



Botley West Solar Farm

Environmental Statement

Volume 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

November 2024

PINS Ref: EN010147

Document Ref: EN010147/APP/6.3

Revision P0

APFP Regulation 5(2)(a); Planning Act 2008; and Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations

Approval for issue

Jonathan Alsop

15 November 2024

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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Project Location	2
1.3	The Applicant	3
1.4	Overview of the Project	3
1.5	Consultation and Preliminary Environmental Information Report	5
1.6	Legislative and Planning Policy Context	6
1.7	References	9

Tables

No table of figures entries found.

Figures (See Volume 2: Figures)

Figure number	Figure title
1.1	Site Location and Order Limits Overview
1.2	Masterplan Overview

Appendices (See Volume 3: Appendices)

Appendix number	Appendix title
Appendix 1.1	Statement of Expertise

Glossary

Term	Meaning
The Applicant	SolarFive Ltd
The Project	The Botley West Solar Farm
The Site or Order Limits	The area of land encompassing the Project development and shown on the Site Location and Order Limits Overview (Volume 2, Figure 1.1 of the ES).

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
CDC	Cherwell District Council
DCO	Development Consent Order
DESNZ	Department of Energy Security and Net Zero
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ES	Environmental Statement
NETS	National Electricity Transmission System
NGET	National Grid Electricity Transmission plc
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPS	National Policy Statement
NSIP	Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project
NTS	Non-Technical Summary
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
PA 2008	The Planning Act 2008
PEIR	Preliminary Environmental Information Report
PINS	The Planning Inspectorate
PV	Photovoltaic
PVDP	Photovolt Development Partners GmbH
SoCC	Statement of Community Consultation
SPV	Special Purpose Vehicle
VWHDC	Vale of White Horse District Council
WODC	West Oxfordshire District Council

Units

Unit	Description
ha	Hectares
km	Kilometres
m	Metres
MWe	Megawatt electrical

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Environmental Statement (ES) has been prepared to present the environmental assessment for the Botley West Solar Farm (Botley West), hereafter also referred to as the 'Project'. The document presents the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that has been undertaken for the Project, in accordance with the Planning Act 2008 (PA 2008) and the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the 'EIA Regulations').
- 1.1.2 The ES has been prepared by RPS for Photovolt Development Partners GmbH (PVDP), on behalf of SolarFive Ltd (the "Applicant").
- 1.1.3 The Project will comprise the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a photovoltaic (PV) solar farm and associated infrastructure with a total capacity exceeding 50 megawatts (MW)_R, in parts of West Oxfordshire, Cherwell and Vale of White Horse Districts. The Project will export electricity for connection to the National Grid at Botley West. October 2027 is the current grid connection offer date, although the Applicant and NGET are in discussions for this to be amended to the beginning Q4 2028. October 2028 is therefore now the assumed date of connection for the purposes of EIA assessment.
- 1.1.4 The Project is classed as a 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project' (NSIP) for the purposes of the PA 2008 and requires an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO). The application for development consent is being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), with the decision on whether to grant a DCO to be made by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (the Secretary of State), as required under the PA 2008.
- 1.1.5 The Project is also considered to be 'EIA development' as defined by the 'EIA Regulations', requiring EIA. Chapter 4 of the ES sets out the approach to EIA, and includes a table which highlights how the ES complies with Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations.
- 1.1.6 This introductory Chapter is followed by a description of:
- the Existing Baseline (Chapter 2) **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**;
 - the Consenting and Consultation Process (Chapter 3) **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**;
 - the Approach to Environmental Assessment (Chapter 4) **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**;
 - the Alternatives Considered (Chapter 5) **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**; and
 - the Project Description (Chapter 6) **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**.
- 1.1.7 The ES is also informed by the following technical assessment chapters, containing environmental information on the following topics:
- Historic Environment (Chapter 7) **[EN010147/APP/6.3]**;

- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Chapter 8) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Ecology and Nature Conservation (Chapter 9) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Hydrology and Flood Risk (Chapter 10) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Ground Conditions (Chapter 11) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Traffic and Transport (Chapter 12) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Noise and Vibration (Chapter 13) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Climate Change (Chapter 14) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Socio-economic (Chapter 15) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Human Health (Chapter 16) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Agricultural Land Use and Public Rights of Way (Chapter 17) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Waste and Resources (Chapter 18) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Air Quality (Chapter 19) [EN010147/APP/6.3];
- Cumulative Effects and Inter-relationships (Chapter 20) [EN010147/APP/6.3]; and
- Summary of Likely Significant Effects (Chapter 21) [EN010147/APP/6.3].

1.1.8 Technical appendices on Glint and Glare and Tree Protection are also provided, along with Figures in Volume 2 [EN010147/APP/6.4] and Appendices in Volume 3 [EN010147/APP/6.5], and a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) [EN010147/APP/6.2].

1.1.9 The likely significant effects for the Project have been studied systematically, in line with the EIA Regulations, the Scoping Opinion, appropriate methodologies and industry best practice, and informed by the statutory consultation stage. The baseline for the assessment has been derived from surveys and studies within and around the Site. This is explained further in Chapter 4: the Approach to Environmental Assessment, and in the methodology section of each technical assessment chapter.

1.2 Project Location

1.2.1 The Project will be located in the county of Oxfordshire, across an area of approximately 1,418 ha. The Project location extends from an area of land in the north, situated between the A4260 and the Dorn River Valley near Tackley and Wootton (the Northern Site), through a central section, situated broadly between Bladon and Cassington (the Central Site), and connecting to a section further south near to Farmoor Reservoir and north of Cumnor (the Southern Site), where the Project will connect to the National Grid transmission network. The name ‘Botley West’ is derived from the location of the grid connection point.

1.2.2 The Project lies within the administrative areas of Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council and Vale of White

Horse District Council. The majority of the Project lies within West Oxfordshire and overlaps with some of the Oxford Green Belt.

- 1.2.3 The Project Site Location and the Project Boundary Plan (representing the extent of the Order Limits) are shown in Volume 2, Figure 1.1 [EN010147/APP/6.4]. The Project Masterplan Overview, which provides a design layout with key parameters, is shown in Volume 2, Figure 1.2 [EN010147/APP/6.4]. The Existing Site Layout is shown in Volume 2, Figures 1.3A to 1.3G [EN010147/APP/6.4].
- 1.2.4 The area containing solar arrays will cover approximately 839 ha in total, unless the new NGET substation which the Project will connect into is delivered outside the Order Limits (see section 1.4 below), in which case the area of solar arrays will cover approximately 843 ha. The remainder of the Site within the Order Limits, but excluding the cable routes, comprises approximately 461ha. The Site will continue in its use for agriculture in the form of conservation grazing (including land under the solar arrays), and for other benefits including Biodiversity Net Gain, community food growing, surface water management, and improved public access.
- 1.2.5 The existing baseline for the Project, and a more detailed description of the locations of the proposed development work, are set out in further detail in Chapter 2: The Existing Baseline [EN010147/APP/6.3].

1.3 The Applicant

- 1.3.1 The Applicant and the proposed undertaker in the draft DCO [EN010147/APP/3.1] is SolarFive Ltd, an electricity generation licence holder under the Electricity Act 1989 and a company registered in England and Wales (company no. 12602740). SolarFive Ltd is the 'special purpose vehicle' (SPV) for the Project and currently has a grid connection offer date with National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) of October 2027.
- 1.3.2 SolarFive Ltd is jointly owned by the two founders of PVDP, a Berlin-based developer of solar farms. PVDP has been successfully developing solar assets in Europe and Japan for the last 18 years, with 1.0GW built to date. Further information on the Applicant's corporate structure is in the Funding Statement [EN010147/APP/4.2].
- 1.3.3 PVDP acts on behalf of SolarFive Ltd and, in liaison with its technical consultant team, has helped to prepare and submit the DCO application, including the ES.

1.4 Overview of the Project

- 1.4.1 The Project is formed of three areas of solar installation (Northern Site, Central Site and Southern Site) with interconnecting cables, which together would generate renewable power through photovoltaic (PV) panels. The Project aims to deliver approximately 840MWe of power to the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS), which would provide secure and clean energy of an equivalent level to meet the needs of approximately 330,000 homes.
- 1.4.2 The Project's solar arrays (comprising all the mounting structures, frames and foundations) will be connected by underground electrical cables within each

section of the Site, and via underground electric cables to the substation at the grid connection point. The interconnecting cable route will largely follow the public highway, but some parts will cross land controlled by the Applicant.

- 1.4.3 The interconnecting cables being proposed are approximately 24.6km in length. Approximately 14.6km is located on farmland; 7.5km is located in public highway; and approximately 2.5km within trenchless crossings, such as those located under rivers, the railway line, main highway corridors, or under hedgerow and tree belt features.
- 1.4.4 The consent being sought is a temporary one. It is anticipated that the Project will be constructed, operated and decommissioned within 42 years. At the end of this period all above ground infrastructure (excluding the NGET substation) and equipment will be removed, along with the cables beneath the main solar array areas, with the land reverting back to its previous agricultural use.
- 1.4.5 Cables located beneath the public highway or cables laid using horizontal directional drilling (HDD) are not, however, proposed to be removed following the decommissioning of the Project.
- 1.4.6 The approach that the Applicant has taken to its assessment is to define and describe the Project by reference to maximum (and where relevant, minimum) design parameters, commonly referred to as the 'Rochdale Envelope'. This approach is described further in Chapter 4: The Approach to Environmental Assessment, at Section 4.2 [EN010147/APP/6.3].
- 1.4.7 The Project will connect to the National Grid, via a new National Grid 400kV substation, to be located close to the existing National Grid 400kV power line, which runs between Cowley, in Oxford, westwards to Walham in Gloucestershire. Discussions have been ongoing with NGET regarding the location and design for their substation based on their own assessment and evaluation work. Whilst, at the time of writing this ES, a final decision has yet to be taken by NGET, it is likely that the NGET substation will be located in one of two possible locations;
1. On land within the Order Limits, at the Southern Site, at the western most extremity, south of the Farmoor Reservoir; or
 2. On land near and to the West of the Applicant's Southern Site, south of the Farmoor Reservoir.
- 1.4.8 For assessment purposes, the Applicant assumes that the NGET substation will be within the Site, as described in Option 1 above, and powers will be taken to consent that substation as part of the Applicant's DCO.
- 1.4.9 However, in the event of Option 2, the ES has also cumulatively assessed:
- a. an alternative location for the NGET substation close to the Southern Site at its western end, with NGET seeking consent via the Town and Country Planning Act 1990; and
 - b. the substitution of solar panels for the substation on the land referred to in Option 1 above.
- 1.4.10 The area to be set aside for the NGET substation amounts to between 2.3ha to 3.8 ha. Within that area it is assumed that the substation itself will occupy a

footprint of approximately 87m by 30m, with a likely maximum height of 12m, excluding connecting tower structures.

- 1.4.11 Chapter 6 of the ES: Project Description [EN010147/APP/6.3] sets out further details of the Project.

1.5 Consultation and Preliminary Environmental Information Report

- 1.5.1 The Applicant completed a first phase of informal consultation during November and December 2022, as set out in more detail in the Consultation Report [EN010147/APP/5.1].

- 1.5.2 In order to inform the scope of the EIA, the Applicant sought a Scoping Opinion from PINS (on behalf of the Secretary of State) on 15 June 2023. The Scoping Opinion was subsequently received on 24 July 2023 (this is provided as an Appendix to Chapter 4: see Appendix 4.1 of Volume 3 of [EN010147/APP/6.5]) and is reflected in the format and contents of this ES.

- 1.5.3 The Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) for the Project was published on 30 November 2023, and accompanied a statutory consultation period that ran between 30 November 2023 and the 8 February 2024. Under Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations, the Applicant prepared a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), in consultation with Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (the host authorities), setting out how the Applicant intended to publicise and consult on preliminary environmental information relating to the Project. More detail on the consultation process is set out in Chapter 3: Consenting and Consultation Process [EN010147/APP/6.3].

- 1.5.4 The PEIR also set out the proposed content, methodologies and key issues to be included within the EIA process and which informs this ES, being submitted with the DCO application.

- 1.5.5 The feedback and output from the statutory consultation process has been used to inform the evolving design for the project, and to set the 'design freeze' against which the EIA has been undertaken.

- 1.5.6 Subsequent to the PEIR, a targeted consultation was undertaken between 14 June and 28 July 2024. This targeted consultation focussed on changes to the redline as a result of further due diligence, engineering and feasibility work, transport and access considerations and scheme refinement. A further round of targeted consultation was then undertaken between 15 August and 15 September 2024. This targeted consultation was in respect of a single change only, a minor extension to the Order limits in a targeted area to include additional land around an established veteran tree. This design change added choice to the proposed cable corridor for the Applicant to avoid or minimise environmental effects upon the veteran tree.

1.6 Legislative and Planning Policy Context

- 1.6.1 The UK Government has legislated under the Climate Change Act 2008 to commit the country to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and to de-carbonising electricity by 2035. These commitments mean that the UK urgently needs more renewable forms of electricity to be produced. The reliance on fossil fuels as part of the UK’s energy mix will have to be displaced by cleaner and more secure sources of energy, resulting in greatly increased renewable electricity demand. Already, many conventional gas-fired power stations have closed and many of the older nuclear power stations will no longer be generating to support the nation’s energy needs. The Project’s anticipated generation output will be vitally important if the Government’s commitments are to succeed, significantly helping to deliver the transition to net zero.
- 1.6.2 The Project is defined as an NSIP under paragraph 14(1)(a) and 15(2) of the PA 2008, which defines an NSIP as including the construction of an onshore generating station exceeding 50MWe in England.
- 1.6.3 The PA 2008 provides that the Secretary of State is responsible for determining the application for a DCO, with the power to appoint the Planning Inspectorate to manage and examine the Application (referred to as the ‘Examining Authority’). In its role, the Examining Authority will examine the Application and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State, who will then decide whether to grant a DCO for the Project.
- 1.6.4 The statutory framework for determining applications seeking development consent is provided by the PA 2008.
- 1.6.5 Section 104 (2) of the Act states that:
- (2) “In deciding the application, the Secretary of State must have regard to —*
- a) any national policy statement which has effect in relation to development of the description to which the application relates (a “relevant national policy statement”),*
 - b) any local impact report (within the meaning given by section 60(3)) submitted to the Commission before the deadline specified in a notice under section 60(2),*
 - c) any matters prescribed in relation to development of the description to which the application relates, and*
 - d) other matters which the Secretary of State thinks are both important and relevant to its decision.”*
- 1.6.6 The Secretary of State is therefore required to have regard to any relevant National Policy Statement (NPS), amongst other matters, when deciding whether or not to grant a DCO.
- 1.6.7 The Overarching NPS for Energy (EN-1), the NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) and the NPS for Electricity Networks (EN-5) form the relevant NPSs with respect to the Project. As NPS EN-3 Renewable Energy includes specific policy relating to solar generating stations, including ground

mounted solar projects, these policy documents have been taken into account in this ES.

1.6.8 The other matters which the Secretary of State must have regard to include Local Impact Reports, prescribed matters, and any matters which the Secretary of State considers are both ‘important and relevant’ to their decision.

1.6.9 A DCO, if granted, has the effect of providing consent for development, in addition to a range of other consents and authorisations, where specified, as well as removing the need for some consents (such as planning permission). Section 115 of the PA 2008 also states that a DCO can include consent for ‘associated development’, which is development that is not an NSIP in its own right but is functionally related to the NSIP. This may be development that supports the construction, operation or decommissioning of the NSIP; which helps to address the impacts of the NSIP; or is of a type normally brought forward with the NSIP.

1.6.10 The Consenting Process is further explained in Chapter 3 [EN010147/APP/6.3].

National and Local Planning Policy

National Policy Statements

1.6.11 The application, including the EIA, has considered the NPS) that will be important and relevant to the Secretary of State’s decision as to whether to grant a DCO for the Project.

1.6.12 The NPSs set out the Government’s policy for the delivery of energy infrastructure, providing the policy framework for planning decisions. The current suite of designated NPS were published in November 2023 and designated in January 2024.

1.6.13 The designated energy NPSs comprise the overarching NPS for Energy (EN-1) alongside technology-specific NPS (EN-2 to EN-5). The EIA has been undertaken with reference to the following:

- EN-1: Overarching NPS for Energy;
- EN-3: NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure; and
- EN-5: NPS for Electricity Networks Infrastructure.

1.6.14 EN-1 sets out the ‘need case’ for energy infrastructure projects, and planning guidance on assessment criteria that are common across a number of technologies. EN-5 refers to the need case in EN-1 and includes planning guidance on the assessment of technology specific criteria.

1.6.15 EN-3 emphasises the central role that solar will play in decarbonising the energy sector. The scale of such proposals and their impacts are also recognised.

National Planning Policy Framework

1.6.16 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in 2012 and revised most recently in December 2023, sets out the Government’s planning

policies for England and how these are to be applied, supported by the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). Under the new Government elected in May 2024, a consultation on proposed amendments to the NPPF will close on 24 September 2024.

1.6.17 NPPF paragraph 5 sets out that an NSIP will be determined in accordance with NPSs. However, paragraph 5 goes on to confirm that the NPPF may be a matter that is both important and relevant for the purposes of assessing DCO applications. It reads;

“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). National policy statements form part of the overall framework of national planning policy, and may be a material consideration in preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications.”

1.6.18 The EIA for the Project has therefore had regard to the relevant policies of the NPPF as part of the overall framework of national policy relevant to solar development. A detailed analysis of the relevant considerations arising from the NPS and the NPPF is provided, for each environmental topic and the cumulative effects, in Chapters 7 to 20 of the ES [EN010147/APP/6.3].

Local Planning Policy

1.6.19 Whilst the NPS are the primary consideration in deciding DCO applications, local Development Plans are also frequently considered as important and relevant matters. District and County Planning Policy, comprising adopted and relevant emerging Development Plans, have been considered in assessing the proposals for the Project. Local Planning Policy will also influence the content of local impact reports, which the relevant host authorities will produce following submission of this application.

1.6.20 The Project lies within the administrative areas of Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. The adopted Development Plans relevant to the Project area comprise the following;

- West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, adopted in 2018;
 - Including the ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plans for Woodstock (2023), Eynsham (2020) and Cassington (2023);
- Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) including saved policies from the Cherwell Local Plan 1996, and its Partial Review, adopted in 2020;
- Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Parts 1 and 2;
 - Including the ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plan for Cumnor (2021); and
- The Oxfordshire Minerals & Waste Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (2017) and saved policies of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (1996).

- 1.6.21 The Applicant has had regard to relevant policy in compiling this ES. Each technical chapter contains a summary of the relevant Local Development Plan policies for each of the technical disciplines.
- 1.6.22 However, the ES does not assess the accordence of the Project with planning policy. This has been undertaken separately and the Applicant has produced a stand-alone Planning Supporting Statement [EN010147/APP/7.1], which sets out key policy considerations, including relevant policy and strategies at national level, assesses the Project against these and the merits of the Project itself, and draws a planning balance and conclusions on the extent to which the Project complies with policy. This policy context is also referred to further in Chapter 5: Alternatives Considered [EN010147/APP/6.3].
- 1.6.23 Regulation 4(4) of the EIA Regulations requires that the ES is prepared by competent experts and must be accompanied by a statement from the Applicant outlining the relevant expertise or qualifications of such experts. This is provided as Appendix 1.2 to this Chapter, see Volume 3 [EN010147/APP/6.5] and is discussed further in Chapter 4: Approach to Environmental Assessment [EN010147/APP/6.3].

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