Whitestone Solar Farm Development Consent Order

Procedural Deadline A: 27 October 2026

Written submissions on the examination procedure

Submission on behalf of City of Doncaster Council and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 2
2 Comments on the draft examination timetable 2
2.2 Initial hearings and Deadline 1 3
2.3 ExQ1 and Deadline 3 4
2.4 February hearing week and Deadline 4 4
2.5 DCO Drafting and Deadline 5 4
2.6 Statements of Common Ground and local authority approvals 5

3 Oral participation 6
4 Attendance by the Host Authority 7
5 Summary 8
6 AI use declaration 9

1 Introduction

1.1 Stantec, on behalf of City of Doncaster Council and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, together “the Councils”, make this submission to comment on the examination procedure for the Whitestone Solar Farm Development Consent Order (DCO) application. The Councils make this submission in their capacity as two of the Host Authorities, and therefore as Interested Parties, in which this application is located.

1.2 As requested, this submission responds to the draft examination arrangements in the Examining Authority’s (ExA) Rule 6 letter, including the draft timetable at Annex D, and sets out the Councils’ intended oral participation and attendance. The Councils recognise the statutory six-month maximum examination period and support a focused Examination, but seek to make observations on the Annex D deadlines as set out below.

2 Comments on the draft examination timetable

2.1 The Councils are generally supportive of the overall structure of the timetable set out in Annex D of the Rule 6 letter, however observations are set out below for consideration by the ExA.

2.2 Initial hearings and Deadline 1

2.2.1 Issue Specific Hearings (ISH) 1 and 2 on environmental matters are programmed for 11 and 12 November 2026, before Deadline 1 on 24 November 2026, which includes Written Representations and the Local Impact Report (LIR). Draft Statements of Common Ground (SoCGs) are also sought from the Applicant at Deadline 1, including with the Councils.

2.2.2 The Rule 6 letter notes that the ISH are for “environmental matters” and therefore the Councils are currently working on the basis that the focus, in securing potential availability of its specialists, will be on matters as headed and bulleted in Annex C “Initial assessment of principal issues”. The Councils would welcome the specific agendas and timings of the 2 no. ISH at the ExA’s earliest possible convenience, to ensure that attendance by any relevant specialists can be confirmed.

2.2.3 Furthermore, the interval between the initial hearings and Deadline 1 is fairly short, particularly given the breadth of environmental matters that might be covered in the Issue Specific Hearings, the need for internal technical coordination and the need for formal approval of the finalised LIR and WR by each Council in the same period. The Councils therefore consider that it is unlikely that any adjustment could be made to the LIR or WR to reflect any notable discussions at the ISH, but note that the subsequent Examination would afford the opportunity to provide further updates to the position set out in the LIR/WR.

2.3 ExQ1 and Deadline 3

2.3.1 The publication of the ExA's 1st Questions (ExQ1) on 22 December 2026, with responses due on 19 January 2027, spans the Christmas and New Year period. Although the calendar period is approximately four weeks, the effective working period is substantially shorter and coincides with reduced officer and consultant availability. Although the Councils note that the majority of ExQ1 questions are normally directed towards the Applicant, the Councils would welcome consideration of the publication of ExQ1 earlier where practicable or, alternatively, that Deadline 3 is moved back by at least one week. As usual, the approach of targeting questions to specific Interested Parties is welcomed.

2.4 February hearing week and Deadline 4

2.4.1 The Council notes the reservation of 9–11 February 2027 for further issue-specific hearings, a compulsory acquisition hearing, a further open floor hearing and any accompanied site inspection. To enable appropriate officer and specialist attendance, the Councils request the earliest practicable confirmation of the dates within the aforementioned window and subsequently, at the earliest opportunity, the hearing agendas and subject matter.

2.4.2 Half term week in south Yorkshire is w/c 15th February 2026. The hearing sessions therefore fall just before half term, whilst Deadline 4 falls within half term on 18th February 2026. Given the tight turnaround after the hearing sessions, and challenging officer and consultant availability during this week, we respectfully request that consideration is made to extend Deadline 4 for an additional week.

2.5 DCO Drafting and Deadline 5

2.5.1 The Council acknowledges the staged consideration of the draft DCO, but would ask that if any material changes are introduced by the Applicant at Deadline 6 (6th April 2027), that are not aligned with the Councils' requests, this is accompanied by a clear opportunity, albeit presumably short, for the Councils to comment before the intended close of the examination on 9 April 2027.

2.6 Statements of Common Ground and local authority approvals

2.6.1 The Councils note that Annex F requests SoCGs between the Applicant and the Councils, including consideration of the articles and requirements in the draft DCO, with a draft at Deadline 1, further development through the Examination, and final documents at Deadline 6. The Councils support this approach and note that they received the first full draft SoCG for review from the Applicant on 23 October 2026, albeit subsequent to an SoCG table issued in advance on 16 October 2026 in relation to the specific matter of Landscape and Visual Impact. The Councils will actively engage in the process of providing clarity to the ExA through SoCG with the Applicant, subject to having sufficient time at each stage to review and respond to the Applicant's proposed wording or updates, and attending topic focussed meetings where necessary.

2.6.2 The ExA will note that the Councils are subject to due public process including potential committee/members approvals of certain documents and matters. The Councils intend to take a proportionate approach to governance to support the ExA's effective running of the Examination. However, the Councils would like to draw attention to the need at times, in either written or oral submissions, to seek approval before responding, agreeing or committing matters on behalf of the authorities.

3 Oral participation

3.1 The Councils have set out below their requests to participate orally at various Hearings. The Councils intend to have a lead planning representative at each hearing session supported by relevant technical officers or advisers where necessary, with the ability for an appropriate specialist to respond directly when invited. Note that at times both Councils may be represented by the same lead attendee or team of attendees, or supported or represented by Officers from either Council. Note that oral contributions may therefore be made on behalf of both or either Council. Attendees will seek to provide clarity to the ExA throughout as to which organisation(s) such contributions should be attributed to.

3.2 The Councils do not intend to ordinarily be legally represented at Hearings, except for those related to the draft DCO.

3.3 The Councils wish to participate orally at the Preliminary Meeting on 10 November 2026 in relation to the draft examination timetable and procedure.

3.4 The Councils wish to participate in Issue Specific Hearings 1 and 2 on 11 and 12 November 2026. As host authorities, the Councils expect to assist the ExA on environmental effects within the council geography, local planning policy, mitigation and controls, and the relationship between those matters and the draft DCO. The Councils do not presently expect to speak at Open Floor Hearing 1, as its case is more appropriately addressed through their Local Impact Report, Written Representation, SoCG and ISH participation. However, the Councils will be in attendance and would respectfully reserve their right to contribute should relevant matters be raised by other Interested Parties.

3.5 The Councils also reserve the right to participate in later hearings, including hearings on environmental matters and the draft DCO, once the detailed agendas and the progress of written submissions are known. At this stage the Councils would expect to contribute orally to all such Hearings. With respect to specific participation in the Compulsory Acquisition Hearing, this would be dependent on whether any land rights are affected of either Council by the time of the Hearing and whether an objection to the Applicant affecting such rights has been resolved.

3.6 The Councils support the blended format of the hearings and intends to identify, through the event participation form, who will attend in person or virtually, together with the agenda items and topics on which they may speak.

4 Attendance by the Host Authority

4.1 The Councils currently expect to attend and be represented at the following events:

- Preliminary Meeting, 10 November 2026 at 10.00am — attendance and oral participation on examination procedure.
- Open Floor Hearing 1, 10 November 2026 at 2.00pm — observation only, unless the ExA specifically requests the Councils' response or a matter is raised on which it would be pertinent for the Councils to respond orally for clarity at that time.
- Issue Specific Hearing 1, 11 November 2026 at 10.00am — attendance and oral participation.
- Issue Specific Hearing 2, 12 November 2026 at 10.00am — attendance and oral participation.
- Further hearings and any accompanied site inspection during the period 9–11 February 2027 — attendance and participation as relevant, subject to the published agendas and the ExA's confirmation that the events are required.

4.2 The Councils will notify the ExA promptly if the identity or mode of attendance of its representatives change. It would be highly beneficial for hearing agendas, particularly those that would really on specific technical specialists, to be issued as early as practicable to support efficient attendance and to avoid unnecessary demands on public resources.

5 Summary

5.1 In line with the above comments, the Councils therefore respectfully request that the ExA:

1. Confirms the November ISH agendas as soon as practically possible;
2. Notes that the Councils' LIR and WR will be unlikely to respond to any clarification or progress made at ISH 1 and 2;
3. Considers publishing ExQ1 earlier than 22 December 2026, or seeks to move Deadline 3 back by at least one week, if practicable;
4. Provides confirmation and agendas for the February 2027 events as early as possible, including clarifying the technical disciplines from whom attendance is sought;
5. Considers moving Deadline 3 back by a week to allow for suitable submissions to be made after the February 2027 Hearings, rather than over a week in which half term will have an impact on officer and consultant availability;
6. Ensures that any material late changes to the draft DCO by the Applicant are subject to a fair opportunity for host authority comment before the close of the Examination; and
7. Notes that appropriate governance in public authorities requires that some matters may be subject to longer time periods for responses that agree or commit the Councils in respect of the Applicant's DCO application.

6 AI use declaration

6.1 This submission has not been subject to AI and has been drafted and reviewed by Stantec and the Councils, who take responsibility for ensuring that it is accurate, complete, fit for purpose and not misleading.