899

00:56:27.004 --> 00:56:30.604

ES chapter six, which is the landscape and visual chapter, with reference to

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00:56:30.644 --> 00:56:34.434

viewpoint locations, supporting photography, and visualization

situated

901

00:56:34.484 --> 00:56:37.924

along those public rights of way and also within Castle Acre.

902

00:56:37.954 --> 00:56:41.324

And that assessment concludes that there would be no potential long-term

903

00:56:41.384 --> 00:56:45.294

significant adverse visual effects upon visual receptors within the site and

904

00:56:45.324 --> 00:56:47.364

the wider landscape and visual study area.

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00:56:48.884 --> 00:56:51.984

I know that there are some other points that have been responded to, including

906

00:56:52.044 --> 00:56:55.784

tourism, traffic and transport, dark skies, and noise.

907

00:56:55.824 --> 00:56:59.004

Just on tourism, I would touch on the fact that the scheme is not anticipated to

908

00:56:59.044 --> 00:57:02.304

result in any residual adverse effects on socioeconomic

909

00:57:02.364 --> 00:57:05.004

receptors across all of the scheme's phases.

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00:57:05.333 --> 00:57:08.964

And indeed, there's a significant beneficial effect anticipated on the provision

911

00:57:09.024 --> 00:57:12.964

of education skills training and supply chain as a result of

912

00:57:13.024 --> 00:57:16.444

those phases. Um- The traffic and transport

913

00:57:18.644 --> 00:57:19.084  
measures-

914

00:57:19.624 --> 00:57:21.264  
Could we be respectful, please-

915

00:57:21.304 --> 00:57:21.373  
Thank you

916

00:57:21.384 --> 00:57:22.404  
... of the response?

917

00:57:22.604 --> 00:57:26.224  
Sorry, I'm nearly finished. The traffic and transport measures touched upon, are

918

00:57:26.284 --> 00:57:30.184  
secured in the outline construction traffic management plan, which has to

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00:57:30.224 --> 00:57:33.784  
be adhered to by the applicant in accordance with the corresponding requirement of

920

00:57:33.804 --> 00:57:37.564  
Schedule 2 of the DC0, and that it will include cumulative impact on traffic and

921

00:57:37.624 --> 00:57:38.924  
transport measures as well.

922

00:57:40.344 --> 00:57:41.544  
That's all I'll say on those matters.

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00:57:41.604 --> 00:57:45.084  
As I want to reiterate, we will respond to everything in full in writing.

924

00:57:46.284 --> 00:57:49.884  
And we, as I say, are very grateful to everyone coming out today and

925

00:57:50.364 --> 00:57:54.174

raising your concerns. Ongoing engagement is always welcome by the applicant, and

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00:57:54.204 --> 00:57:57.424

we look forward to doing that during the examination. Thank you.

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00:58:02.924 --> 00:58:03.344

Thank you.

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00:58:04.164 --> 00:58:06.904

I'll now move on to item six to close the meeting.

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00:58:07.864 --> 00:58:11.774

I'd like to thank you all for your contributions and to remind you again that

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00:58:11.784 --> 00:58:15.544

the evidence presented orally today should be included in post-hearing

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00:58:15.624 --> 00:58:19.504

submissions and submitted at procedural deadline one, which

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00:58:19.564 --> 00:58:21.544

is Tuesday the 2nd of June.

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00:58:22.704 --> 00:58:26.234

The digital recording of the proceedings today will be made available as soon as

934

00:58:26.244 --> 00:58:29.964

possible on the Drove Solar Farm page of the Planning Inspectorate's

935

00:58:30.064 --> 00:58:32.624

National Infrastructure website.

936

00:58:32.634 --> 00:58:36.504

The time is now 14:58, and I draw this hearing

937

00:58:36.514 --> 00:58:37.754

to a close. Thank you.