

Meeting note

Project name	Stone Pit Lane Solar Park
File reference	
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	24 April 2023
Meeting with	Elgin Energy and Pegasus Group
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project 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 Applicant

The Applicant, Elgin Energy, gave a brief introduction to its organisation. Founded in 2009, Elgin Energy is a full-service, utility scale solar and storage developer that has experience delivering projects from their conception through to their operation and management. The organisation has close to 70 employees across three global offices (UK, Ireland, Australia). Pegasus Group, who form part of the Project Team, also introduced themselves.

Introduction to the Project

Stone Pit Lane Solar Park (the proposed Project) would be located on a site that covers around 428 hectares (approximately 1,000 acres) in Lincolnshire. The Project would have an export capacity in the region of 150MW with a further capacity of 150MW in battery storage, with planned connection into Grimsby West substation. The proposed site is held by a single landowner. The Applicant is not anticipating any difficulties in obtaining permission for survey work at present.

The Inspectorate enquired whether it had been decided where battery storage would be located within the proposed site. The Applicant responded that it was flexible to the point of the environmental constraints of the site, which were being explored through environmental surveys, confirming that a preferred location for battery storage is likely to be indicated in scoping but may be subject to change.

The Inspectorate queried whether there was any Special Category Land or relevant land designations that had been encountered at the site. The Applicant is aware of

the host authority's Local Development Plan Policy pertaining to locations of high-quality landscapes that would apply to the southern section of the site, as well as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the south, outside of the site boundary. The Applicant also acknowledged some areas within the site may have important heritage issues, which would be considered in the design of the Project.

Cable Routes

The Project would involve a connection to the existing West Grimsby substation, which is under the ownership of National Grid and the Northern Power Grid. National Grid has confirmed capacity and potential timescales for connection at the substation. The Applicant stated there are some remaining technical details which, when confirmed, will allow the further refinement of the Project's design.

Several assessments, including ecological and technical surveys, have been undertaken to determine the most suitable cable route. The Applicant stated there are 'five' potential cable routes but has identified 'two' preferred routes, which would be located along existing public highways and would form part of its Feasibility Statement.

Regarding its two preferred cable route options, the Applicant stated the Project did not include Special Category Land and is not anticipating a need for Compulsory Acquisition at this time, although investigative work is ongoing on land matters. For the preferred routes, construction areas would likely be located on highway land, rather than third party land. The Applicant acknowledged this could be subject to change as the Project progresses and if other cable route options are pursued.

Environmental Surveys and Scoping

The Applicant covered a range of environmental surveys that had been undertaken at this site to date, and explained it is currently preparing baseline data. This included a soil survey which concluded that the site was split between grade 2, grade 3a and grade 3b land. The Applicant acknowledged that, to achieve the Project's proposed capacity, the inclusion of high-grade land in the scheme would be unavoidable.

The Applicant anticipated that the County Council would request a 2% trenching of the site, based upon consultation feedback on other DCO projects within Lincolnshire. It is expected that a trenching plan can be followed through after the harvest period. There is also ongoing ecology and landscape work across the site, such as surveys for the presence of great crested newts.

Given that the preferred cable routes follow existing public highways, the Applicant has not undertaken geophysical surveys in these areas on the basis that the land would have already been disturbed during highway construction. However, the Applicant added it would be open to discussions with the local authorities on this matter, should specific issues arise.

The Applicant stated it will put forward multiple cable route options during scoping and community consultation. The Inspectorate agreed that the need for flexibility

including having multiple options under consideration was understood at this stage, however encouraged the Applicant to continue to seek to refine the proposals to allow for a proportionate and robust EIA scoping process.

Anticipated Programme

The Applicant has met with West Lindsey District Council, the primary host local authority, and will open discussions with Lincolnshire County Council in due course. The proposed cable routes run eastwards into North East Lincolnshire Council, a unitary authority, which the Applicant will also approach.

The Applicant is currently preparing for scoping and intends to link this with its informal public consultation. The Applicant plans to go public with the Project in early 2024, , and hold an initial six-week informal consultation starting June 2024.

The Inspectorate highlighted a concern that undertaking scoping at the same time as community consultation could result in confusion and suggested applicants should make clear distinctions between these processes or, where possible, avoid tandem periods.

The Inspectorate observed that the indicative programme timescales were short and enquired whether there was a particular driver or reason for this. The Applicant responded that the indicative programme was not in response to connection date or another deadline but were chosen in the interests of progressing the Project in a timely manner.

The Applicant referred to other proposed solar NSIPs in the wider Lincolnshire area. The Inspectorate highlighted that multiple schemes coming forward in an area can have an impact on the statutory parties and certain non-governmental organisations involved in the DCO planning process, and when organisational resources are stretched this can have implications for programme timescales.

The Applicant stated its intention to submit a DCO Application end of 2024.

Practical Arrangements

The Applicant confirmed it would return the information requested by the Inspectorate to allow it to establish a Project website page and email mailbox, which will be required in advance of receipt of an EIA scoping request.

The Inspectorate requested to be kept informed of the proposed timescales for the project in particular the submission date, and suggested the Applicant consider seeking further meetings around project milestones.