

Regeneration & Environment

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Lucy Freeman
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Dear Lucy

Whitestone Solar Farm – Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone Report (“AoCM Report”) received by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) on 06 February 2026 by email.

RMBC understands that, in due course, the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) will seek the Council’s formal views under section 55(4)(b) of the Planning Act 2008 relating specifically to whether the Applicant has complied with its consultation duties under sections 42, 47 and 48 of the Act. RMBC acknowledges that representations at that stage must be confined solely to statutory adequacy of consultation, and not to the planning merits of the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).

With this context in mind, RMBC provides the following comments.

Compliance with Statutory Requirements

RMBC notes that the AoCM report sets out, in comprehensive detail, how the Applicant approached consultation under Sections 42, 47 and 48 of the Planning Act 2008. Based on the information presented, the Council is satisfied that the statutory requirements have been met and that RMBC was appropriately identified and consulted as a host authority.

Engagement with RMBC on the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)

RMBC confirms that constructive engagement has taken place with the Applicant since 2024, including during the preparation of the SoCC and throughout the

subsequent statutory consultation stages. The AoCM Report accurately reflects Officer's input and the corrections sought during this process.

Community Consultation

RMBC acknowledges the consultation undertaken by the Applicant, including leaflet distribution, in-person events, online engagement tools and accessibility measures. The Council is therefore satisfied that the Applicant has complied with the agreed SoCC.

However, it is worth noting at this juncture, significant concerns have been raised by Parish Councils, local residents, and elected Ward Members. These concerns indicate that, while statutory compliance may have been achieved, the quality and effectiveness of the consultation has been perceived as inadequate by these stakeholders. Issues reported to officers include:

- Consultation process lacked transparency, clarity, and genuine community engagement.
- Flyers resembled junk mail and were frequently discarded; some also contained incorrect Freepost addresses, raising concerns about whether responses were received.
- Not all directly affected residents received communication about consultation events.
- Only a small number of drop-in sessions were held across a very large geographical area, many during working hours, with no formal presentations.
- Consultation events were poorly advertised and offered limited opportunity for meaningful participation.
- Treeton was initially excluded from both consultation rounds and only included after pressure from the local MP.
- Whitestone representatives showed poor local knowledge, dismissive attitudes, and were unable to answer key questions regarding flooding, traffic, biodiversity, and community benefits.
- After two years of planning, key infrastructure locations (cable corridors, battery storage, substations) remain undetermined and were not clearly presented.
- Technical documentation was extensive, but the consultation period was too short for residents and organisations to review and understand its implications.
- No consideration was given to extending the consultation period despite issues with incorrect or inconsistent addressing on leaflets and display materials.
- Engagement with both Inner Zone and Outer Zone communities was inadequate, leaving many residents unaware of the scale and impact of the development.
- Communication relied heavily on unclear maps and hard-to-read materials, making it difficult for residents to identify local impacts.
- No information has been provided on the Community Benefit Fund.

- The scale of the scheme, approx. 3,400 acres of Green Belt is not reflected in the limited and superficial consultation undertaken.
- Parish Council(s) believe the overall consultation process is unfit for purpose and should be declared null and void.
- Statutory Notice Failure - No Section 42 notice has ever been served on joint legal owner of Springvale Farm, despite the owners clear status as a statutory consultee. Whitestone were informed in October 2025 that the site forms part of a residential home and is an active Camping and Caravan Club Certified Site. Despite invitations to engage, telephone calls on 17–18 February went unanswered. A representative from Whitestone subsequently attempted entry without notice, contrary to the owners 48-hour requirement issued on 9 February. The representative opened the owners private residential gates and drove into their yard, blocking access. The follow-up email acknowledged a communication issue but not the perceived civil trespass. The engagement to date has not reflected statutory obligations, accurate mapping, or the operational realities of the Certified Site. The current access strategy is not legally or technically viable.

Consideration of Feedback

RMBC notes that the Applicant has made changes to the draft masterplan following consultation feedback, including reductions in solar panel areas and refinements to parcels of land adjacent to Rotherham communities. RMBC welcomes these changes and will continue to examine the evidence base when further submission documents are provided within the Environmental Statement (ES) and draft DCO.

RMBC will, in particular, scrutinise detailed assessments on transport, landscape, green belt, heritage, ecology, agricultural land quality, and other relevant environmental matters through the Local Impact Report and subsequent stages. Officers welcome continued constructive dialogue with the Applicant's technical advisors as the Environmental Statement is finalised and note that there are particular areas of concern, such as the LVIA where no meetings have yet taken place since the Council's initial comments on the draft ES.

Furthermore, RMBC wishes to highlight that, despite requesting sight of the draft DCO on various occasions, no draft has yet been provided. Officers are therefore concerned that the Applicant's intention to submit the DCO to PINS in May 2026 will provide very limited time for meaningful review by RMBC prior to submission. This is not conducive to effective collaborative working and runs counter to the Government's guidance on early and ongoing engagement with local authorities during the NSIP process. We therefore reserve the right to make reps to PINS on this point in due course.

Conclusion

Although the Council recognises that the applicant has endeavoured to satisfy the statutory consultation obligations pursuant to section 42 of the Town and Country Act, at this point due to the failure to serve the appropriate notice at Springvale Farm the Councils position must be that statutory consultation requirements have not been

fully satisfied, unless you can provide appropriate evidence that service has legally taken place. Furthermore, RMBC wishes to emphasise the considerable dissatisfaction expressed by some local communities regarding the quality of the consultation experience. Subject to Data Protection legislation, this information can be provided and will be submitted to PINS in due course. RMBC also remains concerned regarding the absence of the draft DCO and the implications this may have for constructive pre-submission engagement.

RMBC will provide a full statutory adequacy of consultation response when formally requested by the Planning Inspectorate under section 55.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bramidge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew Bramidge
Executive Director Regeneration and Environment