



Meeting note

Project name	Oaklands Farm Solar
File reference	EN010112
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	25 November 2022
Meeting with	Oaklands Solar 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.

Project Update

The Applicant confirmed that the owner of Park Farm has withdrawn from the project as they are pursuing an alternative strategy for the land-holding. The Applicant advised that Park Farm made up approximately 25% of the solar array area and the red line planning boundary has been reduced to reflect this change. No replacement land is being pursued.

As part of the design evolution of the scheme the project substation is now proposed to be located in a more central location within the site. The cabling for the grid connection at Drakelow substation and also cabling within the site is now intended to be underground for its entire length.

An update was provided on the distribution of construction traffic, which has been reviewed due to the imposition of an 18-tonne weight limit at Chetwynd Bridge (part of the wider highway network outside the host authority administrative area). This weight limit would make this route unsuitable for some construction traffic. Construction traffic is now proposed to be routed to the site via the planned Walton Bypass, but alternative routes are available, and will be assessed as part of the Environmental Statement, should the bypass not be delivered as anticipated.

The Applicant stated that they have committed to avoiding HGV construction traffic through the small villages around the project (Walton-on-Trent and Rosliston), with lighter construction vehicles utilising a variety of routes to minimise impact on any particular community.

Regarding potential changes to construction traffic, the Inspectorate understands that due to the changed weight limit imposed on the Chetwynd Bridge, construction routes have been updated since scoping stage.

The Applicant stated the exact location of their grid connection to the Drakelow substation cannot be guaranteed because their grid connection agreement with National Grid could be subject to amendment. The Applicant has therefore kept their red line boundary larger at the north of the proposed site, to allow flexibility for the grid connection point.

The Applicant confirmed that the site is in flood zone 1.

The Applicant advised that there is a medium pressure gas main crossing a portion of the site but it is not anticipated that any works to that main will be required. The Applicant is consulting with utility companies with assets within the redline regarding voluntary asset protection agreements.

The Inspectorate recommended the Applicant ensures any limits of deviation are included in the plans, as well as the Development Consent Order (DCO).

The Applicant is proposing a permissive footpath which will provide a link to the Cross Britain Way. The Applicant explained any site CCTV will be inward facing to ensure members of the public using the ProW will not be recorded. The public footpath will be flanked by deer fencing to secure the site. The Applicant intends to have 50mm mammal gaps in the deer fencing to promote wildlife access to and from the site. The Applicant also intends to include sheep grazing on site.

The Applicant has been consulting The National Forest Company regarding increased planting.

Targeted Second Round of Consultation

The Applicant is proposing a second round of targeted consultation in relation to the recent project updates. The approach to this will be subject to discussion with the host authorities.

The Inspectorate queried whether the Applicant is going to conduct statutory consultation for their second round of consultation. The Applicant stated that the current intention is to inform all 42, 44 and 47 consultees of the design changes and consult them again on a statutory basis in relation to specific updates, however there will be no public exhibitions. The Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) provides for the possibility to conduct targeted consultation in accordance with the principles set out in the SoCC.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant that they may benefit from reviewing the Planning Act 2008: guidance on the pre-application process for major infrastructure projects, and Specifically, paragraph 68 through to 77 in the guidance. The Inspectorate advised that if a project has changed significantly since the previous consultation, further statutory consultation maybe required and this would require a further section 46 notification to be submitted. However, the Inspectorate also suggested the changes to the Oaklands project and the associated reduction in the planning boundary may not be significant enough to necessarily require a further statutory consultation. This would be a decision for the Applicant.

There is a new residential development under construction at the north of the site, on land outside the project boundary. The Inspectorate queried how the Applicant intends to consult with the new residents of the site, should the residential construction be completed, and residents move in before the construction of the solar farm is completed. The Applicant will take this away, although it noted the northern part of the red line boundary around National Grid's Drakelow substation does not interact with the residential development and is only in place to provide flexibility for any grid connection changes imposed by National Grid.

The Applicant hopes to commence consultation early in the new year. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to ensure that they justify any decision-making regarding consultation in their Consultation Report.

The Inspectorate queried whether the Applicant has encountered any action groups. The Applicant stated that there do not appear to be any organised groups at this stage.

Land Update

The Inspectorate queried the impact caused by the Park Farm landowner no longer wanting their land to be involved in the project. The Applicant advised that this will result in a 25% reduction in solar panel capacity, but the project is still viable and benefits from reduced footprint and less interaction with the surrounds.

The Applicant advised that there is a possibility that Compulsory Acquisition (CA) powers will be required to ensure delivery of the project, but they remain confident of securing the necessary rights by agreement.

The Applicant confirmed that there are no crown land / interests within the site and that they will provide details of any identified category 3 land interests in the book of reference.

Programme for Submission

The Applicant confirmed that the submission date is predicted to be during Q2 2023, although the Applicant will confirm a more specific date in the future.

The Applicant queried the timeframe for the Inspectorate to review draft documents. The Inspectorate advised that this could vary depending on what is being reviewed but is typically 6-8 weeks. The Inspectorate clarified that the Applicant needs to be specific on what they would like to be reviewed as whole documents cannot be reviewed.

The Inspectorate confirmed that a staggered submission of draft documents would be helpful for resourcing. Dates of March for Environmental Statement (ES) documents and April for consultation documents were discussed.

The Applicant confirmed that there is nothing novel in the DCO.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The submission date to be updated on the National Infrastructure website to Q2 2023. The Applicant is to provide a more specific date in the future.
- The Inspectorate is to arrange a monthly update meeting commencing from the end of January 2023.
- The Applicant is to consider which areas of documents they would like to be reviewed as draft documents ahead of submission.
- The Inspectorate to confirm that re-scoping of EIA is not necessary due to minor changes to the project