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Comments on *Grid Connection Tower Options and
Solar Farm Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity
Study*

James Bate (RBC - Heritage)

Section 78 Planning Appeal

Against Refusal of Planning Permission for installation of renewable energy generating solar farm comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, together with substation, inverter stations, security measures, site access, internal access tracks and other ancillary infrastructure, including landscaping and biodiversity enhancements

Land East of Hawksworth and Northwest of
Thoroton

Grid Connection Towers

Option 1 – tall tower

Option 2 – short(er) tower

Both options rely on tall towers to provide a connection to overhead lines, both of these towers would sit outside of the linear route which the existing lines and pylons take across the site.

At present whilst the existing pylons across the site have a visual impact the rhythmic spacing of pylons and their linear route helps to soften this impact, alongside what I have previously described as their open latticework construction which gives them a more limited visual presence. (My previous comment: *power lines, which are themselves relatively ephemeral given the grid construction of the pylons*)

Both schemes will result in additional harm above and beyond that previously identified and considered, and as the tower in both cases would break the otherwise linear and regular pattern of pylons across the site the impact would be greater than simply having an extra pylon in the existing line. The additional harm would be relatively modest cumulatively given my view on the impacts of pylons and I would be comfortable that harms would still sit in the areas of the range of harm that I have already assessed in respect of each asset – so greater harm, but not to the degree that it pushes harm into a different band of the ‘less than substantial’ scale in any individual respect.

I am mindful, however, that the appellants witness appears to take a different view of the impact which pylons have on the settings of heritage assets, in particular they note (Para 5.37)

“This introduces a modern energy development in the distant foreground of incidental views towards the spire. Whilst this does cause a temporary change in one peripheral view of the church spire, it is noted that this is very much in the context of the line of existing overhead power lines and tall pylons which are already seen in conjunction with the church spire.”

The implication being that the existing lines and pylons already degrade the setting of assets such that setting is less sensitive to further change. If this is the view taken of the impact of pylons then clearly the addition of a further example, out of the alignment of the existing pylons, would have a somewhat greater harmful impact than would be my own conclusion.

From the ZTV’s provided the taller Option 1 tower would be extensively visible from the boundaries of both conservation areas as well as being visible in views towards those heritage assets visible from viewpoints outside of the conservation areas. Option 2 has a reduced visibility, but would remain visible from vantage points at the fringes of the conservation areas and visible in views back towards them and the individual assets visible within them, particularly the upper tower and spire of St Helena’s Church.

Whilst the tower proposed in option 2 would be less visible, it would also be less similar to the pylons, being a more solid post or column, which it is visible alongside which might also make it stand out to a greater extent from vantage points where it is visible, although option 2 would remain the option with the lesser impact on significance of heritage assets via setting.

Solar Farm Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study

I am mindful that the Council has now published a report into Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity for Solar development within the Borough. This is focused on Landscape impacts on a Landscape Character Zone scale (identified as Landscape Assessment Units for the purposes of the report), whilst there are references to cultural heritage these tend to focus on landscape elements of cultural heritage such as field patterns, estate parkland, ridge and furrow ploughing remains and the routes of Roman Roads. Some mention is made of settlement and the visibility of features such as church spires/towers however these are broad and general observations at landscape scale and at no point does the report try to assess the cultural heritage sensitivity to development beyond the role that it plays as a component of landscape.

The consideration of heritage impacts of any specific development on any specific site and anything below a board landscape scale is not considered by the report and as such I am not of the view that the report has any significant implications for my assessment and views to date.