



## Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	Beacon Fen Energy Park
<b>File reference</b>	EN010151
<b>Status</b>	<b>Draft</b>
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	16 March 2023
<b>Meeting with</b>	Low Carbon
<b>Venue</b>	Microsoft Teams
<b>Meeting objectives</b>	Inception Meeting
<b>Circulation</b>	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.

### Overview of the Project

Low Carbon ('The Applicant') gave a brief introduction to the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development could provide more than 190,000 homes with renewable energy, saving 120,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions every year. The site of the Proposed Development comprises two distinct solar array areas, together comprising some 1,000 hectares.

The Applicant explained that the solar array panels would be able to generate around 600 MW in capacity and the battery energy storage system would also have a similar capacity. The Applicant shared an illustration demonstrating the location of the solar farm. The two main sites are located within North Kesteven District Council with the cable route corridor running through the administrative boundaries of North Kesteven District Council and Boston Borough Council and a small area within South Holland District Council.

The Proposed Development will connect to the existing Bicker Fen National Grid 400kV substation.

### Environmental Context

The Applicant stated it has carried out some baseline surveys including desktop and some field ecological surveys. It is currently looking at the key constraints relating to the cable corridor. The Applicant also confirmed it has completed a provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey.

The Applicant has initially identified that archaeological matters are likely to be a key consideration. The Applicant illustrated the location of the solar farm to The Inspectorate and explained where housing and listed buildings were in relation to the Proposed Development site. The Applicant also identified the receptors which could be affected by any noise and visual impact in the proximity of the Proposed Development. The Applicant

also explained that very few existing public rights of way (PRoW) would be affected by the Proposed Development.

The Applicant described that the landscape is generally quite flat with manmade drainage systems on the north main site, however, the southern main site is more undulating. The Applicant also described that there are not many hedgerows and trees in the area as most of the land is separated mostly by ditches. The Applicant explained that it is in the process of examining this area further to get a better understanding of where the Proposed Development may be visible from and is also in the process of refining the proposed cable corridor whilst continuing with field survey work.

### **Proposed Development**

The Applicant explained that the solar panels will be up to 4.5m in height and that there will be fencing around the perimeter of the site along with CCTV for security. The Applicant also stated that the hedgerows will be improved and new or modified accesses to the land will be constructed. It was suggested that underground cables would be preferred but at EIA scoping stage the possibility of overhead power lines is being kept open, pending environmental assessment and land-based surveys.

### **Policy**

The Applicant confirmed that it will be reviewing the revised draft Energy National Policy Statements (NPS) once these are published.

### **EIA Scoping**

The Applicant stated that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would be undertaken in accordance with the 2017 Regulations.

The Applicant explained that it is in the process of preparing the Scoping Report which will include background details on the proposals; requirement for EIA; policy context; solar array sites; cable search area; and statement of expertise. The EIA will outline the adopted approaches to the assessment of impacts. The Applicant anticipates submitting its Scoping Request in April 2023.

The Inspectorate encouraged the Applicant to look at other Environmental Statements and Scoping Opinions for other proposed solar developments in the area for guidance and to speak to Lincolnshire County Council regarding the methodology for archaeological investigation. The Inspectorate also advised the Applicant to be clear in its scoping as to where these discussions could be found and whether an agreement has been reached with the level of surveying to be carried out.

### **Consultation**

The Applicant explained that it is in discussions with local authority planning officers to introduce the project and the timings/methodologies for the non-statutory consultation planned for late April – May 2023. Statutory consultation is planned for October 2023. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to avoid, if possible, carrying out its consultations during the Scoping period. The Inspectorate will be seeking stakeholder views during the Scoping process and therefore multiple consultations running in parallel could lead to confusion for parties. The Applicant agreed to consider this advice, accordingly, explaining its intention to adopt clear messaging in its consultation to minimise the risk of confusion if the timings overlap.

### **Indicative Programme**

The Applicant provided its indicative programme which is subject to discussions with local authority planning officers:

- EIA scoping in April 2023
- Stage 1 non-statutory consultation April – May 2023
- Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) preparation in early June to early September 2023
- Stage 2 Statutory consultation in October 2023
- Application submission late February 2024

The Applicant suggested it is considering the submission of draft documents to the Inspectorate ahead of the application submission. The Inspectorate advised it is likely to require a six-week review period. The Applicant should ensure that sufficient time is available in its programme to review the feedback prior to the submission of the application.

The Inspectorate advised The Applicant that the Easter bank holidays are taken into consideration for the non-statutory consultation.

## **AOB**

The Applicant enquired about the upcoming changes by DLUHC to allow for faster determination/examination of certain NSIP projects. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to inform the Inspectorate if it wishes to be considered as such a project and the Inspectorate would inform its NSIP reform team, who may discuss this matter with DLUHC.

The Inspectorate advised that it send a project information document to the Applicant to set up a project page on its website. **Post Meeting Note:** this has been done and the project page has now been launched.