



Meeting note

Project name	Longfield Solar Farm
File reference	EN010118
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	23 July 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.

The Inspectorate advised they will take a note of the meeting and publish to the website under s51 advice.

Summary of changes made to the scheme from non-stat consultation

The Applicant presented a plan which illustrated the land use requirements during construction and operation of the Proposed Development. The Applicant discussed changes made to the design of the Project in response to feedback received during non-statutory consultation. These design changes included a reduction in the DCO boundary both in the north and south areas; the removal of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) access to the site from Boreham Road and Waltham Road; and a subsequent reduction in the loss of Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land.

The Applicant stated that the grid connection at Bulls Lodge substation has been confirmed and the proposed battery storage is now located in the area of the application site subject to the highest baseline noise levels and with visual screening from the surrounding vegetation.

Summary of feedback & summary of engagement from statutory consultation

The Applicant stated that statutory consultation commenced on 1 June 2021 and ended on 13 July 2021. The Applicant explained that Local Authorities (LA) were consulted on the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC).

The Applicant adopted a 'zoned approach' to community consultation utilising a range of consultation methods to ensure flexibility in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person engagement above the SoCC has also been conducted. In addition, due to easing of the restrictions the Applicant had been able to conduct some physical consultation activities, such as ensuring documents were available at local depositories at central libraries within the core consultation zones. The Applicant also held covid-safe public exhibitions where there were opportunities to discuss matters with the project team. Several site visits have been held around the application site.

The Applicant stated that they had received 231 responses from consultees during the statutory consultation period. The Applicant explained that the responses principally related to concerns about the safety and decommissioning of batteries, loss of agricultural land, the scale of the Project (e.g. area and height of panels) and potential impacts on visual receptors and from construction traffic.

The Applicant stated that they had held discussions with LAs and Local Planning Authority (LPA) lead officers and team members have been identified. In addition, the Applicant stated that a schedule of meetings was agreed with LPAs and to date have discussed environmental aspects such as noise, cultural heritage, landscape and visual, water drainage, site access and scope of transport assessment, mineral safeguarding and ecology and biodiversity.

EIA update

The Applicant stated that consultation responses are currently under review to ensure the scope of the Environmental Statement (ES) adequately addresses matters raised during the statutory consultation period.

The Applicant explained that archaeological trial trenching of the application site was underway. The Applicant stated that they intend to hold discussions with Essex County Council (ECC) regarding the mitigation requirements for World War I/II practice trenches recorded within the application site. The Applicant stated that all seasonal ecological surveys had been completed, including Environmental DNA (eDNA) surveys for Great Crested Newts.

The Applicant explained that the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) team intend to take summer baseline photographs of the application site and surrounding area by the end of July 2021, with photomontages to follow. The Applicant intends to undergo a design freeze in 2-3 weeks to allow for the EIA to be undertaken. A south facing layout for the solar panels has now been selected.

The Applicant explained that areas within the application site have been identified for planting additional hedges and trees. The Applicant also stated that they intend to commence planting prior to construction to enable the planting to mature quicker should consent be granted and the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) strategy is being developed which will be consulted upon with Host Authorities (HAs). In addition, the Applicant stated that they intended to complete a Mineral Resource Assessment and Glint and Glare Assessment for the Project.

The Applicant presented a map illustrating the preferred cable route, and five/ six alternative route options. The Applicant stated that they would undertake an assessment to compare the environmental effects between each cable route option.

The Inspectorate raised questions regarding the Applicant's ability to safeguard the cable route from future development, including a proposed quarry site, and explained that protective provisions only apply to other parties.

The Applicant stated that they intend to create restrictions around the cable to protect it, which will either be secured through voluntary means or, if necessary, through Compulsory Acquisition (CA). Once the cable route option has been determined, the Applicant will seek voluntary agreements with the relevant landowners.

Potential need for future targeted consultation

The Applicant stated that targeted consultation may be required for the access road between the west and the centre of the application site.

In addition, the Applicant explained that the proposal to widen this road (up to 6m) and the subsequent extension of the site boundary had been agreed upon with ECC.

The access road at Bulls Lodge Substation Extension is not adopted highway, it is a private road which is to be included in the redline boundary and must be consulted upon.

Forward look to examination period

The Applicant intends to share draft documents with the Inspectorate for review in the lead up to submission during Q4 2021, these are to include a draft DCO (dDCO) and Explanatory Memorandum, sample Works Plans and Land Plans, an extract from the Book of Reference and introductory chapters of the ES. The Applicant queried whether anything else is to be expected during this period. The Inspectorate requested that the Applicant highlights articles in the dDCO where precedent was used and to highlight anything novel. The Inspectorate also advised the Applicant to look at submitting a draft Habitats Regulations Assessment report and structure of the Consultation Report – noting that a chronological structure is preferred.

The Applicant queried whether submitting the application near Christmas 2021 would have any implications. The Inspectorate advised that submitting the application over the Christmas holiday period is likely to have implications on the LAs ability to provide a timely adequacy of consultation representation during the very constrained time period. More generally, it may also limit the Inspectorate's ability to seek signposting information from the Applicant, if that was needed during the acceptance period.

A discussion was held regarding virtual and physical events going forward. The Inspectorate advised that the Sizewell C project will host the first National Infrastructure blended event in September 2021, the trial for this event with the Audio/Visual (AV) company was positive. It was also noted that the Bristol Airport inquiry is blended, and it might be useful to investigate as a live example.

A.O.B

The Inspectorate queried whether the draft fire risk management strategy had now been sent to the HAs for comments. The Applicant explained how it has been working recently with Essex Fire and Rescue Service and progress has been made. The Applicant noted how it hopes to secure either a Statement of Common Ground with Essex Fire and Rescue Service or for their views to be aligned before application submission. The Applicant stated that by submission, all reasonable studies relating to battery safety including fire risk should have been completed to help avoid losing valuable time during the Examination, if the application is to be accepted.

It was agreed that the next meeting should be held after the draft document review during Q4 2021.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- Applicant to submit draft documents in Q4 2021
- Next meeting to be held after the draft document review in Q4 2021