



Meeting note

Project name	Botley West Solar Farm
File reference	EN010145
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	13 September 2023
Meeting with	Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) on behalf of SolarFive (“the Applicant”)
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project update 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.

Update on project description (approach to provision of electricity infrastructure and design parameters etc)

The Applicant confirmed that the project description had not altered since scoping, and it was continuing to develop a set of design parameters on which the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) would be based. In response to the comments raised in the Scoping Opinion, the Applicant confirmed that the Project does not include battery storage.

The Applicant reported that it had entered into an agreement with National Grid (NG) regarding the connection to the NG substation, which was anticipated to take place in October 2027. Due to the rapid developments in solar technology, the Applicant was not seeking to set a maximum output on the project, which was the approach recently taken on the Longfield solar project. However, the Applicant explained that it would be including a maximum parameter, secured by a Development Consent Order (DCO) requirement, to limit the area occupied by solar panels; should the substation be located off-site and extra panels located in place of the substation within the red line boundary, this would be accounted for in the requirement, and is also taken into account in the connection agreement.

Optionality for the location of the NG substation was confirmed to remain at present, and the Applicant was continuing to engage with NG about this matter.



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The Applicant explained that the detailed design for the project would not fall to be considered as part of the DCO application. The Applicant's draft DCO would include a requirement for this matter to be submitted to, and agreed in writing by, the relevant local authority(ies) (LA) prior to development commencing. Whilst the Applicant had been engaging in regular discussions with LAs, including for the provision of Planning Performance Agreements (PPA), this requirement had not been finalised with LAs yet.

Approach to consideration of alternatives

The Applicant confirmed it would be including a section about consideration of alternatives within the PEIR. The Inspectorate advised looking at similar recent projects to see how alternatives were addressed for those projects. Areas should be considered in relation to the infrastructure and location of the site, to show that the impact on the environment has been kept to a minimum.

The Applicant was considering options such as different routes for cables and river crossing points.

Project programme: the PEIR, consultation, Environmental Statement, and time to be allowed for Pre-examination

The Applicant envisaged submitting the DCO application in April 2024 and was planning to publish the PEIR and commence statutory consultation in late October 2023, for a period of eight weeks, with public consultation events during November. The feedback would then be used to refine the Proposed Development further.

As discussed in the project's inception meeting, the Applicant confirmed it was aware of the Inspectorate's draft document review service and the associated timescales. It was likely the Applicant would be submitting draft documents for review ahead of the DCO application submission, and it was agreed that timescales would be discussed at subsequent meetings.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant of the Early Adopters Project (EAP) trial, which the Inspectorate is running, to help develop a new enhanced pre-application advice service. A key component of the EAP is reviewing Design Approach Documents (DAD). Whilst this project is not one partaking in the EAP, given its scale and location, the Inspectorate advised the Applicant to consider submitting its DAD, or an equivalent document, as part of the draft document review service.

The Applicant enquired about the likely length of the Pre-examination stage. The Inspectorate explained that this was usually three to four months but could depend on a number of factors such as whether any advice is issued to the Applicant under section 51 of the PA2008 to update documents during the Pre-examination period, and the timing of the Applicant opening the Relevant Representations period. The Inspectorate confirmed that it was not seeking to unnecessarily prolong the Pre-examination period for any project.



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Emerging policy: draft National Policy Statements (dNPS) and approach to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

The Applicant explained that it was currently working on the BNG metric and queried when the BNG calculations should take place. The Inspectorate explained that this was a matter that the Applicant should pursue with Natural England.

Other matters

The Inspectorate advised that the development on the green belt, and the very special circumstances which the Applicant considered relevant, must be clearly addressed in the application and was likely to be a key examination matter.

The Inspectorate summarised some concerns received from the public, which will shortly be published on the Inspectorate's project webpage. The Inspectorate suggested that the Applicant address these matters, either during the statutory consultation or in the form of a community newsletter. The Inspectorate also encouraged the Applicant to engage with local action groups. The Applicant confirmed that it would address these matters, and is keen to receive community and stakeholder feedback on design features and planning issues, and therefore intend to focus the consultation on these topics to ensure it is meaningful.

The Inspectorate requested an update on Compulsory Acquisition (CA), including progress on discussions with the Blenheim Estate, during the next meeting.