



Meeting note

Project name	Botley West Solar
File reference	N/A
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	19 October 2022
Meeting with	Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP)
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 Applicant

The Applicant explained that it has had 1000 MW of energy generation connected to date and has been delivering solar power station projects for 18 years.

The project team includes:

- Photovolt Development Partners
- RPS
- Pinsent Masons
- Counter Context

Details of the proposed development

The Botley West Farm site covers approximately 1350 hectares of land, which has been leased from five landowners. Approximately 1000 hectares would be covered by the solar installation.

The three main development areas cover the areas of Cherwell District (North), West Oxfordshire (Middle) and The Vale of White Horse and District (South) and are connected by an underground cable. There is a connection agreement with National Grid (NG) for 2026, to export 840MW to the grid via a new substation that NG will be building beneath the 400kV overhead lines at Botley West.

The majority of the project sits within the West Oxfordshire district. The Applicant is dealing with some constraints to the East of Oakfield Industrial Estate and therefore are still exploring the most appropriate route connection for this section.

The Applicant is proposing to use buffer zones of at least 10 metres from sensitive receptors and 15 metres from ancient woodland.

The Applicant has had a high-level conversation with the Oxford City council regarding the project. The Applicant explained that if NG locates the substation within the Botley West Solar site, the Applicant will have to review the current red line boundary of the project.

The Inspectorate recommended that the Applicant reviews a technical guide provided for the Little Crow project which covers Power generation storage, maintenance and decommissioning.

The Applicant stated that they understand that substation application by National Grid will be consented through TCPA. The application has not been submitted for this yet, but the Applicant has a meeting with NG soon to get further information on their programme.

The Applicant does not think they will need to seek Compulsorily Acquisition (CA) powers but will defer to the advice of Pinsent Masons, if they recommend seeking them as a precautionary measure.

The Applicant is due to engage with the Highway Authority to discuss the laying of cable under relevant stretches of the highway. The Applicant has not at this stage considered whether any cables buried at the end of the project, will be removed or left in the ground. The Inspectorate recommended that the Applicant gives consideration to decommissioning.

Consenting programme

Autumn 2022

- Stage 1 community consultation (non-statutory)

Early 2023

- Scoping Report submission to the Planning Inspectorate

December 2022 Early 2023

- Consultation with Local Authorities (LA's) on draft statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)

Spring/early summer 2023

- Consultation on Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)
- Stage 2 community consultation (S47 statutory consultation)
- S42/S44 consultation

- Formal S48 notifications

Autumn/Winter 2023

- Submission of Development Consent Order application

Environmental Impact Assessment

The Applicant noted a number of constraints to the proposed development including proximity to the World Heritage Site at Blenheim Palace and to the River Evenlode. It was highlighted that enhancements to the River Corridor may be possible as part of the development proposals.

The Applicant advised that a full suite of scoping topics are currently being assessed and outlined its proposed survey approach and issues arising in relation to:

- Agriculture: The Applicant will conduct auger boring tests to determine agricultural land grade in early 2023. The Inspectorate advised that clear survey information is important for any NSIP application. Additionally, the Inspectorate highlighted the importance of identifying present agricultural land use for comparison with any agricultural land use during the operational life of the project. The Applicant noted that it was considering grazing sheep and other small livestock on site. The Applicant stated that it will also provide details regarding how the project will impact/contribute to food production.
- Arboriculture: The Applicant is proposing a targeted approach. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to be aware of risk to species that may using the hedgerow corridor.
- Underground archaeology: The Applicant explained that it will take a proportional approach to archaeology evaluation but was keen not to be tied to a blanket 4% trial trenching exercise before submission. The Inspectorate responded to state that it was supportive of proportionate approaches but that these should be agreed with local archaeological officers and be justified through geophysical survey results.

Flood risk: The Applicant is assessing flood risk and is in the process of completing modelling work in flood zone two. The Applicant has avoided development within flood zone three. The Inspectorate highlighted the importance of demonstrating that a sequential approach has been adopted when designing the layout of the solar arrays.

Consultation and Land

To date, the Applicant has engaged with landowners, including The Blenheim Estate, Merton College and Denman. The Applicant has also engaged with Local Authorities including Oxfordshire County, Cherwell District, Vale of White House District and West Oxfordshire District.

The Applicant is yet to meet with Officers, Parishes or MP's but is planning to do so and is still to commence non-statutory and then statutory consultation. The Applicant is reaching out to a consultation area of 22,000 homes and all local host authorities, prior to the project going public.

The Inspectorate queried whether there is any Crown Land involved in the proposed development. The Applicant is not aware of any Crown Land issues.

There are a number of public rights of way that run through the site and the Applicant is considering security of the site but aims to keep access as free as possible. The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant needs to be aware of public privacy with any CCTV.

The Inspectorate queried whether fixed or tracking panels will be used. The Applicant advised that they intend to use fixed panels.

In regard to the topography of the land, the Applicant advised that the land is relatively flat, undulating and surrounded by hedgerows and trees.

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant needs to be very clear in their documentation whether any additional development options are still perusable (such as expanding the highway boundary) during consultation.

The Inspectorate advised that encouraging a combined response and engagement with LA's, perhaps through a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) may be beneficial to the Applicant.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant on the details regarding draft documentation and advised that they would need six to eight weeks to review them. It would also be helpful to provide specific points for review.

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant will be sent an email requesting project information following the Inception Meeting and requested that the information is provided promptly to enable creation of the website project page.

The Inspectorate and the Applicant agreed to arrange the next update meeting in November 2022.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The agreement of a date for the next update meeting.
- The Applicant to explore the possibility of delaying scoping to Janua

