



## Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	Heckington Fen Solar Park
<b>File reference</b>	EN010123
<b>Status</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	08 June 2022
<b>Meeting with</b>	Ecotricity
<b>Venue</b>	Microsoft Teams Meeting
<b>Meeting objectives</b>	Project Update Meeting
<b>Circulation</b>	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.

### ***Access and the resulting changes to the red line boundary since scoping***

The Applicant confirmed that there had been a change to the red line boundary since scoping. The Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) had been issued with an updated plan. This was largely a reduction in area with the exception of the addition of two access points. One was a public highway, work was not anticipated to be required to this access but it would be included in the red line boundary as a precaution. The second was the use of an access route currently owned by RWE to the substation at Bicker Fen which re-routed traffic to avoid nearby villages. This access had been included in case agreement for access could not be obtained and Compulsory Acquisition was required. This access route was currently there and neither RWE or the Applicant would wish to de-commission it and for the Proposed Development, it would only be required for the installation of the cable route. The Offshore Transmission Owners (OFTO) process for the sale of the RWE interest is expected to conclude later in 2022. Protective Provisions or formal agreement was preferred. The Applicant confirmed the change to the Order limits did not require an extension to the consultation area. Cabling would connect the solar farm to Bicker Fen Substation.

### ***Agricultural Land Classification – Update***

The Applicant noted it was awaiting agreement from Natural England (NE) on additional survey points (one per hectare where more fixed infrastructure would be in place rather than the whole solar panel area). The proposed approach was viewed by the Applicant as a logical compromise taking into account NE guidance and its concerns surrounding soils. The

Inspectorate advised that any such agreement should be evidenced in the Environmental Statement (ES).

## ***Archaeology update***

The Applicant confirmed geophysical surveys have been completed. Findings were limited to matters already identified. A trial trenching plan was being discussed with Lincolnshire County archaeologists, to be completed alongside the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR). Timeframes for trial trenching were uncertain due to harvesting. Discussions were ongoing about the percentage of the order limits for trial trenching, but it was expected that there would be at least one trench in each field. The Inspectorate requested to be kept informed of progress.

The Inspectorate advised that practice for archaeological trenching had progressed since the Triton Knoll project in terms of Development Consent Order (DCO) drafting. The Applicant should consider how potential environmental impacts from trial trenching would be assessed in the ES and mitigation secured in the DCO. It acknowledged the risk and cost assigned to completion prior to permissions being secured. However, the Applicant was reminded that whilst a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) within the Application documents could be used to give comfort to local planning authorities (LPA's), should surveys be undertaken pre-commencement, the trigger for the WSI should be considered.

## ***PEIR***

The PEIR was on target for publication in June 2022. Both fixed and tracker panels were being considered in the design. A section of overhead cabling was being considered, taking into account existing infrastructure on site. The offsite cable routing was expected to be fully underground. Flood risk modelling work had progressed. The flood risk depth height had reduced but all information in the PEIR was based on the existing risk rating of 4.5metres. This, and the overall flood risk rating was expected to reduce following the completion of sensitivity testing. Revised climate change modelling had been considered. Technical reports and Indicative plans within the PEIR would be available, but specific panel types would not be confirmed at the time of submission to allow for changes in technology.

There was an ongoing obligation for sheep grazing on the site, and the PEIR would explain the discussions to date, legal position for the landowner and how this would be used in mitigation strategies. Higher grade land in the southern section of the site would be used for biodiversity and enhancement. There would be low intensity sheep grazing, meadow planting and hay crops. This had been discussed with Natural England, who were satisfied this fell under the definition of agricultural activities. The PEIR was being formatted to have the same layout and structure as the ES. The Applicant would have a legal agreement with the landlord regarding the grazing activity. The Applicant had not seen the equivalent of a grazing strategy for the Sunnica Energy Farm but will keep this under review. The Applicant was awaiting the designation of the revised draft National Policy Statements

Although other solar National Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) were at a considerable distance, these would be included in the cumulative baseline.

## ***SoCC***

Responses received from LPA's had been considered and taken account of. The consultation window had been extended by two weeks until 1 September 2022. The consultation area had been re-considered for the newsletters following the change to the red line boundary, however no extension to the consultation zone is proposed nor required (remaining at 5km from the main site, and 2km from the grid corridor). Other solar NSIPs covered a similar timeframe for community consultation but did not coincide.

## ***Programme***

The Applicant confirmed trial trenching was anticipated to take place September/ October 2022, with submission of the application at the end of January 2023. The Inspectorate requested the Applicant to provide any change to submission date.

Draft documents review should be discussed once the statutory consultation had been completed. The Inspectorate advised of a six week review period, dependant on the volume of documentation. The Explanatory Memorandum should be supplied alongside the DCO (if submitted) and the Applicant should highlight specific areas to review (such as novel issues). If supplying plans, these should be complete. The Inspectorate would provide feedback in writing, then a further meeting would be held to discuss feedback and provide further advice on the logistics of submitting the application.

The Inspectorate highlighted a technical report submitted during the Little Crow Solar Farm Examination [REP1-011] which was discussed at the first Issue Specific Hearing for the project. The Inspectorate asked the Applicant if it was considering producing something similar for this project.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to consider if Ecotricity were a statutory undertaker for the area, if so it would need to formally consult with itself.

Both parties were aware of other solar farm projects. It was noted that Mallard Pass Solar Project had published its PEIR following the start of its public consultation.

The s46 notification was being prepared, in advance of the Statutory Consultation commencing on 30 June 2022. People with interests in land were included, taking into account the new land. The draft Book of Reference was being reviewed internally, and Category 3 persons were being considered. The Inspectorate confirmed that if identified, a Book of Reference would be required, even if there were no Category 1 or Category 2 persons.

The Inspectorate asked the Applicant to provide details of its website to add to the National Infrastructure planning project page.