

Saxilby with Ingleby Parish Council – Position Statement

Solar Farm Proposal

This position statement sets out Saxilby with Ingleby Parish Council and wider community view on the principle of large ground-mounted solar PV developments and identifies planning issues that should be considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

About Saxilby with Ingleby

Saxilby with Ingleby is a rural historic Parish with the villages of Saxilby and Ingleby making up most of the built up area. Several historic buildings remain in Saxilby with Ingleby which span the centuries: St Botolph's Church (C12th), Saxilby Old Hall (C15th), the Manor Farm House (C16th) and several cottages (C18th). The Fosdyke canal is the oldest artificial waterway in the country, connecting the River Trent at Torksey to the River Till at Odder. The Fosdyke has influenced village life in Saxilby with Ingleby significantly throughout the past two millennia. These historic features are brought together within the Bridge Street Conversation Area.

The rest of the Parish is rural and is located within the rolling arable landscape of the Till Vale, a stretch of land which runs north south radiating out from the River Till and is bounded to the west by the River Trent and to the east by the abrupt escarpment of Lincoln Cliff, a Jurassic limestone cliff.

The Proposal

The West Burton Energy Project (Part 2) led by Island Green power covers a large area of the Parish to the North of Saxilby and encompasses the small village of Ingleby. Part 2 of the project is linked to parts 1, 3 and 4 and to the Cottam project. In total, the scheme will provide 480 MW of renewable energy, and have the facility to store 20 MW of energy. It will also cover around 10,000 acres of farmland across the area.

Our View

This Statement sets out a number of considerations to ensure that any schemes for ground-mounted solar PV which come forward in the parish of Saxilby with Ingleby:

- a) are adequately justified;
- b) are of an appropriate scale and location;
- c) respect local landscape, heritage and visual amenity;
- d) assess of the cumulative impacts.

The Government's drive for a zero carbon economy by 2050 is supported by the Parish Council which itself has a set of environment related objectives whereby local decisions are based. The Parish Council considers that appropriate renewable energy infrastructure and technology forms a central part to achieving this goal. However, the Parish Council also believe that right balance needs to be achieved between the scale and location of renewable energy infrastructure and losing our valued landscapes and biodiversity. Not all of this infrastructure should be provided

within a single area. The impacts of such infrastructure should be spread across the Country and in areas where it causes the least impacts to the environment and communities.

To help manage the impacts of renewable energy developments, Paragraph 155 (a) and (b) of the NPPF states that Local Plans should:

- *‘provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts)’;*
and
- *‘consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development’.*

The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan 2017 (and the emerging 2022 review Plan) fails to identify any ‘preferred’ locations for of renewable energy developments and therefore doesn’t provide the framework for guiding such large-scale schemes. This lack of local guidance contributes towards the continuation of an ‘unplanned’ approach to large scale renewable energy infrastructure across Central Lincolnshire leading to further vulnerability to the environment and a set of cumulative landscape related issues in the future.

The Parish Council works to ensure renewable energy projects are done well, in a way that minimises impacts on our environment and community, and makes sure that the communities who host such schemes benefit directly from them.

The Parish Council consider that if this scheme went ahead, that significant improvements should be made to enhance existing green infrastructure – to encourage more walking and cycling within and between settlements therefore reducing travel by car or through subsidising more localised renewable energy schemes such as ‘community energy sharing schemes’ so that everyone in the Parish can benefit.

A recent increase in applications for large solar farms within the wider area has increased the potential for cumulative negative impact on the rural flat and historic landscape around Saxilby. The West Lindsey Landscape Character Assessment (WLLCA), published in 1999, provides a detailed assessment of the special character, distinctiveness and qualities of the various landscape types found across the district. At a strategic level, it divides West Lindsey into four Broad Landscape Character Areas in respect of scale, geology, topography, land-cover and settlement pattern. Within these categories, Saxilby falls into the Trent Valley grouping. Low-lying predominantly agricultural and historic landscapes of strong rural character, with large, flat, open fields and hedgerows providing enclosure to roads typify this wider Trent Valley area with pockets of woodland scattered intermittently.

Due to the flatter nature of the landscape, there are key sightlines and views across the wider area to the Power Stations along the River Trent to the west and Lincoln Cathedral to the East as identified within the Saxilby Character Assessment 2017. All of which are sensitive to radical and rapid change or intensive development.

This application stretches far beyond the boundary of Saxilby with Ingleby and affects the historic settlements of Brampton, Torksey, Broxholme, Willingham, Stow, Sturton by Stow and up to areas like Glentworth all of which have significant heritage assets. The impact of such a scale of development will lead to a concentration of solar panel infrastructure and, in some locations, nearly an unbroken sea of artificial structures and reflective glare.

The environmental objective of developing renewable energy through large solar farms should not come at the expense of the beauty, character, biodiversity and tranquillity of the countryside, especially in those flatter, more open landscapes where more industrial developments are harder to hide or more difficult to mitigate. In fact, it is difficult to envisage how such a scheme can be mitigated simply due to its sheer expanse.

This part of Lincolnshire provides a significant contribution towards food production for the wider economy. In fact, Lincolnshire is widely known as the 'Bread Basket' of the UK due to the quantity (12%) of food produced and the quality of its agricultural land. Agriculture forms the backbone of the local economy and contributes significantly towards the rural character of the Parish and wider area.

The proposed loss of this agricultural land across the area will ultimately change agricultural practices and the agricultural history of the Parish and wider area forever. Grade 1, 2 and 3a farmland is in itself a major renewable energy resource as well as supporting the supply of food, and is defined as being 'the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) in the NPPF. It is undesirable to take one renewable energy resource out of effective use in order to develop another.

The Parish Council believe that if this scheme went ahead, poorer quality land, brownfield land or retrofitting existing building roof-space should be used in preference to higher quality land, and the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) should be avoided. Where possible and viable, agricultural activity and other environmental/land management services should be able to continue.

The wide open greenfield land supports an abundance of wildlife. The local habitat network of waterways, woodlands and hedgerows are home to a number of native species. These linear habitats are sensitive to change and provide a series of green corridors for animals to move between habitats.

The Parish Council will not support large scale solar PV arrays on sites with high ecological importance. Solar PV arrays will have implications for habitat loss, fragmentation and modification and for displacement of species. The NPPF sets out the approach to ecology in the planning process through a number of guiding principles. The potential impact from all stages of the development, including construction, operation and decommissioning stages, will need to be addressed. Ecological impact assessments, including specific protected species surveys, may need to be submitted to inform planning decisions. These should follow best practice guidelines and refer to the Natural England Standing Advice. They should also

inform and influence the design to ensure potential adverse impacts are mitigated and to maximise biodiversity enhancement opportunities.

The Parish Council require that if this scheme went ahead, that significant net-gain in biodiversity should be made to enhance existing habitats – to encourage more wildlife to thrive within the area and protect those species that are endangered. The implementation of an ecological mitigation/management/monitoring plan can result in Solar PV arrays delivering environmental gains such as the creation of enhanced wildlife habitats including wildflower meadows, hedgerows and woodland buffers. However these may not always be appropriate in terms of landscape character and advice should be sought from the District and other relevant authorities when preparing these plans.

Solar farms will impact nearby residents, particularly those in Ingleby, and the wider local community hosting the development. Concerns about loss of amenity, visual impact including glint and glare from panels and linked to this road safety will need to be appropriately considered as part of determining the acceptability of the development. There are also health impacts associated with such schemes where lithium battery storage facilities are also being proposed. The Parish Council consider that, for such a large project, there has been inadequate public consultation with only two events being held within Saxilby itself. One of these events clashed with the Lincolnshire Show. The developers have also only met with the Parish Council virtually despite several requests for individual face-to-face meetings.

The Parish Council considers that community involvement should be an integral part of the development process. The local community should be consulted by the developer at the conceptual stage, ideally utilising local exhibitions and presentations where community views can be sought and recorded. To support this statement, the Parish Council organised a Public meeting on the 17th January 2023 to seek residents' views on the proposal and make sure local views have been considered.

The opportunities for community gain are encouraged and should be explored as part of developing projects wherever practical. Such opportunities can include:

- Establishing a Community Benefits Trust with funds being contributed annually by the developer for local projects.
- Local or community ownership of panels.
- Local share issue.
- Investment in green infrastructure provision and management.

Conclusion

Saxilby with Ingleby Parish Council, is in principle, not supportive of the installation of a large scale solar farm within the Parish.

Development should be appropriate to the locality and avoid adverse planning and environmental impacts. The Parish Council does not consider that the need for

renewables should automatically override environmental protections and an application will only be supported if the impact is or can be made acceptable.

As a preference, the Parish Council will support solar arrays mounted on existing roofs or integrated into new roofs/buildings. Developments on previously developed and/or contaminated and industrial land are also preferable. Community owned projects would be particularly welcomed. The Parish Council will not support the development of large scale Solar PV arrays in areas identified for their special character or other importance.

The Parish Council will not support large scale solar PV arrays on sites with ecological importance, archaeological or historic interest, or classified as the best and most versatile grades of agricultural land (1, 2, and 3a).

For greenfield proposals outside of protected areas, the Parish Council expect proposals to demonstrate the landscape's suitability to receive such a development. Proposals must show how the design of the scheme has accounted for landscape character. Developments should avoid both landscape and visual impacts, or demonstrate appropriate mitigation. In addition, land management around panels should allow for continued agricultural use and/or encourage biodiversity improvements.

In formulating its views on proposals, the Parish Council has regard to cumulative impacts of multiple solar arrays on landscape character and visual amenity. The impact from a single development may not just be significant on its own, but when combined with other impacts from similar developments could have a much wider impact.

The consultation and involvement of local communities should be an integral part of the development process and the Parish Council believe that the recent consultation was insufficient in terms of providing clear and meaningful engagement with all sectors of the community.