
Statement of Community Involvement

Proposed Solar Farm – Land at Bypass Farm,
South of the A1 Bypass



Project: Bypass Farm Solar Project

Client: By-Pass Farm Solar Ltd.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Scope

- 1.1.1 This report outlines the process of community consultation undertaken in respect of the proposal for a solar farm with a 49.9 MW output for a temporary period of 40 years, including battery storage units, associated infrastructure, permanent grid connection hub and environmental enhancements.
- 1.1.2 The Site measures approximately 210 acres of agricultural land abutting the southern edge of the A1 Bypass Trunk Road (dual carriageway) linking Grantham and Newark-on-Trent forming the Great North Road.
- 1.1.3 The document describes the methods of community consultation which have taken place, reporting on the level of community interest and the feedback received from the public and other key stakeholders. Finally the report reflects upon this feedback and considers the implications for the proposed development.

2.0 Planning Policy Context

2.1 National Policy

- 2.1.1 The consultation carried out during the preparation of this planning application meet the principles for greater consultation with the public and other stakeholder groups contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and as recommended in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2.1.2 In addressing the need of pre-application consultation (between applicants and the community) paragraph 39 of the framework states:

“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community”

- 2.1.3 Paragraph 41 continues to set out further benefits to the process as follows:

“The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits.”

3.0 Scope of Pre-application Activities

3.1 Pre-application Inquiry

3.1.1 A formal Pre-application Inquiry was submitted to South Kesteven District Council on 11th May 2020 and sought advice as to the principle of development and the scope of the impending planning application.

Pre-application feedback was received on 17th July 2020 (reference S20/0747) and was generally positive with regards to the principle of the proposed development. In particular, it was commented that *“the principle of the proposal is clearly supported through both local and national policy”*.

3.1.2 The key planning policy considerations were also agreed with reference to Policy RE1 and advice was given with regards to the type of supporting evidence required to satisfy the planning tests required by the policy.

3.1.3 On the matter of cumulative impacts, the pre-app response stated that *“the details of the closest solar farms are noted, and it is not considered that this development would result in any unacceptable cumulative impacts given the separation distance to these sites.”*

3.1.4 On the specific matter community support (which is required by Policy RE1) it was noted that:

“The requirement for support from local communities is a relatively new aspect of this policy and something which has yet to be tested. It is clearly open to interpretation exactly what would constitute support, but is nevertheless a very important consideration and something members are likely to attach considerable weight to.”

3.1.5 In the absence of specific pre-application guidance on this issue, the ‘Planning Assessment’ chapter has addressed this issue with reference to National Planning Policy and the outcome of recent consultation activities with the local community.

3.2 EIA Screening

3.2.1 An EIA Screening inquiry was submitted on 15th May 2020. A response was subsequently received from the LPA on 12th June 2020 which confirmed that the proposed scheme did not represent EIA development. The response is submitted with this application.

3.3 Local engagement

3.3.1 Despite restrictions imposed due to Covid-19, a comprehensive and robust scope of pre-application consultation activities has been progressed with the local community. This has included the following activities:

- The preparation of a project website at <http://bypassfarmsolar.com/>, shown below in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1: Screenshot of Bypass Solar Farm Website Homepage

- The website has hosted plans and information regarding the emerging proposals and provided an online facility for interested parties to provide feedback to the applicant and ask questions about the proposals
- The website went live on 13th July 2020 and has been operational ever since. It will remain in place throughout the determination of the application and updates will be provided to keep local people informed as to the latest developments

- The website was publicised through notices posted locally to the site and by informing the relevant Parish Councils.
- Engagement with relevant Parish Councils (Allington CP, Long Bennington CP, Foston CP and Westborough and Dry Doddington CP)
 - An email was sent to the Clerks of the Parish Councils on 9th July 2020. These emails informed the Parish Councils of the proposed development and of the public consultation activities being undertaken.
 - An offer was also extended for Savills to meet with the Parish Councils via virtual meeting (either Zoom or MS Teams) at the appropriate time.
- Contact with the relevant the relevant Ward Members – Cllr Paul Wood and Cllr Jane Wood
 - Contact with the local ward member Cllr Paul Wood and Cllr Jane Wood was made via email to inform them of the proposals and provide a link to the website containing further information.
- Press releases to local publications
 - A press release was issued to local publications including the Lincolnshire Reporter and Lincolnshire Echo in order to circulate details of the proposed plans and to provide details of the website as a source of further information.

3.3.2 The feedback received has helped to shape the proposals and the most significant change has been a reduction in the scale of the planned development. Indeed, following feedback from the local community, it emerged that views from the road along the eastern boundary of the site were among the most sensitive and therefore a decision was made to remove this area from the scheme. This amounts to a reduction of approximately 22 acres in order to reduce visual impacts and to acknowledge the concerns of the local community.

3.3.3 It is considered that the pre-application activities have been meaningful and productive in helping to shape the final proposals. The approach follows best practice as set out at Paragraph 39 of the NPPF which states that:

“Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.”

3.4 Main Issues and Responses

3.4.1 The table below summarises the main themes of the feedback received throughout the consultation period, alongside the applicant's response.

| Public Comment | Applicant Response |
|---|--|
| Concern in relation to views from Allington Road | Eastern-most fields removed from the scheme to reduce visual impacts. |
| What plans do you have in place to reduce the visual impact of the proposal on neighbouring properties? | The application is supported by a comprehensive LVIA which assessed the visual effects of the development, both individually and cumulatively. The assessment finds that the proposed development will not lead to significant adverse visual impacts and that the impacts that would occur can be appropriately mitigated through the implementation of landscaping measures. |
| Are you proposing to cover the whole of the site with solar panels or just part of it as it is a very large area? | Due to concerns raised over the scale of the site we have reduced the proposed area of the development by removing part of a field from the proposed site area, located to the east. |

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Summary

- 4.1.1 In recognition of best practice, taking account of social distancing rules and to ensure that the local community was provided with a meaningful opportunity to voice their opinions on the scheme, a virtual community consultation process was conducted.
- 4.1.2 The consultation was widely advertised through the erection of posters, via local stakeholders and through a press release locally.
- 4.1.3 A key conclusion for the public consultation process is that there have been no objections to the proposal reported.
- 4.1.4 A small number of comments raise concerns about views from the east and the overall scale of the scheme. As such, the proposal has been reduced in scale along the eastern flank and a new hedgerow proposed to help shield the scheme from the public viewpoint.

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Bypass Farm Solar Scheme



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