HELIOS RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT

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Consultation Report: Appendix 8.8 - Informal Consultation FAQs

June 2024

Appendix 8.8 – Informal Consultation FAQs (July 2022)

Website (public facing) Updates – July 2022

Helios Renewable Energy Project Frequently Asked Questions

What are we proposing to develop?

Helios Renewable Energy Project consists of a solar farm with energy storage system and associated infrastructure on land to the west of the village of Camblesforth and to the north of the village of Hirst Courtney in North Yorkshire. The proposed solar farm would provide renewable electricity for distribution to the National Grid, connected to the substation at Drax Power Station.

This Project would produce up to 250MW of clean renewable energy. That's enough renewable energy to power around 61,950 homes each year.

The proposal would generate a significant amount of energy each year of the proposed 40-year operational life, while also providing large CO_2 savings when compared to generation of electricity by non-renewable sources.

The energy storage facility will supply electricity to the local electricity network at times of peak energy demand and help make the renewable energy output of the solar farm a secure and reliable part of the UK energy supply.

Who is the applicant?

The applicant is Enso Green Holdings D Limited. Enso Green Holdings D Limited is a joint-venture partnership between Enso Energy and Cero Generation.

Enso Energy is one of the UK's most experienced renewable energy developers, with an unparalleled focus on solar energy.

Cero Generation is a leading solar energy company, working across Europe to support the transition to a net-zero future.

You can find out more about Enso Energy and Cero Energy by visiting: [redacted]

Where is the site?

The site is located south-west of Camblesforth, which lies southeast of Selby, and to the west of Drax Power Station. The southern parts of the site lie to the north of the village of Hirst Courtney. The cable route corridor extends to the east of Drax Power Station.

A site plan can be found here.

Why here?

One of the key drivers for siting renewable energy projects is being close to a suitable connection point to export power to the National Grid. A point of connection to the National Grid at Drax Power Station has been agreed, and the land identified for the project has been refined following a site selection process.

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What are the impacts on the local environment and biodiversity?

A well-designed solar farm provides many opportunities for local ecological and biodiversity improvement particularly on land that has previously been intensively farmed. Potential biodiversity enhancements include reinforcement of existing and planting new hedgerows, planting of native grasses and wildflowers within and around the solar farm itself.

Will the impacts to agricultural land be taken into consideration?

Yes. Understanding the nature and quality of the land (Agricultural Land Classification – ALC) within the site is an important assessment for us to undertake as we develop the scheme design.

For context, the latest agricultural land statistics[1] (DEFRA, 2021) state that in 2021, there was just over 8.8 million hectares of utilised agricultural land in England – this includes arable and horticultural crops, uncropped arable land, land used for outdoor pigs, temporary and permanent grassland and common rough grazing. Just under 4.9 million hectares of this is defined as 'croppable' land (consisting of cereals, oilseeds, potatoes, other arable crops, horticultural crops, uncropped arable land and temporary grassland).

A recent publication by the Conservative Energy Network (CEN) states that *'Currently, 0.08% of all land is taken up by solar farms. This would only increase to just under 0.4% if we managed to increase solar coverage to 70GW of capacity, which the Energy Security Strategy stated as the target for 2035. This is the equivalent of less than one third of the land currently occupied by golf courses across the United Kingdom'.*[2]

The solar panels will be fixed to the ground on fully removeable piled frames which will be removed in the decommissioning phase. There are areas within the site where fixed equipment is proposed which will, for the purpose of assessment, be considered as permanent development. These make up less than 3% of the site. The ALC grading and quantum of these areas will be considered and the significance of the loss assessed against the methodology in IEMA's "A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Impact Assessment" (2022). A Soil Resource Plan, as necessary tied in with a Soil Management Plan, can be used to avoid or reduce the impacts on agricultural land.

Will the project mean that the existing footpaths and rights of way will be closed?

No. Existing rights of way will remain accessible during construction and operation. The scheme will be designed around existing public rights of way (PROW) so as to avoid any long term diversions or changes to these routes.

Will the proposals cause an increase in flood risk locally?

Solar panels are mounted on frames which are driven into the ground, meaning that dispersal of rainwater can continue. Where more permanent bases are required (such as for the transformers

[1] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farming-statistics-land-use-livestock-populations-and-agricultural-workforce-as-at-1-june-2021-england Accessed in May 2022.

[2] [redacted] Accessed June 2022

and energy storage facility) extensive assessment will be undertaken, with mitigation provided to ensure that there is no net increase in flood risk.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) work will need to demonstrate that we have undertaken extensive assessment of drainage and flood risk, and put in place any mitigation measures to ensure that there is no net increase in water runoff from the site.

Will the solar panels be visible from my house?

Visibility of the site from surrounding areas will be a key design consideration. The height of the panels will be relatively low lying therefore much of the site won't be visible from most local residential areas in surrounding villages. Consideration of any visual impact will form part of the assessment of visual effects undertaken as part of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

Provision of mitigation, such as additional screening planting and enhancing the hedgerows throughout the site will also improve screening from local roads and villages.

Will panels cover the whole area?

No. There will be lots of green space all over the site. There will be gaps between each row of solar panels which will remain grass, and grass will grow underneath each row of panels.

Existing hedgerows and trees will be maintained, with buffers to allow for landscaping and there will also generally be at least five metres of open field space between security fencing and solar panels throughout the whole site. There will also be new areas of wild meadow planting, new trees and hedgerows will be planted, and there will be farm-style tracks to facilitate maintenance between the parcels of land.

Further details of the approach to planting and screening will be contained in the Outline Landscape and Environmental Management Plan (LEMP).

When the panels reach the end of their life, will the land be deemed 'brownfield' making it easier to build on in future?

No. The planning approval will require the site to be fully decommissioned and returned to agricultural use at the end of the project life. This application will not change the classification of the land, meaning it remains 'agricultural land'.

Will these proposals cause additional traffic through Camblesforth, Hirst Courtney, Carlton and surrounding villages?

The Project will be consulting closely with the traffic management teams at Selby District Council and North Yorkshire County Council on local construction routes.

Access to the site is currently expected to be from Junction 36 of the M62, via the A645, and then the A1041.

It is anticipated that the average number of deliveries to be made by HGV during the construction period would be approximately 20 to 30 per day on average across the 12 month construction period.

Once operational there would be limited vehicle visits each month comprising a transit style van.

Any approved routes for construction traffic will be subject to a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), which will need to be agreed with local authorities and key consultees.

The initial proposals for access can be found here.

Who will decide whether or not this Project receives planning permission?

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 2023.

NSIPs are major infrastructure projects such as new harbours, roads, power generating stations (such as larger scale solar farms) and electricity transmission lines, 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). Anybody wishing to construct an NSIP must first apply for consent to do so. For such a project, the Planning Inspectorate examines the application and will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, who will make the decision.

Further information about the process can be found here.

How will the proposed project benefit the local community?

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.

Through the consultation process, we are also keen to hear about any other potential local benefits that we could facilitate or deliver directly. If you have an idea for a sustainable community based scheme which could benefit from the project, then please share your idea with us.

Further information about the project benefits can be found here.

When will an application be submitted?

We are currently aiming to submit an application to the Planning Inspectorate in 2023. Pre-application consultation with consultees and the local community will take place in 2022.

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How can local communities and interested parties influence the development of the proposals?

We will be undertaking an extensive pre-application community consultation exercise prior to submitting an application to the Planning Inspectorate. This centres around a formal consultation period as required by the Planning Act (2008), and will incorporate numerous consultation elements, such as public exhibitions, local letter mailings, website updates and feedback forms.

We need to agree our approach to consultation formally with the local authorities – Selby District Council and North Yorkshire County Council through development and publication of a Statement of Community Consultation (SOCC). This document will be prepared, consulted upon and published across this autumn in close discussion with the local authorities and relevant consultees.

We will share further information about this consultation and how local residents and interested parties can be involved. All information about the consultation will be available to view on the project website page and will be publicised via a number of channels.

When will the consultation take place?

Informal consultation will take place in July 2022 in the lead up to a formal consultation process taking place in the autumn of 2022. This is known as statutory consultation and it will entail numerous formal notices, communications and broader publicity explaining how to find out about the application, and how to have your say on the proposals.

The website will contain details about how to provide your comments (via an online form, freepost or freephone) and will be regularly updated over coming weeks. We will publicise further details on this soon.

How can I contact the Project Team to find out more and provide my comments?

You can get in touch with us in a number of ways. The website is the best place to start: www.helios-renewable-energy-project.co.uk. You can also email us at info@helios-renewable-energy-project.co.uk. We have an online comment form to provide your comments or ask any questions.

We also have a freephone number (**0800 0699 0081**). If you wish to write to us, you can post to **'FREEPOST TC CONSULTATION'** (no further stamp or address required).