Planning Inspectorate
Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

Hearing Transcript

Project:	EN0110013 - The Droves Solar Farm
Hearing:	Open Floor Hearing 2 (OFH2)
Date:	09 September 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.

1
00:00:00,040 --> 00:00:03,600
Good afternoon. It's now 4:00 and time for this hearing to

2
00:00:03,680 --> 00:00:04,060
begin.

3
00:00:05,420 --> 00:00:08,920
I'd like to welcome you all to this open floor hearing for the Drove Solar Farm

4
00:00:08,980 --> 00:00:12,160
project. Can I just confirm that everyone can hear me clearly?

5
00:00:13,040 --> 00:00:16,060
Yep. Thank you. And online as well?

6
00:00:18,180 --> 00:00:19,920
If you could raise your hand if you could hear me.

7
00:00:21,020 --> 00:00:21,400
Thank you.

8
00:00:22,800 --> 00:00:26,680
Can I also confirm with the case team that the live streaming and recording of this

9
00:00:26,720 --> 00:00:30,400
event has commenced? Thank you. My name is

10
00:00:30,440 --> 00:00:34,129
Anthony Johnson. I'm a chartered civil engineer, and I've been appointed by the

11
00:00:34,220 --> 00:00:37,780
Secretary of State as the single examining inspector to

12
00:00:37,840 --> 00:00:39,120
examine this application.

13
00:00:40,460 --> 00:00:43,430
You'll also hear me referred to as the examining authority.

14
00:00:44,300 --> 00:00:46,310
Case manager is Sarah Norris, who's being

15
00:00:48,280 --> 00:00:52,140
supported here today by Rachel Owen, James Ledham, and Tim Hole are

16
00:00:52,180 --> 00:00:54,200
providing support remotely.

17
00:00:55,140 --> 00:00:58,480
I'll now deal with a few housekeeping matters for those attending in person.

18
00:00:58,660 --> 00:01:02,040
Can everyone please set their devices and phones to silent?

19
00:01:02,640 --> 00:01:06,540
The toilets are located at the front of the room towards the entrance.

20
00:01:06,720 --> 00:01:10,420
There is no fire alarm drill scheduled today, so should the fire alarm

21
00:01:10,460 --> 00:01:14,280
sound, please treat it as real. The nearest fire exits are at the back

22
00:01:14,420 --> 00:01:18,150
and front of this room. The fire assembly point is in the rear car

23
00:01:18,200 --> 00:01:19,760
park on the right-hand side.

24
00:01:20,660 --> 00:01:22,460
Please wait there for further instruction.

25
00:01:23,560 --> 00:01:27,100
A short break will be taken around 5:30 if the hearing is not

26

00:01:27,160 --> 00:01:29,100
concluded by that time.

27
00:01:32,580 --> 00:01:36,080
In terms of the agenda and logistics, this meeting will follow the agenda published

28
00:01:36,140 --> 00:01:39,960
on the National Infrastructure Planning website on the 26th of August

29
00:01:40,160 --> 00:01:42,900
2026, examination library reference

30
00:01:43,040 --> 00:01:45,140
EV2-005.

31
00:01:46,000 --> 00:01:49,100
It'd be helpful if you had a copy of this in front of you.

32
00:01:50,880 --> 00:01:54,540
Today, I will hear the representations of interested parties who have registered to

33
00:01:54,580 --> 00:01:57,680
make oral representations elaborating on their written

34
00:01:57,840 --> 00:01:59,260
representation to date.

35
00:02:00,280 --> 00:02:04,000
I will conclude the hearing as soon as all relevant contributions have been made

36
00:02:04,060 --> 00:02:07,820
and any questions asked and responded to.

37
00:02:08,600 --> 00:02:11,700
Today's hearing is being undertaken in a hybrid or blended way,

38
00:02:12,660 --> 00:02:16,420
meaning some of you are present with us at the hearing venue, and

some of you are

39
00:02:16,460 --> 00:02:19,600
joining us virtually using Microsoft Teams.

40
00:02:20,600 --> 00:02:24,220
I will make sure that however you've decided to attend today, you will be given a

41
00:02:24,240 --> 00:02:26,420
fair opportunity to participate.

42
00:02:27,549 --> 00:02:30,680
A recording of today's hearing will be made available on the Drove Solar Farm

43
00:02:30,760 --> 00:02:34,640
section of the National Infrastructure Planning website as soon as practicable

44
00:02:34,740 --> 00:02:36,120
after the hearing has finished.

45
00:02:37,340 --> 00:02:40,580
With this in mind, please ensure that you speak clearly into your microphone,

46
00:02:40,760 --> 00:02:41,620
stating your name

47
00:02:43,320 --> 00:02:45,980
and who you are representing each time before you speak.

48
00:02:46,300 --> 00:02:49,460
To use the microphones, just press the button once until it turns

49
00:02:49,480 --> 00:02:53,300
green, and when you've finished

50
00:02:53,360 --> 00:02:55,740
speaking, press it again, so it turns red.

51
00:02:56,400 --> 00:02:59,829
If you're not at a table with a microphone, there is a roving

52
00:02:59,900 --> 00:03:03,840
microphone, so please wait for one of these to be brought to you before you speak.

53
00:03:05,740 --> 00:03:09,580
If any individual or group wishes to use social media, report,

54
00:03:09,700 --> 00:03:13,640
film, or record during today's or any subsequent hearing, then they are free

55
00:03:13,720 --> 00:03:14,200
to do so.

56
00:03:15,000 --> 00:03:18,500
But please do so responsibly and with proper consideration for other

57
00:03:18,560 --> 00:03:21,900
parties. This must not be disruptive,

58
00:03:22,560 --> 00:03:25,040
and the material must not be misused.

59
00:03:25,080 --> 00:03:29,020
The definitive recording is the one that is being made by the audiovisual company

60
00:03:29,040 --> 00:03:32,640
and will be published on the National Infrastructure Planning website.

61
00:03:33,300 --> 00:03:35,440
Does anyone have any questions on this matter?

62
00:03:41,660 --> 00:03:44,400
If you do have any concerns, please contact the case team.

63
00:03:46,060 --> 00:03:49,180

A link to the Planning Inspectorate's privacy notice was provided in the

64
00:03:49,240 --> 00:03:51,299
notification for this hearing, reference

65
00:03:51,420 --> 00:03:54,220
PD-010, dated

66
00:03:55,680 --> 00:03:58,000
3rd of July 2026.

67
00:03:59,600 --> 00:04:03,170
I assume that everyone here today has familiarized themselves with this document,

68
00:04:03,280 --> 00:04:07,160
which establishes how the personal data of our customers is handled in

69
00:04:07,200 --> 00:04:10,480
accordance with the principles set out in data protection laws.

70
00:04:11,380 --> 00:04:14,680
Please speak to Sarah Norris if you have any questions about this.

71
00:04:19,780 --> 00:04:21,959
I'll now move on to agenda item two,

72
00:04:23,620 --> 00:04:27,600
the purpose of the hearing. Let me briefly explain the purpose of this open

73
00:04:27,680 --> 00:04:28,190
floor hearing.

74
00:04:30,340 --> 00:04:34,000
Open floor hearings are your opportunity to raise anything directly to the

75
00:04:34,040 --> 00:04:37,940
examining authority that is important and relevant and that you

think

76
00:04:38,060 --> 00:04:41,580
I should know about and consider. They are not about a particular

77
00:04:41,620 --> 00:04:45,600
location or topic. The topic of your representation about the proposals

78
00:04:45,660 --> 00:04:47,140
is therefore up to yourselves.

79
00:04:49,280 --> 00:04:53,040
However, may I remind everyone that oral submissions should be based on

80
00:04:53,080 --> 00:04:56,880
representations previously made in writing by the particular

81
00:04:56,900 --> 00:05:00,580
participant. Having said that, representations should not

82
00:05:00,600 --> 00:05:04,190
simply repeat matters previously covered in a written submission,

83
00:05:04,680 --> 00:05:08,469
but rather provide further detail, explanation, and

84
00:05:08,560 --> 00:05:12,000
evidential corroboration to help inform the examining

85
00:05:12,020 --> 00:05:12,640
authority.

86
00:05:15,600 --> 00:05:18,740
Additionally, I may refuse to hear evidence which is, in my view,

87
00:05:19,300 --> 00:05:21,200
irrelevant, vexatious, or frivolous,

88
00:05:22,320 --> 00:05:26,180

relates to the merits of a national policy statement, repeats other

89
00:05:26,220 --> 00:05:29,420
representations already made, or relates to

90
00:05:29,460 --> 00:05:33,020
compensation for compulsory acquisition of land or an

91
00:05:33,140 --> 00:05:34,880
interest in or over land.

92
00:05:37,480 --> 00:05:41,200
Additionally, I may request any person behaving in a disruptive manner to leave the

93
00:05:41,240 --> 00:05:45,100
hearing or to remain only if that person complies with

94
00:05:45,140 --> 00:05:46,460
specified conditions.

95
00:05:50,180 --> 00:05:52,580
Due to the number of parties wishing to speak today,

96
00:05:53,500 --> 00:05:56,680
I don't intend to set a strict time limit.

97
00:05:57,580 --> 00:06:01,280
But to make efficient use of the meeting, I would ask that your submissions are

98
00:06:01,320 --> 00:06:05,120
concise and to be concluded within about 10 minutes for

99
00:06:05,160 --> 00:06:08,789
individuals 15 minutes for those speaking on behalf of

100
00:06:08,820 --> 00:06:12,730
organizations, groups, or anyone representing a number of individual

101
00:06:12,840 --> 00:06:13,750

interested parties.

102
00:06:16,160 --> 00:06:17,040
Once you have spoken,

103
00:06:18,060 --> 00:06:18,760
I may wish

104
00:06:19,680 --> 00:06:21,220
to ask you questions.

105
00:06:22,700 --> 00:06:26,020
Finally, the applicant will be given an opportunity to respond to any matters

106
00:06:26,080 --> 00:06:30,060
raised once all speakers have been heard, either orally today or in

107
00:06:30,080 --> 00:06:33,210
writing by deadline four, which is Wednesday the 16th of

108
00:06:33,240 --> 00:06:35,100
September 2026.

109
00:06:40,420 --> 00:06:44,160
I'll now move on to item three to run through the list of interested parties or

110
00:06:44,240 --> 00:06:47,280
other parties who've notified me in advance they wish to speak.

111
00:06:48,240 --> 00:06:51,320
So I'll start online if I may.

112
00:06:54,040 --> 00:06:55,740
George Freeman MP.

113
00:06:59,280 --> 00:07:01,260
Thank you, Mr. Johnson, sir. Can you hear me okay?

114
00:07:01,600 --> 00:07:02,500

I can, yes. Thank you.

115
00:07:04,680 --> 00:07:06,500
Thank you for having me and for allowing me to join

116
00:07:07,620 --> 00:07:10,860
digitally. I'm sorry I can't be there with you as I would've liked to have been

117
00:07:10,899 --> 00:07:12,320
because of parliamentary business.

118
00:07:12,740 --> 00:07:12,920
Okay.

119
00:07:12,980 --> 00:07:16,360
And can I thank you and your team for the diligence with which you're

120
00:07:17,080 --> 00:07:17,700
pursuing this.

121
00:07:18,240 --> 00:07:18,550
Thank you.

122
00:07:18,600 --> 00:07:22,440
In the interest of brevity, I just wanted to confirm that I'm speaking in oral

123
00:07:22,940 --> 00:07:26,900
support of my written evidence previously submitted, and I

124
00:07:26,940 --> 00:07:30,570
will write again summarizing the arguments I'm going to make today-

125
00:07:30,780 --> 00:07:31,040
Okay

126
00:07:31,080 --> 00:07:31,919
... for you in writing.

127

00:07:33,820 --> 00:07:37,000
Sorry. It sounded like you were about to start your submission.

128
00:07:38,500 --> 00:07:42,010
This is just to confirm the running order and the people that are speaking, and

129
00:07:42,010 --> 00:07:42,130
then I'll-

130
00:07:42,280 --> 00:07:42,550
Oh, sorry

131
00:07:42,550 --> 00:07:44,680
... invite you separately in a minute to speak.

132
00:07:46,090 --> 00:07:46,500
Understood.

133
00:07:46,620 --> 00:07:47,160
Okay. Thank you.

134
00:07:48,220 --> 00:07:49,359
James Wild MP.

135
00:07:55,320 --> 00:07:57,820
Yes. Thank you, sir. I'm intending to speak.

136
00:07:58,160 --> 00:07:58,760
Okay. Thank you.

137
00:08:00,100 --> 00:08:02,160
And then in the room, Michael Bennett.

138
00:08:04,060 --> 00:08:07,260
Yes, sir. Mike Bennett from Spall Parish Council.

139
00:08:07,820 --> 00:08:09,320
Thank you. And Tim Hubbard.

140
00:08:11,400 --> 00:08:13,840

Yes, sir. I'm intending to speak. Thank you.

141
00:08:14,180 --> 00:08:15,560
And Anne Mason.

142
00:08:15,620 --> 00:08:17,880
Yes, sir. I am also intending to speak.

143
00:08:18,180 --> 00:08:22,149
Thank you. Is there anyone else either online or in the

144
00:08:22,200 --> 00:08:23,559
room? Tony Morgan, you...?

145
00:08:24,420 --> 00:08:26,780
Yeah. Tony Morgan, Castle Acre resident.

146
00:08:26,850 --> 00:08:27,720
I would also like to

147
00:08:28,580 --> 00:08:29,200
speak, please.

148
00:08:29,860 --> 00:08:30,280
Okay.

149
00:08:31,920 --> 00:08:32,060
So

150
00:08:32,980 --> 00:08:35,941
we'll follow in the same order that we've done the introductions.

151
00:08:35,980 --> 00:08:37,000
That'll be the order that

152
00:08:38,140 --> 00:08:41,920
I'll be asking you to speak. Who will be speaking for the applicant

153
00:08:41,961 --> 00:08:42,321
today?

154
00:08:43,441 --> 00:08:44,700
Alex Tresserdin. Thank you.

155
00:08:47,900 --> 00:08:49,400
So I'll now move on to

156
00:08:50,360 --> 00:08:54,040
oral representations from interested parties and any non-interested

157
00:08:54,100 --> 00:08:54,640
parties,

158
00:08:55,800 --> 00:08:59,760
which is agenda item four, and invite representations from those

159
00:09:00,000 --> 00:09:03,660
who have given me the notice of their intention to speak, starting with George

160
00:09:03,720 --> 00:09:06,300
Freeman. Thank you. George Freeman MP. Sorry.

161
00:09:08,020 --> 00:09:11,940
Thank you, Mr. Johnson. So I won't repeat my earlier thanks to you and the team.

162
00:09:12,020 --> 00:09:15,700
I'll be as brief as I can. I thought I should just describe my

163
00:09:15,740 --> 00:09:19,690
interest and my concerns and then

164
00:09:19,720 --> 00:09:21,500
spin through the specific key points.

165
00:09:22,160 --> 00:09:26,060
My interest as the elected member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk, 135

166
00:09:26,140 --> 00:09:29,920
villages and 4 towns, and the area affected

167
00:09:29,980 --> 00:09:33,640
by the Droves application is in my northwest

168
00:09:33,820 --> 00:09:34,239
corner.

169
00:09:35,140 --> 00:09:37,050
But a major part of my submission

170
00:09:38,220 --> 00:09:42,120
is the cumulative impact of the Droves and High Grove and

171
00:09:42,580 --> 00:09:46,460
on this part of Norfolk and Norfolk generally.

172
00:09:46,720 --> 00:09:50,180
I should say also, I'm Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for

173
00:09:50,680 --> 00:09:52,800
Food Security and Agricultural Research.

174
00:09:53,760 --> 00:09:57,450
You'll be aware Norfolk is a very strong agricultural county,

175
00:09:58,800 --> 00:09:59,810
and a former minister,

176
00:10:00,980 --> 00:10:04,790
and I've convened the Central Norfolk Solar

177
00:10:05,660 --> 00:10:08,580
Alliance for those villages. It's

178
00:10:09,300 --> 00:10:12,840
35 to 40 villages at the moment affected cumulatively by

179
00:10:12,900 --> 00:10:16,440
the impact of the solar farm

180

00:10:16,520 --> 00:10:19,260
applications that are coming in in this part of Norfolk.

181
00:10:20,540 --> 00:10:21,220
Not to

182
00:10:22,459 --> 00:10:26,130
oppose on principle, I should say at all, but to make sure that

183
00:10:26,180 --> 00:10:30,160
there is full awareness of the scale of

184
00:10:30,200 --> 00:10:33,860
what is proposed and the implications for all

185
00:10:33,920 --> 00:10:37,240
residents in this part of Norfolk.

186
00:10:37,280 --> 00:10:41,050
And on Friday last week, as a result of that last 18 months work,

187
00:10:41,220 --> 00:10:45,120
I convened Norfolk's first solar summit, again,

188
00:10:45,920 --> 00:10:49,360
as a strong supporter of solar power, but to make sure that the full implications

189
00:10:49,400 --> 00:10:53,210
of the scale of what's coming across the county are properly

190
00:10:53,240 --> 00:10:57,040
considered. And I should also say that, having been a

191
00:10:57,100 --> 00:11:01,000
strong supporter of renewables, I've been closely involved over the last

192
00:11:01,060 --> 00:11:03,900
eight years with the offshore wind

193

00:11:04,860 --> 00:11:08,700
applications in Norfolk and the infrastructure associated with

194
00:11:08,760 --> 00:11:12,680
it, and have been vocal and active in making the case

195
00:11:12,720 --> 00:11:16,590
to successive governments that whilst the solar power in the

196
00:11:16,620 --> 00:11:17,530
southern North Sea is

197
00:11:18,860 --> 00:11:22,760
a public good, the connection framework is not

198
00:11:22,820 --> 00:11:26,600
in the public interest. And the massive construction

199
00:11:26,620 --> 00:11:29,820
of substations, cables, and pylons around the whole of the Norfolk/Suffolk

200
00:11:29,880 --> 00:11:33,680
Coast is the wrong way to bring this energy

201
00:11:33,740 --> 00:11:37,560
onshore. And I make that point because it's linked specifically to the

202
00:11:37,760 --> 00:11:40,760
infrastructure aspects of this

203
00:11:42,220 --> 00:11:44,200
specific solar application and the others

204
00:11:45,080 --> 00:11:46,560
that are coming in alongside it.

205
00:11:48,160 --> 00:11:52,050
So that's my interest in this, and I've appeared before previous planning

206
00:11:52,100 --> 00:11:55,940
inquiries on those substations. I now have two at Necton,

207
00:11:56,340 --> 00:11:58,400
both larger than Wembley Stadium.

208
00:11:59,840 --> 00:12:03,360
I expected to have one, but two or three years later, a

209
00:12:03,440 --> 00:12:07,240
second came in, and it was then that I realized that every one of the wind farms

210
00:12:07,280 --> 00:12:10,840
offshore is required under statute at the moment to have its own

211
00:12:11,120 --> 00:12:15,020
connection framework. And I make that point simply that the connection framework

212
00:12:15,524 --> 00:12:18,563
for renewables in this country, in my view, is not fit for purpose.

213
00:12:19,444 --> 00:12:23,224
And I've learned through that process the limitations

214
00:12:23,324 --> 00:12:26,784
of the planning process when government

215
00:12:26,794 --> 00:12:29,564
deems infrastructure like this essential.

216
00:12:30,864 --> 00:12:33,444
So let me just turn to my concerns. They are in two batches really.

217
00:12:33,504 --> 00:12:36,584
One is to do with process, and cognizant, Mr.

218
00:12:36,744 --> 00:12:40,544
Johnson, of your point, we're not here to discuss the politics or policy of

219
00:12:40,604 --> 00:12:42,724
this, but I am concerned about the process.

220
00:12:43,404 --> 00:12:47,384
The government has made clear that it strongly supports

221
00:12:47,524 --> 00:12:51,044
solar, and both in terms of the subsidy for solar and the

222
00:12:51,084 --> 00:12:55,064
fast-tracking of applications through the planning system by deeming

223
00:12:55,824 --> 00:12:59,644
commercial solar farms critical national infrastructure,
circumventing the

224
00:12:59,684 --> 00:13:02,984
normal planning process. I'm very concerned that that is

225
00:13:03,044 --> 00:13:06,904
triggering something of an international gold rush, the UK suddenly
an

226
00:13:06,944 --> 00:13:09,754
incredibly attractive place. And indeed, those areas,

227
00:13:10,564 --> 00:13:12,254
such as Norfolk, is in danger of becoming

228
00:13:13,204 --> 00:13:17,004
deemed to be easy places to get applications

229
00:13:17,044 --> 00:13:20,684
through, will become magnets. And the scale of what is initially

230
00:13:20,724 --> 00:13:24,304
proposed, as we've seen elsewhere in the country, rapidly

231
00:13:24,344 --> 00:13:24,964
expanding.

232
00:13:26,384 --> 00:13:26,844
And so

233
00:13:27,784 --> 00:13:30,784
I'm concerned about that. Now some of that is policy, I understand, which is

234
00:13:30,844 --> 00:13:34,124
outside the purview of this, but some of it is to do with process.

235
00:13:34,804 --> 00:13:38,404
And I make the point that critical national infrastructure legislation

236
00:13:38,464 --> 00:13:42,134
was put in place in order to make sure that

237
00:13:42,164 --> 00:13:43,514
genuine critical national infrastructure,

238
00:13:45,044 --> 00:13:48,484
armed forces bases, nuclear power stations, don't go through the local planning

239
00:13:48,524 --> 00:13:52,424
process. I submit that that is not an appropriate way for this to be

240
00:13:52,464 --> 00:13:56,364
dealt with. And I make that point simply because this inquiry and your

241
00:13:56,444 --> 00:13:59,584
work, sir, is all the more important for local communities that are

242
00:13:59,624 --> 00:14:02,324
affected, and who are,

243
00:14:03,284 --> 00:14:06,764
in many ways, unable to rely on the normal planning

244

00:14:06,824 --> 00:14:10,764
process to articulate their legitimate concerns, and indeed

245
00:14:10,864 --> 00:14:13,744
real issues, as we've heard from Breckland District Council and Norfolk County

246
00:14:13,804 --> 00:14:14,064
Council

247
00:14:15,404 --> 00:14:17,064
in your earlier sessions.

248
00:14:18,764 --> 00:14:22,724
And specifically, that process of circumventing local planning, I

249
00:14:22,744 --> 00:14:26,083
think has major implications for community benefit.

250
00:14:26,524 --> 00:14:30,404
So the district council, the development authority here, would normally be

251
00:14:30,444 --> 00:14:33,444
receiving the rates and benefits, and they would go back

252
00:14:33,504 --> 00:14:37,184
into the district. That's not the case here.

253
00:14:37,644 --> 00:14:41,234
And secondly, in terms of democratic voice, parish councils would normally have a

254
00:14:41,304 --> 00:14:44,604
strong voice, both under statute, but also through their elected

255
00:14:44,644 --> 00:14:48,184
representatives, and that is, again, marginalized through

256
00:14:48,224 --> 00:14:49,244
this process,

257
00:14:50,144 --> 00:14:51,664
notwithstanding your good offices here.

258
00:14:52,764 --> 00:14:53,944
And

259
00:14:56,204 --> 00:14:59,024
I'm concerned about the democratic implications of that as well, which is why I

260
00:14:59,064 --> 00:15:02,184
wanted to join today, representing the

261
00:15:02,464 --> 00:15:05,924
150,000 odd residents of Mid-Norfolk and the-

262
00:15:16,044 --> 00:15:19,664
George Freeman, we seem to have lost you temporarily. Are you back?

263
00:15:19,984 --> 00:15:20,554
I'm back, sir.

264
00:15:20,604 --> 00:15:21,404
Okay. Yes.

265
00:15:21,604 --> 00:15:22,044
Am I back?

266
00:15:22,104 --> 00:15:23,464
Yes. We can hear you.

267
00:15:24,584 --> 00:15:28,444
Yeah, apologies. And the 25 villages

268
00:15:28,484 --> 00:15:30,274
who've joined the Central Norfolk Solar

269
00:15:31,224 --> 00:15:34,624
Alliance in order to be aware of the scale of what's coming.

270

00:15:34,684 --> 00:15:35,004
So,

271
00:15:36,344 --> 00:15:38,004
serious process concerns.

272
00:15:39,124 --> 00:15:39,664
Secondly,

273
00:15:41,824 --> 00:15:42,764
with regard to this

274
00:15:43,824 --> 00:15:47,664
Droves application, my principal concern is around cumulative impact.

275
00:15:48,264 --> 00:15:52,224
And we heard at the Solar Summit on Friday in

276
00:15:52,264 --> 00:15:55,974
Norfolk and at our various meetings of the Central Norfolk Alliance, we've

277
00:15:56,004 --> 00:15:59,274
heard time and again, repeated concerns expressed by

278
00:16:00,044 --> 00:16:03,264
parish councils, elected local councilors, and

279
00:16:04,184 --> 00:16:08,004
affected local residents. Concerns about, one, the

280
00:16:08,084 --> 00:16:11,364
scale of the energy infrastructure that individual

281
00:16:11,424 --> 00:16:12,684
applications may not

282
00:16:14,924 --> 00:16:18,794
individually submit as part of their application,

283

00:16:18,864 --> 00:16:22,484
but which will be required given the scale of what's coming.

284
00:16:23,504 --> 00:16:24,924
Just for those listening in,

285
00:16:25,784 --> 00:16:28,944
we currently have 12,000 acres across this corridor

286
00:16:28,984 --> 00:16:32,783
from Castle Acre across to the south of

287
00:16:32,824 --> 00:16:36,364
Norwich. That's equivalent to 250 Wembley Stadiums, or the

288
00:16:36,783 --> 00:16:39,504
same area as Norwich City District Council area.

289
00:16:39,904 --> 00:16:43,704
I think many people think these solar farms, so-called, are

290
00:16:43,744 --> 00:16:44,424
very small

291
00:16:46,284 --> 00:16:48,174
applications, and I think a lot of my villages

292
00:16:49,004 --> 00:16:51,024
laudably think they're doing their bit for the environment.

293
00:16:51,044 --> 00:16:54,764
But actually the scale of this across this area, we're looking at a
major

294
00:16:54,824 --> 00:16:58,724
industrial energy corridor, infrastructure corridor,

295
00:16:58,784 --> 00:17:02,564
which will have a material impact, not just on the specific villages
affected.

296

00:17:02,964 --> 00:17:05,904
Many residents are going to find themselves in a few years living not in a corner

297
00:17:05,964 --> 00:17:09,624
of rural Norfolk to which they moved or have in which they've always lived, but

298
00:17:09,684 --> 00:17:11,254
inside a distributed power station.

299
00:17:12,364 --> 00:17:15,514
But also the construction, traffic, and disruption

300
00:17:15,565 --> 00:17:17,904
associated. That's my second point.

301
00:17:18,664 --> 00:17:22,524
And I'm pleased to see Norfolk County Council, as the highways authority, highlight

302
00:17:22,624 --> 00:17:26,565
concerns. I don't think the applicant has properly considered the scale of the

303
00:17:26,604 --> 00:17:28,144
construction impact.

304
00:17:29,104 --> 00:17:32,224
And it's rather disingenuous not to, because

305
00:17:33,364 --> 00:17:37,044
there's no way any one of these individual fields

306
00:17:37,444 --> 00:17:41,304
would be viable if it weren't for the scale of what is coming.

307
00:17:41,664 --> 00:17:45,584
So I would submit, sir, that the cumulative impact is absolutely within scope

308
00:17:45,944 --> 00:17:47,284

because it is the cumulative

309
00:17:49,484 --> 00:17:53,384
cost efficiencies of concentrated solar development and grid upgrades

310
00:17:53,424 --> 00:17:54,904
that make these schemes feasible.

311
00:17:55,904 --> 00:17:55,984
So,

312
00:17:57,504 --> 00:18:00,504
as it were, what's goose for the-- sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

313
00:18:01,244 --> 00:18:03,524
Thirdly, land use implications.

314
00:18:04,644 --> 00:18:05,464
Both locally--

315
00:18:07,284 --> 00:18:11,184
Anyone who knows Norfolk, sir, as you do now coming through, Castle Acre

316
00:18:11,224 --> 00:18:13,404
is one of the gems. It's a gateway,

317
00:18:14,664 --> 00:18:17,794
a world-class tourist destination of its own-

318
00:18:18,488 --> 00:18:21,368
Standing, but it's also a gateway to Norfolk's

319
00:18:22,508 --> 00:18:25,008
extraordinarily powerful landscape and tourism.

320
00:18:25,048 --> 00:18:28,928
It is tourism, our number one economic sector in Norfolk,

321

00:18:29,528 --> 00:18:33,048
and it'll have a very material impact, the droves, on

322
00:18:33,108 --> 00:18:36,808
the land use both around Castle Acre and

323
00:18:36,868 --> 00:18:40,268
across this part of Norfolk. Fourthly, the landscape and visual impact

324
00:18:41,868 --> 00:18:45,258
that's attendant on this. And I was very pleased to see and hear Breckland District

325
00:18:45,328 --> 00:18:49,268
Council making the point in planning policy

326
00:18:49,308 --> 00:18:53,108
terms that the cumulative impact of the ZTVs really have not been considered

327
00:18:53,148 --> 00:18:54,508
properly. And

328
00:18:55,468 --> 00:18:59,388
I strongly endorse their request, sir, that on your site visit,

329
00:19:00,368 --> 00:19:02,188
I think tomorrow or whenever it is, that you

330
00:19:04,108 --> 00:19:07,748
look at the cumulative impact across this part of Norfolk, and that the applicants

331
00:19:07,788 --> 00:19:10,278
have not done a impact assessment adequately.

332
00:19:12,608 --> 00:19:15,978
Fifth, the habitat, wildlife, biodiversity

333
00:19:17,808 --> 00:19:20,248
effects of these developments. And again,

334
00:19:21,368 --> 00:19:25,018
when these points are raised, the developer

335
00:19:25,088 --> 00:19:25,528
applicants

336
00:19:27,188 --> 00:19:29,788
point out that these are quite small local developments,

337
00:19:31,088 --> 00:19:34,208
which may be the case in the context of one parish council considering a few

338
00:19:34,228 --> 00:19:37,568
fields. But in scale,

339
00:19:37,888 --> 00:19:41,268
anybody listening in will know that 250 Wembley stadiums across central

340
00:19:41,308 --> 00:19:44,528
Norfolk will have a very significant material impact

341
00:19:44,608 --> 00:19:48,468
on habitat, wildlife, biodiversity, drainage, and

342
00:19:48,488 --> 00:19:51,348
migration. And this is a county in which our wildlife,

343
00:19:52,228 --> 00:19:52,768
bird life,

344
00:19:53,708 --> 00:19:55,668
habitats are

345
00:19:56,988 --> 00:19:58,588
both of critical national importance.

346
00:19:58,628 --> 00:20:02,488
We've got a number of SSSI's and rare species, but also crucial to

347
00:20:02,548 --> 00:20:03,548
our

348
00:20:04,428 --> 00:20:05,518
tourism and

349
00:20:07,128 --> 00:20:08,928
bird watching and associated activities.

350
00:20:10,548 --> 00:20:13,668
Sixth, agriculture and the impacts both

351
00:20:14,348 --> 00:20:18,168
on local agriculture, it is after tourism, the

352
00:20:18,208 --> 00:20:21,698
biggest industry here. And in many of these villages,

353
00:20:22,488 --> 00:20:26,068
the agricultural sector and the supply chains that support it are
the

354
00:20:26,108 --> 00:20:29,688
backbone of the local economy. And I'm very concerned, I absolutely

355
00:20:29,698 --> 00:20:31,668
understand the position that many farmers are in.

356
00:20:32,428 --> 00:20:35,668
As farming food becomes harder and harder and less and less

357
00:20:35,708 --> 00:20:39,388
profitable, these long-term subsidies from the government are very
attractive.

358
00:20:40,368 --> 00:20:43,088
And they can't be blamed for following the signals.

359
00:20:43,568 --> 00:20:47,248
But I am really worried that when farms effectively stop farming

360
00:20:47,288 --> 00:20:48,468
food and

361
00:20:49,468 --> 00:20:52,648
put land over to long-term solar in return

362
00:20:53,288 --> 00:20:57,048
for a guaranteed subsidized income, that will have a long-term

363
00:20:57,088 --> 00:21:01,048
effect. There is some increasingly powerful science that soil

364
00:21:01,128 --> 00:21:05,108
quality will be fundamentally damaged by this sort of

365
00:21:05,228 --> 00:21:09,108
long-term set aside. But also, it's clear to me, coming

366
00:21:09,148 --> 00:21:12,857
from a farming family and a farming area, and having worked in the industry, that

367
00:21:12,908 --> 00:21:16,637
once you start to do long-term set aside, you're laying people off, you're getting

368
00:21:16,668 --> 00:21:18,108
out of the habit of farming, and I

369
00:21:19,228 --> 00:21:21,068
worry it'll have a major impact on

370
00:21:22,208 --> 00:21:24,648
Norfolk's agricultural sector. Which

371
00:21:26,248 --> 00:21:30,128
it's worth pointing out, we are one of the country's premier agricultural counties

372
00:21:30,148 --> 00:21:33,857

at a time when the government has rightly made food security

373
00:21:33,888 --> 00:21:34,768
national security.

374
00:21:36,068 --> 00:21:36,508
So I'm

375
00:21:37,508 --> 00:21:41,208
very concerned about the local and national impact of this, and I

376
00:21:41,268 --> 00:21:41,548
hear

377
00:21:42,948 --> 00:21:43,628
economists

378
00:21:44,548 --> 00:21:44,988
and

379
00:21:45,988 --> 00:21:49,708
advocates of this saying, "Look, it's a small percentage of

380
00:21:49,888 --> 00:21:53,748
UK land." Well, that is the case, but farming doesn't

381
00:21:53,808 --> 00:21:55,648
work just on percentages of land.

382
00:21:56,588 --> 00:22:00,528
And when you start to shut down corridors of

383
00:22:00,588 --> 00:22:03,838
active farming in premier farming counties, you send a much bigger

384
00:22:03,888 --> 00:22:07,568
signal to the next generation who might be considering going into

385
00:22:07,577 --> 00:22:11,318
farming, to supply chains, to investors, and that signal has a

386
00:22:11,348 --> 00:22:15,278
long-term impact as well that I'm very worried

387
00:22:15,328 --> 00:22:16,068
about that impact.

388
00:22:17,508 --> 00:22:21,488
Next, the specific heritage

389
00:22:21,528 --> 00:22:25,508
and tourism impacts, and the County Council, as the strategic authority

390
00:22:25,548 --> 00:22:29,448
for heritage and the environment, have shared

391
00:22:29,748 --> 00:22:33,448
concerns. They came to the Solar Summit on Friday and have agreed

392
00:22:33,488 --> 00:22:37,428
to pick those up actively. And there are both specific sites, Castle Acre I

393
00:22:37,468 --> 00:22:39,777
know others will talk about,

394
00:22:41,108 --> 00:22:45,078
but the cumulative impact on Norfolk's heritage and tourism industry,

395
00:22:45,168 --> 00:22:48,468
I think is very significant. So those are

396
00:22:49,108 --> 00:22:52,938
the specific concerns that I wanted to flag, sir.

397
00:22:53,968 --> 00:22:57,948
And of the villages directly affected by the droves, Little Dunham,

398
00:22:58,028 --> 00:22:59,508
Little Fransham, and Great Fransham,

399
00:23:00,508 --> 00:23:04,448
in my patch, I've had very strong expressions of real

400
00:23:04,488 --> 00:23:07,108
concern from residents and councilors.

401
00:23:08,688 --> 00:23:12,608
But my core submission is that the process through which

402
00:23:13,048 --> 00:23:15,048
the government are looking to push this

403
00:23:16,128 --> 00:23:20,068
is fundamentally disingenuous, and it risks

404
00:23:20,208 --> 00:23:22,268
designating critical national infrastructure,

405
00:23:23,688 --> 00:23:26,728
something which is actually just another commercial development.

406
00:23:27,388 --> 00:23:31,288
And in so doing, marginalizing the people and the councilors and the
local

407
00:23:31,328 --> 00:23:33,728
democratic planning process, which is the best protection.

408
00:23:34,428 --> 00:23:38,248
And that we are in danger of ending up with cumulative impact that

409
00:23:38,288 --> 00:23:41,008
doesn't get properly considered in the process.

410
00:23:41,068 --> 00:23:44,868
And future generations will look and ask, "How on earth was this

411
00:23:44,928 --> 00:23:48,708
allowed to go through without proper consideration?" So I'm very
grateful again for

412
00:23:48,748 --> 00:23:49,008
your

413
00:23:49,948 --> 00:23:53,868
work and the opportunity to share this. And as I say, I'm conscious of time.

414
00:23:54,908 --> 00:23:58,408
I'll wrap up there and put this all in writing

415
00:23:59,008 --> 00:23:59,588
to you, sir.

416
00:24:01,928 --> 00:24:05,668
Thank you, George Freeman. I will invite the applicant to respond after

417
00:24:05,908 --> 00:24:08,528
they've heard all the speakers today.

418
00:24:08,648 --> 00:24:12,388
So I'll move to James Wild MP next. Thank you.

419
00:24:15,928 --> 00:24:19,888
Well, thank you very much, sir. And I echo George's comments around

420
00:24:19,908 --> 00:24:22,688
the considered way in which you've been chairing proceedings.

421
00:24:22,728 --> 00:24:26,708
And as the Member of Parliament for North West Norfolk, I welcome the opportunity

422
00:24:26,768 --> 00:24:30,308
to speak on behalf of my constituents who strongly object to the

423
00:24:30,348 --> 00:24:33,568
proposals for this 2,700-acre

424
00:24:34,088 --> 00:24:37,720

development. I will focus In my remarks on the site

425
00:24:37,780 --> 00:24:41,420
selection, the loss of prime agricultural land, defense

426
00:24:41,500 --> 00:24:44,030
issues, as well as heritage and

427
00:24:44,200 --> 00:24:45,840
landscapes. And

428
00:24:46,720 --> 00:24:50,640
as was made clear at a public meeting I held in Castle Acre a few weeks ago,

429
00:24:50,700 --> 00:24:52,860
my constituents are not opposed to renewable energy.

430
00:24:52,920 --> 00:24:56,190
What they object to is the large-scale industrialization of the

431
00:24:56,240 --> 00:25:00,040
countryside in this area. Turning to the site

432
00:25:00,120 --> 00:25:03,680
selection issue, under the National Policy Statement EN1,

433
00:25:03,860 --> 00:25:07,760
applicants are required to provide transparent evidence of alternative

434
00:25:07,860 --> 00:25:11,600
locations, sites, and configurations.

435
00:25:12,280 --> 00:25:16,040
I consider that has not been done in this case, relying instead on a generic

436
00:25:16,140 --> 00:25:19,880
site selection criteria to justify what is a highly

437

00:25:20,000 --> 00:25:23,820
sensitive site. And planning policy states

438
00:25:23,860 --> 00:25:27,700
that previously developed brownfield, contaminated, and industrial land

439
00:25:27,720 --> 00:25:30,470
should be preferred for such solar projects.

440
00:25:30,800 --> 00:25:34,750
And where agricultural land is necessary, poorer quality land should

441
00:25:34,780 --> 00:25:38,340
be preferred, avoiding the use of best and most versatile

442
00:25:38,380 --> 00:25:39,480
land where possible.

443
00:25:40,660 --> 00:25:44,600
Yet more than half of this site is best and most versatile land,

444
00:25:45,080 --> 00:25:48,620
with a further 40% moderate graded land.

445
00:25:49,380 --> 00:25:53,240
It was perhaps reasonable to consider this site when, as is

446
00:25:53,300 --> 00:25:56,980
set out in the applicant's environmental statement, the original

447
00:25:57,040 --> 00:26:00,680
ALC mapping indicated this was likely to be some of the

448
00:26:00,720 --> 00:26:04,440
lowest quality land. But it is frankly inexplicable

449
00:26:04,880 --> 00:26:08,770
that when that proved not to be the case, the project continued, not

450
00:26:08,840 --> 00:26:12,760

least given the impact on food security of taking this land

451
00:26:12,860 --> 00:26:15,600
out of use for 60 years.

452
00:26:16,840 --> 00:26:20,270
In terms of scale, the applicant has repeatedly cited

453
00:26:20,780 --> 00:26:24,010
national statistics arguing solar developments cover

454
00:26:24,400 --> 00:26:28,380
0.1% of UK agricultural land. But planning must

455
00:26:28,420 --> 00:26:32,200
reflect local circumstances, and the local reality and

456
00:26:32,240 --> 00:26:36,100
cumulative impact here is that the planned Droves and the adjacent

457
00:26:36,180 --> 00:26:39,060
High Grove developments together would cover

458
00:26:39,360 --> 00:26:43,050
6,700 acres of Norfolk countryside and

459
00:26:43,100 --> 00:26:47,070
agricultural land. There are also other schemes, as referred to in

460
00:26:47,080 --> 00:26:50,780
the specific hearing this morning, that have not been considered in

461
00:26:50,840 --> 00:26:54,500
terms of the cumulative impact. And this is not incremental

462
00:26:54,660 --> 00:26:58,480
change. It is a concentrated industrialization of

463
00:26:58,540 --> 00:27:00,080
our rural landscape.

464
00:27:01,440 --> 00:27:05,340
Turning to the important issue of defense, it

465
00:27:05,420 --> 00:27:08,980
is apparent that the applicant failed to consider properly the

466
00:27:09,020 --> 00:27:12,910
potential negative impact on RAF Marham, the strategically

467
00:27:12,960 --> 00:27:16,620
important defense site, home to our F-35 Lightning

468
00:27:16,880 --> 00:27:20,620
fast jets. And this morning we heard potential

469
00:27:20,680 --> 00:27:24,400
mitigation has not been designed and is not

470
00:27:24,460 --> 00:27:28,040
available to the inquiry. We heard that perhaps

471
00:27:28,440 --> 00:27:31,960
it will be 4.5-meter-high earth bunds

472
00:27:32,400 --> 00:27:33,100
or fences.

473
00:27:34,000 --> 00:27:37,600
We heard that perhaps they will need to be higher than 4.5

474
00:27:37,640 --> 00:27:40,420
meters to mitigate the risk to radar.

475
00:27:41,100 --> 00:27:42,880
We simply do not know.

476
00:27:43,720 --> 00:27:47,320
And if they need to be more than 4.5 meters, the

477
00:27:47,380 --> 00:27:51,120

applicant was very clear it would be a criminal offense to

478
00:27:51,160 --> 00:27:52,320
build the arrays.

479
00:27:53,300 --> 00:27:57,200
Therefore, this issue is key to determination of

480
00:27:57,260 --> 00:28:00,960
the inquiry and then the Secretary of State's final decision.

481
00:28:01,980 --> 00:28:05,260
So I think it is unacceptable that such an important issue

482
00:28:05,700 --> 00:28:09,430
lacks clarity on the impact on the landscape, ecology

483
00:28:09,920 --> 00:28:13,080
or drainage, and the interested

484
00:28:13,140 --> 00:28:17,100
parties will not have firm plans to consider at phase

485
00:28:17,400 --> 00:28:20,980
five. It cannot be sufficient simply for the

486
00:28:21,020 --> 00:28:24,580
applicant to give a commitment in the DCO to mitigate this

487
00:28:24,940 --> 00:28:28,620
when there is no detail before the inquiry or the registered

488
00:28:28,660 --> 00:28:32,520
parties to give them the opportunity to comment during the process

489
00:28:32,620 --> 00:28:33,920
of this inquiry.

490
00:28:35,060 --> 00:28:38,580
I come now to landscape and visual impact, and the

491
00:28:38,620 --> 00:28:41,920
negative impact of the proposal on the setting of this

492
00:28:42,000 --> 00:28:45,360
cluster of designated heritage assets in the Nar Valley

493
00:28:45,880 --> 00:28:49,800
is significant. The area is described by heritage experts

494
00:28:49,860 --> 00:28:53,500
as Norfolk's Holy Land, and the Priory, Castle, Bailey Gate,

495
00:28:53,900 --> 00:28:57,400
and Grade I listed churches are intrinsically bound to the

496
00:28:57,440 --> 00:29:01,000
topography of the valley. The surrounding

497
00:29:01,080 --> 00:29:04,980
landscape is intrinsic to its significance, and the proposals

498
00:29:04,990 --> 00:29:08,980
would cause harm to landscape character and harm to the setting

499
00:29:09,020 --> 00:29:12,720
of several heritage assets. This would of course have a

500
00:29:12,740 --> 00:29:16,400
damaging impact on the visitor economy and Norfolk's

501
00:29:16,580 --> 00:29:17,120
heritage.

502
00:29:17,920 --> 00:29:20,520
And the proposals to screen the solar arrays

503
00:29:21,500 --> 00:29:25,020
would lead to moderate to high levels of negative impact

504
00:29:25,360 --> 00:29:29,340

through the hedgerows with the loss of expansive sequential views of

505
00:29:29,380 --> 00:29:33,280
the countryside. It is also accepted that the

506
00:29:33,300 --> 00:29:37,040
mitigations for the radar issue will be incongruous to the

507
00:29:37,080 --> 00:29:40,940
landscape, yet this is not covered in the landscape and visual

508
00:29:40,960 --> 00:29:44,480
impact assessment, despite the likely scale, and the applicant

509
00:29:44,540 --> 00:29:48,030
said this morning that they would not seek to revise that

510
00:29:48,060 --> 00:29:52,040
assessment, not least because of the issues I spoke about earlier of

511
00:29:52,060 --> 00:29:54,920
not having any firm mitigation agreed.

512
00:29:55,520 --> 00:29:58,160
Clearly, that matter needs to be addressed.

513
00:29:59,000 --> 00:30:02,860
Another matter that will also not be determined before the
conclusion

514
00:30:02,900 --> 00:30:03,840
of this inquiry

515
00:30:04,940 --> 00:30:08,340
and a Secretary of State decision is the potential

516
00:30:08,400 --> 00:30:11,160
location of a National Grid substation.

517
00:30:11,840 --> 00:30:15,430
That is because the applicant has not got any commitment from

National

518
00:30:15,500 --> 00:30:19,320
Grid for that substation. And as I said at the

519
00:30:19,400 --> 00:30:23,340
first open issues hearing, I consider that makes this

520
00:30:23,360 --> 00:30:26,840
application premature as a result, and it should be

521
00:30:26,960 --> 00:30:29,840
withdrawn, and other projects will proceed.

522
00:30:30,700 --> 00:30:34,320
So to conclude, sir, the scale of the scheme, the loss of prime

523
00:30:34,360 --> 00:30:37,960
agricultural land, and its damaging impact on a heritage

524
00:30:38,060 --> 00:30:42,050
setting are all reasons why I and my constituents oppose this

525
00:30:42,060 --> 00:30:45,920
scheme I will be providing further written representations

526
00:30:46,000 --> 00:30:49,710
on other matters, including transport, decommissioning of the

527
00:30:49,800 --> 00:30:53,560
site, and other issues. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

528
00:30:59,480 --> 00:31:03,360
Thank you, James Wild. I'll now move on to Michael

529
00:31:03,600 --> 00:31:04,020
Bennett.

530
00:31:06,040 --> 00:31:06,860
Thank you, sir.

531
00:31:07,740 --> 00:31:08,420
Mike Bennett,

532
00:31:09,240 --> 00:31:10,880
Spawll Parish Council.

533
00:31:13,580 --> 00:31:14,680
Many of those

534
00:31:16,580 --> 00:31:17,660
issues that

535
00:31:19,200 --> 00:31:22,900
have just been very eloquently spoken of by both

536
00:31:22,980 --> 00:31:23,510
MPs,

537
00:31:24,600 --> 00:31:28,440
I will not reiterate except to talk

538
00:31:28,520 --> 00:31:32,500
about the issue around agricultural

539
00:31:32,540 --> 00:31:34,580
land classification that was

540
00:31:35,420 --> 00:31:36,540
talked about yesterday.

541
00:31:37,500 --> 00:31:39,280
But I first want to just quote

542
00:31:40,520 --> 00:31:42,120
another MP whose

543
00:31:43,580 --> 00:31:47,380
constituency is affected by the Droves scheme.

544
00:31:49,300 --> 00:31:51,820

I was in a meeting with Terry Jermy

545
00:31:52,780 --> 00:31:54,060
probably over 12 months ago,

546
00:31:56,400 --> 00:31:59,760
when he referred to this, but in

547
00:32:00,540 --> 00:32:02,080
more particular, the

548
00:32:03,160 --> 00:32:03,760
Highgrove

549
00:32:05,660 --> 00:32:08,380
development as a 40-year experiment.

550
00:32:09,540 --> 00:32:12,660
In this case, we're talking about a 60-year

551
00:32:13,000 --> 00:32:13,680
experiment.

552
00:32:15,200 --> 00:32:17,440
We do not have sufficient knowledge

553
00:32:18,420 --> 00:32:20,940
as to the impact of such a large scale

554
00:32:22,160 --> 00:32:26,020
and over such large areas of Norfolk

555
00:32:26,080 --> 00:32:27,600
of these developments

556
00:32:28,500 --> 00:32:32,310
to biodiversity, to soils, and numerous other

557
00:32:32,980 --> 00:32:33,540
factors.

558
00:32:35,100 --> 00:32:38,720
The arguments yesterday over the proportion of BMV

559
00:32:38,800 --> 00:32:39,280
land

560
00:32:41,260 --> 00:32:44,840
in the scheme and more widely are

561
00:32:44,900 --> 00:32:48,580
largely immaterial when considering the threat of climate

562
00:32:48,660 --> 00:32:52,440
change that will impact our ability to grow our

563
00:32:52,480 --> 00:32:56,440
own food, when current other important

564
00:32:56,560 --> 00:32:57,920
sources of food,

565
00:32:58,740 --> 00:33:00,080
imported food,

566
00:33:01,060 --> 00:33:02,080
literally dry up

567
00:33:03,620 --> 00:33:06,220
or are not exported because they're needed locally.

568
00:33:07,400 --> 00:33:11,360
We may have stable self-sufficiency around 60%

569
00:33:11,400 --> 00:33:14,940
at the moment, but that is by no means certain it will

570
00:33:15,000 --> 00:33:15,580
remain.

571
00:33:17,680 --> 00:33:21,550

We currently grow something like 50% of our vegetables, and one of

572
00:33:21,580 --> 00:33:21,700
the

573
00:33:22,780 --> 00:33:26,700
points of discussion yesterday was the growing of vegetables

574
00:33:26,800 --> 00:33:27,760
across the scheme.

575
00:33:29,689 --> 00:33:31,020
The discussion of the

576
00:33:32,340 --> 00:33:36,279
agricultural land classification from the '70s with predicted

577
00:33:36,360 --> 00:33:37,500
and actual survey

578
00:33:38,340 --> 00:33:40,960
agricultural land classifications reveals one thing:

579
00:33:41,820 --> 00:33:42,520
irrigation.

580
00:33:44,300 --> 00:33:47,890
Tim Hubbard from Castleacre commented that there are

581
00:33:47,900 --> 00:33:51,880
irrigation mains over much of the site, enabling

582
00:33:51,920 --> 00:33:55,860
what would have been Grade 3B or 4 land, as

583
00:33:55,900 --> 00:33:59,420
was shown in the 1970s ALC

584
00:34:00,700 --> 00:34:01,020
map,

585
00:34:01,960 --> 00:34:05,300
has now become Grade 3A or 2 or even 1,

586
00:34:06,660 --> 00:34:07,720
as was surveyed.

587
00:34:09,240 --> 00:34:13,180
But it was only in the '70s and '80s did we start to see

588
00:34:13,261 --> 00:34:16,890
large areas of land being irrigated in our part of the

589
00:34:16,960 --> 00:34:17,321
world.

590
00:34:18,220 --> 00:34:22,200
This has allowed land that was probably good for raising sheep,
growing

591
00:34:22,281 --> 00:34:23,861
malting barley and sugar beet,

592
00:34:25,700 --> 00:34:29,670
to now grow high-grade vegetable crops, which with

593
00:34:29,670 --> 00:34:33,580
stone and clod separation allow damage-free and easy

594
00:34:33,620 --> 00:34:37,301
harvesting, as well as not being so prone to frost damage

595
00:34:37,960 --> 00:34:41,000
as in the fens where they were traditionally grown.

596
00:34:42,660 --> 00:34:46,400
It's understandable the landowner's decision to allow the

597
00:34:46,480 --> 00:34:50,380
site to be used for solar in the light of current appalling

598

00:34:50,540 --> 00:34:51,640
farm profitability.

599
00:34:52,700 --> 00:34:55,540
However, if we are to take a long view,

600
00:34:56,640 --> 00:35:00,289
even taking into account the current geopolitical

601
00:35:00,560 --> 00:35:04,219
situation and the threat of war, as some

602
00:35:04,260 --> 00:35:06,660
commentators say within the next five years,

603
00:35:09,720 --> 00:35:09,820
and

604
00:35:10,640 --> 00:35:13,580
the increasing problem of climate change,

605
00:35:14,460 --> 00:35:16,060
we are going to need

606
00:35:17,040 --> 00:35:20,580
winter stored water to enable crops to grow.

607
00:35:21,500 --> 00:35:23,760
Taking land out of crop production

608
00:35:25,240 --> 00:35:29,140
where there is an opportunity to irrigate does not make

609
00:35:29,150 --> 00:35:29,640
sense.

610
00:35:30,690 --> 00:35:34,680
This solar project is really in the wrong place when we look

611
00:35:34,720 --> 00:35:38,560
ahead to what we're likely to face with climate change and the

612
00:35:38,620 --> 00:35:42,320
threat to our food production, which George

613
00:35:42,400 --> 00:35:44,300
Freedman has already alluded to.

614
00:35:45,280 --> 00:35:48,980
This is land that can continue to provide the nation's food

615
00:35:49,500 --> 00:35:53,120
in the years to come, when we could find other ways and places to

616
00:35:53,160 --> 00:35:54,640
produce the energy we need.

617
00:35:55,660 --> 00:35:59,440
Yesterday, there was a claim made by the applicant that

618
00:35:59,500 --> 00:36:03,280
the 54% of BMV the site

619
00:36:03,340 --> 00:36:03,620
has

620
00:36:05,600 --> 00:36:08,700
was okay because it was less than the

621
00:36:08,940 --> 00:36:09,840
94%

622
00:36:10,660 --> 00:36:12,440
predicted for Norfolk as a whole.

623
00:36:13,460 --> 00:36:14,880
This is frankly rubbish.

624
00:36:16,500 --> 00:36:19,980
To make the comparison between this particular site and the

625

00:36:20,180 --> 00:36:23,520
overall situation in the county is really not on.

626
00:36:24,100 --> 00:36:27,640
You only have to look at the map which was shown to us, which

627
00:36:27,700 --> 00:36:30,980
shows different colored patches relating to the different

628
00:36:31,080 --> 00:36:34,100
agricultural land classifications across the county,

629
00:36:36,280 --> 00:36:40,000
to see the variations across the whole county, which don't

630
00:36:40,040 --> 00:36:43,560
really relate to the site. It's no good comparing

631
00:36:43,680 --> 00:36:46,640
broadland and fenland with high Norfolk

632
00:36:47,640 --> 00:36:51,500
Different soils with different infrastructures that affect the

633
00:36:51,620 --> 00:36:53,480
agricultural land classification.

634
00:36:56,960 --> 00:37:00,770
On a countywide basis, there is a reason

635
00:37:00,820 --> 00:37:04,640
why the predicted agricultural land classification for Norfolk

636
00:37:04,700 --> 00:37:08,660
shows 94% of BMV land. This

637
00:37:08,720 --> 00:37:12,460
is because of the investment in their land and the

638
00:37:12,540 --> 00:37:16,240
technology employed by Norfolk farmers over the past

639
00:37:16,460 --> 00:37:17,000
50 years

640
00:37:18,500 --> 00:37:22,440
to produce the nation’s food. Why are we

641
00:37:22,520 --> 00:37:25,960
cutting off our nose to spite our face?

642
00:37:26,760 --> 00:37:27,360
Thank you, sir.

643
00:37:32,520 --> 00:37:36,180
Thank you, Mike Bennett. Tim Hubbard

644
00:37:36,380 --> 00:37:37,100
next. Thank you.

645
00:37:39,200 --> 00:37:43,180
Yes. Good afternoon, sir. I fear I might be repeating obviously

646
00:37:43,220 --> 00:37:46,950
some of the contributions previously made, and thank the previous speakers

647
00:37:46,960 --> 00:37:48,760
for their very valid contributions.

648
00:37:50,230 --> 00:37:51,240
My name is Tim Hubbard.

649
00:37:52,180 --> 00:37:55,650
I'm a resident of Castle Acre, having lived there for the last 27

650
00:37:55,760 --> 00:37:59,660
years. I've recently retired from a lifetime working

651
00:37:59,700 --> 00:38:03,000
in agriculture, most of which was spent in Norfolk.

652
00:38:04,520 --> 00:38:08,120
I am chair of Castle Acre Parish Council and chair of the

653
00:38:08,190 --> 00:38:09,460
Castle Acre Solar Group.

654
00:38:10,480 --> 00:38:14,460
The parish council, being a group of volunteers, have been engaged with the

655
00:38:14,480 --> 00:38:17,659
Droves NSIP proposals right from the start,

656
00:38:18,220 --> 00:38:21,020
attending initial proceedings some two years ago.

657
00:38:22,700 --> 00:38:26,150
Nearly three weeks ago, we held a meeting allowing

658
00:38:26,180 --> 00:38:30,080
residents to meet us and our local MP, James Wild,

659
00:38:30,940 --> 00:38:34,320
giving them the opportunity to air their views on the local

660
00:38:34,360 --> 00:38:37,260
proposals for industrial solar developments.

661
00:38:38,480 --> 00:38:41,580
I'm now going to try and convey some of those views

662
00:38:42,600 --> 00:38:44,180
to you and this hearing.

663
00:38:46,000 --> 00:38:49,800
Castle Acre and South Acre are regarded as some of the

664
00:38:49,880 --> 00:38:51,340
jewels of Norfolk.

665

00:38:52,460 --> 00:38:56,420
Residents foster a very strong sense of community.

666
00:38:58,380 --> 00:39:02,160
We are not against solar power and understand that future

667
00:39:02,240 --> 00:39:05,860
national energy security requires a mixture of

668
00:39:05,920 --> 00:39:07,020
generation methods.

669
00:39:08,080 --> 00:39:11,440
We have previously expressed our objection to the proposed

670
00:39:11,660 --> 00:39:15,640
Droves industrial solar site, situated west of the

671
00:39:15,680 --> 00:39:19,640
A1065 with Swaffham to the south and Castle

672
00:39:19,740 --> 00:39:20,020
Acre,

673
00:39:22,660 --> 00:39:26,430
South Acre to the north. This position has not

674
00:39:26,480 --> 00:39:26,960
changed.

675
00:39:28,420 --> 00:39:32,380
We still question site selection and are not satisfied

676
00:39:32,720 --> 00:39:35,240
that the alternatives were sufficiently appraised.

677
00:39:36,640 --> 00:39:40,580
The current Droves site is clearly one of convenience to the
applicant.

678
00:39:41,460 --> 00:39:43,550

We would call it low-hanging fruit.

679
00:39:44,580 --> 00:39:47,160
With its proximity to National Grid power lines

680
00:39:48,400 --> 00:39:48,790
and

681
00:39:50,040 --> 00:39:53,630
that most of the land is being offered by a single

682
00:39:53,700 --> 00:39:54,260
landowner.

683
00:39:56,100 --> 00:39:59,920
What was overlooked was its position within the historic landscape

684
00:40:00,420 --> 00:40:04,370
and the lasting impact it will place on the setting of a significant historical

685
00:40:04,400 --> 00:40:08,200
cluster of Norman origin dating back nearly 1,000 years.

686
00:40:09,800 --> 00:40:13,160
Solar panels and other infrastructure, substations,

687
00:40:13,480 --> 00:40:17,020
transformers, bat storage containers, pylons,

688
00:40:17,260 --> 00:40:20,620
fencing, will inevitably introduce a

689
00:40:20,720 --> 00:40:23,240
fundamental change to agricultural land

690
00:40:25,440 --> 00:40:29,240
and cause major visual harm to the historic landscape and the

691
00:40:29,300 --> 00:40:31,320
setting of important historical assets.

692
00:40:32,480 --> 00:40:35,990
Any attempts to mitigate the visual harm with planting and

693
00:40:36,080 --> 00:40:39,360
screening will itself change the landscape

694
00:40:39,420 --> 00:40:43,000
forever. This surely cannot be contested.

695
00:40:44,000 --> 00:40:46,620
We were told the development is temporary.

696
00:40:46,680 --> 00:40:48,420
It is not and never will be.

697
00:40:51,820 --> 00:40:53,930
What was also overlooked was the proximity

698
00:40:57,660 --> 00:41:01,140
to the Marham Airbase, a strategic UK

699
00:41:01,340 --> 00:41:04,760
NATO asset. We can only hope its defensive

700
00:41:04,820 --> 00:41:08,600
operations are never compromised by this industrial

701
00:41:08,680 --> 00:41:09,240
complex.

702
00:41:10,620 --> 00:41:13,920
We cannot understand the applicant's

703
00:41:13,960 --> 00:41:17,900
claim that this specific site is crucial

704
00:41:17,960 --> 00:41:21,820
to future UK energy supply. The National

705

00:41:21,900 --> 00:41:25,520
Grid is currently overwhelmed by offers of generation,

706
00:41:26,160 --> 00:41:29,820
and no Gate 2 connection point has been secured by the

707
00:41:29,880 --> 00:41:31,300
applicant for this site.

708
00:41:32,320 --> 00:41:35,840
Residents are very concerned that the potential location

709
00:41:36,360 --> 00:41:40,240
of the National Grid substation could change and effectively

710
00:41:40,280 --> 00:41:43,520
will not be agreed as part of this review process.

711
00:41:44,240 --> 00:41:47,620
It just does not make sense in our minds.

712
00:41:49,960 --> 00:41:53,640
Absolute madness is a comment I have heard many times

713
00:41:54,100 --> 00:41:57,240
regarding the use of agricultural land for such large and

714
00:41:57,400 --> 00:42:01,040
inefficient solar development.

715
00:42:02,340 --> 00:42:05,980
We believe national policy states that the use of BMV land

716
00:42:06,340 --> 00:42:09,050
for solar development should be avoided.

717
00:42:10,010 --> 00:42:13,840
Survey work has found large areas of this site are classified

718
00:42:13,880 --> 00:42:14,880
as BMV land.

719
00:42:15,840 --> 00:42:19,640
As we discussed yesterday, irrigation is available to much of this

720
00:42:19,700 --> 00:42:22,980
site, allowing for high-value specialist crops

721
00:42:23,700 --> 00:42:27,240
such as potatoes, carrots, onions, to be successfully

722
00:42:27,300 --> 00:42:28,440
grown in

723
00:42:29,280 --> 00:42:31,660
rotation across the area.

724
00:42:33,340 --> 00:42:36,420
I was most concerned by the applicant's comments yesterday

725
00:42:36,840 --> 00:42:40,820
suggesting that the loss of current agricultural activities are

726
00:42:40,900 --> 00:42:44,400
insignificant and will be replaced by grazing a few

727
00:42:44,460 --> 00:42:47,480
sheep on what will be unproductive grassland

728
00:42:48,976 --> 00:42:52,916
The suggestion that the loss of agricultural and food processing
jobs

729
00:42:54,256 --> 00:42:56,056
that are supported by this unit

730
00:42:56,956 --> 00:43:00,466
will be replaced by an annual panel washing opportunity

731
00:43:01,136 --> 00:43:04,996
shows a total lack of understanding for high-quality food

732
00:43:05,016 --> 00:43:08,876
production in this country. Not only does this unit support the

733
00:43:08,996 --> 00:43:12,896
staff that are actually farming the land, it supports

734
00:43:12,976 --> 00:43:16,556
many other associated business activities, supply

735
00:43:16,656 --> 00:43:19,976
companies of seed, fertilizer, agrichemicals,

736
00:43:20,416 --> 00:43:24,136
along with highly skilled associated advice, haulage

737
00:43:24,236 --> 00:43:27,836
companies, food processing and packing, to mention but a few.

738
00:43:29,336 --> 00:43:32,556
Food security for the nation is hugely significant,

739
00:43:33,376 --> 00:43:34,356
as well as energy.

740
00:43:35,356 --> 00:43:39,256
Who knows what challenges we will be facing next year, let alone

741
00:43:39,316 --> 00:43:42,986
in 20, 30, 40, 60 years' time?

742
00:43:43,956 --> 00:43:47,236
The value of this land for food production should not be

743
00:43:47,256 --> 00:43:48,956
dismissed or overlooked.

744
00:43:49,946 --> 00:43:53,756
There are alternatives which would not use

745
00:43:53,816 --> 00:43:56,796

such vast areas of this precious land resource.

746
00:43:57,886 --> 00:44:01,636
Commercial buildings, brownfield sites, car parks, the

747
00:44:01,696 --> 00:44:02,596
list goes on.

748
00:44:04,036 --> 00:44:06,316
We suggested, and the applicant

749
00:44:08,696 --> 00:44:11,956
was asked to

750
00:44:11,996 --> 00:44:15,256
investigate wind generation, utilizing

751
00:44:16,536 --> 00:44:18,696
much smaller area of this site.

752
00:44:19,796 --> 00:44:23,556
All examples of alternatives that should be

753
00:44:23,636 --> 00:44:24,176
considered.

754
00:44:26,196 --> 00:44:29,976
A local resident has presented or will be

755
00:44:30,036 --> 00:44:33,996
presenting a representation in respect of biodiversity

756
00:44:34,396 --> 00:44:37,796
and the protection of protected species within the boundaries of the site,

757
00:44:38,516 --> 00:44:40,136
which I am not going to repeat.

758
00:44:41,076 --> 00:44:44,986
However, local communities and residents appreciate and

759
00:44:45,156 --> 00:44:48,576
care deeply about the environment and the surroundings they live in

760
00:44:48,956 --> 00:44:49,526
every day.

761
00:44:50,856 --> 00:44:54,516
We respectfully ask, via the inspector, for the applicant to

762
00:44:54,556 --> 00:44:58,236
acknowledge this and commit to further detailed surveys covering

763
00:44:58,315 --> 00:45:00,496
all areas that we are concerned about.

764
00:45:02,176 --> 00:45:06,026
Again, as discussed yesterday, we are rightly concerned about road

765
00:45:06,096 --> 00:45:09,996
safety on the A1065 and the implications for local

766
00:45:10,056 --> 00:45:10,596
residents.

767
00:45:11,436 --> 00:45:15,036
We have mentioned deer crossing the highway many times and

768
00:45:15,156 --> 00:45:19,016
potentially being corralled by site fencing on both

769
00:45:19,076 --> 00:45:21,976
sides of the road, holding them onto the highway.

770
00:45:23,056 --> 00:45:26,516
We asked the applicant at a recent local meeting to

771
00:45:27,256 --> 00:45:30,236
remove solar arrays and

772

00:45:38,576 --> 00:45:42,496
fencing from fields 20, 21, 25

773
00:45:42,596 --> 00:45:43,436
and 26.

774
00:45:44,416 --> 00:45:47,296
This would offer a twofold solution, not

775
00:45:47,376 --> 00:45:50,996
only relieving road safety concerns, but

776
00:45:51,076 --> 00:45:54,896
also hugely reducing the visual impact of the site

777
00:45:55,036 --> 00:45:57,976
from the A1065, another key concern.

778
00:45:59,596 --> 00:46:03,296
At the very least, we ask for panels and fencing to be

779
00:46:03,336 --> 00:46:06,836
moved much further away from the road, creating a

780
00:46:06,876 --> 00:46:10,516
greater safety margin for wildlife and road

781
00:46:10,576 --> 00:46:11,536
users alike.

782
00:46:13,816 --> 00:46:17,556
We hope Norfolk County Council are entirely happy with the

783
00:46:17,636 --> 00:46:21,596
arrangements made within traffic management plans for the safe

784
00:46:21,836 --> 00:46:25,796
entry and exit of development vehicles to and

785
00:46:25,876 --> 00:46:27,256
from the proposed site,

786
00:46:28,216 --> 00:46:32,036
off and on to the A1065, a

787
00:46:32,136 --> 00:46:33,556
busy tourist route.

788
00:46:35,896 --> 00:46:39,456
Castle Acre Parish Council have been trying to engage with the

789
00:46:39,516 --> 00:46:42,216
applicant to discuss community

790
00:46:45,196 --> 00:46:45,696
benefit.

791
00:46:46,856 --> 00:46:50,376
Lack of progress and commitment to this point is

792
00:46:50,416 --> 00:46:54,156
disappointing. However, there is an

793
00:46:54,216 --> 00:46:57,756
acknowledged

794
00:46:57,776 --> 00:47:01,466
desire for the representatives of

795
00:47:02,956 --> 00:47:05,396
Castle Acre Parish Council and the applicant,

796
00:47:06,376 --> 00:47:08,276
and we are planning to do so very soon.

797
00:47:08,976 --> 00:47:11,526
We ask for meaningful engagement.

798
00:47:13,516 --> 00:47:17,096
As shown by a vote at the end of a recent

799

00:47:17,216 --> 00:47:20,756
Castle Acre residents meeting, they support the views

800
00:47:20,796 --> 00:47:21,996
submitted in this hearing.

801
00:47:22,916 --> 00:47:26,896
For the reasons stated in this and other submissions, we cannot

802
00:47:26,936 --> 00:47:28,216
support this application.

803
00:47:29,026 --> 00:47:32,976
The development of this site will have lasting negative impacts

804
00:47:33,036 --> 00:47:36,876
on local communities, the historic landscape, BMV

805
00:47:36,936 --> 00:47:40,796
land, biodiversity, and the general wellbeing

806
00:47:40,836 --> 00:47:42,716
of residents in local communities.

807
00:47:43,716 --> 00:47:45,956
It is just in the wrong place.

808
00:47:47,216 --> 00:47:48,676
Thank you for allowing me to speak.

809
00:47:52,196 --> 00:47:53,356
Thank you, Tim Hubbard.

810
00:47:54,476 --> 00:47:56,016
Anne Mason next. Thank you.

811
00:47:56,756 --> 00:47:57,436
Thank you, sir.

812
00:47:58,596 --> 00:48:00,916
Anne Mason, Castle Acre Parish Council.

813
00:48:01,556 --> 00:48:05,416
I work as a heritage consultant and have a particular interest

814
00:48:05,856 --> 00:48:09,816
in landscape history. Accordingly, and on behalf of

815
00:48:09,856 --> 00:48:13,616
the parish council, I submitted my response to chapter

816
00:48:13,796 --> 00:48:17,676
eight, Cultural Heritage and Archaeology, before the

817
00:48:17,716 --> 00:48:21,676
June deadline, and I appreciate this opportunity to

818
00:48:21,805 --> 00:48:24,816
add to it, though I must say, I will be

819
00:48:25,716 --> 00:48:29,356
repeating some of the remarks already made during this hearing.

820
00:48:30,506 --> 00:48:34,066
The undoubted beauty of the landscape and the

821
00:48:34,116 --> 00:48:37,316
richness of our historic and natural environment

822
00:48:37,836 --> 00:48:41,556
set Castle Acre apart from many other

823
00:48:41,576 --> 00:48:45,076
Norfolk villages, and its position on the northern

824
00:48:45,256 --> 00:48:48,746
slope of the Nar Valley means it has far-reaching

825
00:48:48,836 --> 00:48:51,316
views over the river and farmland.

826

00:48:51,966 --> 00:48:55,856
And this was actually acknowledged and stated in chapter

827
00:48:55,996 --> 00:48:56,276
eight,

828
00:48:57,256 --> 00:49:00,396
6.44, 6.48 and

829
00:49:00,876 --> 00:49:02,056
6.49.

830
00:49:03,684 --> 00:49:07,284
What is at risk if the Droves solar farm goes ahead

831
00:49:07,744 --> 00:49:11,644
is our rural settlement pattern dating back to at

832
00:49:11,804 --> 00:49:15,284
least the Saxons. In fact, even the name

833
00:49:15,444 --> 00:49:19,304
acre comes from the old English for a plot of

834
00:49:19,364 --> 00:49:20,444
arable land.

835
00:49:21,964 --> 00:49:25,894
Our rural narrow road network is based

836
00:49:25,944 --> 00:49:29,344
on Roman and medieval trackways and hollow ways

837
00:49:29,784 --> 00:49:33,384
bounded by banks and ditches. There are still

838
00:49:33,424 --> 00:49:37,164
medieval field boundaries, livestock droveways,

839
00:49:37,704 --> 00:49:41,644
and the agricultural revolution, of which Norfolk was a leader,

840
00:49:42,164 --> 00:49:45,944
is evidenced in our rectangular fields and marl pits.

841
00:49:47,464 --> 00:49:51,444
The proposed solar farm lies within the setting of

842
00:49:51,544 --> 00:49:54,584
multiple designated heritage assets,

843
00:49:55,344 --> 00:49:59,224
including the priory, the castle, and the Bailey

844
00:49:59,304 --> 00:49:59,664
Gate.

845
00:50:00,584 --> 00:50:04,404
All three are scheduled ancient monuments and

846
00:50:04,524 --> 00:50:08,454
are thereby protected under the Planning, Listed Buildings,

847
00:50:08,624 --> 00:50:12,234
and Conservation Areas Act of 1990,

848
00:50:12,804 --> 00:50:16,264
which requires authorities to conserve their

849
00:50:16,324 --> 00:50:16,964
settings.

850
00:50:18,304 --> 00:50:21,864
The two grade one listed churches of St James,

851
00:50:22,184 --> 00:50:25,744
Castle Acre, and St George, South Acre, are

852
00:50:25,864 --> 00:50:29,584
also in settings which are a major part of their

853

00:50:29,644 --> 00:50:30,424
significance.

854
00:50:31,264 --> 00:50:35,164
The Droves solar installation will deprive them of

855
00:50:35,204 --> 00:50:38,794
this context within the wider historic environment,

856
00:50:39,504 --> 00:50:43,324
and this environment also includes six other

857
00:50:43,364 --> 00:50:47,124
monastic sites in the Nar Valley, making it unique

858
00:50:47,324 --> 00:50:50,884
in Norfolk and in fact in East Anglia, if not

859
00:50:50,964 --> 00:50:51,564
nationally.

860
00:50:53,404 --> 00:50:56,964
Not only the solar panels themselves, but the security

861
00:50:57,064 --> 00:51:00,244
fences, the CCTV cameras, the

862
00:51:00,324 --> 00:51:04,184
inverters, the access tracks, the substations,

863
00:51:04,684 --> 00:51:07,824
and additional pylons will impose a

864
00:51:07,944 --> 00:51:11,943
large-scale industrial development on this rural

865
00:51:12,064 --> 00:51:15,744
setting, as has been stated by all of those able

866
00:51:16,184 --> 00:51:18,184
to contribute to this hearing.

867
00:51:19,904 --> 00:51:23,364
In addition, Castle Acre lies in an

868
00:51:23,484 --> 00:51:27,244
area of rich archaeological potential with

869
00:51:27,384 --> 00:51:31,064
documented features from the prehistoric, the

870
00:51:31,164 --> 00:51:34,864
Roman, the Saxon, and the medieval periods.

871
00:51:35,864 --> 00:51:38,564
A development of this magnitude

872
00:51:39,484 --> 00:51:42,644
risks destroying unrecorded

873
00:51:42,744 --> 00:51:44,374
archaeological remains

874
00:51:45,304 --> 00:51:48,464
and denies future generations the

875
00:51:48,544 --> 00:51:52,264
opportunity to add to knowledge of our history.

876
00:51:54,164 --> 00:51:57,764
Castle Acre Parish Council, on behalf of its residents,

877
00:51:58,224 --> 00:52:02,144
therefore considers that the Droves will cause significant

878
00:52:02,704 --> 00:52:06,504
and irreversible harm to our cultural landscape,

879
00:52:07,014 --> 00:52:10,804
the beauty and tranquility of one of Norfolk's most

880

00:52:10,864 --> 00:52:14,304
important and also nationally important

881
00:52:14,764 --> 00:52:16,664
heritage clusters.

882
00:52:17,524 --> 00:52:21,404
How can then this be an appropriate location

883
00:52:21,464 --> 00:52:24,024
for a solar farm? Thank you.

884
00:52:27,264 --> 00:52:28,484
Thank you, Anne Mason.

885
00:52:30,384 --> 00:52:31,944
Tony Morgan next. Thank you.

886
00:52:34,404 --> 00:52:36,624
Good afternoon. My name's Tony Morgan.

887
00:52:36,904 --> 00:52:40,864
I'm an electrical engineer with over 40 years' experience in power systems.

888
00:52:41,644 --> 00:52:45,624
I strongly support renewable generation, especially

889
00:52:45,644 --> 00:52:48,404
distributed home-mounted and rooftop solar.

890
00:52:49,324 --> 00:52:52,484
My objection is to the scale, location, and system

891
00:52:52,564 --> 00:52:55,204
design of the proposed Droves solar farm.

892
00:52:56,574 --> 00:52:57,924
This large-scale solar

893
00:53:03,064 --> 00:53:06,404

and battery installation would cover roughly 840

894
00:53:06,584 --> 00:53:10,484
hectares of productive farmland with up to 500 megawatts

895
00:53:10,524 --> 00:53:14,444
of solar, plus a large battery energy storage system, together with

896
00:53:14,524 --> 00:53:15,984
two large substations.

897
00:53:17,124 --> 00:53:21,003
UK solar has a low efficiency factor of only about

898
00:53:21,044 --> 00:53:24,943
10% compared with a gas oil boiler, which is 94%

899
00:53:25,044 --> 00:53:25,584
efficient.

900
00:53:26,794 --> 00:53:30,694
So therefore, instead of 2,800 acres,

901
00:53:30,804 --> 00:53:34,354
this all could be condensed into 280 acres if it was

902
00:53:34,424 --> 00:53:35,644
100% efficient.

903
00:53:37,594 --> 00:53:41,564
Large ground-mounted arrays also need extensive new high-voltage

904
00:53:41,624 --> 00:53:45,304
infrastructure, two substations up to 13 meters high,

905
00:53:45,964 --> 00:53:49,384
new 400 kilowatt pylons up to 55 meters high,

906
00:53:50,044 --> 00:53:53,344
and a BESS compound up to 10 and a half hectares

907
00:53:53,404 --> 00:53:57,364
containing 416 meter, three and a half

908
00:53:57,464 --> 00:54:01,084
by three and a half meter battery containers, each

909
00:54:01,144 --> 00:54:04,984
requiring liquid and air conditioning, cooling,

910
00:54:05,144 --> 00:54:07,144
and heating 24 hours a day.

911
00:54:08,564 --> 00:54:12,384
In winter, these could take up to 44 days to fully charge if

912
00:54:12,564 --> 00:54:16,084
used by the solar, and they can be discharged within five

913
00:54:16,124 --> 00:54:16,624
hours.

914
00:54:18,284 --> 00:54:22,224
To put the footprint into everyday terms, the BESS compound and the

915
00:54:22,264 --> 00:54:25,494
two substations alone is large enough to store

916
00:54:25,524 --> 00:54:27,604
23,000 vehicles.

917
00:54:28,604 --> 00:54:32,104
This size and scale of solar farm creates transmission losses,

918
00:54:32,724 --> 00:54:36,644
voltage and fault level challenges, and permanent industrial assets

919
00:54:36,704 --> 00:54:37,764
in a rural setting.

920
00:54:38,644 --> 00:54:42,544

Rooftop solar avoids most of these problems because generation is closer

921
00:54:42,584 --> 00:54:43,304
to demand.

922
00:54:44,644 --> 00:54:48,244
The food production cost is also very large, roughly

923
00:54:48,304 --> 00:54:51,784
enough to feed 14,000 people over the

924
00:54:52,044 --> 00:54:55,764
60-year life of the scheme, nearly a 900 million meals.

925
00:54:56,194 --> 00:54:59,744
That is the equivalent to providing three meals a day for every

926
00:55:00,124 --> 00:55:03,864
resident of a city the size of Norwich for more than 40

927
00:55:03,944 --> 00:55:04,404
years

928
00:55:05,988 --> 00:55:09,428
Solar panels will need replacing and recycling approximately three

929
00:55:09,488 --> 00:55:13,008
times. Approximate cost in today's cost is probably

930
00:55:13,128 --> 00:55:15,128
100 million pounds each time.

931
00:55:16,618 --> 00:55:20,488
The BESS will need to be replaced and recycled at least five

932
00:55:20,548 --> 00:55:20,968
times,

933
00:55:22,148 --> 00:55:25,828
and that's approximately, in today's cost, 500 million pounds.

934
00:55:27,208 --> 00:55:30,807
At the moment, we've got no idea where these panels and batteries will end up to be

935
00:55:30,868 --> 00:55:32,208
recycled.

936
00:55:33,548 --> 00:55:36,588
Intermittency costs are already

937
00:55:36,648 --> 00:55:39,988
real. We look at solar as going to be the next

938
00:55:40,028 --> 00:55:43,888
secure energy. Well, just a few weeks

939
00:55:43,948 --> 00:55:46,848
ago, during the 12th of August solar eclipse,

940
00:55:47,668 --> 00:55:51,308
NESSO paid 6.2 million for extra power for two

941
00:55:51,408 --> 00:55:53,108
hours from abroad,

942
00:55:53,928 --> 00:55:56,528
which was about 10 times its normal rates,

943
00:55:57,428 --> 00:56:01,348
and which equate to approximately 10 pound per person, which will

944
00:56:01,408 --> 00:56:02,868
be added to people's bills.

945
00:56:04,188 --> 00:56:08,108
Our overhead lines are full to capacity, and when the wind blows, the

946
00:56:08,128 --> 00:56:10,988
wind turbines will have priority over the solar farm.

947
00:56:11,928 --> 00:56:15,848
More than likely it will be disconnected, therefore penalties will be due and

948
00:56:15,948 --> 00:56:17,228
paid to the solar farm.

949
00:56:18,808 --> 00:56:22,228
The BESS also carry recognized thermal runaway and fire risk,

950
00:56:22,308 --> 00:56:24,568
especially in surface water flood zones.

951
00:56:25,368 --> 00:56:29,168
220,000 liters approximately of stored

952
00:56:29,228 --> 00:56:33,188
water, enough to last for two hours to cool the adjacent lithium

953
00:56:33,248 --> 00:56:35,308
batteries that are to be provided on site.

954
00:56:36,168 --> 00:56:40,068
Field fires under solar, firefighters are not allowed to enter solar

955
00:56:40,168 --> 00:56:43,028
farms as solar panels cannot be switched off,

956
00:56:43,968 --> 00:56:45,748
causing electrocution risk.

957
00:56:46,818 --> 00:56:50,168
The construction traffic for HTVs, lorries, and cars would be

958
00:56:50,228 --> 00:56:53,848
approximately 600 two-way movements a day.

959
00:56:55,008 --> 00:56:58,228
With also three million liters of deionized water will be

960
00:56:58,668 --> 00:56:59,968
required to be delivered

961
00:57:00,888 --> 00:57:04,548
to site, another 100 to 200 lorries possibly per year

962
00:57:05,028 --> 00:57:06,448
for the next 60 years.

963
00:57:07,408 --> 00:57:10,248
Finally, there's no ring-fence decommissioning fund for a

964
00:57:10,548 --> 00:57:14,188
950 million pound project, which could run into

965
00:57:14,208 --> 00:57:15,748
500 million or more.

966
00:57:16,748 --> 00:57:20,508
Miles of plastic-coated underground cables will stay in the ground
forever.

967
00:57:23,548 --> 00:57:27,488
IGP do not have permission for the National Grid substation as yet,

968
00:57:27,868 --> 00:57:31,748
and if built will remain forever. Also, some of the conditions and

969
00:57:31,828 --> 00:57:35,148
clauses imposed will never be transferred to the new owners.

970
00:57:36,197 --> 00:57:40,118
The solar gateway itself is 30 times oversubscribed with solar

971
00:57:40,188 --> 00:57:44,088
projects. We only need a projected 30 gigawatt by

972
00:57:44,288 --> 00:57:48,168
2035 to 2050, not the 900 gigawatt that's

973

00:57:48,208 --> 00:57:51,868
been put forward. So this farm is not a national need.

974
00:57:52,748 --> 00:57:56,428
In short, locking high-quality farmland into large ground-mounted

975
00:57:56,488 --> 00:58:00,388
scheme for 60 years is an inefficient way to deliver the

976
00:58:00,448 --> 00:58:04,368
same megawatts. Preferable alternatives, rooftop,

977
00:58:04,708 --> 00:58:08,628
commercial building-mounted, and brownfield solar, keep generation

978
00:58:08,668 --> 00:58:12,568
closer to the load, reduce transmission needs, avoid

979
00:58:12,628 --> 00:58:16,228
repeated battery replacements, and protect food production.

980
00:58:16,808 --> 00:58:19,488
That is the route I support. Thank you.

981
00:58:28,508 --> 00:58:32,488
Thank you, Tony Morgan. Can I ask if there's anyone else here today,
either in the

982
00:58:32,528 --> 00:58:35,628
room or virtually, who wishes to speak that we have not heard from?

983
00:58:39,048 --> 00:58:39,808
Okay, I'm not...

984
00:58:41,028 --> 00:58:41,568
Tim Hubbard?

985
00:58:46,108 --> 00:58:46,868
Yes. Thank you, sir.

986
00:58:48,148 --> 00:58:50,868

I do just want to make a further point, if I may.

987
00:58:52,548 --> 00:58:54,048
What would be extremely helpful,

988
00:58:54,968 --> 00:58:57,588
particularly with the views from the

989
00:58:57,668 --> 00:58:59,088
A1065,

990
00:59:00,148 --> 00:59:03,197
would be some computer-generated images, please,

991
00:59:05,728 --> 00:59:08,298
as one looks towards the village of Castleacre,

992
00:59:09,108 --> 00:59:10,988
across the

993
00:59:12,228 --> 00:59:15,208
substation site and BESS storage sites.

994
00:59:17,548 --> 00:59:18,828
If that is at all possible.

995
00:59:23,428 --> 00:59:25,827
So that is views from the 1065,

996
00:59:26,988 --> 00:59:29,558
as one heads north towards Castleacre,

997
00:59:30,408 --> 00:59:33,648
across what will be the fields I mentioned in my submission,

998
00:59:34,488 --> 00:59:37,768
towards the substation and BESS storage site.

999
00:59:38,198 --> 00:59:38,568
Thank you.

1000
00:59:38,928 --> 00:59:42,808
Thank you. And if you could put that in your submission following

1001
00:59:42,848 --> 00:59:45,008
today's meeting, I think that would help.

1002
00:59:45,068 --> 00:59:45,908
Yes, I will do that.

1003
00:59:45,988 --> 00:59:46,228
Okay.

1004
00:59:46,268 --> 00:59:47,248
Thank you.

1005
00:59:48,888 --> 00:59:52,568
Okay. So, in that case, now that we've heard from everyone, I'll now move on

1006
00:59:52,648 --> 00:59:55,948
to agenda item five, which is responses by the

1007
00:59:56,008 --> 00:59:59,908
applicant. Does the applicant wish to comment or respond to the

1008
00:59:59,948 --> 01:00:01,148
oral submissions made?

1009
01:00:05,228 --> 01:00:08,428
Thank you, sir. Alex Trezise on behalf of the applicant.

1010
01:00:08,828 --> 01:00:12,588
Yes, I've got several points to make in response, please, if that would be

1011
01:00:12,628 --> 01:00:13,188
acceptable.

1012
01:00:14,748 --> 01:00:18,708
I'd like to start, as you can imagine, by thanking all of the interested parties

1013
01:00:19,508 --> 01:00:21,728
for their submissions and attendance today.

1014
01:00:22,488 --> 01:00:26,348
I also note as well that everyone, the applicant and all the interested parties,

1015
01:00:26,368 --> 01:00:27,218
are required to

1016
01:00:28,188 --> 01:00:31,908
submit a summary of their oral submissions at the hearings into the

1017
01:00:31,948 --> 01:00:35,428
examination at deadline four, and therefore, we look forward to

1018
01:00:35,468 --> 01:00:39,028
receiving these submissions in writing, and we'll consider those

1019
01:00:39,548 --> 01:00:42,748
and respond appropriately to the extent that I don't do so

1020
01:00:44,008 --> 01:00:44,308
now.

1021
01:00:46,088 --> 01:00:48,408
Numerous points

1022
01:00:49,408 --> 01:00:52,908
raised in the hour or so that we've just heard from the interested parties.

1023
01:00:54,808 --> 01:00:58,688
I'll take them in turn in order of the people that

1024
01:00:58,748 --> 01:01:02,108
spoke, but obviously, as we've noted, there was some crossover between the

1025
01:01:02,148 --> 01:01:02,888

submissions, so

1026
01:01:03,708 --> 01:01:07,298
it may be that points are raised under a certain person when they were repeated by

1027
01:01:07,328 --> 01:01:09,348
somebody else. So if I start with Mr.

1028
01:01:09,508 --> 01:01:12,888
Freeman's submission, he made several points about the

1029
01:01:12,948 --> 01:01:15,268
process under which this

1030
01:01:16,478 --> 01:01:20,138
Application for the scheme is examined.

1031
01:01:20,518 --> 01:01:23,858
It's very clear that it's not for this examination to speak

1032
01:01:23,938 --> 01:01:27,738
about that process or the policies of government, i.e., the

1033
01:01:27,798 --> 01:01:30,288
merits of national policy statements.

1034
01:01:30,358 --> 01:01:34,158
And those national policy statements place a strong presumption in

1035
01:01:34,218 --> 01:01:36,108
favor of development such as the scheme.

1036
01:01:36,458 --> 01:01:37,388
And I also reference,

1037
01:01:38,238 --> 01:01:41,828
as I have several times before, the statement of need regarding the critical

1038
01:01:41,898 --> 01:01:45,768

national need for the scheme. So that is the process under which this

1039
01:01:45,778 --> 01:01:49,518
scheme will be examined and decided, and there should be nothing

1040
01:01:49,578 --> 01:01:51,358
further discussed on that matter.

1041
01:01:52,718 --> 01:01:55,758
He also referenced the cumulative impact with High Grove.

1042
01:01:57,678 --> 01:02:00,598
That I note is contained in detail in Mr.

1043
01:02:00,818 --> 01:02:04,558
Freeman's written representation at Deadline 1, and therefore, the applicant

1044
01:02:05,038 --> 01:02:08,158
has responded to that in detail at Deadline 2, which is Rep

1045
01:02:08,318 --> 01:02:11,338
2-028. And so I would encourage Mr.

1046
01:02:11,538 --> 01:02:15,398
Freeman to read that response document in full if he hasn't done

1047
01:02:15,438 --> 01:02:19,338
so already. But in summary, the assessment of cumulative effects has

1048
01:02:19,358 --> 01:02:23,168
been undertaken in line with the requirements of the environmental

1049
01:02:23,238 --> 01:02:27,098
impact assessment regulations and the Planning Inspectorate's advice note

1050
01:02:27,138 --> 01:02:28,598
on cumulative effects assessment.

1051

01:02:29,288 --> 01:02:32,948
That approach to cumulative assessment is detailed in Environmental

1052
01:02:33,058 --> 01:02:36,078
Statement Chapter 2 and Environmental Statement Appendix

1053
01:02:36,278 --> 01:02:39,998
2.4. So cumulative assessments within each of the technical topic

1054
01:02:40,058 --> 01:02:43,198
chapters have been undertaken in accordance with the relevant

1055
01:02:43,258 --> 01:02:46,978
topic-specific guidance and best practice approach, in all cases

1056
01:02:47,018 --> 01:02:49,958
assessing a reasonable worst-case scenario.

1057
01:02:49,998 --> 01:02:53,538
And as we've touched on before in the examination, the scheme adopts
a

1058
01:02:53,578 --> 01:02:57,218
mitigation hierarchy to minimize cumulative impacts as far as

1059
01:02:57,298 --> 01:02:58,358
reasonably practicable.

1060
01:02:59,638 --> 01:03:03,288
Throughout the applicant's site evolution and iterative

1061
01:03:03,378 --> 01:03:07,148
design, sensitive environmental receptors are avoided as much as

1062
01:03:07,178 --> 01:03:10,738
possible, and that reduces the potential for in-combination effects
with other

1063
01:03:10,778 --> 01:03:14,418
developments. And that approach is reinforced by embedding
mitigation

1064
01:03:14,438 --> 01:03:17,998
directly into the scheme, including the strategic positioning of

1065
01:03:18,038 --> 01:03:21,898
infrastructure away from receptors, the layouts being informed to

1066
01:03:21,938 --> 01:03:25,738
limit the use of Grades 1 and 2 agricultural land, and the incorporation of buffers

1067
01:03:25,778 --> 01:03:29,718
and green infrastructure. And I'll come onto agricultural land in a moment, as I

1068
01:03:29,738 --> 01:03:33,578
appreciate that was referenced several times in the submissions we've just

1069
01:03:33,638 --> 01:03:36,378
heard. But Mr. Freeman also referenced scale

1070
01:03:37,318 --> 01:03:41,018
of the scheme. And again, I must reference the previous open

1071
01:03:41,098 --> 01:03:45,088
floor hearing where this matter was discussed at length and our summary of our

1072
01:03:45,138 --> 01:03:49,058
position in that regard in Rep 1-070.

1073
01:03:51,118 --> 01:03:55,058
In summary again, though, the applicant is a solar developer, and therefore, the

1074
01:03:55,158 --> 01:03:58,938
scheme is a large-scale solar scheme and not a wind farm,

1075
01:03:59,058 --> 01:04:02,398
as the statement of need sets out in great detail.

1076

01:04:02,938 --> 01:04:06,858
The scale of the scheme's been carefully considered, balancing the need to

1077
01:04:06,918 --> 01:04:10,618
maximize the grid capacity in line with government policy, whilst also

1078
01:04:10,678 --> 01:04:14,518
making the most efficient use of the land and avoiding impacts as far

1079
01:04:14,558 --> 01:04:18,278
as practicable. And the planning statement and the statement of need set out in

1080
01:04:18,398 --> 01:04:22,338
full the justification for the scheme and its proposed scale within the

1081
01:04:22,378 --> 01:04:25,898
context of the important, clear, and urgent national

1082
01:04:25,978 --> 01:04:28,378
need for low-carbon energy generation.

1083
01:04:29,118 --> 01:04:32,728
Indeed, there was discussion in this hearing about the impacts of climate change in

1084
01:04:32,758 --> 01:04:34,598
the context of agricultural land.

1085
01:04:34,638 --> 01:04:38,408
Well, that climate change is exactly what developments such as the scheme

1086
01:04:38,778 --> 01:04:39,918
are attempting to combat.

1087
01:04:41,858 --> 01:04:45,298
Mr. Wild MP and others talked about site

1088
01:04:45,378 --> 01:04:48,898
selection. So in Appendix 1 of the applicant's planning

1089
01:04:48,958 --> 01:04:52,878
statement, the site evaluation report is included, and that details

1090
01:04:52,918 --> 01:04:55,838
the process followed in selecting the site location.

1091
01:04:55,938 --> 01:04:59,858
So the applicant, as I've said before, followed a staged approach to

1092
01:04:59,868 --> 01:05:03,378
assessment, taking into consideration a range of planning,

1093
01:05:03,418 --> 01:05:07,267
environmental, and operational factors, including consideration of

1094
01:05:07,278 --> 01:05:11,158
designated international and national ecological and geological
sites,

1095
01:05:11,538 --> 01:05:15,078
nationally designated landscapes, ancient woodland, flooding,

1096
01:05:15,338 --> 01:05:17,298
heritage, and archaeological concerns.

1097
01:05:17,338 --> 01:05:21,178
And Chapter 4 of the environmental statement and that Appendix 1 of
the

1098
01:05:21,218 --> 01:05:25,108
planning statement that I've referenced also explain the methodology
that's been

1099
01:05:25,138 --> 01:05:28,928
applied when identifying and evaluating potential sites for the

1100
01:05:28,978 --> 01:05:29,338
scheme.

1101
01:05:30,448 --> 01:05:32,878
Mr. Wild touched on agricultural land and soils.

1102
01:05:32,958 --> 01:05:36,737
I'm not sure if he was present during the relevant item of

1103
01:05:36,797 --> 01:05:38,178
issue-specific hearing to yesterday.

1104
01:05:38,198 --> 01:05:41,878
I appreciate he's a busy man, but this was discussed at length in

1105
01:05:42,558 --> 01:05:46,358
that hearing, and therefore, our submissions in regard to that matter will be

1106
01:05:46,398 --> 01:05:50,278
contained in our post-hearing summary for that hearing, and I don't propose

1107
01:05:50,288 --> 01:05:51,708
to repeat them today.

1108
01:05:52,658 --> 01:05:56,418
Similarly, with the Ministry of Defence, again, that's been

1109
01:05:56,438 --> 01:06:00,278
discussed at length. I don't want to repeat myself on this, but I do find it

1110
01:06:00,358 --> 01:06:03,698
necessary to talk about the height of these bunds again.

1111
01:06:03,738 --> 01:06:07,498
Forgive me, but Mr. Wild made reference to the fact that they could, and he used

1112
01:06:07,518 --> 01:06:10,318
the word could, be higher than 4.5 meters.

1113

01:06:10,538 --> 01:06:14,058
That is absolutely not the case. The design principles,

1114
01:06:14,138 --> 01:06:17,258
parameters, and commitments document, which is secured in the

1115
01:06:17,298 --> 01:06:21,258
DCO, i.e. a statutory instrument when it's made that the

1116
01:06:21,298 --> 01:06:24,998
applicant has to comply with, will state and already does state

1117
01:06:25,198 --> 01:06:27,778
that these maximum parameters are 4.5 meters.

1118
01:06:27,878 --> 01:06:31,678
Therefore, the applicant cannot build bunds higher

1119
01:06:31,738 --> 01:06:32,218
than that

1120
01:06:33,498 --> 01:06:36,878
size, regardless of what mitigation comes around with the

1121
01:06:37,498 --> 01:06:41,358
Ministry of Defence. Further, the mitigation requirement that's

1122
01:06:41,378 --> 01:06:44,778
been referenced, and I appreciate this hasn't been submitted into the examination

1123
01:06:44,838 --> 01:06:48,618
yet, and there will be a chance to review and comment when it's done so, but that

1124
01:06:48,658 --> 01:06:52,518
includes, in relation to RAF Marham, consultation and

1125
01:06:52,558 --> 01:06:56,498
approval with the relevant planning authority and the Ministry of Defence.

1126
01:06:56,858 --> 01:07:00,758
So to say that the council won't have the chance to comment on those

1127
01:07:00,798 --> 01:07:04,398
mitigation proposals and that plan at the detailed design stages is

1128
01:07:04,438 --> 01:07:08,318
completely incorrect. He also referenced the National

1129
01:07:08,398 --> 01:07:11,058
Grid substation, as did a couple of the other interested parties.

1130
01:07:11,428 --> 01:07:14,898
And again, we've responded at length throughout the examination regarding this

1131
01:07:15,638 --> 01:07:18,058
supposed issue, and I won't repeat myself in this regard.

1132
01:07:18,098 --> 01:07:18,998
But I would

1133
01:07:20,026 --> 01:07:23,266
I'd encourage Mr. Wilde and other interested parties to please read in full our

1134
01:07:23,286 --> 01:07:27,086
responses to comments at the previous open floor hearing

1135
01:07:27,186 --> 01:07:28,686
in this regard.

1136
01:07:30,766 --> 01:07:33,706
Mr. Bennett has been present at all the hearings, and we've gone back and forth on

1137
01:07:33,826 --> 01:07:37,546
various matters already. So again, I will refer to the

1138
01:07:37,586 --> 01:07:41,186
full submissions in writing on the matters that you've raised from

the hearings

1139
01:07:41,206 --> 01:07:44,966
that have taken place this week. I would just note in relation to cumulative

1140
01:07:45,006 --> 01:07:48,496
assessment, that we've done our cumulative assessment with the information

1141
01:07:48,526 --> 01:07:52,436
available to us from the High Grove scheme, and it will be for the High Grove

1142
01:07:52,486 --> 01:07:56,146
scheme to undertake their own cumulative assessment when they submit their

1143
01:07:56,466 --> 01:07:59,086
DCO application as well.

1144
01:08:00,526 --> 01:08:04,346
Mr. Hubbard noted at the start of his submissions that understandably, he was

1145
01:08:04,386 --> 01:08:08,216
repeating some of the submissions made by other interested parties, and I

1146
01:08:08,326 --> 01:08:12,256
note that those submissions largely duplicate what's been submitted into

1147
01:08:12,286 --> 01:08:16,206
the examination by Castleacre Parish Council, and therefore, what has been

1148
01:08:16,246 --> 01:08:18,906
responded to by the applicant already.

1149
01:08:18,967 --> 01:08:21,087
And I believe it was yesterday in the hearing, Mr.

1150
01:08:21,286 --> 01:08:25,106
Hubbard quite rightly noted that there are a large number of documents submitted

1151
01:08:25,146 --> 01:08:28,746
into the examination, that it can be difficult to identify which

1152
01:08:28,757 --> 01:08:31,967
document is necessary to be read in relation to which matter.

1153
01:08:32,007 --> 01:08:35,746
So if it would be helpful, we'd be very happy to direct Mr.

1154
01:08:35,786 --> 01:08:39,587
Hubbard or any of the interested parties to the responses to previous submissions,

1155
01:08:40,166 --> 01:08:43,986
including in relation to matters raised in submissions today regarding site

1156
01:08:44,066 --> 01:08:46,446
selection and the process of NISO.

1157
01:08:46,547 --> 01:08:48,887
So I don't propose to repeat those today.

1158
01:08:49,806 --> 01:08:53,326
Meaningful engagement was also referenced, and as you can imagine, the applicant

1159
01:08:53,387 --> 01:08:56,967
completely agrees with the necessity of that and will absolutely

1160
01:08:57,047 --> 01:09:00,967
continue to progress this throughout the remainder of the examination and

1161
01:09:01,026 --> 01:09:03,146
beyond. It doesn't just stop at the end of the examination.

1162

01:09:03,186 --> 01:09:06,846
It's something the applicant's committed to doing on an ongoing basis.

1163
01:09:08,007 --> 01:09:11,967
Just at the end of the submissions made, there was a request for views

1164
01:09:12,007 --> 01:09:14,047
provided from the A1065,

1165
01:09:15,047 --> 01:09:19,026
that viewpoint. And that was provided by the applicant at deadline three

1166
01:09:19,146 --> 01:09:22,766
at a request from Breckland Council in the updated

1167
01:09:23,927 --> 01:09:27,887
landscape technical note, which is Rep 3-083.

1168
01:09:28,025 --> 01:09:28,206
So,

1169
01:09:29,146 --> 01:09:33,116
if that could be checked by Mr. Hubbard, and if there's anything further

1170
01:09:33,146 --> 01:09:34,566
you'd like, then please do let us know.

1171
01:09:34,666 --> 01:09:36,666
But we did provide some viewpoints

1172
01:09:37,686 --> 01:09:40,706
in that document at a request from the council.

1173
01:09:43,026 --> 01:09:46,786
Ms. Mason, again, quite fairly noted that she was repeating

1174
01:09:46,826 --> 01:09:50,486
certain submissions that had been made both today and in the

examination

1175
01:09:50,887 --> 01:09:54,606
generally. Heritage matters were discussed at length

1176
01:09:55,026 --> 01:09:58,926
at ISH 1, and therefore, the applicant's responses to these

1177
01:09:58,946 --> 01:10:02,706
matters are contained in full in our post-hearing summary

1178
01:10:02,786 --> 01:10:06,666
for that hearing. And I also note that some of the points made

1179
01:10:06,726 --> 01:10:10,506
by Ms. Mason were included in the submission made by Castleacre

1180
01:10:10,546 --> 01:10:14,166
Parish Council at deadline three, and therefore, the applicant will

1181
01:10:14,206 --> 01:10:17,606
submit its responses to that document at deadline four, as it will
do with

1182
01:10:17,706 --> 01:10:20,226
all deadline three submissions.

1183
01:10:21,346 --> 01:10:23,406
And finally, but certainly not least, Mr.

1184
01:10:23,626 --> 01:10:27,606
Morgan referenced several matters, including rooftop solar.

1185
01:10:28,016 --> 01:10:31,786
The statement of need and indeed the national policy statements make
it very

1186
01:10:31,886 --> 01:10:35,655
clear that both rooftop solar and large-scale solar

1187
01:10:35,726 --> 01:10:37,426

generation is necessary rather than

1188
01:10:38,526 --> 01:10:42,186
one or the other. He also referenced scale and site selection, which I've

1189
01:10:42,226 --> 01:10:45,466
already covered and which has been covered at length throughout the

1190
01:10:45,506 --> 01:10:49,406
examination. In terms of efficiency, and I don't profess to be an

1191
01:10:49,446 --> 01:10:53,356
expert on this matter, but that is discussed at length in the statement of

1192
01:10:53,426 --> 01:10:57,106
need. So I would encourage a full read-through of that document if it hasn't been

1193
01:10:57,126 --> 01:10:59,896
done so already. And, again, if there are any further questions,

1194
01:11:01,906 --> 01:11:04,646
please put them in writing and we'd be happy to respond in full.

1195
01:11:04,686 --> 01:11:08,426
So, those are the submissions that I'd like to make today, and

1196
01:11:08,586 --> 01:11:12,496
I note again that most of the points raised have already been responded to at

1197
01:11:12,566 --> 01:11:15,426
length by the applicant throughout the examination already.

1198
01:11:15,866 --> 01:11:19,636
As I say, I look forward to receiving further comments in writing from the

1199
01:11:19,666 --> 01:11:23,006
interested parties and responding to those as appropriate where the

1200
01:11:23,066 --> 01:11:26,186
applicant has not already done so during the examination.

1201
01:11:26,226 --> 01:11:29,606
And once again, we are genuinely very grateful to all the interested parties

1202
01:11:29,686 --> 01:11:33,646
for their submissions today and their engagement with the examination in general.

1203
01:11:37,785 --> 01:11:41,646
Thank you, Alex Tresserdin. I'll now move on to item six

1204
01:11:41,706 --> 01:11:42,886
to close the meeting.

1205
01:11:43,746 --> 01:11:47,646
I'd like to thank you all for your contributions and to remind you again that

1206
01:11:47,666 --> 01:11:51,466
the evidence presented orally today should be included in post-hearing

1207
01:11:51,546 --> 01:11:54,906
submissions and submitted at procedural deadline four,

1208
01:11:55,566 --> 01:11:58,206
which is Wednesday, the 16th of September.

1209
01:11:59,526 --> 01:12:03,146
The digital recording of the proceedings today will be made available as soon as

1210
01:12:03,166 --> 01:12:06,926
possible on the Drove Solar Farm page of the Planning Inspectorate's

1211
01:12:07,146 --> 01:12:08,926
National Infrastructure website.

1212
01:12:09,586 --> 01:12:13,466
Time is now 17:12, and I draw this hearing

1213
01:12:13,546 --> 01:12:14,806
to a close. Thank you.