



Meeting note

Project name	Longfield Solar Farm
File reference	EN010118
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	19 March 2021
Meeting with	Longfield Solar Energy Farm Limited
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project Update Meeting
Circulation	All attendees

Summary of key points discussed and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

Timetable / programme to submission

The Applicant provided an update to its Non-Statutory Consultation that was conducted remotely from October 2020 until December 2020, in line with Government COVID guidelines in place during the time. In addition to hosting a virtual exhibition and Q&A webinars online, the Applicant sent consultation materials directly to local residents and invited them to meet by telephone or online. The Inspectorate asked if there were any concerns expressed by the community to the remote consultation. The Applicant confirmed that no major concerns had been expressed about the techniques used as part of the consultation. The Applicant will be clear in its Consultation Report of the approach used.

The Inspectorate queried if there were any themes that had arisen from consultation responses. The Applicant confirmed that they had received a range of views about the scheme; common themes raised were, but not limited to, concerns surrounding HGV access, cabling, scale, ecology, and the grid connection location. The Applicant commented that further refinements to the scheme had addressed many of the issues raised and that they will continue discussions with Affected Person(s).

The Inspectorate asked if any concerns regarding cumulative effects, such as with the proposed A12 Chelmsford to A120 Widening scheme (A12 scheme), had been raised in the consultation responses. The Applicant advised that the Local Planning Authorities had raised points around potential cumulative effects during construction. The Applicant held a meeting with the A12 scheme Applicant (Highways England) and explained that at this stage, it considers there is low potential for the Proposed Development together with the

A12 scheme to result in significant cumulative effects, based on the nature and extent of the likely impacts.

The Applicant identified a timescale for Statutory Consultation between early May and mid-June 2021. DCO submission is expected to be Q4 2021.

Project update

Following further survey work and consultation responses about the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV Land), the Applicant commented that it had worked hard to refine its red-line boundary to minimise the inclusion of that land. Where BMV Land cannot be excluded from the scheme, the Applicant is looking to produce a biodiversity proposal on the best use for the proposed land during operation of the Proposed Development (e.g. sheep grazing).

Protected lanes have been identified as a non-suitable route for through-road construction traffic. The Applicant described that the site access is proposed to be via a single entry point, with access roads in the middle of the scheme utilising existing hard surfaced tracks where possible, within the red line boundary, reducing the impact on the protected lanes.

The Applicant has established through consultation and ongoing design work that the northern area of the site was not an appropriate location for the grid connection.

The Applicant discussed refining the scheme design, including panel layout and height and the battery storage location and design. University College London are conducting research on the environmental impacts typically associated with solar farms, in particular soil health and bio development. Understanding this will allow the Applicant to maximise the environmental benefits of the proposal. The Applicant is planning to keep and improve permissive paths within the scheme. There are synergies between the works proposed, including proposed temporary haul routes, and connecting the existing network of permissive paths across the scheme.

With regard to the description of the generating capacity of the project, the Inspectorate commented that the Applicant should ensure there is consistency between the consultation materials, including the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), and the application documents, in particular, the Environmental Statement (ES) and the draft DCO. The Applicant explained how MW output is only determined by panel performance (rather than panel dimensions), and due to the ongoing advancement of future technology the Applicant has decided not to restrict the output of the scheme by consulting on a maximum figure on MW output. The Applicant further explained that as the environmental impacts would be as a result of the design parameters of the scheme (e.g. panel height, areas where solar PV can be located, dimensions of the battery storage), rather than its electricity generating capacity, the scheme that would be consulted on, assessed and the subject of the application would be described by reference to those design parameters, rather than a maximum generating capacity. The Inspectorate advised that if flexibility is sought, that this is clearly and consistently explained in consultation materials and application documents. The Inspectorate emphasised the importance of ensuring that the parameters on which the ES

assessments of likely significant effects have been based are consistent with the level of flexibility sought through the draft DCO.

The Applicant discussed the proposed on-site substation, comprising of a 400kv onward transmission via underground cables to Bulls Lodge. The largest infrastructure proposed on site will be the 7.5m high transformers. The solar panels will be at a height of approximately 3m. The Inspectorate reminded the Applicant of the importance of explicitly stating that the storage batteries are associated development within the DCO application following the introduction of the battery storage legislation in December 2020, which has clarified that battery storage infrastructure cannot be considered a NSIP in its own right.

Statutory consultation

The Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) is currently with the relevant Local Authorities (LA).

The Applicant described its zoned approach to the community consultation, offering webinars and exhibitions. The Applicant commented that it has allowed for the possibility of holding physical consultation events if Government COVID guidance allows.

The Applicant informed the Inspectorate of its active approach to planning for the possibility of physical events, specifically seeking open air, sheltered spaces such as barns. This would allow for 3D models and other information to be presented in person. Deposit locations for information on the proposal are expected to be available by this time. The Applicant is also willing to conduct telephone and face-to-face 1:1 surgery sessions, subject to COVID restrictions. Discussions on the deliverability of the SoCC have been held with relevant LAs, engagement so far has been positive and supportive.

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant should start considering the procurement of AV services for the Examination, particularly any virtual events that may need to take place. The Inspectorate agreed to send the Applicant a sample Service Level Agreement (SLA) which lists the types of services that would need to be put in place for any virtual events. This may help with procuring these services.

Discussions with Local Authorities

The Applicant has identified the relevant Local Planning Authority (LPA) lead officers and team members. A schedule of meetings has been established with the LPA, and meetings to date have included discussions on site access, transport assessments, archaeological investigations, and mineral safeguarding. Meetings to date have been productive and good working relationships have been established.

EIA surveys

The Applicant discussed EIA surveys, including information on additional ecological surveys to be carried out in Spring 2021. A mineral resource assessment is currently ongoing and archaeological trenching is to be carried out in Q3 2021.

The Applicant described its proposed viewpoints for the purposes of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in the ES, which are currently in agreement with Chelmsford City Council and awaiting response from Braintree and Essex Councils. The Applicant is in discussion with landowners, regarding key preliminary planting locations.

The Applicant proceeded to present their revised concept masterplan. This design was explained to have been influenced by survey results, ensuring any existing environmental assets and constraints have been considered. The masterplan also includes flexibility as part of its design diligence. Key drivers of the masterplan include the areas of woodland, connecting the rights of way network and respecting heritage assets and properties in the area.

The PEIR is due to be complete soon with a subsequent legal review in April.

A.O.B

The Applicant confirmed that the option for a new overhead line has now been discounted and that the new cable infrastructure will be buried underground.

The Inspectorate queried submission timescales and whether draft document feedback would be useful ahead of submission. The Applicant agreed, stating their intention to submit draft documents at least one month before the application submission. The Inspectorate commented that a targeted approach focusing on specific application documents and issues that the Applicant wanted feedback on (particularly in relation to the draft DCO) was preferable.

The Applicant queried whether an audio/visual supplier will be necessary. The Inspectorate advised that the Examination will likely be a mixture of both physical and virtual events. The Inspectorate agreed to send an audio/visual company SLA to the Applicant.

The Applicant explained their position and consultation with the local fire service regarding battery and fire related incidents. A risk management strategy has been drafted and will be sent to Essex County Council before the commencement of Statutory Consultation. The Applicant stated that the local fire service is content with this strategy.

The Inspectorate confirmed that it had not identified any persons under Regulation 11(1)(c) of the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, who may be affected by the Proposed Development.

The Inspectorate advised to meet following Statutory Consultation. The Applicant agreed.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The Inspectorate to send an audio/visual SLA to the Applicant.
- Next meeting to be scheduled after Statutory Consultation period.