

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 1 August 2023 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings (Chairman)
Councillor Trevor Young (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Emma Bailey (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor Karen Carless
Councillor Jacob Flear
Councillor Paul Lee
Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Tom Smith

In Attendance:
Sally Grindrod-Smith Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Russell Clarkson Development Management Team Manager
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager

Apologies: Councillor Frazer Brown
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers

Membership: Councillor Tom Smith sat as substitute for Councillor Frazer Brown

16 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held on 11 July, 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

18 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following non-pecuniary interests were declared by Councillors in the spirit of transparency.

Councillor T. Smith declared that, as a County Councillor, he had been involved in a Planning Committee where the item had been discussed.

Councillors L. Rollings, E. Bailey and K. Carless stated they lived in locations close to proposed solar farm sites.

19 MATTERS ARISING

With no comments, questions or requirement for a vote, the Matters Arising schedule was **DULY NOTED**.

20 GATE BURTON SOLAR PROJECT - WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

The Development Management Team Manager introduced the report and outlined details of the site, the examination process and timetable. The first stage was an invite to interested parties to submit written representations and, whilst it was not mandatory, it was one of the key documents along with the local impact report considered at the meeting. The examiner would need to take them into account when making recommendations to the secretary of state.

It was explained that written representations set out terms of the approach and outlined risks together with areas where the council was supportive of the development, areas where it was neutral and finally where there were concerns and objections.

The Committee was being recommended to submit written representations, and draft representations had been prepared and circulated for consideration.

A Member of the Committee indicated that a submission should be made and suggested that certain points needed strengthening. A concern was raised regarding the loss of agricultural land and potential impact on crop production and local food supply, possibly adding to food miles and emissions if goods needed to be bought in. Secondly, it was suggested that the cumulative impact section needed adding to, in respect of the effect on community life. It was acknowledged that reference was made to the landscape, transport and other issues but the actual impact on life in the villages needed to be highlighted. The development would have a major visual impact but also affect local shops and facilities.

Councillors concurred with the suggested amendments to the response and thanked Officers for the hard work on the report. The need for alternative energy sources was recognised but this needed to be balanced against the impact on local communities. It was suggested that, particularly during the construction phase, there would be a negative impact due to the large number of HGV's using unsuitable rural roads.

A Member of the Committee indicated that this proposal was ten times the size of anything previously seen in the district and reiterated the need to protect food production and security.

Disappointment was expressed that as the local planning authority, this decision was not in remit of the council. It was noted that previous applications had been approved with a 25-year lifespan but this would be 60 years. The importance of encouraging more visitors to the area was highlighted and large developments could have a negative effect. The potential negative impact on agricultural land and particularly on tenant farmers was reiterated. It was

further questioned whether there would be any benefit for the district from business rates from any solar development.

Support was expressed for green energy initiatives but it was felt that it needed to be in the right place, and prime agricultural land was not suitable. It was suggested that smaller scale developments on brownfield sites should be encouraged. The negative visual impact was further emphasised.

A Committee Member highlighted concern from constituents about the proposals and the potential harm to communities that needed to be balanced against the supply of green energy. The potential damage to agricultural land and wildlife habitats was emphasised.

The Director of Planning, Regeneration & Communities summarised the debate and indicated that whilst the impact on agricultural land had been included within the written representations, the Committee wanted to strengthen this further in respect of food security. In addition, the cumulative impact of increased traffic needed to be highlighted together with the wider effect on local services, shops and facilities. The discussion in terms of planning, balance and the potential effectiveness of the solar development proposals, given the climate and the grid capacity, was highlighted.

The recommendations in the report were then clarified and were duly proposed and seconded. On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that:

- a) the invitation to submit Written Representations (WR) on the Gate Burton Energy Park DCO application be accepted and approved; and
- b) the draft Written Representations (WR) prepared for the Gate Burton Energy Park examination be accepted, and authority be delegated to the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities following consultation with the Chair of this Committee, to complete, finalise and submit the WR by Deadline 2 (8th August) as set by the Examining Authority, taking into consideration Committee's comments.

21 DELEGATION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION IN NSIP EXAMINATIONS

The Development Management Team Manager introduced the report and explained that it related to administrative processes associated with the examination timetable. The report therefore made recommendations in regard to delegations so that decisions could be made quickly if necessary. It was emphasised that changes were proposed to the previous scheme of delegation agreed in November 2021.

A Member of the Committee asked about the impact on the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan and the partners involved. It was confirmed that whilst it related to the district, any wider issues would be raised with the Chairman and in that instance, would look at following the same process. Clarification was given that as a group of authorities for the Central Lincolnshire area, all of the nationally significant infrastructure projects were reviewed

regularly.

There was some concern raised regarding the tight timetable for the examination process, in recognition of the impact on all involved when meetings needed to be called at short notice to discuss such matters as these. In accepting the preference for the Committee to be the decision maker, the scheme of delegations was supported for those occasions where it simply was not feasible to call a meeting of the Committee.

The recommendations were proposed, seconded and on being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that the updated Decision and Delegation Protocols, set out at Appendix 1 to the report, for West Lindsey District Council when participating in the examination of a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, be approved.

22 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager introduced the report and explained that the plan would develop as the year progressed and emphasised that Members could make suggestions for items to come forward.

A Member of the Committee referred to the large number of items for the September 2023 meeting. In response, the concern was acknowledged and that this would be reviewed to ensure that the agenda was manageable.

With no further questions or comments, the work plan was **DULY NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm.

Chairman