

Castle Acre Parish Council, Castle Acre, Norfolk, Drovers Solar Farm (NSIP) application, Swaffham, Norfolk

Dear Inspector.

Application by The Drovers Solar Farm Ltd. Ref EN0110013

At the end of ISSUE SPECIFIC HEARING 1, 7th May 2026 within a list of Action Points was the below:

No 13. Party: **Applicant**. Agenda Item 3.5 & 3.6 – engage with parish councils including subject of community benefit, by Deadline 1

At this point in proceedings, regardless of the need to engage with the applicant (including the subject of community benefit) Castle Acre Parish Council (CAPC) (also representing some residents of South Acre) wish to reaffirm their position in relation to this application by The Drovers Solar Farm Ltd. We continue to strongly object to the proposed site for this Solar Farm, offering the many reasons we have already stated in our original representations, it is just ‘the wrong site’ for such an industrial development which cannot be justified. In addition, surely the lack of a confirmed grid connection point and substation location represents a fundamental deficiency in the application which makes it premature.

Without clarity as to where and how the development will connect to the transmission network, how can it be possible to:

- accurately assess environmental effects;
- justify compulsory acquisition; or
- conclude that the development is indeed deliverable.

Surely this uncertainty weighs significantly against the grant of development consent and provides a further and independent basis upon which the application should be refused.

Since ISSUE SPECIFIC HEARING 1, I, Chair of CAPC have received an email from The Drovers Solar Farm Team 21st May 2026, excerpts below:

“I just wanted to reach out following the Issue Specific Hearing 1 and note your comments regarding communication with our team”.

“ We wanted to confirm that we remain very happy to discuss community benefits with you, both during the Examination period and beyond”.

“If there is anything either of us can help with or clarify, please do let us know. Likewise, if there is anything you would like to discuss directly with IGP, we would be happy to facilitate this”.

On behalf of the Drovers Solar Farm Team

I responded to this on 27th May 2026

“Thank you for your email. I am currently away so a proper response at this point will be difficult. I will email again once I am home on Friday.

What I would like to see is some meaningful engagement with IGP regarding community benefit if The Drovers project is to get consent. In the first instance we need to have an

agreed process for all affected communities and IGP to work to, moving this forward please. RWE (High Grove) already have some proposals for the life of their potential project and have confirmed Castle Acres inclusion.

My email to you, dated 7th July 2025 was never responded to, which was a disappointment.

Initially, I have some obvious questions for IGP:

Are we agreed the communities affected are Swaffham, Castle Acre, South Acre, West Acre, Sporle, Palgrave, Narford?

What level of funding might they be thinking of for the affected communities?

Are you thinking funding over 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years?

Are you happy to give any funds directly to the communities or via a third-party charitable trust?

What type of projects are IGP interested in being associated with as part of this funding?

May I suggest a meeting in addition to the PI process to gain an outline of a Community Funding model that would work for all parties..

I look forward to progressing this”.

Many thanks and kind regards

Chair, Castle Acre Parish Council.

At the time of writing, 1st June 2026, I have had no response.

We would also like to comment on the below ExQ1

Q1.0.2 **The applicant.** Community Benefit. With reference to the Consultation Report [APP-025], Table 22 states: “Throughout the pre-application process, the Applicant has consulted on community benefits and, based on feedback and ongoing discussions, will determine how best to distribute funding.” Could the applicant clarify what community benefits are proposed and how these would be secured?

CAPC. Question if we may please. This has currently not happened; we have not had any meaningful discussions regarding community benefit. Are we still able, and would it be appropriate to apply for a Statement of Common Ground between local affected Communities and the applicant to cover community benefits ensuring progress on this matter is achieved and is embedded into any agreement?

Q3.0.2 **The applicant.** Natural England Sufficiency of Bird Surveys. CAPC [RR-013] is concerned that the bird surveys submitted are ‘insufficiently’ comprehensive to provide confidence that all protected and red-listed species which have previously been recorded on the proposed site and in the surrounding area have been fully identified. Could the applicant and Natural England comment on the above concern. **CAPC. Just to confirm this is specifically in relation to Stone Curlew, not Eurasian Curlew as there seems to be confusion. Can we please also ask why current planned mitigation areas are so close to major infrastructure sites potentially reducing their viability as mitigation?**

Q3.0.11 **The applicant Natural England.** Deer presence and activity. Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council's (PC) RR [RR-054] includes concerns that despite the PC's request in its response to the statutory consultation, no survey of deer numbers has been undertaken, nor a deer management plan undertaken with surrounding landowners and the High Groves development. Could the applicant and Natural England comment on the above concern. **CAPC. Could we suggest Fields 20, 21, 25 and 26 are removed from the development area and used as mitigation only? There would be a number of benefits gained by removing these fields.**

1 An important buffer would be created between the A1065 and the first enclosed industrial areas of panels to the west, (fields 19, 22 and 24) reducing the risk of Deer being forced through narrow corridors across the A1065, (**ref:** PEIR Masterplan Strategies, PEIR Fencing Strategy DWG No 9485 0272) endangering both Deer and motorists alike.

2 By removing development from these fields the impact on the Heritage village of Castle Acre could be reduced as one approaches from the South, travelling north on the A1065.

3 By removing development from these fields 20, 21, 25 and 26 the impact, on the overall historic landscape, visual and amenity, would also be potentially reduced.

Thank you.



Chair, Castle Acre Parish Council