



Meeting note

Project name	West Burton Solar Project and Cottam Solar Project
File reference	EN010132 and EN010133
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	05 October 2021
Meeting with	West Burton Solar Project Limited and Cottam Solar Project Limited
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Inception 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 context and overview

The Applicant provided an overview of the proposed solar energy developments as two separate Nationally Significant Infrastructure (NSIP) projects. The West Burton Solar Project aims to generate a 480MW solar output with a 20MW capacity battery storage. The Cottam Solar Project aims to generate a solar output of 600MW with a 600MW capacity storage battery. 400kV cable connections are proposed to the existing National Grid substations at West Burton and Cottam power stations, respectively.

Anticipated elements for the proposed development include but are not limited to:

- Solar panels;
- Built infrastructure (substations, batteries);
- Buried infrastructure (grid connections);
- Security features (fencing, CCTV);
- Landscaping and ecological enhancement.

The Applicant shared a map illustrating the hectare size of each land parcel. Both projects combined, if constructed, will yield the capacity to power approximately 338,000 homes. The West Burton project covers four land parcels and Cottam covers three.

The Inspectorate queried the reasoning for the distribution of the land parcels with the Applicant explaining that due to constraints, it is currently not feasible to place every element within one parcel.

The Inspectorate queried how the project has developed into multiple sites. The Applicant explained its extensive experience with previous large projects since 2013 and the benefits of economies of scale. Site selection has been an ongoing process for multiple years. West Burton was identified first, followed by the Cottam site 12-18 months later.

Activities to date

To date, the Applicant has secured grid connection agreements with National Grid and is in discussions with landowners. It has also had initial briefings with Local Authorities and publicly launched the projects on their respective websites. The Applicant agreed to provide information so that the Inspectorate can publish project websites. The Inspectorate queried whether a designation for a new settlement at the former Cottam Power Station, in the Bassetlaw District Council Local Plan, impacts the solar proposals at Cottam. The Applicant explained that the area is land locked by EDF and it is likely to undertake underground cabling; the cables will cross less than 100m of this land.

Consenting programme

Phase one non-statutory consultation will begin in October 2021 and run for an eight-week period. EIA scoping is aimed to be submitted in Autumn 2021, in preparation for the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) and Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). Statutory consultation will run from summer to autumn of 2022, with the submission of the applications in autumn 2022. Phased construction is aimed to begin from 2024 onwards. The Inspectorate queried whether sufficient time has been built in after the statutory consultation period to respond in design terms to responses received. The Applicant confirmed it has set aside sufficient time and explained how valuable this period is for the development of the proposal.

The Inspectorate queried whether both applications will be submitted simultaneously or whether one project progresses before the other. The Applicant confirmed it is endeavouring to keep everything on the same timeline, however, unforeseen circumstances may split the projects into two separate timelines.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) and surveys

The Applicant outlined the main environmental constraints for the proposals. These include, in the proximity of the sites, the presence of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Scheduled Monument, a deserted medieval village and a number of listed buildings. Stow was noted to be a sensitive location due to its links to the Lady Godiva story. The Applicant advised that the topography of the land makes for adequate screening, with flat land and high hedgerows. The Inspectorate queried what the impact would be on views from Lincoln Cathedral, the Applicant confirmed that there might be some elevated views from the Cathedral and that photomontages will show visual impacts from Lincoln Cathedral.

Flood risk was identified as a minor issue, although the Applicant noted that panel heights would be set to minimise flood risk. The Inspectorate queried how resilient the panels are to flooding, and whether there is a degree of operability in low flood conditions. The Applicant confirmed that due to raised panels, only the frames will be subject to flooding.

The Applicant suggested that in the region of 90% of the land across the sites was grade 3b and not 'best and most versatile' agricultural land.

Initial traffic routing studies have been undertaken by the Applicant with the aim of avoiding impacts on local villages.

The Applicant shared an organogram illustrating the management structure for components of the EIA, e.g. for heritage, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), ecology and arboriculture. The Applicant noted that the same teams will work on both projects for consistency.

The Inspectorate queried whether glint and glare assessments have considered any nearby airfields. The Applicant confirmed it is looking to assess two different design options - fixed panels and tracking panels. The Inspectorate advised that the Rochdale Envelope would need to take account of the differing worst-case scenarios for the two technology types.

The Inspectorate queried the Applicant's approach to consideration of land contamination noting that farms can have areas of tipping and burial of contaminating materials. The Applicant acknowledged that this was a potential risk and outlined that it would consider this as part of its desk study and survey work.

The Inspectorate queried if progress has been made with geophysical surveys. A full assessment has not yet been completed, however the Applicant indicated that based on desk study work, significant archaeology was unlikely.

The Applicant discussed its plans in relation to biodiversity net gain, noting that the current 10% requirements were not particularly challenging for solar projects. The Inspectorate queried drainage runoff and how the Applicant intends to deal with it. The Applicant outlined its drainage strategy, referencing sustainable drainage techniques such as swales to control runoff.

Consultation approach

The Applicant confirmed it will be consulting on both projects simultaneously, through joint consultation periods. The Applicant is considering how it can do this effectively, with methods such as colour schemes. The shared core consultation zone extends 2km from sites, including approximately 9,000 properties. The Inspectorate queried the potential level of public interest in these projects. The Applicant confirmed it is too early to be certain, however meetings with members of the public have been positive. The Inspectorate queried if there is any requirement to divert public rights of way (PRoW). The Applicant confirmed its current plan is to retain where possible any PRoW and consider LVIA results for any treatment to boundaries or any sensitivities.

Compulsory Acquisition and Crown Land issues

The Applicant confirmed no crown land has been identified to-date. Compulsory Acquisition (CA) powers will be used as a last resort and voluntary agreements are preferred. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to ensure a Book of Reference is submitted, even if no CA powers are sought but potential Category 3 persons have been identified; advice has previously been issued in this regard on the [East Northants Resource Management Facility Western Extension Project](#). The Inspectorate queried whether common land has been identified and whether a Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) section 53 authorisation will be required for cable routes. The Applicant confirmed that common land is not included within current land parcel boundaries and that it does not envisage making any applications under s53; Housing and Planning Act 2016 powers may be used in place of the s53 of PA2008.

Submission date and next steps

The Applicant confirmed the anticipated submission date for the applications is autumn 2022. Scoping submission dates are currently being refined and the Applicant will continue to engage with the Inspectorate in relation to confirmed dates. The Inspectorate advised paper copies of the applications are not required and that it cannot accept USBs. However, the Inspectorate can facilitate submissions via file-sharing sites.

Next steps include requesting information from the Applicant to launch the National Infrastructure websites. Two websites and two mailboxes will be created, one for each project. The Inspectorate made the Applicant aware of the wider planning reform agenda and their goal to streamline current processes as part of Project Speed as outlined in the National Infrastructure Strategy 2020.

The next meeting was agreed to take place following the scoping submission or after statutory consultation. The Inspectorate advised that separate meetings should be held for each of the projects, preferably one after the other.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The Inspectorate to send list of information required to set up the project webpage: **Post Meeting Note**: this has now been completed and the project pages have been published.
- Next meeting to be held following scoping submission, or after statutory consultation.