



Stonestreet Green Solar

Environmental Statement Volume 2: Main Text Chapter 1: Introduction

PINS Ref: EN010135

Doc Ref. 5.2

Version 1

June 2024

APFP Regulation 5(2)(a)

Planning Act 2008

The Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 This Environmental Statement ('ES') has been prepared on behalf of EPL 001 Limitedⁱ ('Applicant') for the Stonestreet Green Solar ('Project') Development Consent Order ('DCO') application ('DCO Application').
- 1.1.2 The Project falls under the Planning Act 2008¹ ('PA 2008') and is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project ('NSIP') and requires a DCO. The DCO Application is being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate ('PINS'), with the decision on whether to grant a DCO being made by the Secretary of State ('SoS') for Energy Security and Net Zero ('ESNZ') pursuant to the PA 2008.
- 1.1.3 The Project is 'EIA development' as defined by the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017² ('EIA Regulations'). This ES forms part of the DCO Application and presents the findings of the environmental impact assessment ('EIA') undertaken for the Project in accordance with the EIA Regulations.
- 1.1.4 A glossary and list of abbreviations for the ES and DCO Application is provided in the **Glossary (Doc Ref. 1.6)**.
- 1.1.5 This Chapter is supported by the following figures and appendices:

ES Volume 3 – Figures (Doc Ref. 5.3)

- **Figure 1.1:** Site Location Plan; and
- **Figure 1.2:** Order Limits.

ES Volume 4 – Appendices (Doc Ref. 5.4)

- **Appendix 1.1:** EIA Scoping Report, dated April 2022;
- **Appendix 1.2:** EIA Scoping Opinion, dated May 2022;
- **Appendix 1.3:** EIA Scoping Opinion Compliance;
- **Appendix 1.4:** Location of Specified Information in the ES; and
- **Appendix 1.5:** Statement on Expertise and Qualifications of Competent Experts.

1.2 Overview of the Project

- 1.2.1 The Project comprises the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of solar photovoltaic ('PV') arrays and energy storage, together

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with associated infrastructure and an underground cable connection to the existing National Grid Sellindge Substation.

- 1.2.2 The Project will include a generating station (incorporating solar arrays) with a total capacity exceeding 50 megawatts ('MW'). The agreed grid connection for the Project will allow the export and import of up to 99.9 MW of electricity to the grid. The Project will connect to the existing National Grid Sellindge Substation via a new 132 kilovolt ('kV') substation constructed as part of the Project and cable connection under the Network Rail and High Speed 1 ('HS1') railway.
- 1.2.3 The location of the Project is shown on **ES Volume 3, Figure 1.1: Site Location Plan (Doc Ref. 5.3)**. The Project will be located within the Order limits (the land shown on the **Works Plans (Doc Ref. 2.3)** within which the Project can be carried out). The Order limits plan is provided as **ES Volume 3, Figure 1.2: Order Limits (Doc Ref. 5.3)**. Land within the Order limits is known as the 'Site'.
- 1.2.4 The Site Area is 191.54 hectares ('ha') (this has been rounded to 192 ha throughout the ES) located at Aldington to the south-east of Ashford in Kent. The Project lies within the administrative areas of Kent County Council ('KCC') and Ashford Borough Council ('ABC') local authorities. Further information on the Project, including the proposed infrastructure and design, is provided in **ES Volume 2, Chapter 3: Project Description (Doc Ref. 5.2)**.

1.3 The Applicant

- 1.3.1 The Applicant is EPL 001 Limited. EPL 001 Limited is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Evolution Power Limited which is a UK-based independent solar and Battery Energy Storage System developer established to develop affordable and sustainable renewable energy projects that will help the UK meet its 2050 net zero emissions target. The directors of Evolution Power Limited have installed and / or financed more than 50 UK solar PV projects, including some of the largest solar projects built in the UK during the renewable obligation certificate subsidy period.

1.4 Legislative and Planning Policy Context

DCO Consenting Process

- 1.4.1 The PA 2008 sets out thresholds for NSIPs and the statutory process for the consenting of NSIPs, i.e. applying for a DCO. Section 31 of the PA 2008 states that a DCO is required for development that is or forms part of an NSIP. The Project comprises an NSIP under sections 14(1)(a) and 15(1) and (2) of the PA 2008, as the Project is an onshore generating station exceeding 50 MW generating capacity. The Applicant is applying for a DCO for all elements of the Project.
- 1.4.2 The DCO application process is split into the following six stages:
 - Pre-application;
 - Acceptance;
 - Pre-examination;

- Examination;
 - Decision; and
 - Post-decision.
- 1.4.3 The SoS is responsible for determining DCO applications. A DCO application is submitted to PINS, who act on behalf of the SoS. Subject to an application being accepted, an inspector (or a panel of inspectors) is appointed to examine the application ('Examining Authority'). The Examining Authority will then make a recommendation to the SoS on whether to grant a DCO.

EIA Regulations

- 1.4.4 The Applicant notified the SoS in writing under Regulation 8(1)(b) of the EIA Regulations that an ES will be provided with the DCO Application for the Project.
- 1.4.5 The Project is a 'Schedule 2' development under paragraph 3(a) of Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations as it constitutes an *'industrial installation for the production of electricity'* and is not a project listed in Schedule 1. Schedule 2 development must be subject to EIA if it is considered *'likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location'*. The criteria on which this judgement must be made are set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations. Regulation 14(2) and Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations identify the information for inclusion in an ES.
- 1.4.6 EIA is a systematic process that aims to prevent, reduce or offset the significant adverse environmental effects of development proposals and enhance beneficial effects. It ensures that planning decisions are made considering the likely significant environmental effects and with engagement from statutory bodies and other stakeholders including the public.
- 1.4.7 The first stage of this EIA process was to undertake a scoping study to determine the context and extent of the information to be included within the ES (see EIA Scoping Process below). Following the completion of the EIA Scoping Report and publication of PINS' Scoping Opinion, the EIA for the Project was reported in three stages:
1. a Preliminary Environmental Information Report ('PEIR') was prepared to inform the 2022 statutory consultation ('2022 Statutory Consultation') with the local community, statutory consultees and the public about the Project, based on the preliminary environmental information available at the time of consultation;
 2. a PEIR Addendum was prepared to inform a further statutory consultation in 2023 ('2023 Statutory Consultation'), which was undertaken to provide an update on the Project. The PEIR Addendum collated the changes to the technical assessment made because of Project changes and feedback to the 2022 Statutory Consultation; and
 3. an ES was prepared to accompany the DCO Application.
- 1.4.8 The EIA process is integral to all stages of the DCO process, with the PEIR, PEIR Addendum and ES providing environmental information on the Project that informs the pre-examination, examination and decision stages.

EIA Scoping Process

- 1.4.9 The Applicant submitted an EIA Scoping Report ('Scoping Report') (see **ES Volume 4, Appendix 1.1 (Doc Ref. 5.4)**) in support of a formal request for a Scoping Opinion from the SoS on 19 April 2022. The Scoping Report defined the topics that the Applicant considered should be addressed within the ES and the level of detail to which they would be assessed. On behalf of the SoS, PINS issued their adopted Scoping Opinion ('Scoping Opinion') (see **ES Volume 4, Appendix 1.2 (Doc Ref. 5.4)**) on 30 May 2022.
- 1.4.10 **Table 1.1** outlines the technical topics that are considered by the EIA and addressed within the ES, as agreed with PINS via the Scoping Opinion.
- 1.4.11 **ES Volume 4, Appendix 1.3: EIA Scoping Opinion Compliance (Doc Ref. 5.4)** provides responses to the following sections of the Scoping Opinion:
- Section 2 - Overarching Comments; and
 - Section 3.10 - Cumulative Effects.
- 1.4.12 Responses to Scoping Opinion comments made in relation to 'Environmental Aspect Comments' (Scoping Opinion Sections 3.2 – 3.9) are addressed in the 'Consultation' section of the technical chapters included as **ES Volume 2, Chapters 7 – 15 (Doc Ref. 5.2)**.
- 1.4.13 Responses to Scoping Opinion comments made in relation to 'Topics to be Scoped Out' (Scoping Opinion Section 3.1) are provided in **ES Volume 2, Chapter 16: Other Topics (Doc Ref. 5.2)**.

Consultation and Preliminary Environmental Information

- 1.4.14 Consultation is integral to the preparation of a DCO application and to the EIA process. The comments received from consultees help identify issues that may require further consideration and inform the environmental studies.
- 1.4.15 During the pre-application phase, promoters of a DCO application are required to consult with statutory consultees under section 42 of the PA 2008 and the local community under section 47 of the PA 2008. The DCO application must also be publicised under section 48 of the PA 2008. For EIA development, an applicant is required to consult on preliminary environmental information.
- 1.4.16 The Applicant conducted non-statutory consultation and statutory consultation in accordance with the PA 2008 and associated guidance and regulations, which includes the EIA Regulations. A PEIR and PEIR Addendum were prepared to satisfy the requirements of Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations. In accordance with Regulation 12(2)(b), these documents presented *'the information referred to in Regulation 14(2) which... has been compiled by the applicant ... and ... is reasonably required for the consultation bodies to develop an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the development (and of any associated development)'*.

- 1.4.17 The PEIR was prepared based on the then-version of the Project and published for the 2022 Statutory Consultation held between 25 October and 29 November 2022. The PEIR incorporated the findings of surveys and initial assessments and enabled consultees to develop an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the Project.
- 1.4.18 To support the 2023 Statutory Consultation held between 12 June and 17 July 2023, the PEIR Addendum was prepared and published. The PEIR Addendum outlined the changes to the layout, proposed landscape strategy and biodiversity enhancements, and extent of certain works since the 2022 Statutory Consultation closed. In many cases, the changes responded directly to responses received from consultees during the 2022 Statutory Consultation. The PEIR Addendum provided further information on the construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning of the then Project to aid understanding of the proposals, as well as additional and updated baseline environmental information and assessment.
- 1.4.19 2023 Targeted Consultation was held between 13 November and 13 December 2023 in relation to a number of changes to the Project proposed following the 2023 Statutory Consultation. No new or materially different likely significant environmental effects as a result of those changes were identified from those that were set out in the PEIR or PEIR Addendum.
- 1.4.20 2024 Targeted Consultation was held between 12 February and 12 March 2024 in respect of a minor change to the Order limits. No new or materially different likely significant environmental effects as a result of that change were identified from those that were set out in the PEIR or PEIR Addendum.
- 1.4.21 Further detail on the consultation undertaken is provided in **ES Volume 2, Chapter 4: Consultation (Doc Ref. 5.2)**.

Environmental Statement

- 1.4.22 This ES for the Project advances the content of the PEIR and PEIR Addendum. In preparing the ES, regard has been had to the responses from the pre-application consultation, results of surveys and the assessments of effects of the final Project. The ES describes the Project and any mitigation measures to be implemented.
- 1.4.23 Regulation 14(2) and Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations identify the information for inclusion in an ES. **ES Volume 4, Appendix 1.4: Location of Specified Information in the ES (Doc Ref. 5.4)** provides a summary of where the requirements of Regulation 14(2) and Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations are addressed within the ES.

Planning Policy

National Policy Statements

- 1.4.24 The ES takes account of the following National Policy Statements ('NPS'), which have effect in relation the Project and which the Secretary of State, in deciding the Application, must have regard to under section 104 of the PA 2008:

- Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1)³ ('NPS EN-1');
- National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)⁴ ('NPS EN-3'); and
- National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure (EN-5)⁵ ('NPS EN-5').

1.4.25 The ES does not assess if the Project is in accordance with national and local planning policy. An assessment of the Project in accordance with national and local planning policy is provided in the **Planning Statement (Doc Ref. 7.6)**.

National Planning Policy Framework

1.4.26 The National Planning Policy Framework⁶ ('NPPF') sets out the UK Government's planning policies for England and how these are to be applied.

1.4.27 The NPPF does not contain specific policies for NSIPs. The NPPF confirms that NSIPs must be determined in accordance with the decision making framework in the PA 2008 and the relevant NPS for major infrastructure. Paragraph 5 of the NPPF states, "*The Framework does not contain specific policies for nationally significant infrastructure projects. These are determined in accordance with the decision-making framework in the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) and relevant national policy statements for major infrastructure, as well as any other matters that are relevant (which may include the National Planning Policy Framework)*". The Project has had regard to the NPPF, via the NPSs, which form part of the national policy framework.

Local Policy

1.4.28 The Project lies within the administrative area of KCC and ABC. Local planning and other local policy documents that may be relevant to the Project include the following:

- Ashford Local Plan 2030 (adopted 2019)⁷;
- Dark Skies Supplementary Planning Document ('SPD') (July 2014)⁸;
- Landscape Character SPD (April 2011)⁹;
- ABC Renewable Energy Planning Guidance Note 2: The Development of Large Scale (>50kW) Solar PV Arrays (2013)¹⁰;
- Kent County Council Strategic Delivery Plan (2020 – 2023)¹¹;
- Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2016)¹²; and
- Kent Minerals and Waste Early Partial Review (April 2020)¹³.

1.5 ES Structure and Project Team

1.5.1 **Table 1.1** sets out the structure of the ES, the authors and contributors to each ES Chapter.

Table 1.1: Content, Structure and Authors of Environmental Statement

ES Volume	Title	Author/ Contributor	Description
<i>ES Volume 1</i>	Non-Technical Summary ('NTS')	Quod	The NTS (ES Volume 1, Non-Technical Summary (Doc. Ref. 5.1)) provides a summary of the ES. It contains information about the Project, including alternatives, baseline information, assessment methods, likely significant environmental effects, and ways to mitigate them. Its aim is to use simple, non-technical language to explain the Project and its EIA, aiding in a clearer understanding of the Project.
<i>ES Volume 2 – Main Text</i>	Chapter 1: Introduction	Quod	The ES (ES Volume 2, ES – Main Text (Doc. Ref. 5.2)) assesses the environmental impacts related to various technical topics which have been agreed via the Scoping Opinion with PINS for inclusion within the ES. Each of these topics has its own dedicated Chapter outlining the environmental assessment findings, likely significant effects, and proposed mitigation measures. Additionally, each technical chapter examines the potential cumulative effects that may occur when combining other existing and/or approved developments with the Project.
	Chapter 2: Site and Context	Quod	
	Chapter 3: Project Description	Quod	
	Chapter 4: Consultation	Quod	
	Chapter 5: Alternatives and Design Evolution	Quod	
	Chapter 6: EIA Methodology	Quod	
	Chapter 7: Cultural Heritage	Wardell Armstrong	
	Chapter 8: Landscape and Views	SLR	
	Chapter 9: Biodiversity	Lloyd Bore	
	Chapter 10: Water Environment	SLR	
	Chapter 11: Land Contamination	Wardell Armstrong	

ES Volume	Title	Author/Contributor	Description
	Chapter 12: Socio-economics	Quod	
	Chapter 13: Traffic and Access	Prime Transport	
	Chapter 14: Noise	Wardell Armstrong	
	Chapter 15: Climate Change	Ecolyse	
	Chapter 16: Other Topics	Various	This Chapter (ES Volume 2, Chapter 16: Other Topics (Doc. Ref. 5.2)) includes consideration of other topics that would not result in likely significant environmental effects, including Glint and Glare, Agricultural Land and Soils, Minerals, Waste, Telecommunication, Television Reception and Utilities, Air Quality and Dust, Vibration, Major Accidents and Disasters, Electric, Magnetic and Electromagnetic Fields, Lighting and Daylight, Sunlight and Overshadowing.
	Chapter 17: Cumulative Assessment	Quod	This Chapter (ES Volume 2, Chapter 17: Cumulative Assessment (Doc. 5.2)) summarises the cumulative effect assessments from the technical topic chapters presented in ES Volume 2, Chapters 7 – 15 (Doc Ref. 5.2) . It also includes an assessment of 'effect interactions' for combined effects on sensitive receptors resulting from the Project.
	Chapter 18: Summary of Significant Effects	Quod	This Chapter (ES Volume 2, Chapter 18: Summary of Significant Effects (Doc. Ref. 5.2)) presents a summary of the

ES Volume	Title	Author/ Contributor	Description
			residual likely significant effects remaining following the implementation of mitigation.
ES Volume 3	Figures	Various	Figures and Plans (ES Volume 3, Figures (Doc. Ref. 5.3)) provided to accompany ES Volume 2, Environmental Statement (Doc. Ref. 5.2) .
ES Volume 4	Appendices	Various	ES Volume 4, Appendices (Doc. Ref. 5.4) comprises the background data, technical reports, tables, figures and surveys which support the assessments within the ES.

1.6 Statement of Competency

- 1.6.1 As required by Regulation 14(4)(a) of the EIA Regulations, competent experts must prepare the ES.
- 1.6.2 Quod is the lead editor of this ES and author of certain chapters, as identified in **Table 1.1**. Quod is a member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment ('IEMA') EIA Quality Mark Scheme, an accreditation scheme which sets high standards for EIA practice and demonstrates a commitment to excellence in EIA activities.
- 1.6.3 Each member of the Project team is a suitably qualified professional and details of the professional competency of the technical specialists is provided in **ES Volume 4, Appendix 1.5: Statement on Expertise and Qualifications of Competent Experts (Doc Ref. 5.4)**. The Applicant has provided the following statement confirming that the experts are competent:

"In accordance with The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, EPL 001 Limited (the Applicant) can hereby confirm that the technical consultants appointed to contribute and author this Environmental Statement are competent experts and have demonstrated evidence of sufficient expertise to carry out robust assessment and reporting. This is evidenced in the technical chapters of the Environmental Statement."

References

- ¹ His Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO), (2008). Planning Act 2008. Accessed December 2023. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/29/contents>
- ² HMSO, (2017). The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. Accessed December 2023. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/572/contents/made>
- ³ Department of Energy Security & Net Zero (2023). Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1). Accessed January 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65a7864e96a5ec0013731a93/overarching-nps-for-energy-en1.pdf>
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- ⁹ Ashford Borough Council (2011), Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Document. Available at: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/planning-and-development/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan-documents/other-planning-guidance-and-spds/landscape-character-spd/>. Accessed January 2024.
- ¹⁰ Ashford Borough Council (2013), Renewable Energy Planning Guidance Note 2: The Development of Large Scale (>50kW) Solar PV Arrays. Available at: https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/0k4lfbr4/2_large-scale-solar-pv.pdf. Accessed January 2024.
- ¹¹ Kent County Council, (2020). Kent County Council Strategic Delivery Plan (2020 – 2023). Accessed October 2023.

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¹² Kent County Council, (2016). Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan. Accessed October 2023. https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/112585/Kent-Minerals-and-Waste-Local-Plan-2013-2030.pdf.

¹³ Kent County Council, (2020). Kent Minerals and Waste Early Partial Review. Accessed October 2023. https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/69310/Supplementary-Planning-Document-SPD-on-Minerals-and-Waste-Safeguarding.pdf.