

Good evening councillors, thank you for the opportunity to present this application.

The solar farm would generate enough renewable electricity to power approx. 7,450 local homes each year, making a substantial contribution to tackling climate change in the area, noting that the Council have declared a climate emergency, and that renewables and solar farms are supported in principle in the Government's recent white paper on energy as part of tackling climate change and supporting the long term economic recovery from Covid

The key issue is landscape and visual impact. As the officer report notes, we have purposely avoided the land on the side of the river valley, to the site's north, based on the Council's landscape character assessment's advice. We also dropped the field to the south-east and set the panels back from the busier roads to the south and west.

The LVIA we submitted was reviewed by an external advisor for the Council and found to be robust. Further viewpoints and assessment locations were suggested as were mitigation and landscape management measures. These were all complied with, and the subsequent follow up review of the changes supported the application in terms of landscape and visual impacts. This all reflects the robust independent application assessment process.

In terms of community engagement, which has been a key issue for some members of the local community, we approached the two local Parish Councils in July 2020. Foxearth and Liston didn't respond, however they were happy to consider and support the application. Pentlow were approached again in late July and September, and responded in November, with an engagement event being held in December 2020. We are grateful for Pentlow Parish Council's assistance facilitating the event.

As the officer report notes, under the NPPF, a perceived lack of engagement can't be held against the application, and most stakeholders were able to engage positively and we were able to respond to requests for information and clarifications.

In terms of economic benefits, the proposals will help diversify and support a local farming business, with the land remaining in agricultural use alongside the solar farm, making good use of poorer quality land. There will be local economic opportunities during construction and operation, and a community benefit fund.

Highways impacts are considered acceptable by officers, and a range of management measures will be secured by condition including junction improvements and signage. The route is already used by larger vehicles seemingly without issue and once construction is finished, use will be very low, in the region of 2 vans per month.

There are also substantial biodiversity enhancements proposed including additional tree and hedge planting, wildflower grassland margins, bird boxes and bat boxes. Furthermore, there are 30 specially designed Skylark plots proposed on land around the site to protect and enhance Skylark habitats. These will be secured by legal agreement.

In conclusion, this application has been robustly and independently assessed and is supported by the Council's own internal and externally appointed advisors. Around a quarter of the public comments submitted support the application, which is high for these types of projects.

It is considered the proposals are low impact overall, have substantial benefits and they comply with planning policy and guidance, so we respectfully request the application is approved.

Thank you, happy to answer questions.