



Meeting note

Project name	Dean Moor Solar Farm
File reference	<ref>
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	9 February 2023
Meeting with	Firma Energy Ltd and Ib Vogt UK Ltd
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	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.

Introductions

The Applicant introduced itself as a joint venture between Ib Vogt and Firma Energy. The Applicant also introduced the rest of its team, including Barton Willmore (now Stantec), which would be providing the planning and environment support, BDB Pitmans, which would be providing legal advice, Alpaca Communications, which would be providing consultation assistance and Ardent Management, which would be managing the Book of Reference.

Project overview

The Applicant provided an overview of the project, explaining that the project would include solar arrays and battery storage, currently considering an export capacity of approximately 150MW. The Applicant explained that the development would connect to the existing electricity grid through a new substation, establishing a new point of connection on the site, and would be in place for around 40 years.

The Inspectorate queried whether the project had changed names. The Applicant explained that the original name was Rigg House but that they had decided on Dean Moor Solar Farm as the name that the application would be progressed under.

The Applicant described the project design although explained that this was in its very early stages and subject to change. Nevertheless, the Applicant set out that fixed position solar

panels would be used with a new substation constructed that would connect to an existing overhead line running through the site. The Applicant explained that a 100MW battery energy storage system would be included in the project.

Site

The Applicant described the location of the site and explained that it was in West Cumbria, near to the Lake District National Park. The Applicant explained that the existing local authorities would be merging into the Cumberland Council Unitary Authority in April 2023.

The Applicant described the site itself and explained that it consisted of primarily agricultural land. The Applicant explained that there is an existing post 1988 Agricultural Land Classification survey of the site, indicating primarily Grade 4 land with some Grade 3b and Grade 5. The Applicant also noted that there was some Ancient Woodland and a Scheduled Monument adjacent to the site but no other statutory designations within the site.

The Applicant set out potential additional land north of the site that may be included in the application, to ensure the project would maintain economic viability should some of the main site be unsuitable. The Applicant explained that the additional land consisted of existing wind turbines, woodland and agricultural land.

Environmental Impact Assessment

The Applicant provided an overview of EIA matters and explained that it was beginning preliminary surveys for topography, heritage, ecology, landscape and ground conditions. The Applicant also explained that the request for EIA Scoping Opinion should be issued in spring 2023. The Inspectorate queried the additional land and when the Applicant would know the boundaries for scoping. The Applicant explained that there was an ongoing process to understand whether the additional land would be needed. The Inspectorate explained that having set boundaries prior to scoping would be beneficial.

The Inspectorate queried whether the Applicant foresaw any issues gaining access for surveys. The Applicant explained that the main site was owned by one landowner who it has a relationship with and that they did not expect issues with access.

Consultation

The Applicant set out the approach to consultation as doing a full programme of engagement with the community.

The Applicant explained that it was arranging an introductory meeting with Cumberland Council but was holding off while the integration with Allerdale District Council is developing. The Applicant suggested it was considering whether a planning performance agreement might be useful.

The Inspectorate queried the Applicant's plans regarding statutory consultees, including the Environment Agency and Historic England. The Applicant explained that it planned to engage with these bodies as soon as they have availability. The Applicant also outlined that it was in the process of setting up with the local planning authority and building in any further

consultees. The Inspectorate asked if the Lake District National Park Authority had been spoken to. The Applicant confirmed that it intended to do so.

Compulsory acquisition and crown land

The Applicant explained that the main site is all within the ownership of a single landowner and it does not envisage the need for compulsory acquisition of land and that there is no crown land present.

The Inspectorate queried whether a Book of Reference would be completed due to people using the land. The Applicant explained they will consider whether a BoR will go ahead and will know about third party rights soon.

Project timeline

The Applicant set out its anticipated timeline, with submission in summer 2024. The Inspectorate requested to be kept up to date on expected timescales and to provide a more detailed timeline. The Inspectorate also advised that having a longer and effective Pre-application stage can reduce the burden on Pre-examination and Examination stages.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The Applicant to update the Inspectorate in terms of red line boundary.
- The Applicant to keep the Inspectorate up to date on expected timescales of the project.