Oaklands Farm Solar Park

Consultation Report

Appendix 11.15 - Statutory Consultation Virtual Exhibition

January 2024

Applicant: Oaklands Farm Solar Ltd

Document Reference: EN010122/APP/5.2

Date: January 2024

Pursuant to: APFP Regulation: 5(2)(q)

Author: Thirty4/7 Communications Ltd

Contents

1. Statutory Consultation Exhibition Boards

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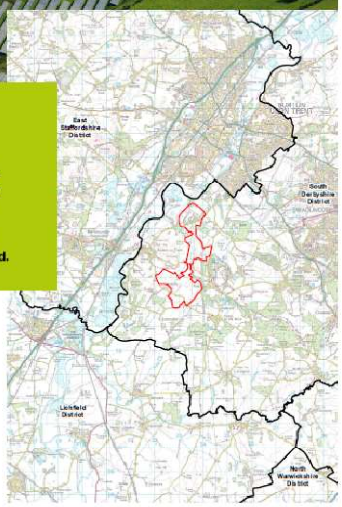
Project overview

Oaklands Farm Solar Limited is in the early development stages of a large-scale solar plus energy storage project in South Derbyshire, on land west of the village of Rosliston, and east of Walton-on-Trent. Oaklands Farm Solar Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of BayWa r.e. UK Limited.



The proposals comprise a solar farm plus energy storage covering approximately 540 acres over two separate parcels of land, connected to the national electricity network by a new cable. The expected generating capacity of the project is 163 megawatts of solar power, and 37.5 megawatts of energy storage capacity.

The main components include:

- Solar Photovoltaic (PV) modules and mounting structures
- Solar Inverters
- Transformers
- Battery storage facility
- On-site underground cabling
- 132kV grid connection cabling connecting the main Site substation to the National Grid at Drakelow
- 132kV Substation and Control building
- Fencing, CCTV and other security measures
- Access tracks and watercourse crossings where necessary

The indicative site is shown on this board. The project will connect to the national grid via a cable to Drakelow Substation located to the north of the site.

160MW of clean renewable energy

that's enough to power around 40,000 homes, or nearly all houses in South Derbyshire*

(*42,210 properties in South Derbyshire as of July 2019 – Ref: South Derbyshire Housing Stock Condition Report 2019)

About BayWa

BayWa r.e. is a leading, responsible, international renewable energy project developer in. BayWa r.e. UK is part of a global company, based in 28 countries around the world. Operating 100% carbon neutral, we are also committed to our own sustainability journey and are driving forward multiple initiatives globally.

In the UK and Ireland, we develop and build solar and wind energy projects, as well as providing longer term technical and commercial services to manage solar and wind assets throughout the country. We have extensive experience in doing this, having delivered 142 solar projects worldwide totalling approximately 2000MW, including 31 solar projects in the UK totalling approximately 536MW.

We are committed to designing and developing projects that help address the climate emergency, as well as maximising the local benefit to the areas in which they are located.

The planning process

Due to the nature of the proposed Project, an application to the Planning Inspectorate will be submitted under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) regime (Planning Act 2008) in Autumn 2022.

NSIPs are major infrastructure projects (such as larger scale solar farms) which require a type of consent known as 'development consent' under procedures governed by the Planning Act 2008. Development consent, where granted, is made in the form of a Development Consent Order (DCO).

Applications for NSIPS are examined by the Planning Inspectorate who then make a recommendation, to approve or refuse the application, to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The Secretary of State will then decide whether to grant or to refuse development consent. Further information on the process can be found on the Planning Inspectorate website: https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/.

We are aiming to submit our DCO application in Autumn 2022.

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Site selection and context

When siting a solar farm we look for a large area of suitable land with good solar irradiation in close proximity to a grid connection point. The Oaklands site meets all these criteria as it is close to the National Grid substation at the decommissioned Drakelow Power Station. A search for suitable and available areas of land, including brownfield and agricultural sites, in proximity to Drakelow was carried out and this identified the Oaklands site as the preferred option for development.

The site is located just to the south of the former Drakelow power station, which once dominated the local landscape. Although the power station has gone the connection to the national grid remains which is why there are so many power lines in the local landscape.

Site design

Following the site selection process, the proposals have been developed following extensive review of the local area, site constraints and survey assessment results, as well as close consideration of the appearance of the site and technical considerations for the type of equipment to be installed during construction.

The proposed site layout can be seen opposite.

Why solar?

This scheme represents an important contribution to meeting the UK's legally binding target under the Climate Change Act 2008 to achieve a 'net zero' carbon account by 2050.

Like other renewable energies, solar power represents a 'clean' source of renewable energy as it doesn't release any harmful emissions or pollutants.

Solar energy is also one of the cheapest forms of new renewable power generation in the UK, and consequently can contribute to controlling consumer's energy bills into the future.

Solar projects are non-permanent (they generally have a lifetime of around 40 years) energy generation projects, that do not alter the site's planning status (meaning they remain classed as 'agricultural' sites). Some agricultural activities can be retained (such as sheep grazing), and there is opportunity to enhance local biodiversity through creation of new habitats and planting around the site. Find out more on Boards 4 and 8).

Key constraints

Aside from the connection point and avoidance of existing infrastructure such as pylons and existing utilities running through the site, there are numerous site constraints which influence the site layout and design.

Constraints include: important hedgerows and trees, public rights of way, residential houses, watercourses and drainage, amongst others. These are all assessed through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, which is explained further on Board 3.

The former cooling towers at Drakelow Power Station

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The EIA process

A full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is being carried out to identify and assess the likely or potential environmental effects of building this proposed development.

This is an important process, which is developed and assessed in close consultation with relevant statutory bodies (such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and local authority planning specialists) to ensure all potential effects are identified and that they are removed, or reduced to an acceptable level through scheme design.

A 'Preliminary Environmental Information Report' (PEIR) has been produced that sets out the results of the technical assessments undertaken to date as a basis of consultation. This document can be viewed on our project website and at our consultation events.

The detailed results of the EIA will be presented in an Environmental Statement (ES) which will be submitted with the DCO application. The ES will outline how any comments received on the PEIR have shaped the design of the proposed power plant.

Indicative viewpoint 5 Cross Britain Way, near Walton-on-Trent Farm – more viewpoints are available in the PEIR

Landscape and visual assessment

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is being carried out as part of the EIA. This will give information on the design of the scheme and will identify key areas where visual and landscape mitigation (such as planting) is required.

The solar farms will comprise rows of solar panels 2.7 metres in height, which means that many will be screened from view by existing hedgerows. Where appropriate, we will be proposing to enhance existing hedgerows, or plant new ones to help screen the panels.

A Landscape Strategy Plan has been produced and can viewed in the PEIR and the Consultation Summary Document.

An assessment of various viewpoints around the site has been undertaken, with visualisations to help show what the site would look like from different locations.

Ecology and biodiversity

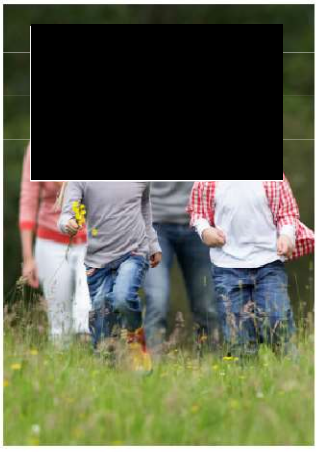
We have undertaken an assessment of the potential ecological effects and proposed mitigation measures required to address any impacts of our proposals on the local environment.

This has included undertaking site surveys and consultation with relevant specialist consultees to provide us with detailed information on a number of environmental considerations, which have been assessed within the PEIR.

During construction and operations mitigation measures will be put in place to protect the flora and fauna on site. The proposals will include a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan which will set out plans to improve the biodiversity at the site.

Opportunities to enhance the local environment biodiversity include the improved management of grassland and management of grassland margins for wildlife, reinforcement of hedgerows, creation of new habitats such as wild flower meadows and woodland planting. Improving the planting around the site will also benefit breeding birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects by improving sources of food and shelter.

The planting will be designed to meet the objectives of the National Forest and other local initiatives. We welcome suggestions from the local community about planting and other environmental benefits we could implement on site.



Land use

We have undertaken an assessment of the land within the redline area of the proposed application and a detailed Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) study has been carried out. This has shown that there is a range of agricultural land quality across the site.

The EIA will be required to assess the amount of agricultural land being impacted and consider the impacts in the wider context as part of this assessment we are required to consult Natural England.

One of the benefits of solar development is the protection and improvement of soil quality as it will no longer be subjected to intensive farming or use of pesticides and herbicides.

At the end of its operational life the solar panels will be removed and the land returned to agricultural use.

We intend to continue to use the land for grazing as part of the management of the grass within the sites, and the construction and decommissioning of the infrastructure will have little impact on the land quality due to the nature of the proposals and construction methods utilised.

Crucially, once the solar farm reaches the end of its operational life, the land designation does not change, meaning that it will be returned to agricultural use. It is therefore not deemed to be "brownfield".

Water resources and flood risk

Solar panels are mounted on frames which are driven into the ground on spikes. No concrete bases are required for the panels, meaning that dispersal of rainwater can continue into the ground.

As part of the application, we are required to assess drainage and flood risk, through a Flood Consequence Assessment, and put in place appropriate drainage and other mitigation measures to ensure that there is no net increase in water runoff from the site taking climate over its lifetime.

Noise

Solar farms are very quiet energy generating facilities. They have very few moving parts and as such require less ongoing maintenance and generate little noise or vibration. Transformers are required to convert the electricity to the correct voltage to export, and whilst these are not particularly noisy, they do generate a 'low hum' at close distances.

As part of the EIA, we have undertaken a noise assessment, utilising information about the proposed scheme including proposed construction activities. To inform this, we have undertaken baseline noise monitoring to establish the current noise levels around the site.

During construction, noise from construction vehicles and plant materials would be generated. This noise would vary, however working hours would be restricted and measures to reduce potential noise impacts (such as erection of hoarding) would be put in place.

Glint and glare

Modern solar panels are designed to capture as much sunlight as possible therefore light reflection is minimised. Nevertheless we have undertaken a Glint and Glare Assessment, which has reviewed the potential for glint and glare on the surrounding area, including potential effects on surrounding roads and local airfields.

Potential effects have been identified along a short section of Church Street (northwest of Coton-in-the-Elms) and some dwellings, however mitigation in the form of screen planting will be used to minimise impacts.

Historic environment

An assessment of the potential impacts on the archaeological and cultural historic assets in proximity to the site (such local churches or listed buildings) has been undertaken. There are no designated heritage assets within the site however the desk top survey has identified evidence of medieval agricultural activities and post medieval marl (clay) pits. Prior to construction starting a program of mitigation will be agreed with South Derbyshire District Council. This is likely to comprise a staged program of works and monitoring during construction.

Air quality

Oaklands Farm Solar Park will have no air emissions during the operational phase. Possible impacts to local air quality only have the potential to occur during the short periods of construction and decommissioning through vehicular movement, plant emissions and creation of dust, however even these will be relatively low. A detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be implemented during the construction period and will outline measures to control dust creation and emissions.

Assessment of cumulative impacts

We are aware that there are other proposed and existing energy generating schemes as well as other large residential construction projects in the local area. Each of the individual assessments within the PEIR includes a cumulative assessment which looks at the impacts of the proposal with other developments in the area including traffic, noise and landscape and visual impacts.

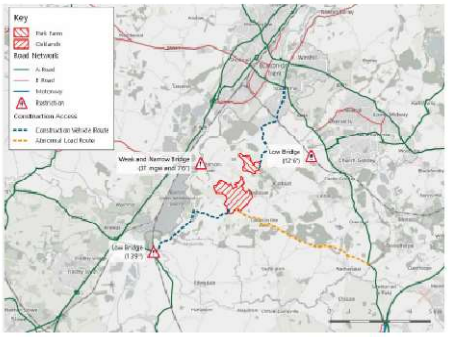
Connecting to the Grid

We are proposing to connect to the National Grid substation at the former Drakelow Power Station. This will require either underground or overhead cables (or a combination of the two) to link the project substation on the Oaklands site to the connection point at Drakelow.

The exact route of this connection is still to be determined, but we are assessing suitable routes that lie within the red-line boundary shown on the plan on board 2. The final route and design of the connection will be included within the application being made later this year.

Construction

The construction of the solar farm is expected to last approximately 16 months and employ up to 149 staff over the construction period. It is envisaged that staff will be from both local and regional contractors who will be encouraged to use shared transport such as minibus or car-sharing. All vehicles parking will be provided within one of two temporary construction compounds that will be situated within the site. There will be no parking on the local highway network.



It is anticipated that the construction phase will generate approximately 1,600 construction vehicle return journeys to and from site (or 3,200 individual movements). At the most intense period of construction when solar panels, frames, posts and electrical support equipment are being delivered, there would be an approximate average of just over 13 HGV deliveries per working day.

Traffic and access

During construction traffic will not be permitted through either Walton-on-Trent or Rosliston. Once installed, the solar farm will require very little maintenance and traffic to the site will be minimal.

As can be seen on the plan, the proposed construction routes approach from the south and the north, and avoid Walton-on-Trent and Rosliston. There may be one abnormal load delivered through Coton in the Elms, and this will be confirmed following further traffic survey and assessment. We are also considering the potential to utilise a route via the new bridge and Walton-on-Trent bypass.

The suitability of these routes will be confirmed by detailed on-site assessment and traffic surveys and agreed with Derbyshire County Council, South Derbyshire District Council and National Highways.

All construction traffic will be subject to a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) that will be agreed with the local authorities. This will agree specific points, such as delivery times, restrictions, and routes to ensure that construction traffic does not have a detrimental impact to the local road network.

Decommissioning

The project lifetime is 40 years, meaning that we would be looking at decommissioning the site in the 2060's. Whilst the exact details of the process will be agreed closer to the time, the decommissioning activity will likely mirror the construction process in duration and activity.

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Social considerations

This scheme represents an important contribution to meeting the UK's legally binding target under the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended 2021) to achieve a 'net zero' carbon account by 2050. Renewable energy developments deliver both the local community and wider population a clean, secure source of electricity that is generated in the UK using natural resources. Solar power represents a 'clean' source of renewable energy as it doesn't release any harmful emissions or pollutants.

Solar energy is also one of the cheapest forms of new renewable power generation in the UK, and consequently can contribute to controlling consumer's energy bills into the future.

In addition, local benefits include:

- Local investment – we are committed to giving local businesses the opportunity to tender to provide services for the construction and operation of the solar farm. The proposed development will offer opportunities for local businesses such as construction services, accommodation providers, hire companies, fencing contractors, landscaping and tradesmen during the construction and operation of the project.
- Potential biodiversity enhancements including reinforcement of existing hedgerows and the planting of new hedgerows, native grasses and wild flowers within and adjacent to the solar farm itself.
- Improved recreational access: maintenance and enhancement of footpaths throughout the site.
- Annual Community Benefit Contribution – Oaklands Farm Solar Limited has volunteered to make an annual donation into a community benefit fund to support local initiatives, throughout the 40 year life of the project. We intend to consult with the local community and relevant organisations as to how best to organise this fund and feedback on local benefit opportunities is welcome. More detail about the level of funds, the initiatives to be supported, and administration of the fund will be available in the final application submission in Autumn 2022.

Through the consultation process, we are also keen to hear about any other potential local benefits that we could facilitate or deliver directly.

Protecting local rights of way

From early informal consultation, we understand that pedestrian links around and through the site are important. We have looked at how we can preserve and improve existing rights of way, and have also suggested an indicative route for a new permissive right of way across Oaklands Farm in the southern development area to provide a new link to the Cross Britain Way and on to Rosliston/Walton-on-Trent. This proposed route can be seen on the plan above. We'd be interested to know if you felt this was appropriate, or if you had any alternative suggestions for local access and rights of way.

Providing feedback

Formal Consultation

We would like the opportunity to understand the views of the local community on these proposals before we submit our application. We'd therefore like to invite you take part in the formal consultation on the proposals and provide your feedback by filling in a form.

The closing date for comments is 6th June 2022.

As part of the NSIP planning process, the Applicant is required to prepare and submit a Consultation Report detailing the consultation undertaken and how feedback has been taken into account for the project.

Let us know your views

You can get in touch with us and provide your feedback via:

- Project website – project documents and plans detailing the nature and location of the project are available at **www.baywa-re.co.uk/en/solar/oaklands-solar-farm**
- Email – written feedback can be provided utilising the project email address – **info.oaklands-solarfarm@baywa-re.co.uk**
- Feedback forms – available online via the project website and consultation events. Alternatively, get in touch to request a hard copy and we will post it to you
- Freepost – written feedback can be provided utilising the project freepost address
- FREEPOST TC CONSULTATION (no further address or stamp required) Freephone – 0800 699 0081 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm excluding public holidays)