

ITEM NO: 1

NO. OF APPENDICES: 1 – Adequacy of Consultation
Milestone Response

Ref: RB2025/0603

Report Title

Whitestone Solar Farm – Nationally Significant
Infrastructure Project – Update No. 2

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Members will recall that the Whitestone Solar Farm proposal is being progressed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), requiring a Development Consent Order (DCO) from the Secretary of State under the Planning Act 2008 rather than determination by RMBC.
- 1.2 As a host authority, RMBC is a statutory consultee throughout the NSIP process. Before the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) can accept an application for examination, it must seek the views of host authorities on the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone. On 5 February 2026, RMBC received the applicant's Adequacy of Consultation Milestone Report (AoCM Report). Officers have reviewed this and issued a detailed response which is appended to this update.
- 1.3 It is important to note that this is not the formal Adequacy of Consultation under s55 of the Planning Act that the Planning Inspectorate request. The AoCM is a non-statutory, interim progress report submitted by the Applicant during the pre-application stage to demonstrate that their ongoing engagement aligns with the project's Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC).
- 1.4 In contrast, the Adequacy of Consultation Representation (AOC) is a formal, statutory response submitted by the Local Authority under Section 55 of the Planning Act 2008. The AOC is requested only after the final application is submitted and provides the definitive local government verdict on whether the developer met its legal consultation duties, directly influencing PINS decision on whether to accept the application for examination.

2.0 Summary of the Applicant's AoCM Submission

- 2.1 The AoCM Report outlines the applicant's approach to statutory consultation, including identification of consultees, community consultation in line with the SoCC, and publication of statutory notices.
- 2.2 The Applicant asserts that statutory requirements have been met.

3.0 RMBC Review of Statutory Compliance

3.0 RMBC is satisfied that most statutory requirements appear to have been met. However, statutory consultation is not considered complete due to the non-service of a Section 42 notice¹ on a number of landowners.

3.1 Until evidence of correct legal service is provided, statutory obligations are not considered fully discharged.

4.0 Summary of Community and Stakeholder Concerns

4.1 RMBC has received substantial feedback from Parish Councils, Ward Members, and residents, outlining concerns including:

- Lack of transparency
- Incorrect Freepost addresses
- Some residents not notified of events
- Limited and poorly advertised engagement events
- Gaps in information on infrastructure locations
- Short consultation periods for extensive documentation
- Unclear mapping materials
- No information on Community Benefit provision
- Concerns that consultation does not reflect the scale of the proposal

5.0 Consideration of Applicant Response to Feedback

5.1 The applicant has made some changes to the draft masterplan; however, RMBC will continue to scrutinise the Environmental Statement, draft Development Consent Order (DCO), and technical submissions. Officers note concern that no draft DCO has yet been provided despite requesting this on numerous occasions.

6.0 Masterplan Changes

6.1 Following a review of the comments received by local residents and statutory consultees, which include RMBC, the applicants have made amendments to the masterplan. These updated masterplans now incorporate additional reductions to the proposed solar development areas located in proximity to villages and residential properties. These revisions result in an overall 37% reduction in the developable area when compared with the initial proposals.

6.2 A further review of land identified for environmental mitigation has also been undertaken. As a result, areas that exceed what is required to deliver appropriate ecological benefits have been removed from the scheme. These

¹ A Section 42 notice is the formal letter an NSIP promoter sends out at the statutory pre-application stage to consult prescribed bodies, relevant local authorities, and certain affected land interests on a proposed Development Consent Order (DCO) application. It's part of the legal duty under s.42 of the Planning Act 2008 to consult before submitting the DCO, alongside community consultation (s.47) and public publicity

parcels of land will therefore remain outside the project boundary and continue in their existing agricultural use, supporting the applicant's objective of maximising local agricultural productivity.

- 6.3 These amendments, together with any subsequent revisions to the Draft Environmental Statement, are anticipated to form part of the documentation submitted to PINS as part of the Development Consent Order application. RMBC will be afforded the opportunity to provide representations on these matters through the preparation of its Local Impact Report.

7.0 Inclusion of the National Grid Substation

- 7.1 National Grid has offered Whitestone a 750 MW grid connection to the existing Brinsworth substation. As part of the wider Great Grid Upgrade, National Grid is progressing proposals for a new 400 kV substation at Long Lane, together with new overhead lines. This National Grid project is independent of the Whitestone scheme.

- 7.2 Notwithstanding this, National Grid has advised that the Whitestone connection point will be moved to the proposed Long Lane 400 kV substation if both proposals are approved. As this new substation remains subject to planning approval and has not yet been constructed, the project boundary for Whitestone includes cable routes to both the existing Brinsworth substation and the proposed Long Lane site. This ensures that a viable grid connection can be achieved should the Long Lane substation be delayed or not proceed.

8.0 Next Steps

- 8.1 RMBC will provide a statutory adequacy response when formally consulted by PINS. Officers will continue to prepare for the Local Impact Report (LIR), Statements of Common Ground (SoCG), comments on the DCO and other statutory submissions.

Instruction of Consultants

- 8.2 To ensure the Council can meet its statutory responsibilities during the Whitestone Solar Farm NSIP process, specialist external consultants are being instructed to provide technical expertise in key areas such as landscape, ecology, heritage and agricultural land quality, where the scale and complexity of the proposal exceed internal capacity. These consultants will operate under RMBC direction, and their work will support the preparation of the Local Impact Report, Statements of Common Ground, and responses to the Planning Inspectorate throughout the pre-application and examination stages. All consultancy costs will be fully funded by the applicant through the agreed Planning Performance Agreement, ensuring the arrangement is entirely cost-neutral to the Council.

Draft Environmental Statement, including Cumulative Impact

- 8.3 Since issuing the comments on the draft Environmental Statement, topic based meetings have been held to discuss the applicants response to the issues raised. These will continue throughout the pre-application stage on

subjects such as Landscape Visual Impact, Heritage, Noise and Transportation.

- 8.4 Additionally, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and the applicant have agreed a comprehensive Long List of developments to be considered within the cumulative impact assessment for the Whitestone project.
- 8.5 In order to ensure that the Council's approach is fully compliant with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, officers sought legal advice on the correct application of the legislation. This advice confirms that cumulative assessment must be based on 'committed development', defined as existing development and/or development that has already received approval.
- 8.6 However, given the extended timescales associated with the determination of this NSIP, the Council has also included all other relevant current applications, such as the two solar farm proposals at Ulley and Thurcroft and the proposed substation at Brinsworth on the basis that they are likely to reach determination within the NSIP assessment period. Consequently, the Whitestone proposals will be required to assess their cumulative effects alongside these schemes.
- 8.7 Conversely, applications determined under the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) will not be required to consider the Whitestone project, as its determination is expected to take place after those applications have been concluded.
- 8.8 The legal advice received is explicit in its interpretation of the legislation, and deviation from this approach would expose the Council to a significant risk of challenge.

Development Consent Order (DCO)

- 8.9 At the time of writing neither RMBC nor CDC have had sight of the draft DCO. The applicant has suggested this will be provided in early March. Officers will continue to press the applicant for this and once received it will be circulated to relevant internal departments, including legal representatives for comment. Liaison with the applicant will thereafter continue to feedback any relevant concerns, ensuring that they align with national Policy Statements and guidance.

Local Impact Report (LIR) and Statement of Common Ground (SOCG)

- 8.10 The pre-application process should be used to gather information that will inform the Local Impact Report (LIR) and any Statement of Common Ground (SoCG). A proactive approach at this stage is seen to help reduce resource pressures during the formal Examination phase.
- 8.11 The Local Impact Report (LIR) is a critical document in the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. It is report written by the LPA that outlines the anticipated effects of the proposed development on the local authority's area. As a technical and evidence-based assessment, the LIR is required to

address all topics the local authority deems relevant to understanding the development's impact. It serves as a formal mechanism for the authority to present its local knowledge and evidence on pertinent issues to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). The LIR also provides an opportunity for the authority to articulate how local planning policies relate to the proposed development. Its primary function is to inform the examining authority of the potential local impacts, supported by the authority's unique insight and expertise. The report is likely to cover topics such as:

- Landscape and Visual Impact
- Ecology
- Heritage
- Flood Risk
- Agricultural Land Classification
- Socio-Economics
- Glint & Glare

- 8.12 This list is not exhaustive, and the deadline for submission of this report is likely to be required at short notice, however Government guidance suggests that Council's should begin the preparatory work once they have sight of the final Environmental Statement and draft DCO. Officers
- 8.13 It is important however to note that there is no need for the Council to prepare a balancing exercise between the impacts, this is the role of PINS when considering the proposals.
- 8.14 Having regard to the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG), PINS will set deadlines for submission of the SoCG in a post Preliminary Meeting letter; however, early submission is encouraged by Government. A final SoCG is expected to be submitted at the final deadline of the examination. Usually, the SoCG begins with few items agreed, and as the examination progresses more items may become agreed and therefore removed from the document. This final version is often signed by both parties.
- 8.15 Generally, a SoCG sets out matters on which the applicant and another party or parties agree and identifies those areas where agreement has not been reached.
- 8.16 Again, timescales for submission of the LIR and SoCG are unknown at this time given we are not yet at this stage of the process.

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1 The Whitestone Solar Farm proposal continues to progress through the NSIP pre-application process, and the Council remains actively engaged in its statutory role as a host authority. While the applicant has made revisions to the masterplan, several key matters remain outstanding, including confirmation of full statutory compliance, provision of the draft DCO, and clearer evidence of how consultation feedback has informed the evolving scheme.
- 9.2 Officers will continue to scrutinise all forthcoming documentation, including the Environmental Statement, draft Development Consent Order, and cumulative impact assessments, to ensure that the Council's statutory responsibilities are met and that local issues are fully and accurately represented. The appointment of specialist consultants will strengthen the Council's technical capacity and ensure robust evidence is available during both pre-application and examination stages.
- 9.3 The Council will prepare its Local Impact Report, and Statements of Common Ground at the appropriate stages, ensuring that the local planning authority's position is clearly articulated, evidence-based, and aligned with national requirements. Members will be kept informed as the project progresses, including when the application is submitted and when further formal responses are required.
- 9.4 Overall, while progress has been made, significant work remains to ensure that the potential impacts of this nationally significant proposal are fully understood and appropriately addressed. Officers will continue to prioritise transparency, statutory compliance, and the protection of local interests as the project advances toward examination.