

Meeting note

Project name	Springwell Solar Farm
File reference	EN010149
Status	FINAL
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	13 March 2024
Meeting with	Springwell Energy Farm Limited
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project Update Meeting
Circulation	All attendees/additional contacts to share meeting note

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.

Stakeholder meetings

The Applicant updated the Inspectorate on their progress with s47 Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) Statutory Consultation. The consultation process is not entirely completed due to cable routing and related further identified land interests. The consultation is extended to capture feedback in relation to these interests.

The Applicant sent letters to local homes and business, hosted six consultation events, arranged statutory advertising in local and national newspapers and engaged in targeted social media advertising. The Applicant received 247 responses to consultation:

- 198 responses from the local community
- Seventeen from those with land interests
- Thirty-two responses from statutory consultees

The Applicant explained it is in the process of analysing common themes within the feedback and advised that there is broad agreement with relevant local authorities and that it had acted upon a local authority request to host an additional event focusing on the National Grid substation.

The Applicant noted that a key theme arising from consultation is flood risk in the Scopwick (East Springwell) area and the Inspectorate asked if this feedback is from community respondents or statutory consultees. The Applicant confirmed this theme was raised by community respondents owing to recent bad weather this area had flooded. The Inspectorate notes that one key theme arising from feedback is fire risk

and drew the Applicant's attention to another solar park application for which the relevant local authority has rejected the detailed Battery Safety Management Plan.

Surveys

The Applicant outlined engagement with stakeholders. The Applicant is holding further meetings with North Kesteven District Council to discuss landscaping mitigation measures and understand discussions are moving forward positively. The Applicant advised adverse weather had delayed some surveys. Noise and air quality baseline monitoring and modelling is complete.

Cultural heritage

With regards to cultural heritage, the Applicant confirmed that they had agreed with Lincolnshire County Council on the Written Scheme of Investigation for the archaeological surveys but remained unable to agree the extent of the trial trenching. The Applicant has completed most full geophysical surveys for all but the grid corridor. The Applicant confirmed that the extent of the trial trenching covered is not as large as requested by Lincolnshire County Council but is considered by the Applicant to be proportionate.

Biodiversity

The Applicant is in discussion with stakeholders, including Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, regarding biodiversity issues. The Applicant is aware of potential plans for convening a forum for regional approaches to biodiversity for solar projects for which it is anticipated that Solar Energy UK may take a leading role and is participating in the process. The Inspectorate asked the Applicant if they are aware of the programme for developing the forum and regional approaches and how this would align with the project programme. The Applicant confirmed this is at a conceptual stage. The Inspectorate noted the potential challenges for the Applicant in attempting to incorporate any regional/strategic approaches so late in their project programme and highlighted the associated risks at examination stage. The Inspectorate encouraged ongoing engagement with the forum as it develops.

The Applicant confirmed that breeding bird surveys were complete, and it has been agreed with North Kesteven District Council and Natural England that the Wintering Bird surveys conducted in November 2023, December 2023 and January 2024 are sufficient and no further surveys are required.

Surveys yet to be completed include:

- Hedgerow surveys
- Bat emergence surveys
- Arable weed surveys
- Water vole and otter surveys (should any watercourses be impacted)

Agricultural land

The Applicant confirmed that Agricultural land surveys are complete with the exception of the grid cable corridor.

Traffic and transport

With regards to traffic and transport, the Applicant has identified some required junction improvements and has been engaging with Parish Councils in relation to Public Rights of Way (PRoW) enhancements.

Water

The Applicant confirmed that they are liaising with all relevant bodies with regards to water and flood risk management. A key topic being discussed is Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) firewater strategy.

Glint and glare

The Applicant has been liaising with Network Rail to discuss glint and glare despite there being no initial concerns identified. In addition, the Applicant has been in consultation with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) due to the proximity of RAF Digby to the proposed development. This airfield is not active, and no initial concerns have been identified, however the Applicant seeks to maintain ongoing engagement.

DCO submission design updates

The Applicant presented a consultation plan that includes areas for solar, areas for battery storage and mitigation measures. The grid connection corridor will be located to the Northwest with an option for battery storage at the southern end of the site. The current design is approximately 1,450 hectares (ha) with a solar photovoltaic (PV) area of approximately 700 ha.

The Applicant is putting in place design updates where it believes them to be most appropriate and effective. The greatest proportion of mitigation land is to the west of the site where land is drier, arable land and aligns with the location of existing bird species of interest. The Applicant is prioritising lower grade agricultural land in its design and is integrating an amenity and recreation strategy that includes new paths with further routes being considered following consultation feedback. Further, tree belt planting and hedgerow reinforcement and new hedgerows will provide screening and habitat.

Project Programme

- Design Freeze April 2024
- Planning Inspectorate Document Review July 2024
- Development Consent Order (DCO) submission Quarter 3 2024

The Inspectorate advised with regards to how long the draft documents review can take depends on what type and scale of documents submitted. A typical review can take between 6-8 weeks. The Applicant should factor this time scale into their

programming and ensure that documents are as complete as possible to get the most from the document review process.

The Applicant stated that the final list of documents that may be submitted has not yet been agreed, however it is thought that key documents to be included is the early chapters of the Environmental Statement (ES), Land Plans, draft DCO (dDCO) front end of the Book of Reference and the front end of consultation report. The Applicant will confirm this list in due course.

The Planning Inspectorate advised the Statement of Reasons, Project Description Chapter of the ES, and any information to inform the Habitat Regulations Assessment would be useful to have reviewed. The Planning Inspectorate confirmed it could accommodate a July review.

The Inspectorate confirmed it could hold a post document review meeting potentially at the end of August / early September to discuss feedback.