



Meeting note

Project name	Tillbridge Solar Project
File reference	EN010142
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	11 July 2022
Meeting with	Applicant
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project 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.

The Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted (if requested by an Applicant for commercial reasons).

The Project

The Tillbridge Solar project is a joint venture between Tribus Clean Energy and Canadian Solar.

The project will comprise of the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays and supporting infrastructure. The infrastructure will include:

- Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)
- Solar stations, comprising electrical equipment such as inverter and transformers
- Substations
- Access tracks for maintenance and staff car parks
- Security fencing and CCTV
- Landscape planting to screen views, most likely through infilling and planting of hedgerows and trees
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
- Underground cabling connecting the solar farm with National Grid at Cottam Power Station
- Potential for collaboration with other solar developers in the area

The Applicant conducted a desk-based Site Search Assessment in 2020 to identify an appropriate location for a solar energy farm that can generate more than 50MW of electricity in the east of England.

The Site Search Assessment considered:

- Operational Criteria (topography, irradiance and available grid connection)
- Planning and Environment Constraints
- Selection of Zones which were potentially appropriate for a solar energy scheme
- The above process, resulted in the identification of land to the east and south-east of Gainsborough for further consideration.

Collaboration With Other Developers

The Applicant acknowledges that there are a number of other projects in the area, and this will need to be considered when calculating cumulative impact data. A master-planning process has identified areas with potential cumulative impacts and the Applicant will seek to omit these areas. They have developed a methodology for the completion of an Environmental Capacity Study to support the consideration of cumulative impacts.

The Applicant is collaborating with other developers on:

- Potential for sharing the cable route
- Timing of workshops so they do not clash
- Potential for sharing information
- Collective and individual delivery of additional benefits such as BNG.
- Seeking agreement to a standard methodology to assess cumulative impacts.

The Inspectorate raised that other developers of NSIPs in the locality are being handled by the Inspectorate's project speed team and there could be joint meetings with those developers and the Inspectorate in due course. The Applicant confirmed it would like to be included in those meetings.

Cable Route

The Applicant explored a series of cable route options but has identified a preferred route. This preferred route crosses a railway line, which provides services between Doncaster and Lincoln, operated by East Midlands Railway and Network Rail, and also crosses the river Trent.

The Applicant aims to identify sensitive habitats through baseline surveys, which will inform the use of non-intrusive techniques such as drilling underground to avoid the impacts caused by trenching.

The Applicant advised that the proposed project covers a total of approximately 100 hectares of developable land and around 700 hectares is to be used for ecological mitigation.

The Inspectorate queried the length of the cable corridor. The Applicant advised that the cable line is approximately 16km.

Activities to Date, Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation

The Applicant has carried out a number of activities to date as listed below:

- Desk based data collection
- Data collections (land referencing and statutory undertakers)
- Constraints and Opportunities Mapping
- Initial high-level landscape and visual appraisal
- Initial design feasibility and parameter work
- Baseline environmental surveys (ecology, noise, traffic surveys, air quality, landscape, visual surveys)
- Drafting of EIA scoping report under-way
- Initial meetings held with each Local Authority to introduce the scheme
- Members Briefings held with each local Authority

The Applicant is aware of potential for “consultation fatigue” due to the number of projects in the area and is therefore aiming to support targeted engagement with key stakeholders and community representatives at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Applicant plans to run three collaboration workshops from 20 July 2022 to 22 July 2022. At these workshops the Applicant plans to introduce the project, explain how the project fits with wider developments in the area, what is fixed by constraints and what is being consulted on, and potential benefits to the community.

The Inspectorate highlighted the importance of the Applicant providing clear time-frames and project programme when collaborating with stakeholders to try to avoid resourcing issues due to the number of projects in the area and ensure as much engagement during statutory consultation as possible.

Programme

The Applicant stated that Scoping is likely to be conducted near the end of Q3 2022. The Inspectorate advised that a September submission may be helpful due to resourcing commitments in August.

Statutory Consultation is planned for Q1 2023 while the submission of the application is currently scheduled for Q3 2023.

Any Other Business (AOB)

The Inspectorate queried whether the Applicant will be seeking Compulsory Acquisition (CA) powers in the application. The Applicant confirmed that it is seeking to negotiate the voluntary acquisition of the property rights it requires for the scheme and therefore the objective is to limit the use of CA powers over the principal site. It is likely that notwithstanding this that CA powers will be included in the DCO in case there is a need to exercise these powers in default of the obligations in a property agreement. All but one landowner of the principal site has entered into exclusivity agreements with Tillbridge Solar and work is progressing on the option/lease arrangements.

The Inspectorate highlighted potential cumulative concerns by local authorities such as regional scale bird impact and regional scale archaeology impacts.

The Inspectorate advised that should tracking panels be used instead of fixed panels, consideration will need to be given to noise. The Applicant advised that at this stage the proposal includes single access trackers rotating East to West and believes this should not provide significant noise. However, the Applicant will assess this. For the purposes of EIA scoping, fixed south-facing and single-axis trackers will be assessed.

The Inspectorate queried if there are any existing tracking panels in operation that could be viewed by the Inspectorate. The Applicant advised that they would need to get back to the Inspectorate in regard to this point.

