# FAIR OAKS RENEWABLE ENERGY PARK

Design and Access Statement

PREPARED ON BEHALF OF

Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park Limited

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## DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

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## FAIR OAKS RENEWABLE ENERGY PARK

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## INTRODUCTION

- DA.1 The following Design and Access Statement is provided to explain the Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park (the Proposal) location and design process. It is produced in accordance with Planning Practice Guidance 'Making an Application' (DCLG, 2014) and The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedures) (England) Order 2013, Article 8, parts 2 and 3. As recommended by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) publication 'Design and Access Statements - how to write, read and use them' (2006), this statement concentrates on seven Key Design Issues and answers a set of Key Questions for each one, based upon the 'Assessment Crib Sheet' contained within the CABE guide.
- DA.2 The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (SI 2015/595) superseded the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010, SI 2010 No. 2184 (and subsequent amendment), which

introduced '*context*' to be discussed with respect to the development as a whole, rather than with respect to the sub-components discussed by the CABE guide.

- DA.3 This Statement has been prepared on the basis of the application being classified as 'Major' development.
- DA.4 Questions shown in square brackets in this Statement are not considered relevant to the proposed development.

#### THE PROCESS

Have the physical characteristics of the scheme been informed by a rigorous process which should include assessment of the site's full context (physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies); involvement; evaluation; and design?

DA.5 As discussed in **Chapter 3 - Site Selection and Design (ES Volume 2A)** the suitability of the landholding for a solar array and the initial site design, within the boundaries of the landholding, was based on consideration of technical and environmental constraints and best practice.

- DA.6 Within Rushcliffe Borough, the Applicant secured a 49.9MW grid connection with export and import capacity (to charge the Battery Energy Storage (BESS) element on the 132kV overhead power line south-east of Clifton near Nottingham. Land within relative proximity of this existing infrastructure was then screened to identify areas with potential to host a Renewable Energy Park.
- DA.7 In selecting the potential site, the developer considered the proximity to ecological, historic and landscape designated sites within the locality.
- DA.8 Initial factors considered through desktop study also included:
  - proximity to settlements;
  - access; and
  - agricultural land classification.
- DA.9 Taking these constraints into account, land was identified to the south of Clifton and Ruddington. As discussed further in **Chapter 3 - Site Selection and Design**, the land was observed to have an association with energy infrastructure, particularly the 400kV overhead lines that cross the site and 132kV powerlines to the west of the site and south of Clifton.

- DA.10 As the proposed site layout evolved, more specific environmental and technical constraints were accounted for, including:
  - separation from the Fairham Brook and other field drains;
  - separation from utilities infrastructure;
  - separation from the footpaths to the south and east of the site; and
  - inclusion of hedges and tree planting as landscape mitigation, with appropriate separation from panels to avoid shading.
- DA.11 At this stage it was felt appropriate to introduce the site to residents and local representatives of the area and invite comment. Feedback from neighbouring residents and parish councils was gathered through public consultation. A point of interest from the community related to traffic through Ruddington village and planting to provide visual screening and habitat improvement.
- DA.12 Following the conclusion of the ecological assessment and a refinement of the layout, panels were removed from the area to the south

of Fairham Brook to set the land aside for further ecological mitigation/ enhancement and avoid the need for a crossing of the watercourse. Furthermore, upon more detailed consideration of key flood areas the BESS and substation compound was moved out of an area identified as being submitted to potential flood risk.

- DA.13 The Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park was judged by Ridge Clean Energy (the Developer) and the EIA assessment team to be a location offering a suitable balance of the site-specific features which render a solar and BESS development (with its associated environmental benefits) both technically and financially viable, and the need to keep any adverse environmental impact of such a development to an acceptable minimum. The potential for significant environmental effects were considered in detail through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) the results of which being presented within the Environmental Statement (ES) accompanying the application.
- DA.14 Relevant policies of the Council's Local Plan (2019) were considered in the assessments, as identified during

the pre-application advice consultation process:

- Part 1: Core Strategy:
  - Policy 2: Climate Change; and
  - Policy 16: Green Infrastructure, Landscape, Parks and Open Space.
- Part 2: Land and Planning Policies:
  - Policy 16: Renewable Energy;
  - Policy 19: Development affecting Watercourses;
  - Policy 21: Green Belt and the Countryside;
  - Policy 34: Green Infrastructure and Open Space Assets;
  - Policy 35: Green Infrastructure Network and Urban; and
  - Policy 37: Trees and Woodlands.

# USE

What are the buildings and spaces used for?

Would the application help to create an appropriate mix of uses in the area?

Would different uses work together well, or would they cause unacceptable annoyance?

- DA.15 The application is for a solar array and BESS for the generation and storage of renewable energy, and those other elements required for its construction, operation and maintenance. Details of the associated infrastructure (including frames, access tracks, inverters, transformer units, substation compound and security fences) are provided at **ES Volume 2A, Chapter 6 - Development Proposal** and associated **Figures** in **ES Volume 3**.
- DA.16 The operation of the Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park would utilise approximately 82.4ha of arable land. Arable land would be temporarily removed from intensive agricultural production for the lifetime of the Proposal and left fallow to recover.
- DA.17 A change of land management to fallow land with solar and BESS infrastructure

with no cultivation will enable a return towards a higher equilibrium of soil organic matter. Benefits of this change will be land that is more fertile, easier to cultivate and permits more rapid infiltration of rainfall.

- DA.18 The presence of overhead electricity power lines across the site, the railway line adjacent to the eastern site boundary and views over Gotham Hill with the chimney of the Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station beyond to the west provide an existing element of development within the local landscape. The Proposal would fit well within the context of existing electricity grid and industrial infrastructure.
- DA.19 The use of renewable energy in the UK is supported through the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2021), which states at Paragraph 155 that:

'To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, 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).'

- DA.20 A detailed Agricultural Land Classification survey of the site found agricultural land is Grades 3a.
- DA.21 Natural England provide guidance on the protection of valuable agricultural land within TIN049 (Natural England, 2012) and state that the best and most versatile land is defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a by policy guidance. This is reiterated within Annex 2 of the NPPF.
- DA.22 A full assessment of agricultural land quality is provided within **Chapter 4** -**Existing Conditions** which concludes 'a long term fallow period will enhance the soil's functional capacity for the support of agricultural production'.
- DA.23 The location of the proposal is technically and economically viable and the site has been designed to minimise environmental and social impacts where possible, with resultant impacts determined in the studies contained within the ES and the other non-EIA assessments accompanying the application.
- DA.24 The Proposal will create a mix of land uses through biodiversity enhancement and management, energy storage and electricity generation, which each compliment each other.

DA.25 The potential for the Proposal to cause any unacceptable annoyance has been assessed within the Environmental Statement and other reports and Statements accompanying the Application. No such potential impacts have been identified.

## AMOUNT

#### The planning application will say how much development is being applied for. Why is this the appropriate amount?

#### Is the density appropriate?

DA.26 The total site area is approximately 84.1ha. The array will be sited within a fenced area of approximately 75.3ha, albeit not all of the ground is covered by panels. Approximately 30ha will be over-sailed by panels. Only a small proportion of this area will penetrate the ground by the frame legs. A 1ha area is identified to host the substation and BESS. The total solar array would have a rated capacity of up to 49.9MW at the point of connection and the BESS a capacity of 100MWh, enabling it to export 50MW over two hours. The proposed temporary operational lifetime of the project is 40 years, following which the Proposal would be decommissioned, unless a fresh

planning permission was granted for its retention.

- DA.27 Whilst the wider landholding extends beyond the site area, the development is considered to be the appropriate amount for relatively contained visibility of the site and maximising the available grid connection capacity.
- DA.28 The Landscape and Visual Impact
   Assessment provided at ES Volume
   2A, Chapter 9, assesses the impact of
   the Proposal on landscape and visual
   receptors within the study area.
- DA.29 The site will be subject to biodiversity enhancements. This amounts to (as extracted from **Chapter 8 - Ecology** of the ES):
  - Restoration of lowland meadow

     the large majority of the site is currently arable farmland of low diversity and low ecological value. This grassland will be managed after construction of the solar farm to promote the re-establishment of a diverse meadow plant community. The target will be to enhance 83ha of improved grassland to a more biodiverse neutral grassland.
  - Native hedgerow planting 3.2km of new native hedgerow will be planted;

- Native woodland planting 0.45ha. of new native broadleaved woodland will be planted in the south-west and north-west corners of the site.
- Provision of 1ha. plot on the southern edge of the site (outside the area in which the solar panels would be located, for ground-nesting birds (including lapwing and skylark).
- DA.30 These enhancement measures offer a material environmental benefit of the Proposal as quantified by the Biodiverseity Net Gain calculations provided within **Chapter 8 - Ecology** of the ES. In summary, there will be a net 75% gain in habitat units, from 165 to 288 Biodiversity Units with hedgerow units increasing from 0 to 25 Units.
- DA.31 The density of the development is determined by the technical requirements of the technology with the development areas described in **Paragraph DA.26**, albeit not all of the ground is covered by panels with approximately 30ha over-sailed by panels. Only a small proportion of this area will penetrate the ground by the frame legs.

## LAYOUT

How will the buildings and public and private spaces be arranged on the site, and what is the relationship between them and the buildings and spaces around the site?

DA.32 As stated in Paragraph DA.5 on page

**5**, the suitability of the landholding for a Renewable Energy Park and the initial site design, within the boundaries of the landholding, were based on consideration of technical and environmental constraints as guided by Planning Practice Guidance and industry best practice.

- DA.33 The rows of solar panels are arranged east to west on the site and approximately south facing to maximise energy generation. Existing site tracks are used where available. This means that the site tracks will generally be obscured from view by field boundary vegetation.
- DA.34 The inverters are mounted on the backs of the solar panel frames and the transformer units are containerised and look similar in form to the client cabin container. These elements are located as far as practicable from the Public Rights of Way to minimise

their potential prominence. The BESS and substation compound is located outside of the flood zone (to ensure protection of sensitive equipment) towards the centre of the site near to the site access point.

DA.35 There are no public spaces within the proposed development and no Public Right of Way (PRoW) cross the Proposal's development area. There is one PRoW along the southern boundary following Fairham Brook and one which follows a short section of the eastern boundary alongside the Great Central Railway heritage route before joining Asher Lane and proceeding in to Ruddington. Potential impacts on PRoW users have been considered within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment provided at ES Volume 2A, Chapter 9 and mitigation planting proposed, where appropriate.

[Will public spaces be practical, safe, overlooked and inclusive?]

[Will private spaces be adaptable, secure and inviting?]

#### Do all spaces have a purpose?

DA.36 The elements forming this application are limited to those which are necessary for the storage, generation and transport of electricity or for the access to and maintenance of the Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park. The proposed arrangement of these elements is shown at **Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3**, **ES Volume 3**.

- DA.37 The key determinant for the use of space on the site is the height and angle of the solar panels. The solar panels will be mounted at an angle of approximately 25 degrees with a maximum height of 3.0m and minimum height above the ground of 0.9m. This arrangement, with consideration of terrain requires a spacing between panel rows of around 4m to avoid shading and maximise generation. Space between and below the panel rows will be set to a speciesrich meadow mix of grass and wild flowers for the purpose of enhancing biodiversity, improving soils as well as surface water management capability of the soils.
- DA.38 The panels are grouped in blocks (or 'racks') of 52 panels that are arranged in two rows of 26 panels in portrait format. Half 'racks' of two rows by 13 columns of panels are used to infill smaller areas. These racks are arranged within the existing field shapes to maximise generation and allow sufficient space for other infrastructure.

- DA.39 Mitigation and enhancement measures also form part of the proposed development. These additions to the existing site baseline include the measures set out in **Paragraph DA.29 on page 8**.
- DA.40 The environmental impact of the proposal is examined through the EIA, as reported in the **ES**.

#### SCALE

The statement should explain and justify:

the height, width and length of [buildings];

the size of spaces in relation to each other and their surroundings; and

[the size of parts of a building or its details]

The statement should provide clear evidence that the planned scale has been influenced by the existing character of the local area or, where relevant, opportunities to improve that character.

DA.41 Modern commercial electricity generation solar farms range from approximately 5MW to over 200MW. BESS schemes vary from 5MWh to 1GWh depending upon location and available grid connections.

- DA.42 This solar array has been proposed to provide up to 49.9MW (3 S.F.) at the point of connection and the BESS at 100MWh to maximise use of the secured 49.9MWh import/export connection capacity. The generation is maximised from the available unconstrained site area and for the available grid connection.
- DA.43 As mentioned from **Paragraph DA.5** on page 5, the spacing of the solar farm relative to its surroundings has been driven by consideration of various constraints such as landholdings, proximity to dwellings, existing infrastructure, and trees and hedgerows and watercourses. In combination, these separations minimise potential environmental impacts and maximise output.
- DA.44 The NPPF, at Paragraph 158, states that Local Planning Authorities should:

'not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy'.

# Will the [buildings] sit comfortably with their surroundings?

[Will they, and parts like doors and windows, be of a comfortable scale for people?]

- DA.45 Solar farms and arrays by nature have a large footprint, but the whole area is not covered with panels as spacing is left in between for access, ancillary equipment and also perimeter fencing. The panels are mounted with a maximum height of 3.0m. It is proposed to grass/ wild flower seed the areas between, under and around the panels and seasonally mow.
- DA.46 The BESS and substation compound elements are functional by their nature and set out to ensure electrical safety and to minimise cable lengths. The dimensions of the substation are set by electrical safety standards with the highest element being the electrical busbars. The elements of this part of the proposal comprise:
  - batteries and associated infrastructure housed in 70 containers (max 3.5m high);
  - Substation compound with a control building (5.1m wide x 9m long x 5m high) housing the switch gear, an external transformer and busbars (approximately 1.2m above control building ridgeline; and

- Solar PV and BESS substation building (4m wide x 13m long x 5m high).
- DA.47 It is proposed that the external finish of the containers and cabinets included within the proposal (transformer units, client cabin container, BESS containers and substation compound containers) will be agreed with the Local Planning Authority (secured by way of planning condition) prior to construction commencing.
- DA.48 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment provided at **Chapter 9**, **ES Volume 2A**, sets out the specific effects of this proposal in detail.

#### LANDSCAPING

#### How open spaces will be treated to enhance and protect the character of a place.

DA.49 During the EIA phase, an Outline Landscape and Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Plan (OLBMEP) was developed to draw together planting associated with screening of views to the development and ecological enhancements, as discussed in Chapter 9 - LVIA, ES Volume 2A; and Chapter 8 - Ecology, ES Volume 2A.

# DA.50 The OLBMEP (provided as **Figure 8.3** to the ES) includes:

- woodland copses of native trees, one in the far north of the site and two along the western boundary, new hedgerows around the boundary of the site with occasional small native hedgerow trees along the western and northeastern boundaries of the site.
- Species-rich meadow across the entire site within the perimeter fencing including beneath the solar PV arrays (but not within the battery storage and substation compound).
- Grassland between the perimeter fence and the site boundary.
- A tha area of lapwing habitat to the south of Fairham Brook which would be left fallow, allowed to vegetate naturally and ploughed once a year to prevent the establishment of tall woody vegetation.
- DA.51 The OLBMEP evolved with the site design, and carefully considered the existing landscape character of the area. Native species will be selected for the new grassland, meadow, hedge

and tree planting and it is anticipated the LBMEP will be agreed with the Local Planning Authority prior to construction and controlled by condition.

#### APPEARANCE

The statement should explain and justify the appearance of buildings and spaces, and show how they relate to their surroundings. It should cover: architecture, materials, [decoration], lighting, colour and texture.

- DA.52 The appearance of a solar array, BESS, substation compound and ancillary infrastructure is largely functional, with materials primarily chosen for their weight, strength, performance and practicality.
- DA.53 The purpose of the solar panels is to absorb light and so they will have a non-reflective slightly textured surface, minimising glint/glare and maximising the transmission of light to the generating layers. The framing system is typically self-coloured aluminium and typically only visible from below or behind the panels.
- DA.54 Site containers will typically be in the form of steel shipping containers or Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP)

containers. The colour and finish of all site containers and cabinets will be agreed with the Local Planning Authority (secured by way of planning condition) prior to construction.

DA.55 A full description of each element of the proposed Fair Oaks Renewable Energy Park is provided at Chapter 6
Development Proposal, ES Volume 2A. Photos of typical infrastructure forming the solar farm are shown at Plate DA.1 on page 14.

How will the development visually relate to its surroundings?

#### Will it look attractive?

- DA.56 The landscape enhancement proposals have been developed by the landscape architect and ecologist who have in turn been guided by policy and the LCAs to ensure the proposals are in keeping with the local landscape context.
- DA.57 The solar farm will have a perimeter fence, which will be stock style fencing with wooden posts. This type of fencing is chosen to be less intrusive and more rural in character than other types of fencing. Steel mesh field gates will be used at the site entrances. For safety purposes, the BESS and

substation compound will be secured with palisade fencing. Landscape and visual impacts are assessed in detail in **Chapter 9 - LVIA, ES Volume 2A**.

DA.58 Visual representations of the proposed development in the landscape are provided through a series of visualisations and contextual photographs contained at **ES Volume 4**.

## CONTEXT

A design and access statement should demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the proposed development. It is important that an applicant should understand the context in which their proposal will sit, and use this understanding to draw up the application.

DA.59 The immediate and wider context of the site was evaluated during the site selection and design process, as discussed at Chapter 3 - Site Selection and Design, ES Volume 2A. A description of the site's context is provided at Chapter 4 - Existing Conditions, ES Volume 2A and by the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Chapter 9 - LVIA, ES Volume 2A).

- DA.60 The social and economic aspects of the proposal are discussed in the **Socio Economics Statement** accompanying the planning application.
- DA.61 The effects of climate change are now being experienced at all levels – global, national, regional and local. Similarly the socio-economic effects of the proposal will also have effects at the global, national, regional and local level.
- DA.62 Addressing the Youth4Climate Summit in Milan on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021, climate activist Greta Thunberg said:

"There is no plan B...Build back better. Blah, blah, blah. Green economy. Blah blah blah. Net zero by 2050. Blah, blah, blah, ... This is all we hear from our so-called leaders; words, Words that sound great but so far have not led to action. Our hopes and ambitions drown in their empty promises. Of course we need constructive dialogue, but they have now had 30 years of blah. blah blah. And where has this led us ... While carbon emissions must be halved by 2030 to have a chance of avoiding dangerous climate change, instead they are on course to rise by 16 per cent. Just look at the numbers. Emissions are still rising. The science doesn't lie'.

- DA.63 More recently, the urgency to act on the climate emergency was highlighted in speeches made by various world leaders, experts and climate activists at the COP26 Conference in Glasgow.
- DA.64 Net Zero is enshrined in law and Rushcliffe Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency in March 2019.
- DA.65 The potential for a renewable energy park at the proposed site location was investigated in the context of the existing overhead electricity lines and pylons crossing the site, the views of Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station beyond to the west and the Great Central (heritage) Railway to the east, as well as in context of environmental designations. Feasibility assessment and a detailed site design process determined the site to be suitable against a number of environmental, technical and social constraints.

#### ACCESS

The design and access statement will need to cover two potential aspects of access vehicle and transport links, and [inclusive access...] Will the place be safe and easy for everyone to move around?

# Will it make the most of the surrounding movement network?

- DA.66 Delivery of components would use the motorway and A-road network as far as possible to minimises the potential disruption to local traffic and road users.
- DA.67 There is a single construction point of access off of the Artex Factory site accessed off of Pasture Lane (Unique Street Reference Number (USRN): 33001773), Ruddington approximately 535m south of Clifton Lane/Road between Clifton and Ruddington.
- DA.68 From the site entrance to the south of the Artex factory, steel track way will provide temporary access for the duration of construction, parallel to Pasture Lane in agricultural land to the point that Pasture Lane becomes Asher Lane. This will avoid construction traffic being routed along the publicly accessible stretch of Asher Lane. From the start of Asher Lane (north west of Fields Farm Cottages), the access will follow existing farm tracks as far as is possible and on to the BESS and substation compound and

the transformer unit locations. Access tracks are kept to a minimum and are not required to access each row of panels. The existing field entrance has been used so that no new breaks in hedgerows will be required for access through the proposed site.

#### FAIR OAKS RENEWABLE ENERGY PARK



Plate DA.1 - Typical Renewable Energy Park Infrastructure Appearance (colour finish to be agreed with Ruscliffe Borough Council) - clockwise from top left: typical site track; construction works and typical cabinet/container; typical transformer container; installed solar panels; typical solar array fencing and installed panels and typical BESS.

- DA.69 There will be no public access to the proposed site. The existing PRoWs to the south and East of the site will remain accessible during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases, being fenced off from the construction site for user safety. Advance notification and signage will be in place to warn users of the PRoW of the adjacent construction activities.
- DA.70 Construction personnel will be required to adhere to health and safety procedures, as set out in a Construction Traffic Management Plan (draft to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority prior to construction and controlled through condition.
- DA.71 Further information regarding access to the site is provided in the **Transport and Access Statement** accompanying the planning application.

# Has the applicant clearly described their policy approach and consultation process, whether carried out or planned?

DA.72 The approach to the consultation process included informal presubmission consultation with the Local Planning Authority as well as a comprehensive package of pre-application consultation with surrounding residents, community organisations and Parish Councils.

- DA.73 Relevant policies of the Council's Local Plan (2019) were considered in the assessments, as identified during the pre-application advice consultation process:
  - Part 1: Core Strategy:
    - Policy 2: Climate Change; and
    - Policy 16: Green Infrastructure, Landscape, Parks and Open Space.
  - Part 2: Land and Planning Policies:
    - Policy 16: Renewable Energy;
    - Policy 19: Development affecting Watercourses;
    - Policy 21: Green Belt and the Countryside;
    - Policy 34: Green Infrastructure and Open Space Assets;
    - Policy 35: Green Infrastructure Network and Urban; and
    - Policy 37: Trees and Woodlands.
- DA.74 Prior to submission of the application, members of the public from the surrounding settlements were consulted via letter sent in the post, and were offered the opportunity to provide pre-planning comment about the proposal. In addition, the letter

invited residents and interested parties to attend two public consultation events where questions and comments could be made directly or via a feedback form. Local Parish Councils were also consulted on the proposed development prior to submission. The Statement of Community Involvement accompanying the application provides further information on local consultation

- DA.75 Issues raised and suggestions received were incorporated into the iterative site design process wherever possible.
- DA.76 Notably, access for the delivery of equipment was initially anticipated to be routed through Ruddington Village to site via Asher Lane. During public consultation (as discussed further in **Chapter 5 - EIA**), valuable information was provided by the community which the Applicant considered and progressed. Accordingly, an alternative construction delivery route was sought which avoided Ruddington.
- DA.77 The consultation process and incorporation of amendments to the design is summarised in **Chapter 5** -**Environmental Impact Assessment** and detailed in the Statement of Community Involvement.

#### REFERENCES

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## DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

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