



Little Eau Solar Farm

Statement of Community Involvement

January 2015



Submitted on behalf of Little Eau Solar Limited

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**PLANNING APPLICATION
SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF LITTLE EAU SOLAR LIMITED**

**SOLAR FARM DEVELOPMENT:
AREA LOCATED IN THE PARISH OF SUTTON ST JAMES IN
LINCOLNSHIRE, APPROXIMATELY 3.5km SOUTH WEST OF THE
VILLAGE OF SUTTON ST JAMES**

**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SUPPORT OF
PLANNING APPLICATION TO SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL**

JANUARY 2015

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGL	Above Ground Level
ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BERL	BE Renewables Limited
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DNO	Distribution Network Operator
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPS	European Protected Species (EU Habitats Directive)
ER	Environmental Report
EU	European Union
FRA	Flood Risk Assessment
GLNP	Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership
Ha	Hectare
HGV	Heavy Goods Vehicle
HV	High Voltage
IDB	Internal Drainage Boards
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LPA	Local Planning Authority
LB	Listed Buildings
LBAP	Local Biodiversity Action Plan
LCC HER	Lincolnshire County Council Historic Environment Records
LDF	Local Development Frameworks
LDP	Local Development Plan
LDV	Light Duty Vehicles
LTP	Local Transport Policy
LV	Low Voltage
M	Metres
MAGIC	Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside
MW	Megawatt
MWh	Megawatt hour
MWp	Megawatt 'peak'
NBN	National Biodiversity Network
NE	Natural England
NERC	Natural Environment and Rural Communities
NGR	National Grid Reference
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
PTZ	Pan Tilt Zoom
PV	Photovoltaic
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategies
SAC	Special Area for Conservation
SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument
SFRA	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
SHDC	South Holland District Council
SUDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems
UK	United Kingdom
UK BAP	United Kingdom Biodiversity Action Plan
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCA	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 5 Species
WP	Watts of Power
WPD	Western Power Distribution

APPENDICES

Please read this report alongside the following appendices (submitted as part of the full planning application);

Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan
Appendix 2 – Site Layout Plan
Appendix 3 – Typical String Inverter
Appendix 4 – Typical Substation
Appendix 5 – Camera Mounting System
Appendix 6 – Wooden Post, Stock Proof Fence
Appendix 7 – Typical Access Gate
Appendix 8 – Typical Cable Trench Details
Appendix 9 – PV Framework Elevations
Appendix 10 – Typical Front and Piled Front Elevations
Appendix 11 – Access Track Elevations
Appendix 12 – Traffic Management Schematic
Appendix 13 – Biodiversity and Habitat Management Plan
Appendix 14 - Screening Response Letter
Appendix 15a – Public Consultation Display Boards
Appendix 15b – Public Consultation Viewpoints
Appendix 15c – Public Consultation Responses
Appendix 17a – Agricultural Land Classification Impact Assessment and Sequential Test
Appendix 17b - Development Zone Constraints Map
Appendix 17c – Agricultural Land Classification (Post Construction)
Appendix 17d - Agricultural Land Classification Report
Appendix 17e - National Soil Resources Institute Soils Report – Little Eau
Appendix 18a - Natural England's (NE) Joint Character Area (JCA) 46 - The Fens
Appendix 18b - SHDC Landscape Capacity Study - 'Peaty Fens Landscape Character Type'
Appendix 18c – Landscape Plan
Appendix 18d – Visual Amenity Plan
Appendix 18e – Mitigation Proposals
Appendix 19a – Habitat Map of Site
Appendix 19b – Site Photographs
Appendix 20a - Little Eau_Qbar_Imp_100CC_Runoff
Appendix 20b - Little Eau_Qbar_Imp_100CC_Storage
Appendix 20c - Little Eau_Qbar_Imp_FEH_PPT
Appendix 20d - Little Eau_Qbar_Imp_Rates
Appendix 20e - Little Eau_Qbar_Imp_Summary
Appendix 20f - Environmental Agency Flood Risk Assessment Enquiry
Appendix 21 – Cassini Map 1805 – 1874
Appendix 22a – Overview of Sectional Views
Appendix 22b – Sectional Views
Appendix 22c – Sectional Views
Appendix 22d – Sectional Views
Appendix 22e – Sectional Views
Appendix 22f – Sectional Views
Appendix 23a - Event Report
Appendix 23b - Monument Report
Appendix 23c - HER Map

Please note: There is no Appendix 16.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	8
CHAPTER TWO: CONSULTATION PROCESS	9
CHAPTER THREE: CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES	10
3.1 Screening Letter:	10
3.2 Consultation and Desktop Research:.....	10
3.3 Press Release to Local Media:.....	10
3.4 Invitation by Letter:.....	11
3.5 Letters and Information to Organisational and Individual Stakeholders:	11
3.6 Pre-planning Public Consultation Event:	11
CHAPTER FOUR: RESPONSES AND FUTURE CONSULTATION.....	14
4.1 Responses:.....	14
4.1.1 FEEDBACK.....	14
4.1.2 COMMUNITY BENEFITS.....	17
4.2 Future Consultation:	17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the approach to consultation and the programme of consultation activity carried out for the proposed solar farm, which included advertising, personal invitations and a public consultation exhibition. The report contains details of feedback received during the consultation process, via the exhibition, email and post.

The exhibition was widely publicised via a number of methods including press advertising in two local newspapers with a combined circulation of 24,118 weekly and digitally, 72,964 monthly, as well as individual letters sent to the residential households in and around the site at Little Eau.

Letters were also sent via post (or email where requested) to several organisational and individual stakeholders including; parish councillors, councillors, district councillors, county councillors, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of European Parliament (MEPs) to advise them of our plans and seek their feedback.

76 people attended the exhibition, including local parish councillors and members of the public. 35 attendees completed a consultation questionnaire at the exhibition. Of the 35 people who completed a questionnaire, twenty three (66%) are supportive of the plans and two (5%) are undecided. Ten (29%) are opposed.

This document lists feedback received during the event and includes copies of materials produced, including the invitation letters, press advert, public consultation boards and questionnaire.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared to accompany a planning application submitted by Little Eau Solar Limited which seeks consent for the development of a solar photovoltaic (PV) farm to generate electricity, which will be fed into the national grid, known as 'Little Eau Solar Farm' (referred to in the document as the 'project', 'site' or the 'proposal'). Energy calculations indicate that the site has a maximum peak power capacity for 5 Megawatts peak (MWp).

The project will be on approximately 11.81 hectares (ha) of arable farming land located in the parish of Sutton St. James in Lincolnshire, approximately 3.5km South West of the Village of Sutton St James. The National Grid Reference (NGR) for the centre of the site is TF375159 (Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan).

On behalf of the applicant, pre-application community consultation commenced in July 2013, organised and managed by BE Renewables Limited (BERL).

CHAPTER TWO: CONSULTATION PROCESS

Accessible and inclusive public consultation play an important role in the planning process, offering a legitimate opportunity for local people to express their opinions and ask questions in a timeframe which allows for constructive discussion and response.

The South East Lincolnshire SCI, April 2012 (which covers SHDC) states that, ‘most people have opinions on the neighbourhood in which they live and many have ideas for maintaining or improving such places. They also have ideas about other areas they use, such as a high street in a town or village, the open countryside, an employment area or local park. It is therefore important that local people are involved in the development of planning policy that will help to shape the future of such areas as well as decisions on planning applications for individual development proposals’¹.

As illustrated in full detail in this document, a public exhibition was held as part of the consultation process. The exhibition was publicised via an invitation to local residents surrounding the site and newspaper advertisements.

The following consultation programme was agreed for the proposed development:

PROCESS	ACTIVITY	TIMING
Pre-Submission Consultation	Screening letter to SHDC	January 2013
	Consultation and Desktop Research; - Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership - National Biodiversity Network - MAGIC - UK Biodiversity Action Plan - Local Biodiversity Action Plan - Natural England - Environment Agency - North Level IDB	February 2013 – August 2013
	Meeting with SHDC Planning Officer	June 2013
	Issue press release to local media – Lincolnshire Free Press and Spalding Guardian	July 2013
	Issue invitation to all residents surrounding the site	July 2013
	Held public consultation exhibition. Public able to register any issues, comments or observations.	July 2013
On-Going Consultation	Respond to enquiries – letters, emails	Ongoing
	Update website and email registered users with newsletters and information sent to organisational and individual stakeholders	Ongoing
Pre - Planning Committee Meeting	Public forum and meeting with local community in Sutton St James	July 2014
Post Submission Consultation	Meeting with planning officers SHDC	July 2014

¹ South Holland District Council - <http://www.sholland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/9CC01815-D58B-43C0-B2BD-78294C34604A/0/SouthEastLincsJSPC27April2012Item3Appendix.pdf>

CHAPTER THREE: CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

3.1 Screening Letter:

A screening letter was sent to SHDC in January 2013 and a response was received from to SHDC in February 2013 (Appendix 14).

3.2 Consultation and Desktop Research:

Consultation with key statutory and non-statutory bodies is recognised as being critical to the planning application process. It focuses attention on key issues and opens a dialogue to discuss methodologies for undertaking further investigations and possible mitigation of the development.

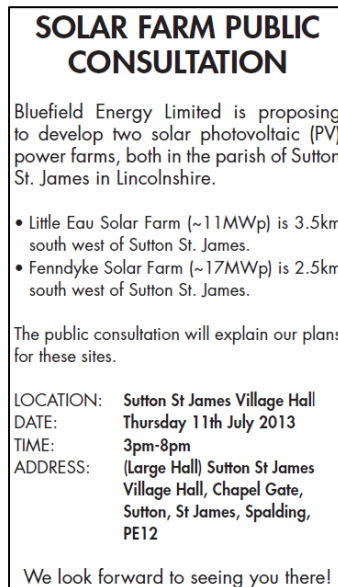
During the preparation of the planning application, consultation has been carried out as part of the specialists assessments being undertake. Those contacted (and / or websites used for desktop surveys) include;

- Desk based analysis of OS mapping relating to landform, vegetation, settlement patterns and the drainage regime in the wider area;
- Desk based analysis of aerial photography for the area;
- Natural England;
- Review of the NPPF;
- Review of SHDC Local Development Plans;
- Site surveys and appropriate modification of previously described zones. Site recording involved annotation of 1:12,500 and 1:25,000 scale OS plans defining the zones and the key elements determining character;
- Site photography to illustrate character zones, notable views / viewpoints and key landscape elements;
- Drafting and description of national and local landscape character areas within the context of the broader assessment; and
- The proposed development corridor and wider setting including an evaluation of their quality, value and sensitivity to change in the context of the proposed form of development.

3.3 Press Release to Local Media:

Members of the local community were informed of the public consultation by a press release (Figure 4:1) advertised for two weeks (starting 2nd July 2013) in two local newspapers, the Lincolnshire Free Press and Spalding Guardian.

- The Lincolnshire Free Press newspaper has a circulation of 13,140 weekly and a digital audience of 36,482 monthly.
- The Spalding Guardian newspaper has a circulation of 10,978 weekly and a digital audience of 36,482 monthly.



(Figure 4:1 Press Release)

3.4 Invitation by Letter:

Letters providing a brief outline, details of the project and invitation to the planned public consultation exhibition were posted to several of the identified households in close proximity to the site.

3.5 Letters and Information to Organisational and Individual Stakeholders:

Letters were sent via post (or email where requested) to 8 parish councillors, 37 councillors, 1 district councillor, 1 county councillor, 1 Member of Parliament (MP) and 5 Members of European Parliament (MEP).

3.6 Pre-planning Public Consultation Event:

A Pre-planning Public Consultation Event (Figure 4:2) was held on Thursday 11th July 2013 from 3pm – 8pm in the village hall of Sutton St James.



(Figure 4:2 Public Consultation Display - Property of BERL)

We had a small team of BERL representatives present during the consultation. This covered all sections of the proposal (e.g., environmental knowledge, design knowledge) so the vast majority of questions and queries could be answered. Any questions that could not be answered on the day were responded to in writing by letter or email upon request.

Exhibition displays provided information on;

- Site Location
- The Proposal
- Site Characteristics and Area Plan
- Existing Site: Visual Receptors
- Existing Site: Photographs

A copy of the display can be found in more detail in Appendix 15a.

Accompanying documents provided information on;

- Facts and Figures regarding the proposal at Little Eau
- Module Specification
- Solar Panel Specification
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Solar Farm Information Pack (Additional Information)

Visitors to the exhibition were invited to complete a questionnaire (Figure 4:3) giving their views on the project.

Bluefield Energy appreciates your attendance at today's Public Consultation. We hope that you found our information and discussions helpful in permitting you to understand more with regard to the proposed project. We are seeking planning permission for a solar farm of <10 MWp at Little Eau which will generate electricity to supply approximately 1,350 homes in the UK as well as to help reduce approximately 3,950,000kg CO* emissions per year. Solar farm projects are of a temporary nature and at the end of their 25 year term they will be removed and this may well be a requirement of any future planning consent, permitting the land to be returned and used for new purposes. We expect to submit our Planning Application in the next few weeks and if all goes well we would expect to commission the plant before the end of March 2014. Finally we would like to ask you to complete the following information and question: Do you support the proposed scheme? (Please tick your choice below); <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr> <th style="width: 25%;">Scheme</th> <th style="width: 25%;">Yes</th> <th style="width: 25%;">No</th> <th style="width: 25%;">Unsure</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Little Eau</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>				Scheme	Yes	No	Unsure	Little Eau			
Scheme	Yes	No	Unsure								
Little Eau											

Please confirm your name and post code;

Name	Post Code	Contact Details

If you have any other comments please feel free to write in the box below (continuing overleaf if required)

Name	Post Code	Contact Details

Once again, and on behalf of Bluefield Energy, thank you for attending and showing interest in this development.

(Figure 4:3 - Example of questionnaires given out at public consultation)

CHAPTER FOUR: RESPONSES AND FUTURE CONSULTATION

4.1 Responses:

76 people (including parish councillors and members of the public) attended the exhibition.
35 people registered their views for the scheme on paper;

Questionnaire asked... 'Are you able to register your support for the proposed scheme?'			
Yes	Do not know	No	Total
23	2	10	35
66%	5%	29%	100%

4.1.1 FEEDBACK

BERL and the applicant have taken the feedback from each registered view into consideration before submission of the full planning application.

Those comments in support included;

- *Solar better than wind turbines.*
- *Solar over fossil and wind over fossil.*
- *I strongly support renewable schemes.*
- *I feel this has less impact than wind turbines.*
- *This is the future.*

Below are the registered objections / queries / questions that were expressed along with our response. Many were of a similar nature and therefore have been categorised into three groups –

1. Rural Character Concerns
2. Community Benefit Requests
3. Other Concerns

(Please refer to Appendix 15c for the full Public Consultation Responses).

	PUBLIC CONSULTATION QUERIES, QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS	OUR RESPONSE
RURAL CHARACTER CONCERNS	<i>'Too many planned blight on landscape'</i>	Little Eau Solar Farm has the potential to create minimal landscape and visual impacts due to the low height of the panels and perimeter screening that will take place.
	<i>'Too much green energy with the turbines!'</i>	
	<i>'Disgraceful use of potential'</i>	The land at Little Eau is classed as Grade 3a – Grade 3b

	<i>good land if formed well’.</i>	agricultural land. It is currently used for arable farming and the crop yields can be used to determine the classification of the land as well as the assessment of the soil composition and characteristics. Its potential use as a solar farm will allow the grassland to develop around and under the solar panels due to their arrangement, making it an ideal opportunity to enhance and enrich the biodiversity of the site.
	<i>‘Taking good agricultural land out of production’.</i>	
	<i>‘160 acres so close to Sutton St James as grade 2 farmland is not acceptable. They should be put on brownfield sites away from residents’.</i>	
	<i>‘Adversely affect the local character and visual amenity which is essentially a rural open area. And a detriment to my property. Is inappropriate and harmful to the area’</i>	Solar panels on the floor help improve the productivity of surrounding arable land thanks to the enhanced habitat for pollinating insects. The project is for 25 years, during which agricultural use will also be retained – the design will enable sheep to be grazed between and around the panels. It was concluded in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that the mitigation proposals have reduced the impact on landscape of the solar park, from ‘moderate’ to ‘minor’ negative impact on two receptors; • Boundaries • Other use ...and reduced the negative impact from ‘minor’ to ‘negligible’ on three receptors; • Settlement • Horizontal • Experience ‘Agriculture’ remains the only key landscape receptor at ‘moderate negative change’. However, this is <i>not</i> a permanent change and the site will partly retain its agricultural land-use by the proposed grazing of sheep underneath the solar modules. In addition, any change to landscape character, will only affect the immediate area of the solar park development, located at the northern periphery of the ‘Peaty Fens Landscape Character Type’ and not the whole area. Subtle changes are typical of this area, due to the merging of three different landscape types and the county boundary to Cambridgeshire is also within 5km. Hedgerows are a local feature of the ‘Peaty Fens Landscape Character Type’ and are likely to be viewed by the general public as a ‘slight beneficial’ change to the landscape of the solar park.
COMMUNITY BENEFIT REQUESTS	<i>‘There will be no real benefit to the community?’</i>	We always endeavor to work with the planning authority and local community to find out what could benefit them in terms of a proposed solar PV farm development. There are a number of ways in which this
	<i>‘Community Grants – help our young folk; with apprenticeships</i>	

	<i>and transport to their jobs’.</i>	can be done;
	<i>‘Could the Parish, via the Parish Council, recieve some towards reccompensated and the immediate neighbours whose property will be bloghted are also suitbly recompensated’.</i>	EXAMPLE ONE: Many communities can benefit from solar power being installed on community facilities such as their local school or community hall. EXAMPLE TWO: Other communities prefer to work with the developer to improve the existing ground conditions whereby footpaths are enhanced or measures are taken to improve existing surface water drainage issues on the site. EXAMPLE THREE: Using the community fund for the benefit of examples one and two or allocating all or part of the community fund to the benefit of good causes within the local community. We will continue to engage with the planning authority and local community to get the best solution possible. Little Eau Solar Limited is planning to be an active contributor to the village life and is keen to understand the ways in which the operational life of this development and our professional operational skills can best benefit the wider and local community of Sutton St James.
OTHER CONCERNS	<i>‘Noise from panels’</i>	Solar cells are inert solid state devices which convert light into electricity. The systems therefore produce almost no noise, no emissions, no radiation. Please refer to Chapter Four of the Environmental Report for more information.
	<i>Will the glare affect low flying miliatry aircraft?</i>	Pilots currently fly relatively low next to water without significant adverse glint effects. For example, aircraft flying out of London Heathrow airport fly low and adjacent to many large reservoirs with no difficulty. Solar PV farms and panels are now installed close to many UK airports such as Newquay, Gatwick and Birmingham. There have been no adverse published reports from any of these facilities. Therefore glare and glint are not expected to cause any serious impact on air traffic. Please refer to the Environmental Report for more information.
	<i>‘I will be against this planning application. Surely a site could be foundaway from residents’.</i>	The site is not visually perceptible beyond approximately 1km distance. Those residential dwellings nearest to the site of the proposed development are typically well screened by surrounding boundary trees and vegetation; combined with the buffer zone and perimeter screening proposed by the applicant the visual impact upon these receptors is considered extremely low.

4.1.2 COMMUNITY BENEFITS

We always endeavor to work with the local community to find out what would benefit them in terms of a proposed solar PV farm development. Such opportunities could include;

- Establishment of a local Environmental Trust or Community Benefits Trust, with funds being contributed annually by the developer and used for energy conservation measures.
- Local share issue.
- Local or community ownership of panels.
- Investment in Green Infrastructure provision and management, especially at the landscape scale.

We will continue to engage with the community forums and local community to get the best solution possible. Little Eau Solar Limited is planning to be an active contributor to the village life and is keen to understand the ways in which the operational life of this development and professional operational skills can best benefit the wider and local community.

4.2 Future Consultation:

The attendance and feedback provided has been extremely useful in permitting us to conclude our planning application. We look forward to ongoing engagement with the local community.