Planning Inspectorate
Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

Hearing Transcript

Project:	Whitestone Solar Farm
Hearing:	Preliminary Meeting - Part 2
Date:	10 November 2026

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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:04:10 - 00:00:46:15
Thank you, everyone. It's now twelve o'clock in time for the hearing to resume. Mr. Northcote, I was just gonna come back on on your points with regards to the relevant representation submissions. So obviously, were aware at the time and we looked into it and extra time, extra two weeks was given for submission of relevant reps. What we would say is if anyone can demonstrate and they're aware that they've sent in a paper form that hasn't been picked up, they can write in again and we will consider adding them as an interested party going forward so that they've got IP status throughout the examination.

00:00:47:11 - 00:01:07:04
And as we understand it, the case team did transcribe quite as all the forms that they got that were sent in on the wrong form, but we will sort of look into that. And like I say, if there's anyone who feels like they have been missed out and wanted to be an IP at this stage, then just write in and let the case team know, and we'll pick that up and give them status going forward.

00:01:11:18 - 00:01:14:17
Mr. Walker, did you want to come back on any of those points?

00:01:15:11 - 00:01:18:20
You, madam. Yes, I have had a couple of minutes to investigate.

00:01:20:22 - 00:01:31:27
And on the address issue, understand that in general, but not necessarily specifically, that anything sent to Temple Quay House is generally forwarded to the Quadient address.

00:01:33:22 - 00:01:49:08
But I can't say for sure whether that happened in this case. And it's good to hear that the forms that were received on the incorrect form were transcribed by staff, so that issue goes away really.

00:01:51:05 - 00:01:58:08
I can confirm that we only handed out these forms at meetings to two individuals, so it is not a widespread issue.

00:01:59:24 - 00:02:04:01
I've got one more any other business type point. Shall I do that now?

00:02:04:15 - 00:02:09:26
Yes. Well, I'll hand over to my colleague then to just introduce us to that section, and then we'll hand over to you. Thank you.

00:02:12:06 - 00:02:31:12
Thank you. Moving on to Item six of the agenda. Any other matters? Mr. Northcote, I know you had indicated you wanted to speak further on this. So perhaps if we can take your comments, and then we'll come back to Mr. Walker. Thank

00:02:33:09 - 00:03:26:15
you. you, madam. I have three points to make under this heading. The first one is the use of artificial intelligence. You did refer earlier, madam, to the procedural decision, which is Annex F in your Rule six letter that you've made. I think there are two questions that I still have outstanding, madam. The first one relates to whether a statement needs to be produced by the applicant to either confirm that they've made no use of artificial intelligence in producing all of the documents or whether, if they have, whether a detailed schedule of precisely what content has been made use of of artificial intelligence can be set out in order that that can help inform not only the examining authority, but other parties in committing going forward.

00:03:27:16 - 00:03:57:23
And secondly, madam, in the interest of objectivity, openness, and fairness, your procedural note doesn't clarify whether or not the examining authority either has or proposes to make use of any artificial intelligence. For example, we don't know whether you are... Have or are proposing to have that summarized relevant representations or written representations.

00:03:58:29 - 00:04:37:01
If you are, again, I think that needs to be clarified in your rule eight letter because there would be concerns that that may result in information which might either be incorrect or incomplete as you've set out yourself as a concern relating to that. There are a very large number of relevant representations, and there might be a very large number of written representations. But if you do make any use of any aspects of summarizing, think I that does need to be clarified so we can we can comment on whether or not we think that's a sort of fair way of dealing with things.

00:04:38:12 - 00:05:09:24
My second point, madam, is one about the number of errors that we seem to be getting in this process. We've barely started, but there needs to be a greater attention to detail in in matters that are distributed. So the rule six email, for example, with the rule six letter on it, it contained a link that didn't work. That was only corrected and notified the day before the day for registering for the events.

00:05:11:11 - 00:05:43:05
I would ask on behalf of being fair to the participants, particularly those that are unrepresented, can everything be properly checked before it's sent out to make certain links and matters do actually work? People rely upon those. People have been trying to ring the general number which is given. That general number is often not answered, particularly in an afternoon. It rings out, and after a period of it ringing, it cuts you off.

00:05:43:17 - 00:05:47:10
So people don't have the ability just to ring up.

00:05:49:15 - 00:06:20:08
You know, people can email in. I did email in the other day. I received no response to my email, although the matter was addressed through a note that then came out. That was about car parking. But I am aware that people are finding it a struggle to contact the case team, particularly by telephone. I do note that in the invitations to the hearings, a direct number has been given for a member of the case team rather than the general...

00:06:20:10 - 00:06:46:29
Or in addition to the general number, which I do think is helpful. But I think we do need to be a little bit more attentive to detail in things that are being sent out that are actually correct. And the third and final point builds upon that matter. It is exceedingly worrying that the case team sent an email that contained a GDR breach with email addresses of a number of interested parties.

00:06:48:15 - 00:07:00:03
Nothing has been published in relation to that. That e mail was attempted to be recalled, we understand. But at face value, a data breach appears to have taken place.

00:07:01:26 - 00:07:35:24
But no information has been circulated to actually confirm whether a data breach did take place. If so, how many parties were affected? Have those affected parties been notified? And has the breach been reported as required internally and externally to the information commission's office? It is very concerning that we seem to have matters which should not be arising in terms of sort of procedural errors that we've had during the start of the process.

00:07:36:02 - 00:08:03:27
And going forward, I would urge, there are a large number of members of the case team that you've talked about this morning. And I think we do need to have a greater degree of things being checked for accuracy and care and attention when things are being set out. People are participating in this process on the basis that it's fair. It needs to be fair to them, and it needs to respect their privacy. Those are the issues I've got. Thank you, madam.

00:08:06:16 - 00:08:20:19
Thank you, mister Harthkar. And the points you've made, we do note and we do take on board. In particular, with regards to the data breach that you have raised,

00:08:22:09 - 00:08:34:16
I can say that the planning inspectorate does apologize for this error that was made in relation to the email notification, which was on twenty sixth of October.

00:08:37:00 - 00:08:40:25
It was an administrative error, as you've already pointed out,

00:08:44:16 - 00:09:02:09
and we were made aware of it fairly quickly after that has happened so that case team were able to issue a further communication requesting that any recipients deleted the email.

00:09:04:09 - 00:09:46:07
It is appreciated that this may have caused concern to certain individuals, but I can confirm that the matter was then reported through the planning inspectorate's internal data breach reporting process, and it was reported or referred to the appropriate team for further investigation that may be required. However, if anybody is still dissatisfied with how this has been dealt with by the planning inspectorate, then there are complaints procedures, and case team will be able to talk people through what needs to be done to to deal with that.

00:09:52:00 - 00:09:55:23
Is that is that satisfactory

00:09:57:18 - 00:09:59:06
for your purposes at this point?

00:10:01:25 - 00:10:05:09
Anti Northgate for the three joint parishes. It it it is, madam. Thank you. Yes.

00:10:05:11 - 00:10:11:05
Okay. Thank you. And now if I can pass over to Mr. Walker because I know you have some comments.

00:10:11:07 - 00:10:17:25
Thank you, madam. I just had one initial comment and then one in response to Mr. Northcote's submission.

00:10:19:22 - 00:10:41:05
The first one is about readable documents that Mr. Eastwood raised earlier. I'd just like to put on the record that the applicant's documents when submitted to the planning inspectorate were all readable. But it seems that when published, some of them have become not readable. And to the point we've already raised with the inspectorate.

00:10:42:20 - 00:10:45:24
And I think we'd all appreciate if they could all be made readable.

00:10:47:17 - 00:11:05:13
And then in response of Mr. Northcott's point about the use of AI, the applicant's approach, which it has adopted so far and will continue to do so at each deadline, is in the covering letter to say what AI has been used with the submissions at that deadline.

00:11:07:02 - 00:11:22:24
So it has done that in the procedural deadline 1A covering letter PD1001. And if that's agreeable to the examining authority, we'll continue to do that at each deadline. Thank you.

00:11:27:28 - 00:11:35:21
Thank you. At this stage, does any other person in the room have any other points that they wish to raise?

00:11:38:17 - 00:11:39:08
Thank you.

00:11:40:00 - 00:12:09:02
Hi. Sorry. I just I just wanted to ask where the culmative impact is assessed through the items and through the process for other developments in the area that obviously have an impact on the communities, such as the housing developments that propose backing up to Whitestone that is then obviously completely connecting townships together, eradicating the Greenbelt altogether. How is assessed that when you assess Whitestone and the other the other developments as well?

00:12:10:29 - 00:12:17:09
As we proceed with the examination, we will be considering cumulative effects, and that will be

00:12:18:29 - 00:12:39:02
part of our examination. We will be looking at the local impact reports, the written representations. We will be doing our written questions. And we've already highlighted there will be further issue specific hearings next year. So we will be looking at cumulative impact throughout the process.

00:12:47:10 - 00:12:51:13
Sorry. I can I can see a number of? Missus Greenwood?

00:12:52:09 - 00:13:30:16
Thank you. Janet Greenwood. One of the things that we found quite annoying, if you like, with the number of documents that we had to trawl through, etcetera, was that a reference to a number of the photographs that were taken at the viewpoints were wrongly labeled. It it we was have reported it to the inspectorate, and I believe that the applicant is aware of it. We'd be interested to see how these have been rectified, but the references were regarding wrong times of year, actually, descriptions.

00:13:31:08 - 00:13:44:12
So really what... You know, it doesn't give you much encouragement that... About the rest of the information that's been put in front of us. So I just want that to be noted. Thank you.

00:13:46:07 - 00:13:50:17
Thank you. That's noted, though. Has that been put in writing?

00:13:54:10 - 00:13:57:11
Yes. I believe it has. To save our green belt.

00:13:57:13 - 00:14:03:11
Okay. Thank you. If I could pass to Angela Eastwood. I can see your hand up.

00:14:07:20 - 00:14:49:21
Hello. Angela Eastwood, Fursby Residence Association and founder member of Save Our Bridalways. Again, speak for the community and myself. I think we're all of the opinion that the data provided to you needs to be accurate for you to make a decision on this tremendously important national

significant project. What I'd like to ask mister Walker is, how can he be sure that only two forms were handed out at the consultations? The forms weren't numbered, so I'd like to know where the evidence is that there was only two because I'm of the understanding from people that went to that meeting, a number of forms were incorrectly handed out to councillors and parish councillors.

00:14:49:23 - 00:15:24:13
Obviously, we can provide evidence on that point. But, also, I'd like to ask that when Whitestone, the applicant, has been asked about the legislation, because we've asked what legislation was used to giving out these forms. Because early on in the procedure, trying to help elderly members of the community, I asked yourself about these forms and whether they could be sent out to me, and I was told, not. So I'd like... My question is to the applicant, how can they be sure only two forms were passed out, and what legislation that they've referenced did they use because they've not answered it yet on that point.

00:15:32:04 - 00:15:38:28
Maybe, mister Walker, that's something you might want to consider and come back to us on unless you have an answer at the moment.

00:15:39:05 - 00:16:00:25
Yes, madam Angus Walker for the applicant. We may come back in more detail in in writing. When said forms were handed out to two people, I think we may have got more than one each. But I understand there are fewer than ten forms themselves were handed out to those two people, just to clarify that one.

00:16:03:18 - 00:16:19:02
I think as we've already suggested, if there are people who can be identified that they had tried to submit a form and have not been engaged in this process, then this is something that we will look at.

00:16:19:05 - 00:16:24:23
Yes. Of course, madam. We, as the applicant, would not stand in the way of anyone becoming an interested party.

00:16:28:08 - 00:16:30:04
Is there anything further, missus Eastwood?

00:16:32:20 - 00:16:53:14
Mister Walkie did actually say two forms unless I can be corrected. So please bear in mind how important this is to myself, my members of my community, and the people on this floor. Make sure the data you provide is accurate, And if you can give us the information, the evidence through further submissions of how you came to this this number, it'd be very much appreciated.

00:16:55:12 - 00:17:00:20
Thank you. And mister Gully, you'd you'd indicated you wanted to speak as well.

00:17:01:17 - 00:17:36:04

Thank you, madam. Rob Gully for Bromcaster and Rotherham councils. Just two closing points from us. Just reflecting on discussions earlier as the examining authority consider all the very relevant submissions made on the examination timetable. Just to draw the attention to rule seventeen letters, potential to ask for additional information and that if those are issued or if there are any other requests that proper time is allowed for those to be put out and responded to at the... Many years ago now, but had a thirty six hour deadline from a rule seventeen letter.

00:17:36:13 - 00:18:07:28
And reading those responses, they are largely gibberish because most people were half asleep when they were written. So if there are any in considering that timetable and any potential for Rule seventeen, please do allow people good time, particularly those who are not professionals, as many people here have said. And on the second point, it's more just a statement and observation, just that the in discussions with the councils, we have liaised with the applicant to understand how they were going to be represented at the various hearings. We obviously understand they're legally represented by Mr.

00:18:08:00 - 00:18:38:00
Walker. The councils have made a decision in the interests of efficient use of public funds that they won't ordinarily be legally represented except at any compulsory acquisition hearing or the draft DCO hearing. Not just on the basis of if things were to change and the applicant was to sign up with a case or be advised by counsel, for example, that might you might take a different view on that, but that's the assumption we're making that it won't put the councils at a disadvantage in the issue specific and open floor hearings not to be indelibly represented.

00:18:38:02 - 00:18:38:17
Thank you.

00:18:40:00 - 00:18:48:17
Thank you, Mr. Gulley. Do you have want to come back on that, Mr. Walker? I saw there was a hand up in the room.

00:18:54:07 - 00:19:01:03
Okay. Thank you. I can't see any hands up online for anybody else. Sorry,

00:19:02:28 - 00:19:04:00
mister Eastwood.

00:19:04:26 - 00:19:27:29
Thank you. Could the examining authority confirm whether nearby homes that sit on the edge of the order limit or outside the red line of the order limit have been individually assessed for the effects on residential use and amenity? The fact that a property is just outside the red line does not show the effects of being assessed by the applicant.

00:19:34:17 - 00:19:53:24

Thank you, mister Eastwood. These are issues that we we will be taking comments on, this afternoon at the open floor hearing and at the further issue specific hearing, and there will be an opportunity for people who are affected to put their views forward.

00:19:57:22 - 00:19:58:11
Yes, please.

00:20:02:03 - 00:20:39:26
Redlands for Bramlin Ravenfield. I'd like to ask why the information I got had that such heavy formatting on it. I couldn't actually access it with my computer. I had to bring it into the offices where a computer expert said, there is that much formatting that it wouldn't translate into any of the programs I'd got. And it was taking forty eight minutes to download one page because he was having to do it page by page because there was so much adobe formatting on it that it was impenetrable to to to to get through.

00:20:39:28 - 00:21:11:15
So that's that's the first thing that the information I've been getting... I have been getting is originally given. And when it's given, there's a whole load of other hoops to jump through. Like, you will be sent a code, and you must remember this code, and then... Goodness sake, why isn't it simple? If you've got a question, it needs to be answered, and it needs to be answered properly and honestly. And the other thing is, I asked repeatedly because we're not against solar power.

00:21:12:00 - 00:21:14:05
This is just in the wrong place.

00:21:15:20 - 00:21:50:16
Rotherham is not sure to brownfield sites, and yet I have never had the applicants tell me where they are. I've got a letter, which I haven't bought with me, which just refuses to do that. Right in the last paragraph, I will go home this afternoon and get it and read it out. But, basically, it says they can't reveal what the brownfield sites are because they've already been looked at and rejected. Now where was the consultation at that point where it could have been properly discussed, and it never was.

00:21:50:28 - 00:22:13:26
Like I say, we've been presented not with a consultation, but with a presentation on what the applicant desires. And what I would say in terms of fairness, it all seems very weighted in the side of the app... On the side of the applicant. And in terms of fairness, we're all being listened to, but nobody's taking it on board. Thank you.

00:22:16:27 - 00:22:22:20
Thank you, mister Reynolds, and your comments are noted. And we we do take things on board, so thank you.

00:22:24:27 - 00:22:30:03
Do you want to come back with anything, mister Walker? No, madam. And Mr. Gully?

00:22:30:19 - 00:23:01:25

Yes. Rob Gully for Doncaster and Mothraum Council. Sorry to come back in again on just a live issue in respect of the issue specific hearing tomorrow. Item three point five, water, flooding and ground conditions. I appreciate the examination time. It doesn't necessarily move for anybody, but I've just been aware that our water specialist who would just be can't attend after four fifteen. So whether as we make progress during that hearing, whether just be borne in mind if it can be made so that we can get through that item before four fifteen, that would be extremely appreciated.

00:23:01:27 - 00:23:02:12
Thank you.

00:23:03:03 - 00:23:04:19
Okay. Thank you.

00:23:07:01 - 00:23:08:00
There's

00:23:09:14 - 00:23:28:00
okay. Sorry. I just wanna ask a question of yourselves. Obviously, there's been tech issues today with people that's attending Zoom, and there's quite significant people that have been unable to speak that, for instance, Mark Corrigan from the BHS want to speak on a number of these items. What's gonna be done about those people and their representations?

00:23:29:21 - 00:24:02:17
As we have already indicated in the previous part of the hearing, it is primarily a written process. And the fact that somebody hasn't been able to speak or doesn't wish to speak doesn't mean that any of their comments are not heard or listened to, and anything that comes to us in writing holds as much weight as somebody who is before us and speaking at a hearing.

00:24:03:25 - 00:24:12:17
So we we hope that anybody who's not been able to attend today will be able to put something in writing if they have anything further to add.

00:24:17:10 - 00:24:29:08
If there aren't any further comments to be made on this matter, I will now pass over to Mr. Lachlan to take the last or to close the Premier League meeting at this point.

00:24:32:06 - 00:24:58:00
Thank you, and thank you to everyone both in the room and online today for contributing so fully and constructively to this preliminary meeting. We look forward to working with you during the examination of this application. We will, of course, reflect on what is being said today. Our rule A letter, which includes a confirmation of the examination timetable, will be published next week at the earliest opportunity.

00:24:59:16 - 00:25:44:16
Both a written note and a recording of today's proceedings will be made available as soon as practicable on the Planning Inspectorate's National Infrastructure Project page for the proposed

Whitestone Solar Form. For any administrative queries that you might have, I'm sure the case team will be able to help you, but I would ask you not to speak directly with any members of the examining authority in the interests of fairness and impartiality. I would also take this opportunity to remind you that an open floor hearing will be taking place here and online this afternoon starting at two PM, with registration for anyone participating in that hearing commencing at one thirty PM.

00:25:45:03 - 00:25:48:16
Thank you to everyone. This preliminary meeting is now closed.