

## **East Park Energy Development Consent Order (EN010141)**

### **Comments on Applicant Responses to Relevant Representations**

Stop East Park Energy (SEPE) is an independent, community-led group established in response to the proposed East Park Energy solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) development. The group, which operates on an unfunded, entirely voluntary basis, has more than 1,000 registered supporters, and comprises residents, landowners and stakeholders from across Hail Weston, Great Staughton, Little Staughton, Pertenhall, Keysoe, Swineshead, and neighbouring settlements including Perry, Stonely, Kimbolton, Catworth, Buckden and St Neots, all of whom may be directly or indirectly affected by the project.

#### **Introduction**

This submission highlights a consistent and systemic pattern in the Applicant's responses to Relevant Representations whereby the use of thematic aggregation, policy justification and deferred detail serves to dilute or bypass the substance of individual representations. Across multiple topics, there is a clear failure to engage with the specific technical details and local knowledge embedded within those representations – particularly where they challenge modelling assumptions, identify site-specific impacts or raise nuanced, evidence-based concerns. Instead, the Applicant's responses tend to rely on high-level assertions, generic conclusions and references to future controls, resulting in a fragmented and often opaque evidential framework. The combined effect is that locally grounded, technically informed objections are not meaningfully interrogated, weakening both the transparency of the process and the robustness of the conclusions presented.

This submission does not seek to repeat the substantive merits of SEPE's Written Representation. Its focus is narrower: whether the Applicant's Responses to Relevant Representations meaningfully engage with the concerns raised, and whether material issues remain insufficiently answered.

#### **1. Repeated systemic issue: thematic coding dilutes individual concerns**

The document explicitly states that representations were "coded... identifying common themes" rather than addressed individually.

This approach aggregates distinct concerns, potentially masking site-specific impacts, cumulative localised effects and unique or technical objections, specifically

ignoring concerns identifying detailed data or assumption issues. It enables generic responses that may not reflect the nuance of original representations.

Key deficiency: no transparent audit trail showing how each representation was interpreted or whether any points were excluded, merged or reinterpreted.

This creates a risk of procedural unfairness: participants cannot verify whether their concerns were accurately considered.

## **2. Repeated reliance on ‘policy need’ to override local concerns**

Across multiple themes (eg excessive scale, energy efficiency, alternatives), the Applicant repeatedly deflects concerns by citing Net Zero obligations, national policy (NPS EN-1 / EN-3) and energy security arguments.

This is not a direct response to representations. It substitutes policy justification for impact rebuttal.

Examples of minimisation include efficiency concerns answered with “solar is part of policy mix”; alternatives (eg rooftop solar) dismissed as insufficient without providing evidence; energy timing/output concerns set aside by restating national need but without technical modelling. The scheme’s high installed solar+battery capacity is framed as an ‘energy security’ benefit without reference to either the low load factors of UK solar power, or its diurnal or seasonal intermittency. Similarly, in a further instance of material minimisation, the commercial operation of the BESS is not addressed in response to specific points raised in representations. The potential for arbitrage-driven operation to exploit, rather than reduce, price volatility is not examined.

Key deficiency: failure to engage with specific local harms vs national benefit balancing and whether this scheme, at this scale, in this location is justified.

This raises a question as to whether sufficient weight has been given to the relationship between asserted national benefit and the specific local harms identified in Relevant Representations, a matter the Examining Authority may wish to scrutinise.

## **3. ‘Addressed elsewhere’ – deflection rather than response**

The Applicant’s submission frequently redirects issues to other documents or sections (eg ES chapters, other responses) rather than addressing them substantively. For example, flooding “see FRA and oSWMP”; ecology “assessment concludes no significant effects”.

This creates a fragmented response structure, forcing readers to navigate multiple documents and with no synthesis or clear rebuttal.

Key deficiency: no integrated response to key objections and no demonstration that concerns were understood or that conclusions were changed as a result.

This raises a question as to whether the responses demonstrate, in a sufficiently transparent way, how regard has been had to the substance of the representations.

#### **4. Hydrology and flood risk: assertion without independent validation**

The Applicant states that runoff rates “would not be changed”, mitigation is sufficient and that additional modelling is “awaiting confirmation” from the EA.

Key conclusions rely on outline plans (oSWMP, oCEMP) and future approvals. Critical evidence (EA agreement) is not yet secured.

Ignored or minimised concerns include localised drainage patterns, long-term soil compaction effects and cumulative runoff from large-scale panel coverage.

Key deficiency: over-reliance on post-consent controls and monitoring rather than prevention.

This may limit the extent to which potentially significant effects have been fully assessed at application stage, which the Examining Authority may wish to examine further.

#### **5. Ecology: ‘No significant effects’ without addressing disagreement**

The Applicant concludes that there are “no residual significant adverse effects” and that there are “beneficial effects for many receptors”.

This directly contradicts many representations but does not explain why the Applicant believes representations are wrong and does not address specific species or habitats raised.

Minimisation patterns include reframing concerns as already assessed or within agreed scope.

Key deficiency: no engagement with uncertainty in ecological modelling, survey limitations or seasonal variability.

This suggests a closed evidential loop: the ES is treated as definitive rather than contestable.

The issue raised here is not simply disagreement on the merits, but whether the Applicant’s responses engage substantively with the uncertainty and contrary evidence identified in the representations.

## **6. Infrastructure and traffic: downplaying local experience and technical detail concerns**

The Applicant concludes impacts are “negligible or minor” and “not significant in EIA terms”.

This relies on modelling assumptions and mitigation plans (eg CTMP).

The Applicant ignores or minimises issues relating to cumulative traffic across villages, behavioural reality (non-compliance with routing), strain on local services, and specific concerns raised over assumptions and the details of key modelling.

Key deficiency: no sensitivity analysis for worst-case scenarios or peak construction periods.

There is also limited evidence within the responses of independent verification or testing of contested assumptions raised in the representations.

The response prioritises model outputs over lived local conditions. It overlooks questions relating to critical technical details.

## **7. Safety and BESS: overconfidence in future controls**

The Applicant relies heavily on its outline Battery Safety Management Plan, future approvals and compliance with standards, and refers to its battery system as a “safe and proven technology”.

Responses assume that future design will resolve risks and that regulatory compliance equals acceptable risk.

Ignored or minimised concerns include examples cited of real-world incidents of recent BESS and other lithium-ion battery fires, both internationally and in the UK, emergency response capacity in rural areas, and cumulative risk with large-scale deployment.

Key deficiency: no quantitative risk assessment presented and no worst-case scenario analysis.

This appears to place substantial reliance on post-consent controls in relation to matters some representations contend should be more fully examined at consent stage.

## **8. Socioeconomic and community impacts: selective framing**

Examples include food security concerns dismissed based on national land proportions, and the community benefit fund framed as mitigating widely expressed community impacts.

Key deficiency: no serious engagement with displacement of local agricultural activity, cumulative land-use change or distributional impacts.

This may reflect strategic minimisation through scale framing, a matter the Examining Authority may wish to test.

### **9. Consultation: defensive rather than reflective**

The Applicant asserts consultation was adequate, highlights number of events and attendees and rejects claims of bias or predetermination.

There is no acknowledgement of power imbalance, accessibility barriers or technical complexity.

Key deficiency: no evidence that consultation changed outcomes materially or influenced key design decisions beyond minor adjustments.

This suggests consultation was procedural compliance, not substantive engagement.

### **10. Over-reliance on the ‘DCO framework will fix it’**

The Applicant deploys a recurring argument that detail is not needed now and that issues will be resolved via DCO requirements, management plans and future approvals.

This is a core structural weakness, shifting critical assessments from consent stage to discharge stage.

Key deficiency: undermines transparency, ability for stakeholders to challenge impact and the robustness of EIA conclusions.

### **11. Limited evidence of independent verification**

Across a number of topics, the Applicant’s responses rely on reiteration of conclusions already presented in the application documentation, but provide limited evidence of independent verification or testing of contested assumptions. Where representations raised technical concerns regarding assumptions, modelling inputs or omitted scenarios, the responses generally restate existing conclusions rather than demonstrate that those matters have been independently examined.

### **12. Logical and evidential gaps**

1. Alternatives assessment – dismisses alternatives (eg rooftop, brownfield) without comparative analysis.
2. Carbon efficiency – states no need to prove ‘best’ option and avoids demonstrating optimal land use.
3. Cumulative impact – addressed superficially and with no meaningful regional context.

### **13. Thematic coding, transparency and regard to responses**

The Applicant's Thematic Responses document appears to rely on a coding methodology under which Relevant Representations are grouped across broad themes, with individual representations capable of being coded repeatedly under multiple topics. This approach may obscure, rather than transparently reveal, the distribution and weight of underlying support, objection and unresolved concern.

The issue is not whether supportive representations exist, but whether the coding methodology enables the Examining Authority clearly to understand the extent, substance and significance of unresolved objections, and whether those objections have materially influenced project evolution.

In particular:

- the thematic coding framework aggregates representations in a way that may dilute issue-specific concerns through abstraction into broad categories, without clearly distinguishing unresolved objection on principal topics;
- repeated coding of individual Relevant Representations across multiple themes may create an impression of breadth of engagement, but does not in itself demonstrate substantive regard to the issues raised;
- the Applicant's material does not transparently demonstrate how unresolved objections have been weighed in the planning balance, nor how the Examining Authority can distinguish between responses merely categorised and responses substantively addressed.

Accordingly, there is a material question as to whether the Applicant has demonstrated adequate regard to consultation responses and Relevant Representations in a transparent and auditable form.

SEPE respectfully requests that the Examining Authority consider whether the Applicant should provide:

1. a schedule identifying unique Relevant Representations (without duplication through repeated coding), distinguishing support, objection and unresolved concern;
2. a response matrix showing how principal categories of objection influenced (or did not influence) project design, mitigation or alternatives assessment;
3. clarification of how unresolved objections have been weighed in the planning balance, separate from their thematic categorisation.

#### **Overall conclusion**

The document demonstrates a consistent pattern of:

1. Aggregation over specificity – individual concerns diluted through thematic coding.
2. Policy substitution – national need used instead of addressing local harm.

3. Deferral of detail – critical matters postponed to post-consent stage.
4. Assertion over evidence – conclusions stated without engaging counterarguments.
5. Fragmentation – issues dispersed across documents without clear synthesis.

SEPE respectfully submits that these issues do not in themselves determine the merits of the application, but they do indicate that a number of matters raised in Relevant Representations remain insufficiently answered and may require further scrutiny during Examination.