Comments on Deadline 4 submissions

Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council represented by Michael Bennett RIN - [redacted]

Executive Summary

- Traffic accidents – comparison of Norfolk County Council's 30-year data and the Applicant's Traffic Assessment to make the case that the ExA should take into account the serious concerns of local communities with regard to traffic levels and road safety along the A1065.

- Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council's (PC) concern that Marham PAR mitigation will extend into Fields 14 and 15 and that any mitigation fences will impact the views from Visual Receptor Group 4 (VRG4).

- Agreement with BDC's comment regarding the age of the Breckland Landscape Character Assessment. That it is reasonable and proportionate to include all the energy infrastructure whether proposed or built. That cumulative impact is not just experienced by local communities in terms of individual pieces of infrastructure but as an overall impact of all infrastructure across the landscape affected.

- The landscape does not have the capacity to absorb further such developments before significant adverse effects on the landscape over a wider area.

- The impact on VRG4 is Significant and Adverse, even during the operational phase of the project. This is due to the sloping nature of the landscape and the close intervisibility of High Grove and the Droves meaning that impacts on those viewpoints visited during the ASI and Viewpoint 8 will still be there even when mitigation vegetation is fully grown.

- As previously requested, High Grove areas of solar arrays should be shown in all relevant viewpoint photomontages to give a true picture of the likely cumulative impact.

- The case can be made for providing overlapping ZTV's with High Grove being intervisible and bordering the Droves. The area of particular concern would be in relation to VRG4.

- The PC would add its agreement to BDC's position that the effects on views have been underplayed and that open panoramic views which characterise the area and the whole of the Droves site including views into the Site have not been fully accounted for.

1. *Traffic Accidents along the A1065*

- With reference to Norfolk County Council's Deadline 4 submission (REP4-044) paragraph 4.13.

  NCC as the LHA has reviewed the traffic accident data for the A1065 between Swaffham and Castle Acre for the last 30 years. The data indicates a total of 177 recorded collisions over the period, comprising:
  • 131 slight collisions
  • 35 serious collisions
  • 11 fatal collisions

  The submission then produces the type and distribution of the collisions in Figure 1 below going back 30 years from 1st July 2026. It shows a preponderance of the fatal collisions in the stretch of road from the A47 junction to the Southacre Road cross roads, along which the accesses will be for the Scheme as well as accesses onto the proposed High Grove development.

- Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council (PC) and other local representations have consistently pointed out that the A1065 is considered the most dangerous road in the county.

- In the 6.4 ES Appendix 9.2: Traffic Assessment (APP-163) section 2.9 the Applicant gives collision data for this stretch of A1065. Using the Department of Transport's STATS19 database it only covers 2022-2024. This is shown in Figure 2-3 and summarised in Table 2-2. It shows 6 collisions over those years.

- The PC has stated in its submission comments for Deadline 2 Traffic (REP2-040) their concerns for road safety along this stretch of road because of increasing delays on the A1065 during the construction of the Droves and the likely concurrent High Groves development with the likelihood of increased traffic on associated minor roads as a result.

- There is a need to regularly replace items of infrastructure during the operational sixty-year life of the project (PV panels and BESS – sections 3.1 & 3.2 oOTMP (REP3-075)). Added to this it appears that de-ionised water will require to be brought onto the Site by water tankers to regularly clean PV panels. (The Applicants response to the PC in item 3.3 Population ISH3 (REP4-035)). Therefore, the PC would contend that the NCC's accident figures of 177 collisions in total over 30 years relates better to the operational life of the development, showing the average number of collisions per year is greater than that shown in the Applicant's data.

- Following the last issue specific hearings, it would appear that there is largely agreement between the Applicant, Norfolk County Council and National Highways over the likely traffic figures and other traffic issues associated with this development, including the cumulative impact from High Grove and other developments likely to use the A47 and A1065. However, the PC would ask that the ExA take into account, when examining and assessing these issues, the serious concerns of local communities with regard to traffic levels and road safety, ensuring the outline traffic management plans for all phases of the development are strong enough to enable traffic to be accurately assessed and controlled without causing impediment to businesses, local residents and tourists using the road system around the development.

2. *Mitigation of RAF Marham PAR landing radar*

It is noted that the Marham mitigation Areas Plan (REP4-039) shows Mitigation Area 3 straying across Petticoat Drove into Fields 14 and 15.

It is also noted that in the Written Summary of Applicant's Oral Submissions to Action Points (REP4-035) Appendix 1 shows a possible cross section through Mitigation Area 2 showing the likely mitigation to be employed. The PC notes that it shows a number of mitigation fences at 4.5m high and also a bund. Although not showing further fences into Field 4 on its down slope to the north east we would ask whether that would be the case in Mitigation Area 3 in Fields 14 and 15 to the east of Petticoat Drove where the land slopes downwards.

The PC's concern is that fences at the top of Fields 14 and 15 would impede the view of Petticoat Drove on the horizon from VRG4 viewpoints such as viewpoint 17 on Hungry Hill. As the landscape slopes down towards Fincham Drove the possibility of mitigating this is difficult as the solar arrays will be progressively lower in the view with the fence likely to appear above the arrays. In addition, the hedges at the bottom of Fields 14 and 15 will be less able to mitigate the impact of the view.

3. *Reference BC5 from Comments on Applicants Response to Deadline 3 Submissions (REP4-034)*

- The PC would comment that the age of the Breckland Landscape Character Assessment is relevant to assessing the capacity of the landscape to accommodate solar and other substantial renewable energy developments and would want to support BDC's comments in relation to LCA's D1 Swaffham Heath and E6 north Pickenham Plateau.

- With reference to the Applicant's response in quoting GLIVIA3 we would interpret that paragraph 7.3, which states that cumulative effects are "*the additional changes caused by a proposed development in conjunction with other similar developments",* extends to not just other solar developments but other renewable energy infrastructure.

- The Applicant goes on to quote GLIVIA3 paragraph 7.5 *"the challenge is to keep the task reasonable and in proportion to the nature of the project under consideration. Common sense has an important part to play in reaching agreement about the scope of the assessment."*. It is interesting that common sense are words used to describe how agreement might be reached as to the scope of the LVIA. The PC would contend that common sense has not prevailed and that a reasonable and proportionate assessment would include all the energy infrastructure whether proposed or built. This is because common sense tells us that the impact is not just experienced by local communities in terms of individual pieces of infrastructure but as an overall impact of all infrastructure across the landscape affected.

- BDC in this response comments about the landscape only having so much capacity to absorb further such developments before significant adverse effects on the landscape over a wider area. The PC has consistently tried to put forward the case that the likely construction and operation of two mega solar developments immediately adjacent will overload the capacity of the landscape. They have been joined by other local voices with regard to the even wider implications for landscape

character and the impacts on the whole county. This is at the heart of the PC's and other bodies' objections to the Droves. The landscape does not have the capacity to take further developments.

- The Applicant's response also states:
  Potential significant cumulative effects in relation to the High Grove Solar DCO to the south-east of the Site have been identified within Section 6.11 of ES Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual [AS-016]. The assessment concludes:
  • Significant adverse landscape effects during the construction and operation (short and long term) stages on the E6 North Pickenham Plateau LCA; and
  • Significant adverse visual effects during the construction stage for receptors within Visual Receptor Group 4: Great Palgrave and Little Palgrave.

  The PC has sort to show in previous representations (RR-054, REP1-097, REP1-099, REP2-038, REP2-050, REP2-052) and during the ASI that the impact on VRG4 is significant and adverse, even during the <u>operational phase</u> of the project. This is due to the sloping nature of the landscape and the close intervisibility of High Grove and the Droves meaning that impacts on those viewpoints visited during the ASI and Viewpoint 8 will still be there even when mitigation vegetation is fully grown.

- The Applicant's response also states: *"Where the projects are visible in-combination from the higher ground to the east at Representative Viewpoint 8 on the South Acre Road, for example, only a proportion of both projects would be visible within the same field of view."*

  It is true that only a proportion of both projects can be seen. However, the view as shown in the photo montages 6.3.2 Figure 6.14 Winter Photomontages montages (REP3-058) whilst showing fields 21, 25, 24, 23, 15 & 14 of the Droves also shows the two fields closest to the A1065 of High Grove at the northern extent of High Grove's Central Area. The Photomontages do not, as has been requested by the PC at ISH3 (Summary of oral representation made under agenda 3.1 – Landscape and Visual – REP4-050) show the cumulative impact with High Grove. The Applicant's response is misleading as stated in REP4-050 the photomontage does not include the full view from Viewpoint 8 as stated:
  "This might be true but the visual impact is still significant and adverse when traversing the view from south round to the southwest."

  As requested, High Grove areas of solar arrays should be shown in all relevant viewpoint photomontages to give a true picture of the likely cumulative impact.

4. *<u>Reference BC6 from Comments on Applicants Response to Deadline 3 Submissions (REP4-034)</u>*

- The Applicant quotes from paragraph 7.31 of GLIVIA3: *"The initial study area may include overlapping ZTV's of all the relevant projects. This approach has been particularly important in assessing wind farms, which can be visible over considerable distances…and so the study areas for the cumulative effects can be very extensive. This may not necessarily be the case for other forms of development."*

  And goes onto say: *"The proposed Solar PV Arrays are of a lower visual profile compared to other forms of renewable development, such as wind turbines, and due to the visual containment provided by landform, hedges and woodland, the ZTVs are typically less extensive or aligned with the actual extent of visibility. For these reasons, the provision of overlapping ZTVs of the Scheme with the High Grove Solar*

DCO are not considered necessary to provide a greater understanding of the cumulative effects when travelling through the landscape."

- The PC does not think that the case can be made for not providing overlapping ZTV's with High Grove being intervisible and bordering the Droves. The area of particular concern would be in relation to VRG4.

5. *Reference BC7 from Comments on Applicants Response to Deadline 3 Submissions (REP4-034)*

- BDC considers that a number of views have been underplayed and that *"While the Council acknowledges the ecological benefits of restoring these hedgerows and, should the development come forward, would welcome the screening function they would provide, it considers, nonetheless, that the loss of these open, panoramic views which characterise the area, has not been fully accounted for and thus the effects have been underplayed."*

- The PC would add its agreement to BDC's position that the effects on these views have been underplayed and that open panoramic views which characterise the area and the whole of the Droves site including views into the Site have not been fully accounted for.

- The PDC would include those views shown in VRG4, both those included in the ES Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual and also those added and included in the ASI itinerary.

Response to Applicant's request for clarification in Representation at Deadline 4 – Following ASI

Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council represented by Michael Bennett RIN - [redacted]

The Applicant's landscape architect asks for clarification of the following:

1. Representation submitted by Sporle – "*At Location 6 there is no visible potential impact from High Groves however it is impacted by views of the Droves (fields 14 and 15 up to the horizon along Petticoat Drove). Although this is a minor road (from Sporle to Newton by Castle Acre) it is used by many people walking out from Sporle village."*

(This is item 4 in Representation at Deadline 4 – Following ASI (REP4-052))

2. Representation submitted by Sporle – *"As mentioned in item 4 above, Location 6 is only a representative view from Newton Road along which there are several points where the Droves can be viewed, which is why several points were requested in PDA-004. Again, the same argument was made by the Applicant but this is a largely open road so does not apply."*

(This is item 12 in Representation at Deadline 4 – Following ASI (REP4-052))

Response:

1. We would draw your attention to point 2 in Representation at Deadline 4 – Following ASI (REP4-052). This lists the locations visited in VRG4 as part of the ASI. VRG4 is shown in 6.3 Environmental Statement Figure 6.7: Visual Receptor Groups (APP-084). These location points are described in the itinerary for the ASI – see AS-084 - and were described and clarified in document REP1-98.

2. It is noted that the only viewpoint shown on 6.3 Environmental Statement Figure 6.7: Visual Receptor Groups. (APP-084) which is VRG4 is Viewpoint 8. The viewpoints mentioned in the above were additional requested ones including Location 6 to be visited by the ExA in the ASI.

3. We note that the Applicant requires direct reference to ES Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual (AS-016) to respond to the points above referencing Location 6.

4. The ZVI zone is shown in 6.3 Environmental Statement Figure 6.7: Visual Receptor Groups (APP-084) where it cuts roughly across the middle of VRG 4 in a north to south direction with a section that projects eastwards from Viewpoint 8 to encompass the Peddars Way and location 9 (as described in ASI itinerary). Location 6, being on the Newton Road, is situated outside of the delineated ZVI and on the boundary of VRG4. (It still shows as being within the ZTV; being able to see both solar arrays and customer substation.)

5. Paragraph 6.6.23 of ES Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual (AS-016) contends that: *The anticipated main area of visibility, based on site observations, is annotated on the ZTV study as the 'Zone of Visual Influence'.*

6. Paragraph 6.6.25 also contends that *Based on fieldwork observations, it is judged that effects on landscape and visual receptors outside the ZVI described above would be Negligible and, as such, are not assessed in further detail in this ES Chapter. This does not mean that there would be no potential visibility outside the ZVI indicated, but rather that any visibility beyond the ZVI would be minimal or at such a distance that visibility would not affect views*.

7. To clarify first point requested: We would contest that although the Applicant contends that the effects on visual receptors beyond the ZVI are Negligible in this case, there are clear views of fields 14 and 15 leading up to Petticoat Drove on the horizon. These views are created by the sloping topography which will make it difficult to mitigate and even at maturity we would expect the solar arrays to still be visible.

8. To clarify the second point requested: The minor road is used by many local walkers as it links into PRoW heading off from the road. The road offers large views westwards towards the Scheme and is largely open with few hedges. 6 above applies to all the points originally requested in PDA-004, although different bits of the Scheme maybe viewed as shown in Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council response to Statutory Consultation.

   To clarify the last sentence in the requested second point:
   Again, the same argument was made by the Applicant but this is a largely open road so does not apply."

   This is referring back to point 11 in Representation at Deadline 4 – Following ASI (REP4-052).

   However, the Applicant contends in paragraph 1.2.14 of Technical Information Note – Landscape and Visual. REP3-083:

   The proposed Solar PV Arrays would be visible within transient and intermittent views from motorists travelling along the A1065 on what is considered to be a low sensitivity receptor. On balance, the effects on the A1065 would be medium-small scale over a limited extent resulting in low-negligible magnitude and a Slight-Minimal Adverse and Not Significant effect in the long term. These assessments are further detailed within ES Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual [AS-016].

   This may be true for motorists however the impact, we would contend, is different in the case of a PRoW which this road acts as well.

   Paragraph 1.2.12 of Technical Information Note – Landscape and Visual REP3-083 the Applicant contends:

   Representative Viewpoint 8, South Acre Road and Peddars Way is judged to experience a small-scale effect in the long term after 25 years of the operation phase and beyond. This viewpoint is from an open field access point. The new trees and hedges along the field boundaries would further subdivide and compartmentalise views of the proposed Solar PV Arrays such that, in the context of the wider view, the Scheme would result a minor alteration in the long term.

   Effectively the Applicant is making a similar argument for PRoW's which we would contend is not the case for gaps in the hedges are important for walkers who appreciate the long views afforded by the landscape whether along South Acre Road and the Peddars Way or along the largely open Newton Road. Therefore we would contend that the LVIA in the ES Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual (AS-016) is inadequate as there are significant impacts beyond the ZVI within VRG4.