

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

4 March 2025

Subject: Lime Down Solar Park

Cabinet Member: Cllr Nick Botterill - Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

The Lime Down Solar Park scheme has been designated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. It is being promoted by Island Green Power, the applicant, under the requirements of the Planning Act to secure a Development Consent Order (DCO) to allow work to being.

The applicant describes its proposals as “Lime Down Solar Park is a new utility-scale solar park and battery energy storage project proposed to be built on land in North Wiltshire. The project would comprise the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and an on-site battery energy storage facility, plus associated development to connect the project into the national grid at Melksham Substation.”

At present, the scheme proposal covers approximately 2,834 hectares (ha) of land for solar PV energy generation, battery storage, associated infrastructure, and landscaping, heritage, surface water and biodiversity mitigation areas. The scheme would have up to a 500 MW export connection, 250 MW import connection and 500 MWh battery storage. The scheme is anticipated to be operational for a period of 60 years and be decommissioned from 2089.

A statutory public consultation was launched by Island Green Power on 29 January and runs until 19 March 2025, for public and key stakeholders to comment on their proposals and identify any areas of concern or opportunities for further improvement.

The issues relating to this significant and large-scale solar project are complex. The impacts are broad-ranging and potentially significant. Some impacts are positive (such as renewable energy generation and carbon reduction), while other are either neutral or adverse. Clearly it is a matter for the Secretary of State, rather than Wiltshire Council, to weigh up these competing impacts to arrive at a decision.

Council officers from a variety of technical specialisms have reviewed the consultation material. These responses have been collated in Appendix 1, which is intended to be submitted to the applicant as the council’s formal response to this consultation, and are summarised in this Cabinet report.

However, it is necessary for further information to be made available to the council in order for it to fully assess the proposals. It is expected for this information to be available in advance of the submission of the DCO application and it is recommended that the applicant undertakes a further supplementary public consultation to enable sufficient scrutiny of the cable connection route and its associated impacts. This would also permit the full cumulative effects of the development to be adequately considered.

As the scheme progresses through the DCO process, the council will have many statutory obligations governing its participation and contribution to the examination of the application. In order to ensure the council is fully able to fulfil these obligations, delegated authority is sought to cover its main responsibilities and input. This will ensure that the council is able to meet the tight statutory timescales associated with the DCO process. However, it is the intention for the council's Relevant Representation, which is prepared during the pre-examination phase, to be considered by Cabinet prior to submission to the Planning Inspectorate.

Proposals

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report.
- Agree the proposed response to Island Green Power for this statutory public consultation, including the council's request that a supplementary public consultation be held.
- Agree the proposed delegated authority provisions outlined below to enable the council to fulfil its statutory duties with regard to the Development Consent Order (DCO) process for this solar farm development scheme.

- 1) Endorses the response to Public Consultation document, as set out in Appendix 1 subject to amendment in (2), for the purpose of submission to Island Green Power.
- 2) Authorises the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration, in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member(s), to:
 - a. Finalise the consultation documents and make any necessary minor changes in the interests of clarity and accuracy before they are submitted to Island Green Power as the council's formal consultation response;
 - b. Make arrangements for any subsequent consultation responses that may be requested by Island Green Power; and
 - c. Respond to any queries that may arise as a result of the submission of this consultation response.
- 3) Delegated authority to be granted to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to prepare the Local Impact Report on behalf of the council and submit to the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with the timetable for the examination process.
- 4) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to make minor amendments to the Local Impact Report to rectify such matters as typographical or grammatical errors.
- 5) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to formally contribute to, agree and sign a statement

of common ground to be submitted to the Examining Authority of the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with the timetable for the Examination process and within the terms of the council's Local Impact Report.

- 6) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to prepare on behalf of the council and submit to the Planning Inspectorate:
 - a. An adequacy of consultation representation
 - b. Representations on the Environmental Statement
 - c. A Written Representation on the application.
- 7) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to formally respond to the Examining Authority's Inspector's questions in accordance with the timetable for the examination process during the course of the Examination and also to make comment on the submissions of other parties including the Applicant.
- 8) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to formally represent the views of the council at the preliminary meeting, any topic specific hearing and subsequent requirements in accordance with the timetable for the examination process during the course of the Examination, within the terms of the council's Local Impact Report.
- 9) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to add formal comments on the draft requirements (conditions) and planning obligations of the Development Consent Order.
- 10) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to carry out all non-statutory community benefit negotiations and to make decisions relevant to such negotiations in connection with or arising from the Lime Down Solar Park scheme.
- 11) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to carry out all statutory functions of the council under the Planning Act 2008 as both Local Authority and Planning Authority in connection with the Lime Down Solar Park scheme.

Reason for Proposals

Wiltshire Council is the Host Authority for this NSIP scheme, and one of the key statutory consultees. By providing a detailed response to the scheme's statutory consultation, the council has an opportunity to influence the scheme's further development and refinement by the applicant. The council will continue to work with Island Green Power and other key stakeholders to further develop the scheme proposals in advance of the DCO application being submitted.

Nic Thomas

Director – Planning, Economy and Regeneration

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

4 March 2025

Subject: Lime Down Solar Park

Cabinet Member: Cllr Nick Botterill - Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning

Key Decision: Key

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the Lime Down Solar Park scheme proposals and actions by Island Green Power (the applicant) since their non-statutory public consultation.
2. To confirm the council's response to the statutory public consultation.
3. To agree the proposed delegated authority provisions to enable the council to fulfil its statutory duties with regard to the Development Consent Order (DCO) process for this solar farm development.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

4. Renewable energy generation is relevant to the council's sustainable environment priority and the pathway towards carbon neutrality (net zero).

Background

5. The Lime Down Solar Park scheme is anticipated to generate in excess of 50 MW of electricity, therefore it has been designated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. The applicant describes its proposals as "Lime Down Solar Park is a new utility-scale solar park and battery energy storage project proposed to be built on land in North Wiltshire. The project would comprise the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and an on-site battery energy storage facility, plus associated development to connect the project into the national grid at Melksham Substation."
6. This NSIP is being promoted by Island Green Power, the applicant, under the requirements of the Planning Act to secure a Development Consent Order (DCO) to allow work to begin. This process will involve detailed engagement with the general public, local communities and stakeholders.
7. Island Green Power undertook a non-statutory public consultation between 14 March and 26 April 2024. During this consultation, six in-person community consultation events were held alongside two online webinars. The applicant has advised the council that they received 1,660 submissions in response to its non-statutory consultation via paper and online feedback forms, e-mails and letters. Some of the key statistics from this initial consultation included:

- 79% of feedback came from those identifying as local residents
- 88% of respondents do not support the scheme
- 53% do not agree with the need to install ground-mounted solar
- 35% found the consultation uninformative.

8. The applicant has grouped the responses into the following key themes in relation to the project design proposals: landscape and visual; soils and agriculture; ecology and biodiversity; hydrology, flood risk and drainage; noise and vibration; socio-economics, tourism and recreation; cultural heritage; transport and access and other. Island Green Power indicated in the Stage One (non-statutory) consultation report that the feedback provided during the initial consultation would be considered by the team preparing the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), which would accompany the statutory consultation. This report would include chapters on the relevant environmental topics to explain the assessments undertaken, the potential effects of the project and any appropriate mitigation measures being explored.
9. The purpose of this Cabinet report is to set out the council's considerations of the statutory consultation material, including the applicant's PEIR.
10. Whilst policy considerations are covered within the "Main Considerations for the Council" section of this report, it is considered relevant to highlight the recent motion (2024-03) supported by Full Council on 21 May 2024, which was in relation to solar farms. This motion stated:

"Whilst not opposed to the principle of the development of solar farms in line with the National Planning Policy Framework this Council is increasingly concerned at the concentration of solar farms, battery storage and associated infrastructure in Wiltshire. Some villages are now completely surrounded by solar farms and their continued concentration represents a significant cumulative impact and industrialisation of the countryside.

Wiltshire Council therefore calls on the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to define more closely what is meant by 'cumulative impact' regarding solar farms, battery storage, and associated infrastructure and to take clear steps to ensure that solar developments are more evenly spread across the UK and not concentrated in specific areas effectively industrialising the countryside.

We would also ask for clarity of the priority given to ensuring that food production and farming are not destroyed as industries in specific areas through an excessive concentration of solar farms given the massive impact that would have on the rural way of life in villages that have been farmed for time immemorial."

Main Considerations for the Council

Statutory Public Consultation Approach

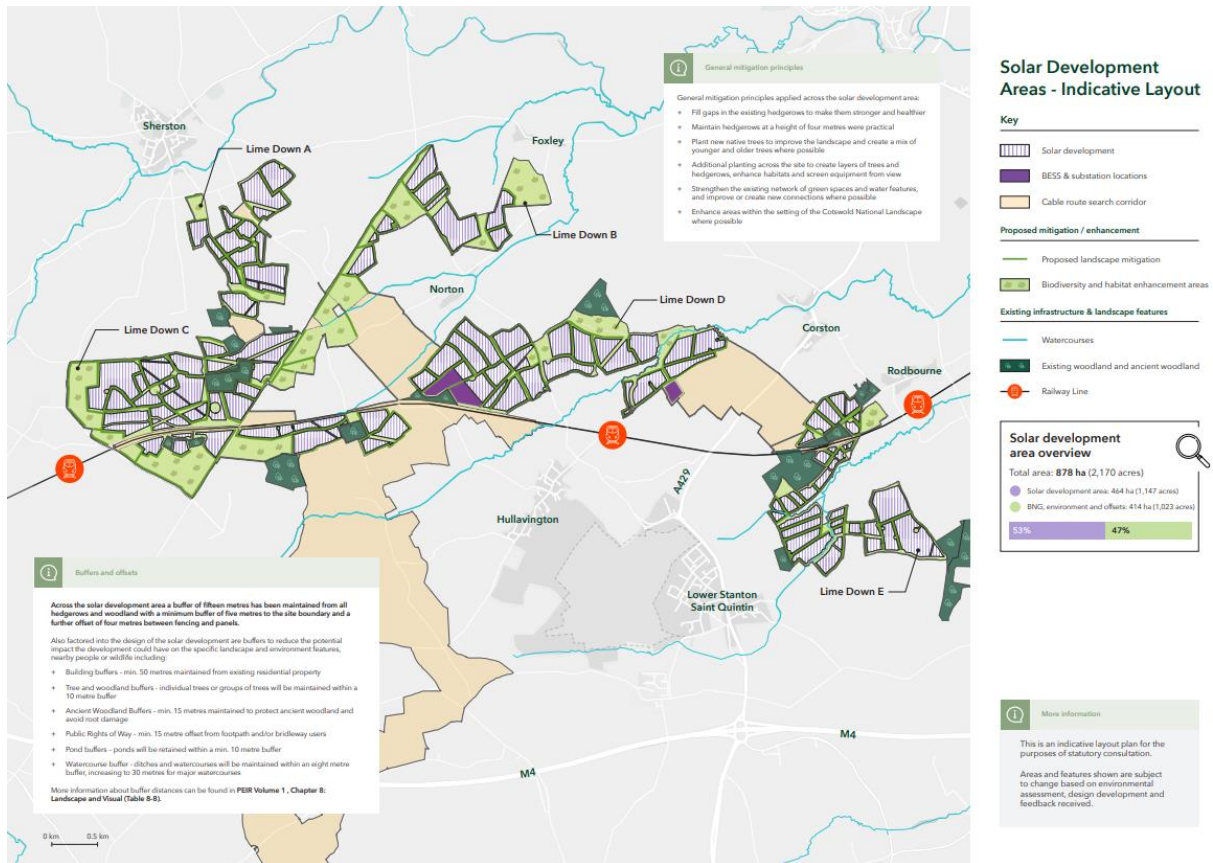
11. In preparation for the launch of the statutory consultation, Island Green Power prepared a Statement of Community Consultation, which was published on 14 January 2025. This set out the proposed approach to the consultation, including what will be consulted on, how the consultation will be undertaken and how feedback received will be used. In accordance with Section 47(2) of the Planning Act 2008, Wiltshire Council was

consulted on the content of the draft Statement of Community Consultation, and the council's comments were submitted to the applicant on 6 December 2024.

12. On 21 January 2025, Island Green Power brought to the council's attention that the published Statement of Community Consultation contained an incorrect map of the core consultation zone and therefore incorrectly stipulated the number of addresses who would receive direct communication on the upcoming launch of the public consultation. Following agreement of the proposed approach with the council, Island Green Power published a Statement of Community Consultation Errata Statement on 27 January 2025, which corrected these errors.
13. The statutory public consultation for this scheme is being held between 29 January and 19 March 2025. All consultation materials are available from the Island Green Power Lime Down Solar Park website ([Documents— Lime Down Solar Park](#)), with hard copies of the Consultation Leaflet, Project Information Booklet and Feedback Form available to take away from the 4 Community Access Points, which are located in libraries, and from the in-person consultation events. Additionally, hard copies of the full suite of documents, including plans, maps and the PEIR will be available to view at the Community Access Points and the in-person public consultation events. The applicant has indicated that hard copies of the full suite of documents can be produced for individuals at an additional charge.
14. Island Green Power have committed to hosting ten public information events, of which eight are to be in person events held at various locations across north and west Wiltshire and two will be online. Additionally, the applicant will undertake various promotional activity on the public consultation, including through national and local media, advertisements, posters, briefings and direct communication with residents and businesses throughout the affected area.

The Scheme

15. At present, the scheme proposal covers approximately 2,834 hectares (ha), (10.94 square miles), of land for solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generation, battery storage, associated infrastructure, and landscaping, heritage, surface water and biodiversity mitigation areas. The scheme would have up to a 500 MW export connection, 250 MW import connection and 500 MWh battery storage. The scheme is anticipated to be operational for a period of 60 years and be decommissioned from 2089.
16. The proposed area for the solar array is illustrated below (as taken from the indicative layout within the applicant's consultation):



17. Regarding the construction phase, the proposals suggest that the solar PV sites and grid connection cables would start in tandem (estimated 2027 at earliest). The grid connection cables installation suggested to require up to approximately 18 months, and the construction of the solar PV sites requiring an estimated 24 months and the operation and maintenance phase anticipated to commence in 2029. The documents do acknowledge that the construction phase could be of longer duration, with the timings being taken as a worst-case assumption for the technical assessments being undertaken by the applicant.

18. The identified routes for construction traffic for the various development parcels are anticipated to be:

- Lime Down A, B and C: M4 Junction 18 - A46 – B040 – B4039 - Alderton Road - Fosse Way;
- Lime Down D: M4 Junction 17 – A429 – Bradfield Cottages
- Lime Down E: M4 Junction 17 – A429 – Grange Lane – Rodbourne Road

19. The proposals expect there to be a relatively flat profile of deliveries throughout the construction phase. Notwithstanding this, the proposals acknowledged that there will be peaks throughout the construction phase, especially during the initial phases. To account for this, a 50% uplift appears to have been applied for the purposes of assessments. At this stage, based on the preliminary construction material and equipment requirements, the following is anticipated:

- Average HGV Arrivals and Departures per Day – 51 (103 movements)
- Peak HGV Arrivals and Departures per Day – 77 (154 movements)

20. Noting that all movements will be spread around the different areas of the site and the different routes to access the site.

Wiltshire Council Statutory Consultation Response

21. The issues relating to this significant and large-scale solar project are complex. The impacts are broad-ranging and potentially significant. Some impacts are positive (such as renewable energy generation and carbon reduction), while others are either neutral or raise significant adverse impacts. Clearly it is a matter for the Secretary of State to weigh up these competing impacts to arrive at a decision.

22. Council officers from a variety of technical specialisms have reviewed the consultation material in order to identify any concerns or opportunities and any further information required. These have been collated in Appendix 1, which is intended to be submitted to the applicant as the council's formal response to this consultation.

23. However, it is necessary for further information to be made available to the council in order for it to fully assess the proposals. It is expected for this information to be available in advance of the submission of the DCO application and it is recommended that the applicant undertakes a further supplementary public consultation to enable sufficient scrutiny of the cable connection route and its associated impacts. This would also permit the full cumulative effects of the development to be adequately considered.

24. A summary of the council's proposed response, including its main findings and areas for further work / investigation, is contained in the following section.

Consultation Response Summary

25. The proposed development is for the installation of a renewable led energy scheme comprising ground mounted photovoltaic solar arrays together with ancillary infrastructure. The proposed development could be considered to be sustainable development that will make a contribution to the supply of renewable energy helping to reduce carbon emissions required to meet the Climate Change Act 2050 net zero target.

26. The proposed development has the potential to broadly accord with policy CP42 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy provided that adverse impacts are adequately mitigated. It is also broadly aligned with Wiltshire's Green and Blue Infrastructure and climate strategies. Furthermore, the council would expect the Examining Authority to ensure that the scheme is aligned with the National Planning Policy Framework's requirement for the planning system to support the transition to a low carbon future as well as other national policies, such as the National Policy Statement for Energy, EN-1, EN-3 and EN-5 which offer support for renewable energy development.

27. In this case the development will generate up to 500MW of renewable energy and, as is advocated by national policy and guidance, it is acknowledged that appropriate weight should be given to the nature of the proposal as a renewable energy generating development. The development will contribute to the national target to generate 32% of overall energy generation from renewable energy, assisting with the government objective to move to a low carbon economy and cutting greenhouse gasses.

28. However, and notwithstanding this policy context, as it stands, a good number of the various surveys to comprise the EIA and inform the final form of development have yet to be completed. Consequently, it is also clear that the proposals are far from being

fully articulated and therefore the council cannot yet be assured that the likely impacts will be fully captured within the DCO submission. Indeed, whilst there is clear policy support for development of this nature, as it stands, it is not possible for the council to reach a fully considered view on the adequacy of the PEIR and the proposals as a whole. There is particular concern around the following aspects:

- As per the council's motion no. 2024-03, there is significant continued concern about the concentration of solar farms, battery storage and associated infrastructure in Wiltshire, with an associated adverse cumulative impact and industrialisation of the countryside. As it stands, it is unclear that the EIA, ES and DCO submission will adequately assess alternative locations for this development and the cumulative impacts associated with having a significant number of solar related development in the County. This also has the potential to adversely affect tourism within the county, however the assessment regarding this is still awaited from the applicant.
- With specific regard to landscape impacts, the council is concerned about the visual impact created by such a vast sprawl of solar panels across a substantial geographical area. As it stands, there is a lack of detail and clarity on how zones of influence for the cumulative impact assessment have been devised and on the assessment's methodology, resulting in the scope of the assessment being considered insufficient for cumulative assessment of landscape and visual effects. The applicant has not sufficiently evidenced their provisional assessment of likely significant effects of the development upon the existing landscape character baselines or appropriately considered the effect of the development's scale. There is some potential for some limited shared intervisibility between some Lime Down panel areas in combination with other existing solar development already present in the landscape.
- It is evident from the survey work so far undertaken that the development will not avoid elements of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Whilst national policy does not preclude its use, given the continued assessments being undertaken, it will remain possible for the applicant to reduce the amount of BMV being used and to seek out previously developed and non-agricultural land, as is advised within the Planning Practice Guidance. It remains difficult to judge what weight should be given to benefits such as improvements to soil health, biodiversity and carbon sequestration. Clearly, should BMV agricultural land continue to be incorporated into the development site, it will weigh against the proposals in the planning balance. It should be noted that Wiltshire has a significant food producing economy.
- In respect of heritage impacts, there is concern over the clarity of the zones of influence used to assess cumulative and in-combination effects upon the setting of heritage assets in the vicinity, the methodology behind the compiling of short-list of projects, and whether this work has yet been completed. There is a need to complete necessary heritage assessments to fully inform the ES. In the absence of the completed assessment at this stage, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the development would harm the significance of heritage assets via development within their setting. However, it is noted that there are some significant heritage assets in close proximity to the scheme.

- As it stands, insufficient information is available to assess arboricultural impacts relating to the scheme, especially since the cable connection route is not sufficiently defined.
- It is appreciated that an Outline Battery Safety Management Plan is referenced within the documents as being prepared and submitted with the DCO. However, in the absence of such a document to consider now, the council remains concerned that sufficient measures will be embedded within the development so as to suitably mitigate against the risk of fire at the BESS. Similarly, the consultation material does not contain sufficient detail as to the arrangements for firefighting resources to be made available in the event of an event. It is of course recommended that the applicant work closely with the Wiltshire and Dorset Fire Service in developing their plans. The council is aware that there have been instances elsewhere where failures in respect of battery storage facilities have led to widespread air pollution concerns leading to the evacuation of residents from their homes. The council would seek to ensure that the Inspector is satisfied that the relevant safety precautions are in place to sufficiently protect Wiltshire's community.
- There is concern that scheme could have the effect of stymieing planned growth, as envisaged within the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan, since it is at present unclear whether the needs of other development has been considered in the Site Selection Assessment and indeed whether Melksham Substation has the capacity to serve all committed development, without significant reinforcement.
- Whilst the submission suggests that the majority of the solar sites and cable connection route are located within Flood Zone 1, there remains some risk of flooding primarily from pluvial sources. It is evident that a significant amount of additional flood modelling and survey work is yet to be undertaken, including with regard to the management of surface water, accommodation of fire suppression flows, compliance with Wiltshire Council's betterment policy and not increasing flood risk from changes affecting overland flow routes. Until such assessments are available, the council remains extremely concerned about the development's potential impact on drainage and flooding.
- Whilst the true archaeological potential of development area can only be determined once trial trench evaluation complete, the council disagrees that concrete feet to solar panels would constitute sufficient mitigation. If an area is archaeologically sensitive, it should be subject to excavation or strip, map and sample.
- As it stands, the construction traffic routes are all suggested as being indicative with survey work of those roads not yet being complete. Similarly, whilst reference is made to the intended preparation of an Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan, it is not yet available for the council to consider. The absence of certainty and key information in this regard is of concern to the council given the relatively long construction phase and degree of disturbance and inconvenience to affected communities.
- More information and calculations are required on the noise assessment, e.g. source heights, octave band data, individual sources and noise contour map before the council can fully consider and assess noise predictions. As it stands, there is a lack of clarity on intended approach to works at the Melksham sub-

station, and whether there will be a full noise assessment. Further information on the exact nature and location of screening mitigation to address light glare is also not available in respect of south facing solar panels.

29. The council is grateful for the ability to make comment on the emerging proposals and asks that the detailed comments in the Appendix 1 submission are taken into account in the scheme by the applicant as it progresses. However, and whilst the council is aware of the significant support given to renewable energy projects by local and national policy, as it stands, there remains significant omissions in the survey work and consequent gaps in the specifics of the proposals. Accordingly, as set out in Appendix 1, further information is required from the applicant before the council can fully understand the likely impacts and to reach an objective, balanced planning judgement on the merits of the proposed scheme.

DCO Process and Delegated Authority Considerations

30. Following the conclusion of the public consultation, Island Green Power will evaluate the responses received to further refine the detail of the scheme. This will include the preparation of the full Environmental Statement, and various management plans, strategies and impact assessment reports which will accompany the DCO application.

31. The DCO application is expected to be submitted in early Autumn 2025, at which point the Planning Inspectorate / Secretary of State will have 28 days to decide whether to accept the application for examination. The Local Authority is required to report on the adequacy of community consultation within 14 days of submission. If accepted, the pre-examination phase will then commence, which typically has a 3-month duration. During this time, the draft examination timetable will be prepared, a preliminary meeting will be held and interested parties will be invited to submit relevant representations.

32. The examination phase has a statutory 6-month duration, and requirements on the Local Authority will include the preparation and submission of a Local Impact Report, Statement of Common Ground, written representations and a signed planning obligation (if required). The council will also need to attend issue specific hearings and / or accompanied site visits, respond to questions and requests for further information by the Examining Authority and comment on other interest parties' representations and submissions.

33. Following the conclusion of the Examination phase, the Examining Authority will have 3-months to submit their recommendations to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, who will then have a further 3-months to make his decision. Post decision, the council will be required to discharge requirements and monitoring, undertake any necessary enforcement action and respond to notifications relating to non-material and material change applications.

34. Compliance with the DCO requirements outlined above will present challenges for the council and its governance procedures due to the tight timescales. Therefore, it is appropriate, in the interests of efficiency, to provide delegation to officers to amend documents for the sake of clarity and accuracy and further to take all appropriate actions to progress the process on behalf of the council. Advice from the Planning Inspectorate strongly recommends that councils have sufficient delegated powers in place to allow councils to respond quickly, especially once the Examination has commenced.

35. A draft resolution to cover these points is therefore as follows:

- 1) Endorses the response to Public Consultation document, as set out in Appendix 1 subject to amendment in (2), for the purpose of submission to Island Green Power.
- 2) Authorises the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration, in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member(s), to:
 - a. Finalise the consultation documents and make any necessary minor changes in the interests of clarity and accuracy before they are submitted to Island Green Power as the council's formal consultation response;
 - b. Make arrangements for any subsequent consultation responses that may be requested by Island Green Power; and
 - c. Respond to any queries that may arise as a result of the submission of this consultation response.
- 3) Delegated authority to be granted to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to prepare the Local Impact Report on behalf of the council and submit to the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with the timetable for the examination process.
- 4) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to make minor amendments to the Local Impact Report to rectify such matters as typographical or grammatical errors.
- 5) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to formally contribute to, agree and sign a statement of common ground to be submitted to the Examining Authority of the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with the timetable for the Examination process and within the terms of the council's Local Impact Report.
- 6) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to prepare on behalf of the council and submit to the Planning Inspectorate:
 - a. An adequacy of consultation representation
 - b. Representations on the Environmental Statement
 - c. A Written Representation on the application.
- 7) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to formally respond to the Examining Authority's Inspector's questions in accordance with the timetable for the examination process during the course of the Examination and also to make comment on the submissions of other parties including the Applicant.
- 8) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to formally represent the views of the council at the preliminary meeting, any topic specific hearing and subsequent requirements in accordance with the timetable for the examination process during the course of the Examination, within the terms of the council's Local Impact Report.
- 9) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to add formal comments on the draft requirements (conditions) and planning obligations of the Development Consent Order.
- 10) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to carry out all non-statutory community benefit negotiations and to make decisions relevant to such negotiations in connection with or arising from the Lime Down Solar Park scheme.
- 11) Delegated authority to be given to the Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration to carry out all statutory functions of the council under the Planning Act 2008 as both Local Authority and Planning Authority in connection with the Lime Down Solar Park scheme.

36. Whilst a number of the authorities sought above relate to activities to be conducted many months from now, the Planning Inspectorate recommends that delegated authority is sought early on in the DCO process to ensure appropriate governance arrangements are in place to comply with the DCO timescales. This is because it is recognised that Local Authority committee structures and the associated timeframes to take reports through them are unlikely to comply with the DCO statutory requirements placed upon them.
37. However, it is proposed that the council's Relevant Representation will be considered by Cabinet prior to submission. The Relevant Representation includes a summary of what the local authority agrees with or disagrees with in the DCO application and what the main issues are considered to be, including their impact. This will be required to be submitted during the pre-examination phase of the DCO and the timescales for submission will be set by the applicant in conjunction with the Planning Inspectorate.

Safeguarding Implications

38. None

Public Health Implications

39. Due to the scale of the proposed development, the scheme may have an adverse impact on the wellbeing and mental health of Wiltshire residents during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases of the proposed solar farm development. Therefore, the council is recommending that the applicant employs an independent third party to act as a 'Relationship Manager' between the applicant, local authorities and the impacted communities to ensure conversations remain positive and helpful. Furthermore, the applicant should consider the adoption and application of Key Performance Indicators on 'empowering communities' to help ensure communities are proactively helped to maintain their own wellbeing throughout the process and good quality information and effective communication is delivered by the applicant.
40. Officers will continue to work with Island Green Power to ensure that public health implications arising from this scheme are sufficiently considered and mitigated.

Procurement Implications

41. Wiltshire Council is not the developer of this scheme and therefore there will be no direct procurement activity associated with the design, development, implementation or operation of the solar farm.
42. However, the council may be required to commission specialist reports and / or engage external consultancy support to assist the council with fulfilling its statutory obligations in relation to this scheme. Consultancy support will be secured utilising any appropriate frameworks and / or existing procurement arrangements and will be in accordance with the council's procurement policies.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

43. Council officers reviewed the draft Statement of Community Consultation prepared by Island Green Power, and provided feedback in advance of its publication on 14 January 2025 to ensure the consultation is adequately promoted within local communities, including any identified hard to reach groups.

44. Whilst some analysis of the social impact of the scheme has been undertaken to date, it is expected that a full equality impact assessment will be undertaken by Island Green Power as part of the DCO process.
45. Equality impact considerations will also be referenced within the council's report on the adequacy of community consultation, which is required to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate following DCO submission.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

46. Island Green Power have prepared a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) as part of its consultation documentation. This has been reviewed by the appropriate council officers and the considerations in respect of climate change, landscape and visual, ecology and biodiversity, arboriculture, flood risk and drainage, built heritage, archaeology, highways and transport, public rights of way, public protection, economic development, best and most versatile agricultural land and minerals and waste relating to the proposed scheme are included as part of Appendix 1.
47. However, further information, as identified within Appendix 1, is required in order for the council to fully assess the implications of this scheme, and as such we will continue to work with Island Green Power and other key stakeholders to undertake this.
48. Whilst it is anticipated that the scheme will deliver benefits from both a local and national perspective, further information is required to confirm this and to form a judgement on the overall merits of the scheme, when viewed in the context of applying a suitable planning balance.
49. The scheme will also result in environmental adverse effects. Further information is required relating to the applicant's assessment of these environmental effects and the proposed mitigation measures in order for the council to determine whether these have been sufficiently mitigated.

Workforce Implications

50. The Lime Down Solar Park scheme requires input from a variety of council services and disciplines. A multi-discipline team is in place comprising representatives from arboriculture, archaeology, climate change, community engagement, conservation and built heritage, communications, development management, ecology, economic development, finance, flood and drainage, highways and transport, landscape, legal, minerals and waste, public health, public protection, public rights of way, strategic planning, waste management and transformation.
51. Additional resources and specialist input will be required as the scheme is further developed. For example, the council will be required to engage a King's Counsel (KC) for the Examination. Further resources and specialist input may also be required for any future implementation phase, should permission for the scheme be granted.
52. As the scheme programme is further developed by the applicant, the council will identify and secure the full anticipated resource requirements to ensure that the council's obligations can be met.

Risk Assessment

53. It is anticipated that engagement in this scheme will be controversial, and it is likely that there will be conflicting views amongst the service areas involved, by Members and by the community. The council will be required to formulate a corporate position on many of the issues considered and it is anticipated that this will be set by Cabinet following recommendations from officers.
54. Whilst these proposals are being further refined, the council may need to reserve judgement on some matters until further information is available in order for the council to make a fully informed decision on certain key aspects.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

55. Failure to respond to the statutory public consultation may result in the council's views of the scheme being insufficiently considered and taken into account during the scheme's development, which may result in an unsuitable application being considered at DCO examination. This would have a detrimental impact on Wiltshire's communities and the council's reputation and may also subject the council to potential future cost claims at the discretion of the Examining Authority.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

56. Wiltshire Council will continue to engage with Island Green Power and other key stakeholders to manage the inputs required for the DCO submission.
57. In the event that a supplementary public consultation is not held by the applicant, the council will have a number of opportunities within the DCO acceptance and examination process to inform the Planning Inspectorate on its views of the scheme and Island Green Power's engagement and work to date. This will include the statement on adequacy of community consultation, relevant and written representations, the statement of common ground and through the local impact report. The council will also attend any issue specific hearings and respond to the Examining Authority's questions as required.
58. The development of this scheme and the associated DCO process will be quite resource intensive for the council and therefore additional resource will be allocated / secured as necessary utilising funding available through the Planning Performance Agreement with the developer and the council's internal budget allocation.
59. Members will be regularly updated and agreement sought at each of the key stages of the DCO process, subject to any delegated authority awarded to officers to ensure statutory timescales are met.

Financial Implications

60. It is broadly recognised that Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) such as this, place a significant resource burden on local planning authorities, local highway authorities and other council services. To help ease the financial pressure, the council has negotiated a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with the applicant to agree service standards and to agree a mechanism for recovering funding for some aspects. This is in line with best practice.

61. However, the council will be required to undertake a number of statutory duties which would fall outside the remit of the negotiated PPA, therefore an internal budget has been created to accommodate any additional costs associated with fulfilling the council's statutory responsibilities. This budget will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the normal budget setting processes.
62. The council may have additional resource implications for the period post consent whilst the scheme is being delivered, if applicable. Any future financial implications would need to be assessed and understood as part of the DCO process. In the event that the DCO application is approved, the council will set out its responsibilities and any further financial implications in a future report to Cabinet.

Legal Implications

63. It is Island Green Power who will be the lead body in any application for a DCO. The role of the council within this process is as a statutory consultee (and one of the principal consultees given its role as Host Authority).
64. This scheme is currently at the statutory public consultation stage, and it is important that the council identify any issues that may need to be considered by the Planning Inspectorate to ensure that the "one stop" application process for nationally significant infrastructure is sound.
65. As well as providing the council's response to the public consultation documentation, the council will be obliged to provide a Local Impact Report and provide a report on the adequacy of public consultation.
66. As a result of the responses to the public consultation and the on-going assessments, it is likely that further information will become available to the council in order for it to fully assess the proposals. Therefore, the council should retain the ability to refine its position once the additional information becomes available, including any associated developments necessary to ensure the effective delivery of the project.
67. This report identifies the process going forward and proposes delegations to ensure that the council can meet the DCO process timelines.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

68. Engagement with the Environment Select Committee had originally been intended to be undertaken at the meeting on 4th March 2025, as this would have been in advance of the Cabinet meeting on 18th March 2025. However, the meeting date for Cabinet was brought forward and therefore both Committees are now meeting on the same day. As a result, it has not been possible to seek prior engagement from the Environment Select Committee on this report.

Options Considered

69. None

Conclusions

70. Following assessment of the proposals, significant concerns have been raised about the potential harm that the development will have upon matters such as landscape and visual impact, ecology and biodiversity, heritage and flooding. The extent to which these

impacts can be mitigated is unclear at this stage. However, this is expected to be challenging given the scheme's significant scale (area, height etc.), the duration of the construction phase and the disruption to local residents. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are some environmental and economic benefits, based upon the information submitted, these are outweighed by the anticipated harm in this rural countryside setting.

71. It is recommended that since the council does not yet have sufficient information to understand the full likely local impacts of the development, it is not possible to fully determine the impact at this time.
72. Island Green Power should be asked to ensure that additional information, as identified within Appendix 1 of this report, is provided either before DCO submission or contained within its DCO application. Island Green Power should also seek to resolve the identified issues from the council's statutory consultation response during the ongoing scheme refinement and in advance of submission of the DCO application. It is recommended that the applicant undertakes a supplementary public consultation in advance of DCO submission to enable sufficient scrutiny of the cable connection route and its associated impacts. Therefore, the council must retain the ability to refine its position once the additional information required to fully assess the scheme is available.
73. In anticipation of the scheme being taken through the Development Consent Order (DCO) process, delegated authority is sought to ensure that the council is able to fulfil its statutory obligations with respect to this solar farm development scheme.
74. Members are asked to:
 - Note the contents of this report.
 - Agree the proposed response to Island Green Power for this statutory public consultation, including the council's request that a supplementary public consultation be held.
 - Agree the proposed delegated authority provisions outlined in paragraph 35 to enable the council to fulfil its statutory duties with regard to the Development Consent Order (DCO) process for this solar farm development scheme.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Wiltshire Council Statutory Consultation Response to Island Green Power for the Lime Down Solar Park Development Scheme

Background Papers

The council has reviewed the Island Green Power statutory public consultation documentation, which is available on the applicant's website through the following link: [Documents — Lime Down Solar Park](#)