

# Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	Great North Road Solar Park
<b>File reference</b>	EN010162
<b>Status</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	27 April 2023
<b>Meeting with</b>	Elements Green Trent Ltd
<b>Venue</b>	MS Teams
<b>Meeting objectives</b>	Inception Meeting

## 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

Elements Green Trent (the 'Applicant') gave a brief introduction to its proposed Great North Road Solar Park project, being a ground-mounted Solar PV development with associated infrastructure consisting of Solar PV Arrays and equipment including cables, inverters, substations, transformers, and associated grid connection works.

The proposed development will be located to the west of the A1, north of the A617, east of Eakring, and south of Egmanton (), occupying two main areas to the north and northwest of Staythorpe. Once built, it will have an anticipated generation capacity of approximately 1,040 Megawatts (MW), to be connected into the existing Staythorpe substation (with the development following existing connection infrastructure). The proposed development and order limits will occupy approximately 2,000 hectares of land, with the expectation that the order limits may likely be modified to include access tracks, private cables connecting to the solar PV areas.

The Applicant therefore plans to apply for an order granting development consent under the Planning Act 2008.

The Applicant states that this site has been selected taking into consideration current and draft Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy and Renewable Energy Infrastructure as well as the Newark and Sherwood Local Development Framework, and owing to its proximity to the existing grid connection, solar irradiance, topography, highway network, and environmental and planning designations, which should help avoid navigating certain local constraints such as historical towns, flood zones and best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land. The site excludes Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Ancient Woodlands and Historic Landscapes. The Applicant has also taken national and wider geographic designations into consideration. However, there are green belt

designations to the south of the site, with the River Trent and Sherwood National Forest to the southeast.

In terms of the design process, the Applicant is still choosing between fixed tilt and tracker PV panels/maximum height in terms of the parameters. The Applicant also mentioned that there is a battery storage project connected adjacent to the proposed development, which is currently proceeding through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 route. The Inspectorate queried whether the Applicant will include the battery project into the Development Consent Order (DCO) Application, with the Applicant responding that they have not yet decided but will include as much detail as practicable in the Scoping report. The Inspectorate advised that if the battery storage project comes into the DCO at a later date, it may constitute a material change.

## Project Key Dates

The Applicant outlined the timeline for the project as follows:

Draft scoping report and design iterations	May 2023
Project introduction to members of the public and technical scoping	June 2023
Submission of EIA Scoping Request	July 2023
Phase one non-statutory community engagement	September – October 2023
Formal Consultation on Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)	November – December 2023
Publication of SoCC	Early February 2024
Submission of Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)	Mid-February 2024
Phase two community engagement and submission of statutory consultation	February – April 2024
Final design freeze	May 2024
Development Consent Order (DCO) Application submission	November 2024

## EIA Scoping

The Applicant will notify the Inspectorate by letter that they intend to provide an environmental statement (ES) in accordance with the EIA Regulations. Given the scale of the project, as an ES will be required, the Applicant does not intend to submit a screening opinion request.

The Applicant suggested the provision of a list of consultees for the Inspectorate's information in advance of scoping. However, the Inspectorate advised that they have no responsibility involved in agreeing such documents in advance.

The Applicant intends to show the order limits, including the areas being considered for solar panels, cables, substation locations, construction compound access points, areas for environmental enhancement, and parameter limits (e.g. height of panels). The Applicant also

stated that they will seek to limit the scope of the project and provide adequate detail to support such scope reductions where needed.

The Inspectorate referred the Applicant to advice notes on submitting EIAs and that a Shape File will need to be submitted 10 days in advance of Scoping as well as information to enable the Inspectorate to set up the project page on its national infrastructure website. The Applicant's team said that they were already aware of Advice Note 7 and would provide the requested information accordingly.

## **Surveys**

The Applicant has been assessing the site for approximately a year. Over time the extent of the site has changed. The Applicant is aiming to complete the below mentioned surveys and do any further detailed surveys needed in summer 2023.

### ***Ornithology survey***

A Breeding Bird Survey was conducted in April 2022, with wintering bird surveys undertaken between September 2022 and March 2023, which covered most of the site.

The Inspectorate asked whether the Applicant plans to conduct further wintering bird surveys given advice usually stipulates assessing over a period of two years. The Applicant responded that the project's ornithologist thought there is little potential worth to do any more wintering bird surveys owing to the level of bird activity in the area. However, the Applicant is seeking advice from Natural England and expecting a reply before the wintering bird season this year. The Applicant will check how much land has been added since the last survey and will investigate if any additional parcels of land will need to be included and will look to agree the survey scope with Natural England before the relevant season ends.

The Inspectorate asked about the Applicant's access into the survey sites. The Applicant advised that all the survey sites are under landowner agreement and anticipated that a section 53 request should not be necessary, although the project is still at early stage.

### ***Flood risk assessment***

The Applicant has obtained flood data from the Environmental Agency last year and will request an update of the data this year to ensure that the design is compatible with flooding mitigation, where needed to keep sensitive and electrical infrastructure sufficiently above flood depths.

### ***Archaeology survey***

The applicant has carried out test studies and consultation with the county archaeologist and agreed the specification for geophysical surveys to be carried out. Approximately 70% of the geophysical survey has taken place – this is now on hold to avoid crop damage. Remaining survey works will be completed in late 2023. Trial trenching is also expected.

### ***Other assessments***

Landscape Visual and traffic assessments are commencing now to inform the design for scoping and drafting of the scoping report.

## **Consultation**

There has been limited technical consultation to date, but this will commence in earnest following the public 'launch' of the project in mid-June 2023.

The Applicant proposes to prepare Statements of Common Ground with relevant consultees throughout the process.

The Inspectorate advised that the applicant should avoid undertaking public consultation at the same time as the scoping consultation to eliminate confusion. The applicant stated that they have considered this and planned consultation timelines to avoid consultation occurring at the same time accordingly.

## **Compulsory Acquisition**

Land take is across 23 landowners and around some 2000 hectares. The applicant is now negotiating with the landowners and aiming to get provisional agreements in place with them in the next few months.

## **Practical Arrangements**

The Inspectorate also asked the applicant to supply the necessary information for the project webpage. The Inspectorate would also set up a project email account for the proposed development in due course. The Inspectorate wished to be kept updated on timelines and milestones.

The Inspectorate and the Applicant has updated their points of contacts regarding the proposed development.

## **Next Steps**

The Applicant will keep the Inspectorate notified of frequency of meetings and will arrange with the Inspectorate a meeting before submission of scoping report if necessary.