

Online Comment

Application H04-0849-22
Location Land West of Cowbridge Road Bicker Fen Boston
Proposal Proposed development of a photovoltaic solar array, grid connection, access improvement works & ancillary development on land at Bicker Fen, Boston and South Holland

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For/Against Comments

The proposed development is located in an area that has recently been subject to a number of archaeological investigations associated with new infrastructure schemes, which has revealed important Iron Age and Roman settlement and industrial activity in the fens between Donington and Bicker.

The developer has already carried out a geophysical survey prior to application, which has identified probable archaeology that may be of considerable significance. This is in the form of Iron Age or Roman settlement or industrial activity (located in 'Field 5' within Boston Borough) and a possible Roman stone building that may be a villa or bath house (in 'Field 3' within Donington parish). Roman stone buildings of any kind are exceptionally rare within the fenland region and where they do occur are often thought to relate to the imperial administration. If accurately identified these remains may therefore be of regional or national significance. In the latter case they may fall within the provisions of NPPF paragraph 200 which states "Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets."

However, it should be noted that geophysical surveys have been shown not to fully identify all of the archaeology present in this particular area, and these results may under-represent the extent of remains which may exist here and which could be impacted by development. The developer's Heritage Impact Assessment notes that excavations carried out following geophysical surveys nearby found that:

"The majority of geophysical anomalies did not correspond to the pattern of features identified during the initial evaluation and were actually geological in nature (Headland Archaeology 2017b, 18). The report further states that 'it has proved impossible to distinguish the lower magnitude responses of the archaeological features from the higher magnitude and extensive anomalies caused by the much varying geological background. In this case the cropmark evidence has provided a more accurate assessment of the level of archaeology present although even this does not reveal the true extent of the archaeological remains on this site' (Headland Archaeology 2017b, 18)."

Geophysics alone also cannot provide confirmation of the depth, condition or significance of buried remains and further evaluation will be needed in order to understand the potential impacts of the proposed development.

Therefore, we would recommend that further information is required in order for the local planning authority to be able to make a reasoned decision regarding the potential impacts of the proposed development on any archaeological remains. It is recommended that the developer be required to commission a trial trench evaluation the results of which should be provided prior to determination. This is in accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (section 16, paragraph 194) and the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (Policy 29C).