

Meeting note

Project name	Dean Moor Solar Farm
File reference	EN010155
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	12 October 2023
Meeting with	FVS Dean Moor
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.

Environmental Constraints

The Applicant gave an overview of the West Cumbria based project, including the project's potential production of 150 megawatts (MW) with a 100MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).

As the area is topographically distinct, the Applicant discussed that it is focussing solar infrastructure in areas that are less visible. There are plans to retain an area around the solar farm for sheep farming and maintenance purposes. The Applicant gave an outline of the site's environmental constraints including a statutory heritage designation which is a scheduled ancient monument, a country wildlife site and British Geological Society (BGS) records which indicate that peat is present on site. The site is surrounded by ancient woodland and the Applicant plans to include a buffer to minimise potential impacts on that.

Project Programme

The Applicant informed the Inspectorate of their target project timeline:

- Non-statutory consultation – 3 October to 3 November 2023
- 6-week Statutory Consultation period, including Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) – February 2024
- DCO application submission – October 2024

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant, if it intends to seek a draft document review, to allow six to eight weeks for this, and to leave sufficient time between receiving draft document feedback and submission of the application for comments to be addressed.

Consultation and Engagement

Consultation methods include a letter to nearby residents, project websites (the Applicant's website and the Inspectorate's website), public consultation events and correspondence with Parish Councillors.

The Applicant detailed engagement with various stakeholders including:

- **Cumberland Council:** agreed landscape viewpoints, plans to meet to discuss Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scope following the Scoping Opinion and engagement with county archaeologist;
- **Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFA):** meeting to discuss approach to drainage design;
- **Lake District National Park Authority;** agreed landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) viewpoints;
- **Environmental Agency (EA):** planning a meeting following LLFA engagement;
- **Highways England:** pre-scoping engagement;
- **Natural England:** ongoing engagement with ecologists;
- **Fire Service:** planned engagement on BESS safety/design; and
- **National Highways – Historic Rail Estate:** planned engagement on historic rail bridge.

EIA Scoping

The Applicant explored points raised in the Scoping Opinion, including topics to scope in and scope out of the Environmental Statement (ES). The Applicant explained that some of the topics that are scoped out will be included as standalone reports appended in the introductory sections of the ES (traffic and transport, air quality, glint and glare, noise and vibration).

The Applicant noted that in the Scoping Opinion the Inspectorate refused to scope out construction noise impacts due to a lack of information about construction techniques. The Applicant provided reassurance it will be able to provide sufficient information in the PEIR, factoring it in to the 'Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment'. The Inspectorate advised to provide an explanation and rationale of where a topic has been scoped out and why it is not included in the ES.

The Applicant intends to include the consideration of soils within the 'Ground Conditions' chapter alongside an Outline Soil Management Plan, in response to comments in the Scoping Opinion requesting to scope this matter in. An assessment of impacts to ground conditions will be scoped into the ES as a chapter, with a minerals assessment as a supporting appendix. The Applicant plans to liaise with Cumberland Council as the Local Planning Authority to agree the approach.

The Applicant will consider potential water quality impacts on designated ecological sites in the 'Biodiversity' chapter in response to the Scoping Opinion and will seek agreement with the LLFA to justify scoping 'Water Environment' out of the ES. If scoped out, a Flood Risk Assessment and outline Surface Water Drainage Strategy will still be included as appendices to the introductory section of the ES.

As operational lighting will be motion activated and not permanently on during operation, the Applicant considers the effects not to be significant and any mitigation measures will be included in the ES.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to present tables in the ES to detail how the comments in the Scoping Opinion had been addressed and signpost to where the material is presented.

The Applicant confirmed that it will agree the cumulative schemes to be assessed in the ES with Cumberland Council.

AOB

The Applicant enquired about the status of the draft National Policy Statements (dNPS) and the Inspectorate confirmed that it was not aware of current timescales for designation of the dNPS suite.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- Another project update meeting will be arranged to update the Inspectorate on feedback to upcoming engagement including non-statutory and statutory consultation.
- The Inspectorate recommended that the Applicant consider best practice from recent examinations of other solar DCOs by looking at previous Examining Authority (ExA) questions for useful information and common issues raised.