



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Kilnside Energy Park
Case reference	EN0110022
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	20 May 2025
Meeting with	Meeting with Kilnside Energy Park Limited
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Circulation	All attendees

Summary of key points discussed, and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the Planning Act). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

The proposed development

A development consent order (DCO) will be sought by Kilnside Energy Park Limited (the applicant), a subsidiary of Aukera Energy, for a proposed solar generating station with an expected capacity of up to approximately 400 megawatts (MW) and a co-located battery energy storage system (BESS). As the generating capacity exceeds 50MW, the project would currently qualify as a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) (it was noted at the meeting that the threshold for solar projects to qualify as an NSIP is expected to rise to 100MW under The Infrastructure Planning (Onshore Wind and Solar Generation) Order 2025 coming into force on 31 December 2025).

The proposed development is expected to comprise the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a solar farm with ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panel areas (fixed south facing panels), an onsite substation or substations, supporting infrastructure (such as transformers, inverters, and switchgear), storage containers, temporary construction compounds, underground cabling, highway works (including improving existing access and the creation of internal access tracks), perimeter fencing and security equipment, environmental enhancement and mitigation, and other associated works.

The proposed development is made up of a main solar array site, located within the administrative area of Rutland County Council near the village of Great Casterton and north of Stamford, and options for three potential cable connection corridors which are currently presented as Grid Cable Route Search Areas, for connecting the main solar

array site to National Grid's transmission network. Two of the three potential cable connection corridors are located within the neighbouring administrative areas of Lincolnshire County Council and South Kesteven District Council. All grid connections are expected to be placed underground, the applicant confirmed.

The main solar array would cover an area of approximately 937 hectares (ha) of primarily agricultural land and the grid connection corridor search areas being approximately 1,812 ha. The site is currently subject to appraisal and preliminary surveys at this stage. However, the applicant stated that the site selection had been informed by its proximity to the transmission network and a likely grid connection point, the absence of known heritage assets onsite, the land benefiting from limited environmental constraints compared to alternative sites, and the planning policy support for solar energy development in Policy CC8 and Policy Map 48 within the emerging Rutland County Council Local Plan (which is currently subject to Local Plan examination).

The applicant explained that there is an underground gas pipe that runs underneath the main site, but that it was seeking to avoid crossing nearby railway lines and watercourses where possible. The applicant added that while the northern and middle grid connection corridor avoids crossing any major rivers, the southern grid connection route would need to cross the River Gwash. Additionally, the applicant stated that it was still determining whether to include one large onsite substation, or two smaller substations, and the location for these. Furthermore, the applicant stated that it was currently assessing possible cumulative effects with the nearby Mallard Pass Solar NSIP, which is approximately 130 metres away from the proposed development's draft Order Limits and which has received development consent. The applicant was assessing emerging practices from the examination of solar applications and made DCOs, such as acceptable fire safety measures for BESS and safe distances from residential dwellings.

In relation to good design, the Inspectorate advised the applicant to ensure it explains how the proposed development has taken account of the criteria for good design in the National Policy Statements, from earliest concept through to the submission of the final application. It was recommended that a Design Approach Document or similar tool should be used to set out the design principles guiding the development of the project and explaining its evolution following, for example, consultation feedback and / or survey outcomes and the mitigation measures proposed. The Inspectorate stated that this can help support community engagement and placemaking, to capture and explain how the local community uses the landscape, its natural environment and built structures, and what are most valued. The Inspectorate referred to its published advice page on good design and its recent webinar for further information, which the applicant stated it would consider.

Grid Connection

The applicant informed the Inspectorate that they have a Connection Agreement in place to connect to a National Grid substation by 2034, but that the substation identified by National Grid in the Connection Agreement (which states 'formerly at Casewick') does not yet exist.

The applicant explained that National Grid has recently (on 13th May 2025) publicised some information about a forthcoming Great Grid Upgrade project called Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire (WMEL) to reinforce the high voltage transmission network between Lincolnshire and the East Midlands. As part of their presentation, they shared a plan published by National Grid titled 'NGET's projects in the region' which includes an

indicative alignment for WMEL and proposed high-level locations for future substations, including one north of the Kilnside Energy Park site. The applicant noted that this may be the connection point that their proposed development connects into, in order to operate and export renewable energy to the transmission network. However, the exact location of this new substation is not yet known so there is no certainty at this stage of the project as to the exact connection point.

The Applicant also identified a possibility of connecting to the existing Ryhall substation if capacity were available. Consequently there are three options being explored for the substation connection – WMEL substation, the existing Ryhall substation or another third party potential new substation location.

In conclusion, the new transmission network substation (connection point) is being developed as part of either National Grid's WMEL project or as a possible extension to the existing Ryhall substation.

Consequently, the applicant needs to assess and consult on three broad cable route corridors at this stage, in applying the Rochdale Envelope, until the precise location of National Grid's substation is confirmed. The applicant stated that the extent of its grid connection corridors was being informed by content within its grid connection agreement. In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant said that it had supplied National Grid with its Substation Siting Study on 14th April 2025, to help with its ongoing consultation with the statutory undertaker about its plans for the new substation, which will seek separate consent via a planning application under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The applicant added that National Grid was expected to consult on its Western Marsh to East Leicestershire project in June, which would likely provide further insight into its plans for its proposed new substation. Further studies and assessments are expected to be undertaken, and the grid connection corridor refined and narrowed, once the location of the point of connection is known.

Owing to the current uncertainty with regard to the location of National Grid's new substation, the applicant stated that its approach to its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would maintain a degree of flexibility for the cable route corridors at the scoping stage, assessing the worst-case scenario, but would seek to define the grid connection route(s) by the time of producing the Environmental Statement and the submission of the DCO application.

Consenting programme

The applicant outlined its draft consenting programme, namely:

- undertaking environmental surveys - October 2024 to July 2026
- stakeholder and community engagement - May 2025 to December 2025
- statutory consultation - January to February 2026
- Adequacy of Consultation Milestone - July 2026
- submission of the DCO application - October 2026

Early engagement with statutory bodies, local authorities, and other stakeholders

The applicant stated that it was proposing a two-phased consultation approach, consisting of an early, non-statutory stakeholder and community engagement process during May to

December 2025, followed by a period of statutory consultation between January and February 2026.

The applicant stated that it would be meeting locally elected representatives and community groups before and following the official launch of the proposed development (expected to be around 3 June 2025), as well as visiting 30 nearby properties to obtain initial feedback from residents on its proposals. A newsletter is also planned to be posted to around 1,500 properties within and close to the draft Order Limits. More information will be held and updated on the applicant's project website, with the applicant planning to host online Q&A sessions. However, the applicant added that it would need to keep its consultation activities under regular review, in response to emerging requirements under the Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025.

The applicant confirmed that a meeting had been held with Rutland County Council (as the host authority) on 14th May 2025 to formally introduce the proposed development and its main features. The applicant reported that the meeting was constructive but that the council did not give any opinion on the proposed development, instead outlining that there could be potential opposition within the local community. The applicant confirmed that it has drafted a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with the host authority to identify areas that the authority may need support with.

The applicant also confirmed that they have introduced the project to neighbouring Lincolnshire County Council and South Kesteven District Council albeit by e-mail given that only Grid Cable Route Search Areas pass through their authority area.

Environmental constraints and issues

Environmental constraints at the site and surrounding area include mainly pockets of ancient woodland and established hedgerows. The site is approximately 3.5 kilometres (km) away from the Rutland Water Nature Reserve Special Protection Area (a large, artificial freshwater reservoir and a network of wetland habitats) and Ramsar site. The applicant added that the main solar array site is located within Flood Zone 1, while portions of the cable corridors are within Flood Zones 2 and 3.

In terms of the built environment, an A1 Road crosses the main site together with several Public Rights of Ways (especially within the northern section of the site). A registered park and gardens are located within 1km of the site, with a scheduled monument located towards the south-eastern section of the Main Site. Listed buildings and conservation areas can be found at different locations surrounding the site, the applicant explained. Additionally, the East Coast main railway line is located to the east of the site, which at its closest point is adjacent to the northern grid connection corridor.

The Inspectorate enquired about glint and glare effects on nearby road users, especially HGV drivers. This has been an important issue for other solar projects, the Inspectorate stated, with some applicants needing to remove panels from certain land parcels near to roads in order to mitigate such effects. The applicant confirmed that a baseline for glint and glare has been explored and there will be further assessment in a stand-alone document that will be included in its DCO application, with a focus on mitigation by design.

EIA scoping

The applicant is looking to submit its EIA scoping report to the Inspectorate during the week of 16 June 2025. The associated GIS shapefiles are scheduled for submission in the first week of June, in accordance with the Inspectorate's requirement to provide these 10-working-days prior to the scoping report. The Inspectorate flagged the requirement to ensure the pre-application fees are paid in good time, as work cannot be started until payment is received.

The Planning Inspectorate advised that the red line boundary figure submitted at scoping should include all elements of the proposed development, including the cable corridors and any scope should consider the proposed development in full.

The applicant confirmed that they have had regard to the Inspectorate's published advice on solar scoping in preparation of submitting its scoping report. In answer to a question from the applicant, the Inspectorate commented that the Commitments Register was not mandatory but is a helpful method for tracking and subsequently verifying assumptions and mitigation / good design measures relied upon for scoping matters out. It also provides for tracking of how the commitments of the proposed development evolve through to submission allowing for better understanding of the proposal by all parties.

In answer to a question from the Inspectorate, the applicant confirmed that the Wolfox airfield on the western section of the site is not believed to be an active airfield. The airfield has been identified by Rutland County Council as an opportunity area for potential mixed use development.

Environmental surveys

Several surveys have been undertaken to date, the applicant explained, including wintering birds surveys (for the 2024–2025 season), Phase 1 habitat surveys, and a landscape and visual walkover and viewpoint locations appraisal. Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys are in progress, the applicant reported, with preliminary findings indicating a mix of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land and non BMV land (grades from 2 to 4). Once the grading surveys are completed there is an intention to avoid areas of the highest value, the applicant stated. The current use of the land is mainly arable. Geophysical surveys have also begun to establish an archaeological baseline. The applicant is waiting to conduct an arboricultural survey, ecology surveys, landscape surveys with summer and winter photography, along with heritage, water resources and ground conditions walkovers to be conducted following receipt of the Inspectorate's scoping opinion.

Preparing the draft development consent order, including any novel approaches to drafting

The applicant confirmed that it is not expecting to include any novel approaches in its DCO drafting, and would seek to base its content on some of the standard conditions and requirements included in recently made DCOs for solar NSIPs. The applicant said that it was aware of the made DCO for the Mallard Pass NSIP and would look to deal with any overlaps using precedented drafting, to ensure both projects could be carried out and would not be in breach of each other. Land referencing is also underway, and the applicant is mindful of certain complexities in this regard, such as unregistered land and highways interfaces.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to clearly communicate the rationale for the width and location of its cable corridors in both consultation and application materials.

Land rights

The applicant stated that the solar array areas were currently owned by seven landowners, which it was seeking to secure land acquisition options via voluntary agreement. Three of the main landowners have signed such agreements, the applicant added, and that it was progressing discussions constructively with the remainder landowners.

Submission date

The applicant currently plans to submit its DCO application for the proposed development in October 2026.

The pre-application service offer

The service tier requested by the applicant, including justification

The applicant has requested the 'basic' tier of the Inspectorate's pre-application service. The applicant based its service tier request on the collective knowledge of its planning and specialist advisers about the DCO process and that the proposed development was not likely to involve novel or complex issues or extensive examination issues. The proposed site was also relatively contained to one main area, with relatively limited environmental or built heritage constraints.

The basic tier service was considered by the Inspectorate to be appropriate for this project, based on the discussion held at the inception meeting and the information provided by the applicant. The Inspectorate said that it would look to confirm the service tier to the applicant shortly following the meeting.

The Inspectorate emphasised the usefulness of the Programme Document for sharing up-to-date information about the proposed development and its progress through the pre-application process, in clarifying the timeframes for engagement with consultees and the maturity of its progress against the main issues and the management of risks, and any agreements on the methodology used and outcomes surveyed with relevant statutory consultees.

The Inspectorate recommended that the applicant should review recent accepted solar projects such as Dean Moor, Pear Tree Hill, One Earth, and Beacon Fen, for examples of how those applications have met the acceptance tests and the use of new components such as policy compliance documents.

Practical Arrangements

The Inspectorate would confirm the pre-application service tier and the appointment of the Case Manager by Thursday 22 May 2025. The proposed development is then expected to be launched on 3 June 2025, along with the Infrastructure's project page on its Find a National Infrastructure Project website. An invoice for payment of the Inspectorate's pre-application fee would be issued shortly. The next meeting between the Inspectorate and

the applicant is expected to take place in 4 months' time, following the issue of the scoping opinion.

Feedback on the applicant's initial Programme Document (post meeting advice)

The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document before the inception meeting, in line with the Inspectorate's 2024 Pre-application Prospectus.

Having reviewed the document, the Inspectorate considers overall that it satisfactorily covers the expected content for a Programme Document as set out in the government's statutory pre-application guidance at paragraph 10. For example, it is considered that the applicant has provided enough detail about the proposed development, its timetable and activities necessary for the pre-application process, the applicant's view of the likely main issues and risks, and the applicant's approach to early engagement with statutory consultees and other parties, at this early stage.

It would be helpful, however, if the applicant could also include:

- reasons for not using an Issues Tracker (as a primary pre-application service feature), as the Programme Document currently states that the applicant intends to use Statements of Common Ground and a Statement of Commonality instead;
- information on what non-DCO licences or consents may be needed;
- information as to whether the Programme Document has or will be shared with relevant statutory bodies;
- information on whether a need for any targeted consultation is foreseen at this early stage;
- indicative dates in its programme timetable for consultation on the applicant's draft Statement of Community Consultation, the expected publication date of its Preliminary Environmental Information Report, the holding of any multiparty meetings if these are being pursued, and Project Update Meetings with the Inspectorate.

Additionally, it would be helpful if the applicant could also indicate as to whether any of the pre-application components set out in the Inspectorate's 2024 Pre-application Prospectus will be pursued, such as submitting a Design Approach Document and/or Policy Compliance Document.

The Programme Document will need to be published on the applicant's website as soon as practicable once the project has been launched and updated during the pre-application stage at each milestone. In particular, the Programme Document should record and provide greater detail on the main issues and the progress made on surveys and any outcomes / mitigation measures proposed, the progress made with consultation with local authorities and relevant statutory bodies, and any agreements reached on the assessment methodology used and / or conclusions.