

Executive Summary: RMBC Response to Whitestone Solar Farm Draft Environmental Statement

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) has formally responded to the statutory consultation on the Draft Environmental Statement (ES) for the proposed Whitestone Solar Farm Development Consent Order (DCO). The proposed scheme, led by Whitestone Net Zero Ltd, involves the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) array with a capacity of approximately 750 megawatts (MW), alongside battery energy storage systems (BESS), substations, and associated infrastructure across 1,914 hectares of land within Rotherham and Doncaster.

While RMBC supports the principle of renewable energy generation and has declared a climate emergency, the Council has identified a number of significant concerns regarding the environmental, landscape, heritage, and community impacts of the proposed development.

Key Issues Identified:

Biodiversity and Nature Conservation: The ES fails to adequately assess impacts on designated Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), including Brampton Common, and lacks sufficient detail on habitat mitigation and long-term land management. RMBC recommends the removal of solar arrays from sensitive ecological areas and calls for greater transparency in biodiversity planning.

Landscape and Visual Impact: The development is expected to cause significant visual changes, particularly in rural areas. RMBC highlights the need for improved visual impact assessments, including photomontages, and raises concerns about the use of high fencing and surveillance equipment in open countryside.

Cultural Heritage and Archaeology: The proposal may result in harm to multiple designated heritage assets, including Grade I and II* listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. RMBC requests further archaeological evaluation and detailed visual evidence to assess the full extent of potential impacts.

Ground Conditions and Land Quality: RMBC strongly opposes cable routing through Maltby Landfill due to risks to containment systems and nearby receptors. Additional concerns are raised about proximity to Kiveton Park Landfill and the lack of detail on BESS locations and ground stability.

Water Resources and Flood Risk: The Council considers the flood risk assessment methodology to be robust but requests confirmation of compensatory flood storage volumes and detailed surface water drainage strategies.

Climate Change and Carbon Assessment: While the project aligns with national decarbonisation goals, RMBC identifies inconsistencies in energy output and carbon savings calculations. The Council recommends improved transparency on lifecycle emissions, battery recycling, and climate risk management.

Traffic, Noise, and Public Access: Construction activities may disrupt Public Rights of Way and local roads. RMBC seeks collaboration on routing, access, and public safety, and recommends revised working hours and active monitoring to mitigate noise and vibration impacts.

Socio-Economic and Land Use Impacts: The ES lacks a clear strategy for minimising agricultural land loss and does not commit to local employment, training, or community benefit. RMBC recommends the development of a Local Employment and Skills Plan, a Community Benefit Strategy, and a separate Health Impact Assessment.

Conclusion:

RMBC acknowledges the importance of renewable energy but remains concerned about the cumulative environmental, landscape, and heritage impacts of the proposed Whitestone Solar Farm. The Council expects continued engagement with the applicant and reserves the right to provide further comments as additional information becomes available. RMBC urges the applicant to address the concerns raised, improve transparency, and work collaboratively with the Council and local communities to ensure that the development delivers genuine public benefit while minimising harm to the Borough's environment and heritage.