6 New Bridge Street
London EC4V 6AB
T: 020 7489 0213
F: 020 7248 4743
E: info@dwdllp.com
W: dwdllp.com

VICARAGE DROVE SOLAR FARM

LAND NORTH- WEST OF BICKER

CONSULTATION REPORT

Date: September 2021

DWD Ref: 15349

CONTENTS

TABLES

FIGURES

APPENDICES

Revision	Description	Originated	Checked	Reviewed	Authorised	Date
1	FINAL	JM	NB	NB	NB	15/09/21
DWD Job Number: 15349						

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Renewable Connections Developments Limited (the 'Applicant') has carried out a comprehensive and meaningful pre-application community engagement exercise in respect of the construction and operation of solar photovoltaic farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure on agricultural land located to the north-west of Bicker. The proposal is referred to collectively as the 'Proposed Development' and the project is known as 'Vicarage Drove Solar Farm'.

The primary purpose of this Consultation Report is to set out the measures taken to ensure the local community in the surrounding area was consulted regarding the Proposed Development. The report details how local residents were able to share their feedback and how the Applicant has responded to views expressed by consultees, including through changes incorporated into the Proposed Development.

In addition to the above, particular emphasis has been placed by this report on consultation measures adopted by the Applicant in order to adequately and safely engage with the local community during the circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The local community consultation advertised the Proposed Development through a mailout and an online consultation website. The consultation period ran for four weeks between 16 April 2021 and 14 May 2021.

During the consultation, respondents raised concerns about various aspects of the project while also acknowledging the need for renewable energy and the benefits of the Proposed Development for wildlife and biodiversity in the area. The most common concerns related to the site access. It is considered that the further information provided with the planning application and outlined in Table 5.1 above should alleviate many of the main concerns.

The Applicant considered the points raised by consultees during the engagement process and subsequently made changes and additions to the Proposed Development, where necessary. This included, amongst other things: amendments the proposed access; additional screen planting; and standoffs from sensitive features.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Overview

1.1 This Consultation Report has been prepared in support of an application for planning permission submitted to Boston Borough Council (the 'Council') under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) on behalf of Renewable Connections Developments Limited (the 'Applicant').

1.2 The proposal comprises the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic ('PV') farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure, including inverters, substation compound, security cameras, fencing, access tracks and landscaping. The proposal is referred to collectively as the 'Proposed Development' and the project is known as 'Vicarage Drove Solar Farm'. It is estimated that the solar panels would generate around 49.9 megawatts ('MW') of renewable energy – enough electricity to power approximately 14,000 homes.

1.3 The Proposed Site (the 'Site') comprises approximately 80.36 hectares ('ha') of agricultural land, located 2.5km to the north west of Bicker village.

1.4 The UK Government has committed to meeting a legally binding target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and the Council has declared a climate emergency. This requires major investment in proven technologies, such as solar and wind, which is supported by planning policy at local and national level. The Proposed Development would help to address this need by generating clean and renewable energy without the need for subsidies.

1.5 Planning permission is being sought to operate for 40 years, at which point it would be decommissioned and the land returned to its previous state.

The Applicant

1.6 Renewable Connections Developments Ltd ('Renewable Connections') are one of the most experienced renewable energy teams in the UK having developed over 1GW of solar projects globally since 2010. Renewable Connections work in partnership with European Energy, one of the largest renewable operators of renewable energy plants across Europe.

Pre-Application Consultation

1.7 The Applicant considers that being a good neighbour is instrumental to delivering a successful development project. Furthermore, that it is important to engage with the local community at the earliest opportunity to seek feedback about the Proposed Development, using local knowledge to inform and refine the approach wherever possible.

1.8 The applicant has therefore carried out a comprehensive and meaningful pre-application community engagement exercise in respect of the Proposed Development, primarily focused on the local community, but also including consultation with the Council, parish councils, ward councillors and other key local consultees.

1.9 For the purposes of this report, the 'local community' refers to local residents and businesses, parish councils, district and county councillors, and local interest groups and organisations. The local community consultation included advertising the Proposed Development through a mailout, emails, newspaper notice, social media posts and an interactive online consultation exercise. The consultation with the Council consisted of an Environmental Impact Assessment ('EIA') Screening Request. The Applicant also sought pre-application advice from the Council and a formal written pre-application advice letter was issued on 10 February 2021. The Council was supportive of the scheme in principle.

1.10 The Applicant has listened to the views expressed by consultees and has made several changes and additions to the Proposed Development as a result, including, amongst other things: amendments to the proposed access; additional screen planting; standoffs from sensitive features.

1.11 The approach taken to consultation was informed by the South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee Statement of Community Involvement (2012) which sets out proposals for involving and consulting members of the public and stakeholders on the preparation of planning policies and the determination of planning applications in South East Lincolnshire (which covers the areas of Boston Borough Council and South Holland District Council).

Purpose and Structure of this Report

1.12 This Consultation Report provides details of the pre-application consultation undertaken by the Applicant in respect of the Proposed Development. The focus is primarily on consultation with the local community.

1.13 The following matters are covered:

- the approach that has been taken to consultation;
- the methods and activities employed;
- the timescales and deadlines set for consultation; and
- the responses that have been received to the consultation and how these have been taken into account by the Applicant.

1.14 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – explains the consultation strategy adopted by the Applicant;
- Section 3 – provides details of the pre-application consultation with the local community;
- Section 4 – sets out the responses the Applicant received to the consultation with the local community;
- Section 5 – sets out how the Applicant has had regard to the responses received to the consultation with the local community; and
- Section 6 – provides a summary and conclusions.

2.0 THE APPLICANT'S APPROACH TO CONSULTATION

Introduction

2.1 The Applicant devised a consultation strategy before carrying out the local community consultation. When devising the strategy, the Applicant recognised that early community engagement can identify key issues, help allay concerns, and allow for amendments to proposals before formal submissions.

Planning Policy and Guidance

2.2 The Applicant has had regard to the relevant planning policy and guidance in devising the consultation strategy. This included reviewing relevant local and national policy and guidance.

2.3 The South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee Statement of Community Involvement (2012) states that:

"Consultation prior to specific planning applications being submitted is not currently a statutory responsibility of either LPA or developer. However, the three partner LPAs actively encourage developers to seek involvement of the community at this stage. Applicants should submit details of any preliminary consultation that they have undertaken with the community as part of their application.

The partner LPAs believe that potential applicants should pay particular attention to engaging with the wider community before submitting applications which in the opinion of officers are likely to give rise to issues of significant economic, environmental or social impact. Public involvement at this stage should ensure that such schemes are well understood by the local community and other interested parties, and allow early consideration of the fundamental issues relating to whether a particular proposal would be acceptable in principle. The scale and scope of consultation exercises should be agreed with Council officers on a case by case basis.

It should be noted that the Localism Act 2011 does introduce a requirement for applicants proposing certain, as yet unspecified, types of development to carry out consultation before applying for planning permission. This matter will be addressed through the introduction of new planning regulations."

2.4 Furthermore, the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) states that *"Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system*

for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community."

Consultation Objectives

2.5 The Applicant's overall consultation objectives have been to:

- raise awareness of what is proposed and to give the local community and other stakeholders the opportunity to make informative comments about the Proposed Development;
- provide clear and concise information;
- invite feedback and have regard to it in finalising the Proposed Development; and
- show, within the application, how the Applicant has taken account of consultation.

2.6 To deliver the consultation objectives, the Applicant proposed a wide-reaching consultation centred around an online platform.

3.0 LOCAL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Introduction

3.1 This section explains the scope of the local community consultation, including who was consulted, consultation methods, how the information was made available and how feedback could be provided by consultees. Furthermore, detail about how the Applicant adopted extra measures to ensure adequate and safe consultation as a result of the challenging circumstances associated with COVID-19.

3.2 The local community consultation ran for four weeks from 16 April 2021 until 14 May 2021.

Consultees

3.3 The following groups were consulted:

- local residents and businesses;
- local parish councils;
- relevant district and county councillors; and
- members of parliament.

Consultation Methods

3.4 A significant element of the exercise was conducted via an online consultation website. The information on the website is covered in further detail below. Ordinarily when coordinating a community consultation the Applicant may organise face to face meetings and a public exhibition event at a venue close to the Site.

3.5 However, owing to the circumstances bought about the COVID-19, face to face meetings and exhibition events were deemed unsuitable due to safety concerns under UK Government Guidance. The website was utilised to provide easily accessible information in the absence of being able to carry out face to face meetings and events.

3.6 In addition, a telephone line was set up and operated by the Applicant for the duration of the consultation period to allow interested parties to discuss the Proposed Development, ask questions and leave comments.

Website

3.7 The consultation website was hosted on the Applicant's own website and so consultees could quickly access information about the client. The consultation website featured the following sections on a single page that consultees could easily scroll through:

- Welcome – here consultees received a brief introduction to the project, the opportunity to download the community information leaflet and a number of quick facts.
- Location – here consultees could view a site location plan and a description of the Site and surrounding area.
- Our proposals – here consultees could read about various components of the Proposed Development and download a proposed site plan, viewpoint photographs and the construction traffic route.
- Project timeline – here consultees were given a rough timeline of how the Applicant intended the project to progress.
- The need for the project – here consultees would read about the local and national need for renewable energy in response to climate change.
- FAQ's – here consultees could view succinct answers to a number of common questions.
- Get in touch – here consultees were given email, telephone and postal contact details for leaving feedback as well as an online form.

Mailout

3.8 Letters, along with leaflets, were posted first class on 16 April 2021 via Royal Mail to properties in the surrounding area who were considered likely to be interested in the Proposed Development. The mailout area is shown below in Figure 3.1 and included 594 addresses, 579 of those residential and 15 business addresses.

3.9 These letters, examples of which are attached at Appendix 2 of this report, informed local occupiers of the proposals along with further details of the consultation including how to view information online and how to comment.

Figure 3.1: Mailout Area

Other

3.10 District and County Councillors, Parish Councillors and the local MP were contacted through a mixture of email and telephone calls from week commencing 8 March 2021 to be given details of and discuss the Proposed Development.

3.11 The Applicant also gave a presentation to Bicker Parish Council on 13 May 2021 outlining the initial proposals, the expected timeline, the key findings from the technical assessments, the proposed construction traffic route followed by a 'questions and answers' session.

3.12 The Applicant also scheduled an online community information event, to be carried out through Zoom, at 7pm on 29 April 2021 for which residents could register their interest. However, this event was cancelled due to a lack of interest and written responses received prior to the scheduled date, although the Applicant encouraged consultees to attend the abovementioned Bicker Parish Council meeting and spoke to a number of local residents directly.

Feedback

3.13 Feedback could be provided via the following means:

- **Website:** www.vicaragedrovesolar.co.uk
- **Post:** Vicarage Drove Solar, 3rd Floor, 141-145 Curtain Road, London, EC2A 3BX
- **Email:** consultation@dwdllp.com

- **Telephone:** 01775 302205

3.14 Comments were requested by no later than 5pm on 14 May 2021.

4.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

4.1 This section provides details of the general interest in and responses received in relation to the consultation, along with analysis of the key themes.

4.2 During the course of consultation, the consultation website received a total of 81 visitors, while 16 responses were left via email or the online feedback form, some from the same people. A small number these responses were also last minute sign-ups to the online consultation event which had already been cancelled at that point due to a general lack of interest. These consultees were advised of this and told that the Applicant was appearing at the Bicker Parish Council meeting on 12 May 2021, or that the Applicant could contact them directly by telephone or e-mail.

4.3 The most common topics raised in the responses and their frequency are set out below:

- 6 – Traffic and Transport;
- 3 – Landscape and Visual Impact;
- 3 – Biodiversity and Wildlife;
- 2 – Renewable Energy and Climate Change;
- 2 – Site Selection;
- 2 – Community Benefit;
- 1 – Cultural Heritage;
- 4 – Other.

4.4 Those Other topics raised included overhead lines, glint and glare, future development and restoration of the Site following the decommissioning of the Proposed Development.

4.5 More detailed topics and examples of specific comments are displayed below in Table 5.1 of Section 5, alongside the Applicant's regard had to those comments and any related changes made to the Application.

5.0 REGARD HAD TO CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY

5.1 The Applicant has given meaningful consideration to the feedback received from the local community and has made a number of additions and changes to the design of the Proposed Development.

5.2 Table 5.1 on the following pages sets out the key themes identified from analysis of all the submitted feedback and the Applicant's response in respect of each matter, including where changes have been made.

Table 5.1: Regard had to Consultation

Categories/ Themes	Sub themes	Example Comments	Applicant's response/regard had to the comments/issues	Changes made to the Proposed Development & relevant document/s
Traffic and Transport	Access	*"Why would you not use the substation access road from the A17, constructed for the specific purpose of keeping vehicles away from Bicker homes?"*	The construction traffic route was originally proposed to route from the A52 to site via Fendike Lane, Fore Lane, Longhedge Drove and Bicker Drove, however, following consultation with Bicker Parish Council and in order to address concerns raised by residents, the Applicant sought to secure an alternative delivery route across third party land utilising an existing haul route connecting the A52 directly with Ing Drove passing through Cowbridge Road, Bicker Drove and then onto Vicarage Drove.	The construction traffic route has been amended following consultation to respond to comments, including the need to avoid the villages of Northorpe and Bicker. Please refer to the following documents: • Transport Statement • Planning, Design and Access Statement
	Construction traffic	*"Adverse effect on the local community during building works."*	During the construction phase of the Proposed Development the highest increase in average two-way daily traffic movements expected during the 6-month construction phase is 10. Notwithstanding the de minimis change in highway capacity which is expected to arise from the construction, in order to reduce or avoid this potential disturbance arising from heavy goods vehicles, a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) is proposed. The CTMP would be secured by condition. The development will not require significant noise generating activities and therefore it is unlikely there will be significant disruption experienced by local residents.	A Construction Traffic Management Plan is proposed to be secured by condition. Please refer to the following documents: • Transport Statement • Planning, Design and Access Statement
	Road conditions	*"Bicker Fen roads are in a dire condition and were not built for heavy traffic"* *"Fendyke lane is unsuitable for hgvs as it is single track in very poor condition and has tight bends."*	During the preparation of the Transport Statement, the Applicant's transport consultants, Motion, visited the Site and accessed the proposed site access. The roads were found to be suitable for the small number of HGVs associated with the construction of the Proposed Development. However, as noted above, the construction traffic route was amended to avoid Fendike Lane.	As above, the construction traffic route was amended to avoid the use of Fendike Lane. Please refer to the following documents: • Transport Statement • Planning, Design and Access Statement
Landscape and Visual Impact	Character of the area	*"Industrial installation in a rural environment."*	The Site is within an area already characterised by wind energy turbines, pylons and substations. It has been intentionally located in close proximity to the Bicker wind farm and the South Forty Foot Drain. The 13 turbines, electricity generating station and the associated infrastructure create a prominent vertical, industrial element in the landscape. A high power (400kV/275kV) National Grid pylon route runs from south east to north west across the landscape and a plethora of local poles and wires cross the landscape on both sides of the South Forty Foot Drain. The area of apparent industrialisation has been expanded by the addition of the substation for the Triton Knoll Onshore Substation which is located to the north, and the Viking Link interconnector converter station, which is to be currently being constructed within an area to the south; both close enough to link to the existing generating station.	Following National Guidance, well-established principles of design have been incorporated into the layout taking a range of constraints into consideration to minimise effect. These include: • the layout and landscaping has been designed to be sympathetic to the local landscape, located by the Bicker windfarm in order to minimise any sprawl across open landscape. • retaining the existing structural landscape features such the
	Cumulative impact	*"This installation adds to the infrastructure already in the area and growing by the day!"*		

			The selected Site is therefore positioned in close proximity to other built form relating to renewable energy and, because of this proximity, the wind turbines and infrastructure have been incorporated into the discussion of the landscape baseline. The existing features, including the now completed Triton Knoll onshore substation and the Viking Link converter station that is being constructed are an integral part of the Site environs and it is not logical to separate them out for a separate cumulative assessment. The design aims to be sympathetic to the local landscape and the need to retain as much of the sense of openness for those experiencing the landscape is recognised. Consequently, the proposed layout is closely associated with the existing industrialised elements in order to minimise visual intrusion into the wider open landscape. Existing structural landscape features such as scattered scrub and undermanaged hedgerows that have developed in association with the existing wind farm and infrastructure provide some screening and will be retained and linked to the proposed boundary planting. In order to integrate the Proposed Development into the local landscape and to address the need to mitigate landscape and visual effects as far as is reasonably possible, a landscape scheme with native planting has been designed to establish new planting and reinforce existing perimeter planting; to develop the structure of the local landscape; and to minimise the long term effect. It is considered, therefore, that the proposed development would, in the long term, not be out of keeping in this locality, would continue to form an integral part of the landscape and the proposed development at the site, with suitable mitigation, would not have a significant adverse effect on the local landscape character.	geometric drain pattern and existing vegetation. • a buffer of 20m would be maintained to the east of the South Forty Foot Drain and a buffer of 11m would be maintained against all boundary drains and 5m from internal drain margins. • including a comprehensive landscape scheme as mitigation planting where appropriate. • manage the new hedge lines by the South Forty Foot Drain embankment at 4m height and along boundary drains at 3m height to increase their presence in the landscape and add to the green Infrastructure and biodiversity. Please refer to the following documents: • Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment • Planning, Design and Access Statement
Biodiversity and Wildlife	Wildlife	*"The local proposals for wildlife conservation etc are welcomed."* *"Your proposals will cause vast environmental damage"*	We are pleased to note the positive comment received with regards to wildlife conservation. The impact of the Proposed Development on biodiversity is considered in the Ecological Assessment submitted as part of the planning application. The Proposed Development would mainly affect agricultural land, which is of negligible value. The boundary drains, along with poor semi-improved grassland along the banks are of low ecological value at a local scale. As recommended by the assessment, the arable habitats below proposed solar arrays and boundary habitats are, wherever possible, enhanced to provide a net gain in biodiversity. In addition, the Site has been identified as having the potential to support protected species. The assessment makes a number of recommendations regarding mitigation by design, such as buffer zones, which have been factored into the design, and a construction ecological management plan secured through a planning condition.	The following enhancement measures are to be included in the Proposed Development, secured via a Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy that will link to the Landscape Mitigation Strategy and safeguarded through a Grassland Management Plan/Biodiversity Management Plan secured by planning condition: • Where possible, convert arable fields under solar arrays to higher quality habitats such as species-rich grassland or pasture with species-rich elements; • Enhance and strengthen boundary habitats to provide an improved connective habitat resource post-development; and

				• The creation of mammal gates within lines of security fencing to allow dispersal of mammal species and other fauna across the solar farm site. A number of protection measures during construction will be detailed in a Construction Ecological Method Statement, secured through planning condition. The development has also been designed to provide sufficient buffers from badger setts. Please refer to the following document: • Ecological Assessment • Planning, Design and Access Statement
Renewable Energy and Climate Change	Need for renewable energy	*"The benefits of solar generation … are welcomed"* *"I understand the need for change and renewable energy"*	We are pleased to note the positive comments received with regards to the recognised benefits of solar farms and their significant contribution towards meeting renewable energy targets and tackling climate change. This need for the Proposed Development is set out in detail in the Planning, Design and Access Statement section 2.0.	No changes made. Please refer to the following documents: • Planning, Design and Access Statement
	Use of rooftop solar	*"These panels should be sited on low grade land, brown field sites and roofs of buildings."*	Commercial and domestic rooftops were not considered as an alternative because (i) there are no known rooftops of sufficient size in the local area and (ii) it is considered that assessing the potential for development of multiple rooftops is not comparable to a ground-mounted solar PV farm. Furthermore, paragraph 013 (REF:5-013-20150327) in the Government's National Planning Practice Guidance states that in considering ground-mounted solar farms, the focus should be on the effective use of previously developed land and non-agricultural land.	No changes made. Please refer to the following documents: • Alternative Site Assessment
Site Selection	Agricultural land grade Brownfield land	*See above.*	The identification of the Site is the result of a careful site selection exercise undertaken by the Applicant. This took account of both brownfield sites and lower or equal grade agricultural land and applied a number of important criteria, including technical feasibility, environmental and planning constraints, and land availability. The process did not identify any more suitable sites located on lower or equal grade agricultural land, with the Site itself found to be a mixture of Grade 2 and 3a land, with 3a predominating. Furthermore, no viable brownfield sites were identified. Please refer to the Alternative Site Assessment that forms part of the planning application submission for more detail.	No changes made. Please refer to the following documents: • Agricultural Land Classification Report. • Alternative Site Assessment
Community Benefit	Public footpath	*"If the site could incorporate extended public footpaths/cyclepaths without interference to the installation or*	The Applicant has explored a number of ways of providing community benefit and welcomes all suggestions. However, due to the location	No changes made.

		livestock, for instance to link Vicarage drove to Bicker Drove, this would also be of benefit."	and nature of the Proposed Development it is not considered feasible to offer public footpaths/cycle paths.	
	Community grants	*"I'm a resident whose volunteers for a Animal charity we have a colony of feral cats on fendyke Lane fore lane. One of my colleagues asked if you would support our charity to be told that you do not support offer grants of this nature"*	The Applicant is committed to maximising benefits for the Bicker Fen Community. The project will support local businesses, provide enhanced business rates, and provide enhancements to wildlife. The Applicant will also establish a Community Benefit Fund to share the profits from the electricity sales to support local causes.	No changes made.
Cultural Heritage	Local history	*"No mention in any planning of archaeological surveys on the proposed site. Evidence of historical community living down Bicker Fen was recorded and many artefacts found before work began on Triton Knoll project."*	The planning application for the Proposed Development has been submitted alongside a Cultural Heritage Assessment. Regarding impacts on buried archaeological remains the Assessment identified a low to medium potential for finds or remains from the prehistoric period, a medium to high potential for finds or remains from the Late Iron Age to Roman period, and low potential for finds or remains from the early historic, medieval, post-medieval and modern periods to be present on the Site. As such, a Geophysical survey was undertaken as a form of non-intrusive field evaluation and a report accompanies the planning application.	A geophysical survey was carried out which identified . Please refer to the following documents: • Cultural Heritage Assessment • Geophysical Survey
Other	Overhead lines	*"Can you confirm if new overhead power lines will be installed or is the existing infrastructure able to support it without modification?"*	The power generated by the Proposed Development will be exported to the grid via the substation connecting to existing powerlines which run through the site boundary. As a result, no new pylons will be necessary to facilitate the connection.	No changes made.
	Glint and glare	*"We are naturally concerned about what screening/other measures will be put in place to ensure that we do not suffer from reflective glare."*	The solar panels would be mounted on a metal frame and constructed from non-reflective glass. It is notable that the solar panels are designed to absorb sunlight, therefore there would be no significant issues associated with glint and glare. It is also notable that the metal frame is treated to avoid any significant issues associated with glint and glare. The metal frame is necessary because it is durable and is sufficiently strong to hold the panels in position; a functional design requirement. The panels will also be orientated east towards the National Grid substation or west towards the South Forty Foot Drain. Furthermore, the tracking system aims to reduce reflections by keeping the angle of incidence with the sun as close to 0 degrees as possible. As the angle of incidence increases, reflections increase.	No changes made. Please refer to the following documents: • Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
	Site size	*"Additional concern is plans to screen "more land than is required" because the applicant wishes to "retain flexibility on the site." Does this mean the 80 hectares of panels will, in the future, eventually become 122 hectares, the area planned to be screened?"*	The Applicant chose to screen more land than is required to generate 49.9 MW solely for the purposes of EIA screening in order to retain flexibility during the early stages of design development. The 122 ha of land screened was reduced to approximately 80 ha during the pre-application consultation which represents the area of land proposed for development as part of this planning application.	The size of the Site was reduced from 122 ha at the EIA Screening stage to 80.36 ha during the pre-application consultation. Please refer to the following documents: • Planning, Design and Access Statement
	Decommissioning	*"[Will] the solar farm … be dismantled and put back to 'green field' when it reaches its design life or does it mean that it will be replaced with someone more visible or permanent? What is it's predicted operating life?"*	Planning permission is being sought to operate for 40 years, at which point it would be decommissioned and the land returned to its previous state.	No changes made. Please refer to the following documents:

				• Planning, Design and Access Statement

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The Applicant has carried out a comprehensive and meaningful pre-application exercise in respect of the Proposed Development, primarily focused on the local community but also including consultation with other key consultees.

6.2 The exercise would usually have included a number of face to face meetings and a public exhibition at a venue close to the Site. However, this was not possible as a result of COVID-19. The consultation website was utilised to contribute to filling the gap left by the inability to carry out a public exhibition, as it allowed consultees to review a significant amount of information about the Proposed Development, provide feedback and ask questions. An online community information event was scheduled but later cancelled due to a lack of interest. In addition, a telephone line was set up and manned by the Applicant, to allow interested parties to call, ask questions and leave comments. The local community consultation was advertised through a mailout.

6.3 During the consultation, respondents raised concerns about various aspects of the project while also acknowledging the need for renewable energy and the benefits of the Proposed Development for wildlife and biodiversity in the area. The primary concern related to the site access and as a result of this, the construction traffic route was amended following the consultation stage in order to address this concern. It is considered that the further information provided with the planning application and outlined in Table 5.1 above should alleviate many of the main concerns.

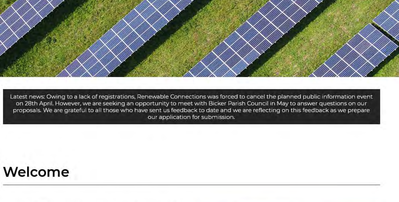
6.4 The Applicant has considered the points raised and subsequently made other changes and additions to the Proposed Development, including: additional screen planting; standoffs from sensitive features; and the abovementioned amendment to the proposed access.

6.5 It follows that the Applicant has carried out a significant and meaningful consultation exercise prior to submitting the planning application, in accordance with relevant local and national policy and guidance and the South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee Statement of Community Involvement (2012).

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT WEBSITE

Vicarage Drove

Solar Farm



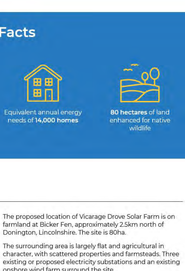
Latest news: Owing to a lack of registrations, Renewable Connections was forced to cancel the planned public information event on 28th April. However, we are seeking an opportunity to meet with Bicker Parish Council in May to answer questions on our proposals. We are grateful to all those who have sent us feedback to date and we are reflecting on this feedback as we prepare our application for submission.

Welcome

Renewable Connections is investigating the potential for a 49.9MW solar energy farm in Bicker Fen, Lincolnshire. Once operational, the project would supply enough power for 14,000 homes, and make a valuable contribution towards tackling the climate emergency in Lincolnshire.

As we prepare an application to submit to Boston Borough Council, Renewable Connections is undertaking consultation to inform local communities of our proposed plans and invite any feedback. We will also be hosting virtual community information events to present our proposals and answer any questions given the COVID-19 pandemic.

We welcome any feedback you wish to provide so please do get in touch.



Download community information leaflet

Quick Facts

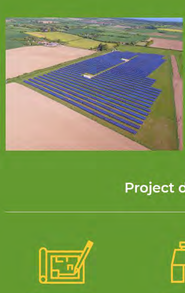
22,500 tonnes of CO2 saved annually

50,000 megawatt hours supplied each year

Equivalent annual energy needs of **14,000 homes**

80 hectares of land enhanced for native wildlife

Location



The proposed location of Vicarage Drove Solar Farm is on farmland at Bicker Fen, approximately 2.5km north of Donington, Lincolnshire. The site is 80ha.

The surrounding area is largely flat and agricultural in character, with scattered properties and farmsteads. Three existing or proposed electricity substations and an existing onshore wind farm surround the site.

There are no houses within 500m of the proposed development. Views from the west are largely screened by the South Forty Foot Drain and the majority of views from the east and south will be screened by existing infrastructure or proposed planting.

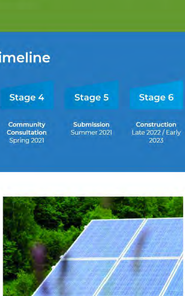
The solar farm will be temporary and comprise of panels and associated equipment. In addition, a range of wildlife proposals will be introduced to greatly enhance the biodiversity of this area, creating news habitats and offering food and shelter to wildlife.

Our plans are still in the development stages, so our proposals will evolve as we gather local input and the results of our environmental assessments.

Our Proposals

If installed the solar farm will have a capacity of up to 49.9MWp and will be operational for up to 35 years. After the time, all of the installation will be removed and the land restored to how it was before, but with improved soil health and biodiversity. The power generated will be exported to the grid via a substation connecting to existing powerlines which run through the site boundary. No new pylons will be necessary to facilitate the connection.

The solar panels will be installed in rows which run north to south through the site. These rows will track the sun through the day to capture the maximum amount of solar irradiation possible. The total height of the panels will be no more than 2.75m above the ground with a gap of more than 0.8m above the ground at its minimum.



Small electric cabins will be located amongst the panels and these will be accessed by a network of crushed stone track which will run through the site. All of the panels will be surrounded by a deer fencing to protect the equipment from large animals entering the site. CCTV cameras will be located periodically around the site perimeter for security.

The development will also involve additional landscaping including hedgerow planting and improved biodiversity management. The site is currently pasture and arable land with low ecological value, however with the implementation of a Green Infrastructure Plan the site will be significantly enhanced for biodiversity by creating a range of new habitats, offering food and shelter to wildlife.

Project documents

Proposed site plan

Our site plans are still being developed and we welcome feedback on these before they are finalised.

Viewpoint Photos

Proposed views of what the site will looks like from various points in the local area are provided here:

Construction traffic route

Details of our proposed route for construction traffic is provided here.

Project timeline

Stage 1
Site selection
Autumn 2020

Stage 2
Preliminary Surveys
Late 2020

Stage 3
Pre-application
Early 2021

Stage 4
Community Consultation
Spring 2021

Stage 5
Submission
Summer 2021

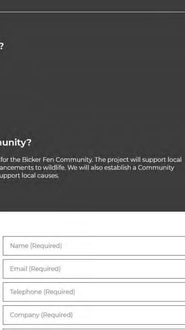
Stage 6
Construction
Late 2022 / Early 2023

The need for the project

Following the Government's declaration of an "Environment and Climate Emergency" in May 2019, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) advised that to meet 'Net Zero' targets, the UK will require substantial amounts of new, low carbon power sources to be built before 2050, up to four times that of today's levels.

Boston Borough Council declared their own climate emergency in February 2020 acknowledging that urgent action is required to limit the environmental impacts produced by the climate crisis.

Solar is one of the cleanest, lowest cost forms of energy available. Vicarage Drove Solar Farm would make a meaningful contribution to Lincolnshire's energy needs by delivering green energy to over 14,000 homes annually. Over the lifetime of the project, it would save an estimated 700,000 tonnes of CO2 from being emitted. This is around the same reduction in carbon emissions as taking over 150,000 cars off UK roads.



FAQ's

+ Why this location?
+ Will there be any impacts on local roads?
+ Will there be any permanent impact?
+ Does solar pose a health risk?
+ How long will the project be there?
+ Are solar farms noisy?
- What are the benefits to the local community?

Renewable Connections is committed to maximising benefits for the Bicker Fen Community. The project will support local businesses, provide enhanced business rates, and provide enhancements to wildlife. We will also establish a Community Benefit Fund to share the profits from the electricity sales to support local causes.

Get in touch

consultation@dwdllp.com
01775 302205

Vicarage Drove Solar,
3rd Floor, 141-145 Curtain Road,
London,
EC2A 3BX

Name (Required)

Email (Required)

Telephone (Required)

Company (Required)

Enquiry (Required)

This form collects your details and emails them to us so that we can receive, view and reply to your enquiry. View our privacy policy for more information on how and why we store your information and how you can manage what we store.

☐ I consent to Renewable Connections collecting my personal details

SEND MESSAGE

APPENDIX 2: PROJECT LETTER

April 2021

Dear Resident,

Vicarage Drove Solar Farm – Community Consultation

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves and advise you about a new solar energy project in your local area that we are in the early stages of preparing.

Renewable Connections is a leading developer of solar projects across the UK. We are currently developing proposals for a project on land at Vicarage Drove, Bicker, Boston. The site has been carefully chosen because of its proximity to the point of connection (Bicker Fen substation), which is directly adjacent to the east of the site, and due to its relatively unconstrainted nature in planning and environmental terms.

Boston Borough Council declared a climate emergency in January 2020, and in turn the proposed solar farm will make a significant contribution to renewable energy capacity in the locality, as well as the overarching commitment made by the UK Government to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Once operational, the project would supply enough power for 14,000 homes, and save 22,500 tonnes of CO2 each year. That is the equivalent of removing 4,750 cars from the road each year. Renewable Connections is dedicated to tackling the climate emergency and delivering the decarbonisation pledge that the UK has signed up to.

We carefully select sites with low visual impact and work closely with local communities to be a good neighbour before, during and after installation. The site would be retained in agricultural use for the life of the proposed solar farm. The majority of the site would be planted with a combination of grassland/meadow, which would enable seasonal sheep grazing. This would include land between and underneath panels.

There is a great opportunity to significantly enhance biodiversity at this site through a range of landscape and ecological measures which will form an integral part of the overall proposal. For example, this could include the installation of barn owl boxes, bird nesting boxes, bee hives, log piles, restoration of traditional field boundaries, and other hibernacula such as small buried rubble piles suitable for reptile species, amphibians and insect life. There is limited existing planting in the locality, however any existing hedgerows would be bolstered with additional hedgerow and tree planting where required in addition to potential new mitigation planting around the boundaries of the site in order to provide a natural screen.

We have recently undertaken environmental surveys and consulted with local stakeholders to receive initial feedback, including Boston Borough Council. We are now consulting local residents, businesses and community representatives to provide information about the proposal, answer questions and to receive valuable feedback. All of the comments received will be reviewed, taken into consideration and incorporated into the scheme where possible as we prepare our formal planning application ready for submission in Summer 2021.

In particular, we would welcome comments regarding any further benefits that we could bring to the area through improvements to footpaths, wildlife enhancements (as above), community funds, local supply chain and local employment, or anything else you might think is appropriate.

We enclose an information leaflet which provides information on our proposal and the benefits it will offer, along with some frequently asked questions. Due to the current health risks associated with COVID-19, unfortunately public drop-in events are not currently considered to be appropriate, however we are still committed to hearing your views. Therefore, we are asking for you to provide us with your comments on the information provided in the attached leaflet and on our website, which can be visited at: www.vicaragedrovesolar.co.uk.

You can submit feedback/comments on the project via the following means:

- **Website:** www.vicaragedrovesolar.co.uk
- **Post:** Vicarage Drove Solar, 3rd Floor, 141-145 Curtain Road, London, EC2A 3BX
- **Email:** consultation@dwdllp.com
- **Telephone:** 01775 302205

All comments should be received by **no later than 5pm on 14th May 2021.**

We will also be hosting an online community information event at **7pm on 28th April**. If you wish to attend, please register your interest at consultation@dwdllp.com.

We hope this letter and the information enclosed is a helpful introduction to our plans, but if you do have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact us via the details above.

Yours faithfully

Ed Perrin

Senior Development Manager

Call: 01775 302205
Email: consultation@dwdllp.com
Website: https://www.vicaragedrovesolar.co.uk
Address: Vicarage Drove Solar, 3rd Floor, 141-145 Curtain Road, London, EC2A 3BX

APPENDIX 3: PROJECT LEAFLET

Vicarage Drove Solar Farm

A proposed new 49.9MW solar farm at Bicker Fen, Lincolnshire

Renewable Connections is investigating the potential for a solar energy project in Bicker Fen, Lincolnshire. Once operational, the project would supply enough power for 14,000 homes, and save 22,500 tonnes of CO2 each year.

As we prepare a planning application to submit to Boston Borough Council, Renewable Connections is undertaking a 4 week consultation process to inform local communities of our proposed plans and invite any feedback.

More information on the project, our plans and how you can consult with us is provided on our website at: **vicaragedrovesolar.co.uk**

Have Your Say

Please provide any comments you have on the proposal either via the project website, or by email or post using the details provided. Comments provided by the local community will be taken into account in shaping the final planning application submission.

T - 01775 302205
E - consultation@dwdllp.com
A - Vicarage Drove Solar,
3rd Floor, 141 - 145 Curtain Road,
London
EC2A 3BX

renewable connections

Proposed Timeline

Stage 1
Site selection
Autumn 2020

Stage 2
Preliminary surveys
Winter 2020/21

Stage 3
Public consultation
Spring 2021

Stage 4
Application
Summer 2021

Stage 5
Construction
Est. Spring 2023

Quick Facts

22,500 tonnes of CO^2 saved

50,000 MWh generated

Over **14,000** homes powered

80ha of land supporting wildlife

The Proposed Site

The proposed location of Vicarage Drove Solar Farm is on farmland at Bicker Fen, approximately 2.5km north of Donnington, Lincolnshire. The site is 80ha.

The surrounding area is largely flat and agricultural in character, with scattered properties and farmsteads. Three existing or proposed electricity substations and an existing onshore wind farm surround the site.

There are no houses within 1km of the proposed development. Views from the west are blocked by the South Forty Foot Drain and the majority of views from the east and south will be screened by existing infrastructure or proposed planting.

The solar farm will be temporary and comprise of panels and associated equipment. In addition, a range of wildlife proposals will be introduced to greatly enhance the biodiversity of this area, creating news habitats and offering food and shelter to wildlife.

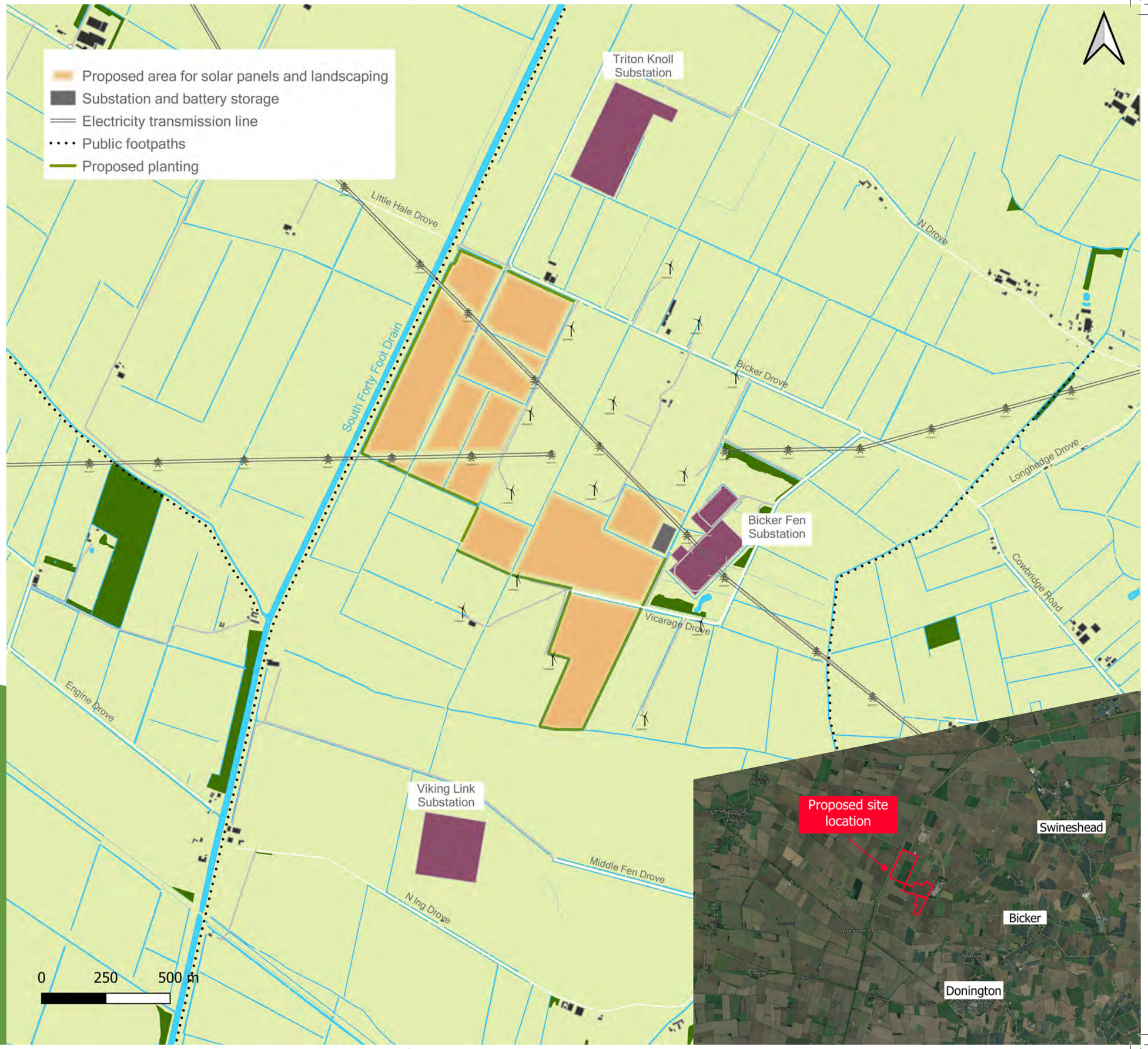
Our plans are still in the development stages, so our proposals will evolve as we gather local input and the results of our environmental assessments, however we have presented some preliminary concepts here for your feedback.

Why Here?

Boston Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency in January 2020 and are committed to contributing to UK renewable energy targets.

This site has been identified following extensive site selection across Lincs which took into account environmental designations, local electricity network access and capacity, the physical characteristics of the site, and a supportive landowner.

Further analysis and surveys were undertaken to better understand ecology and landscape impacts, and other factors such as flood risk, ecology, landscape and access.



FAQ's

Why solar?
Solar is one of the cleanest, lowest cost forms of energy available. Vicarage Drove Solar Farm will make a meaningful contribution to Lincolnshire's energy needs.

Does solar pose a health risk?
No - solar doesm't produce any harmful by-products.

Are solar farms noisy?
No – solar farms are not noisy, producing no more than normal background levels of sound similar to wind or distant traffic beyond the site boundary.

Will there be any permanent impact?
Solar farms are temporary and the land will be fully reinstated to farmland once the equipment is removed at the end of the project life.

Will there be any impacts on local roads?
For a period of approximately 6 months during construction, there will be deliveries of equipment to site. Renewable Connections will put in place measures to manage impacts of construction traffic and these measures will be included in a Construction Traffic Management Plan that will submitted with the planning application. There will be infrequent maintenance visits to the site during operation.

What are the benefits to the local community?
Renewable Connections is committed to maximising benefits for the Bicker community. The project will support local businesses, provide enhanced business rates, and provide wildlife benefits across the site. We will also establish a Community Benefit Fund to share the profits from the electricity local causes.

About us

Renewable Connections was established in early 2020 to deliver solar energy projects across the UK. The Renewable Connections team is one of the most experienced renewable energy teams in the UK having developed over 1GW of solar projects globally since 2010.

Our team is committed to developing high quality projects which see benefits delivered locally and we are committed to listening to local people in advance of any planning submission. Renewable Connections is working in partnership European Energy, one of the largest renewable energy investors in Europe.

Find out more at **vicaragedrovesolar.co.uk**

renewable connections

EUROPEAN ENERGY

APPENDIX 4: CONSULTATION SLIDES

Vicarage Drove Solar Farm

A proposed new solar farm development in Bicker, Lincolnshire

Briefing to Bicker Parish Council
14th May 2021

renewable connections

Who are we?

We are an experienced UK development team committed to support the UK's net zero targets

- Renewable Connections was established in early 2020 by the Armstrong Group to deliver ground mount solar and energy storage projects across the UK.
- The Renewable Connections team is one of the most experienced renewable energy teams in the UK having developed over 1GW of solar projects globally since 2010.
- Our team is committed to developing high quality projects which see benefits delivered locally and we are committed to consulting with local people in advance of any planning submission.
- Renewable Connections is working in partnership with European Energy, one of the largest renewable energy investors in Europe.

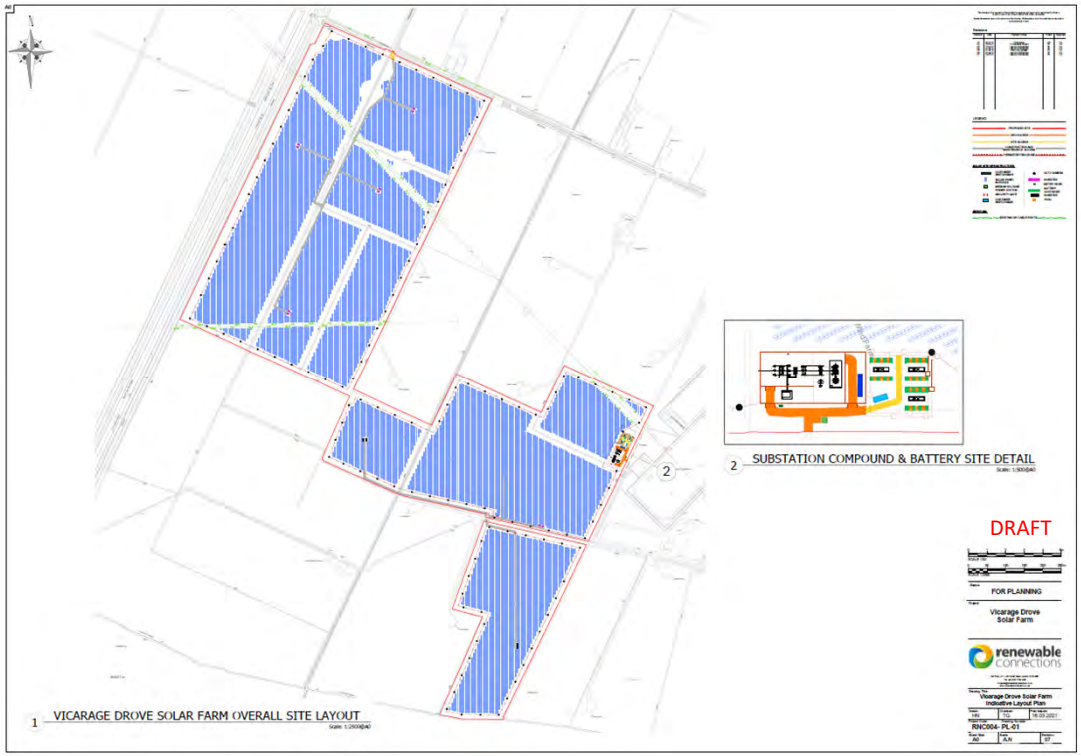
What is being proposed?

50MW solar energy and battery storage facility

- Proposed site is 2 miles northwest of Bicker Village and adjacent to the Bicker Wind Farm and National Grid substation.
- 50GWh electricity production every year, **equivalent to power approximately 14,000 homes**[1].
- CO_2 emissions saving of over **22,500 tonnes per year**[2] helping to tackle the climate emergency, and meet national and local renewable and carbon saving commitments.
- A **40 year planning permission term** is being sought, after which the equipment will be removed and the site fully decommissioned.
- Envisaged construction commencement in **Summer 2023**.

1 Calculated using the most recent statistics from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) showing that annual GB average domestic household consumption is 3,578kWh

2 Calculated using BEIS's "all fossil fuels" emissions statistic of 446 tonnes of carbon dioxide per GWh of electricity supplied in the Digest of UK Energy Statistics (July 2020)



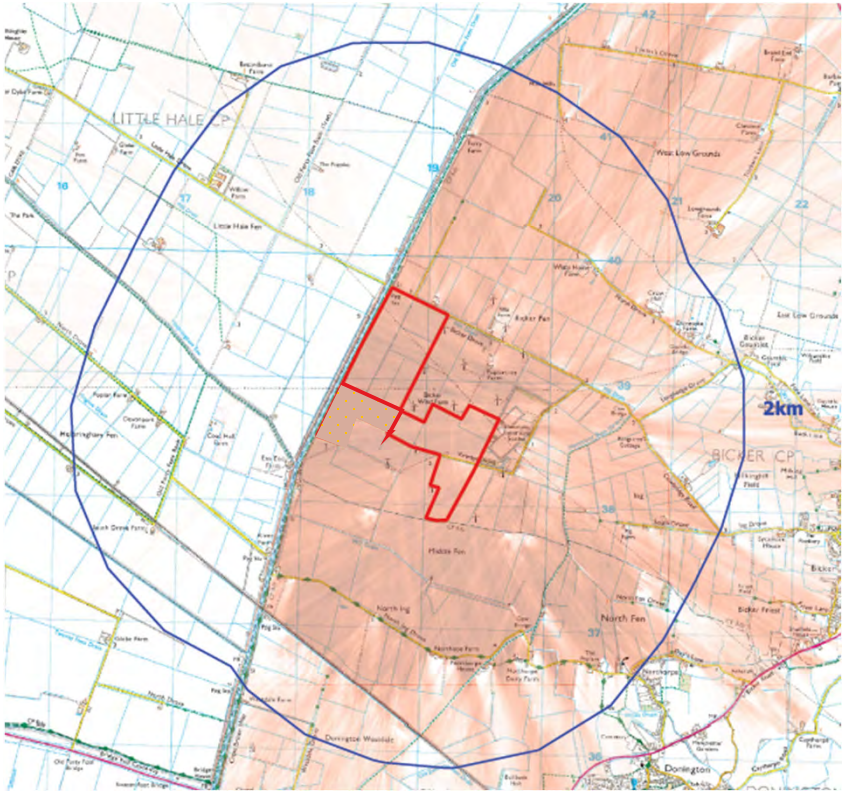
Progress to date

- Renewable Connections first commenced investigating the opportunity to develop a solar farm in Bicker Fen in summer 2020. We reviewed the local constraints extensively to identify potential locations to ensure a lower impact site was selected.
- To date, we have completed the following activities:
  - Environmental assessments – ecology, landscape, hydrology, archaeology and built heritage, transport;
  - Screening for Environmental Impact Assessment;
  - Engagement with technical stakeholders;
  - Preliminary concept designs.
- We sent letters and information leaflets to over 600 properties covering an area of 18 square miles, seeking views from local people in order to shape our plans ahead of submission to Boston Borough Council.
- We have received 11 responses from local people and we are currently reviewing these to ensure these comments are addressed into our design proposals.
- We propose to submit our planning application in June and if approved, construction would commence in Summer 2023.
- Renewable Connections is committed to ensuring our proposed project provides benefits not only to the environment through low carbon generation, but also to wildlife and local people.

Why was this site selected?

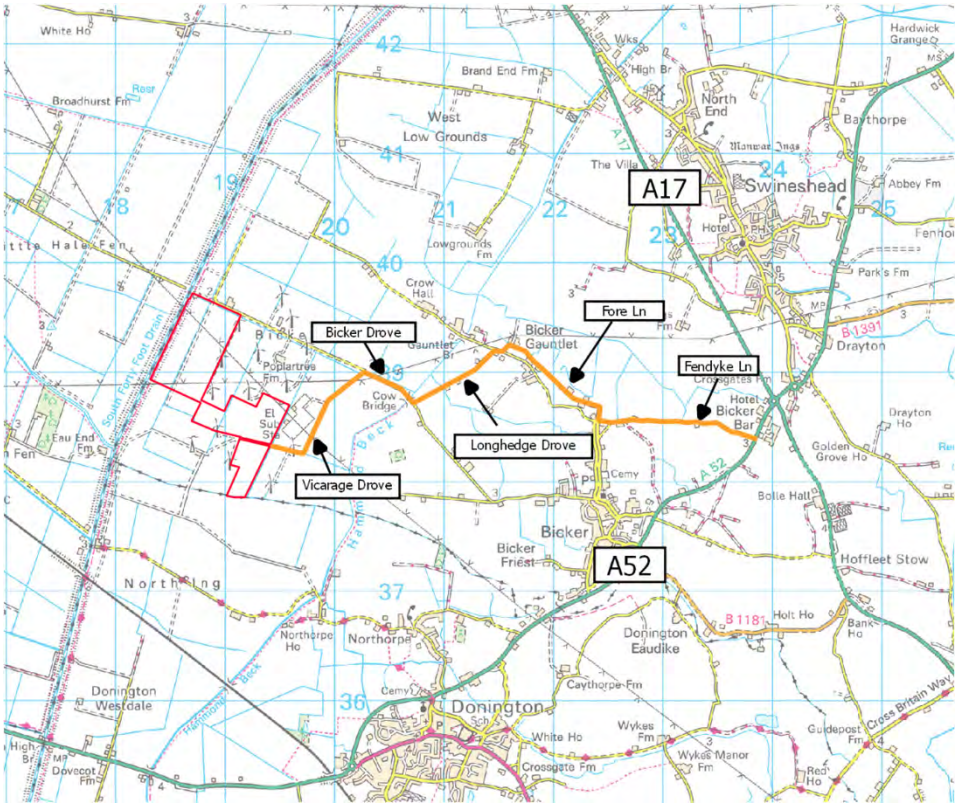
A low impact site with limited visual impact

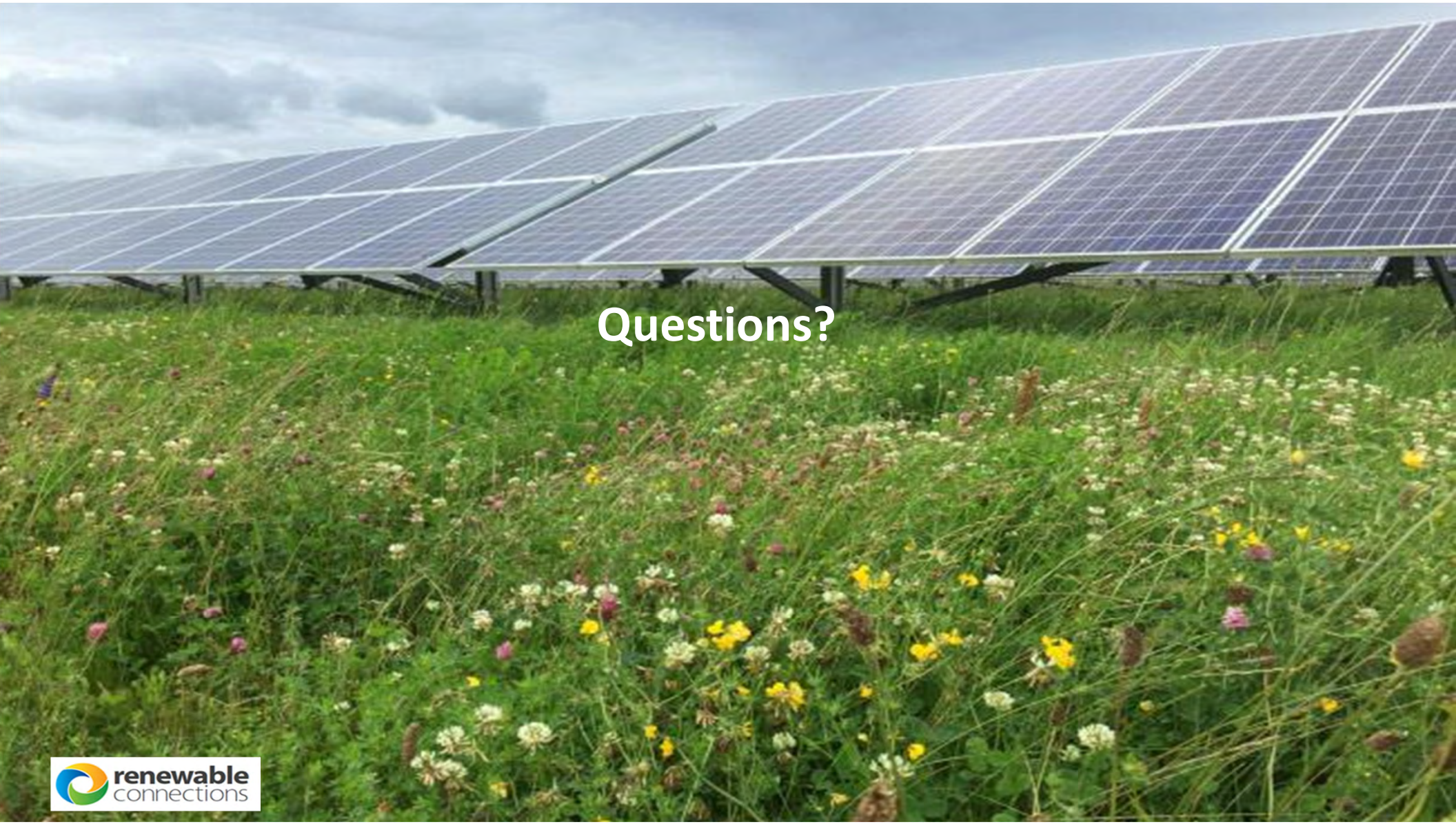
- **Large and regular site area** – opportunity to locate infrastructure sensitively within a wide area maximising use of existing field patterns.
- **Flat open landscape** – the site has limited topographical features or vegetation so requires no vegetation clearance or regrading.
- **Few properties in close proximity** – there are no occupied properties within 500m of the site boundary.
- **Adjacent to existing infrastructure** – three major substations, powerlines and an existing onshore wind farm dominate this landscape
- **Lower grade agricultural land** – the land is poorer grade agricultural land compared with land in the surrounding area.
- **Opportunity for ecological enhancements** – agricultural land has poor ecological value and solar affords the opportunity for significant wildlife enhancements which will link the network of drains and mature vegetation.



Proposed access route

- Construction traffic is proposed to route from the A52 to site via Fendyke Lane, Fore Lane, Longhedge Drove and Bicker Drove.
- Proposed route has been identified to avoid any vehicular traffic through Bicker.
- Construction of a solar farm is very short term. 3-4 conventional HGVs typically arrive per day during construction bringing the panels and frames. This lasts for 16-20 weeks at most. There is also no requirement for abnormal sized loads.
- In operation, a landrover type vehicle visits the site once or twice per month. This is a significant reduction in traffic using this site at present for farming.
- By comparison, the Triton Knoll onshore substation construction period lasted over 250 weeks (over 5x longer than the solar farm) and is estimated to result in 172 HGV movements per day for around 40 weeks of this construction period. For the remaining 210 weeks there was between 10 and 66 HGV movements per day. On top of this, there was considerable traffic to access the cable route. Even during the "quietest" phase of construction, Triton Knoll resulted in more HGV movements per day than the construction of a solar farm.




Questions?
renewable
connections