



## Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	Future Energy Llanwern
<b>File reference</b>	EN010171
<b>Status</b>	Final
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	23 February 2024
<b>Meeting with</b>	Lighthouse Development Consulting
<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.

The Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months, if requested by the Applicant for commercial confidentiality/ sensitivity reasons, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

### The Applicant

Funding the project, NextEnergy Capital is one of the world's largest specialist solar investors that is driven by its mission to lead the transition to clean energy. Since its inception in 2007, NextEnergy Capital has been active in the development, construction, and ownership of solar generating assets across the globe, having deployed over 3GW of solar capacity. NextEnergy Capital manages \$3.9bn worth of solar globally, having either acquired or built over 400 high quality solar assets to date.

### Details of proposed development

The site is located within the administrative boundaries of Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council, in South Wales, adjacent to the Severn Estuary, on the Gwent levels. The proposals seek to deliver 400 MW installed capacity – enough to power 108,000 homes – which is equivalent to the total household power demand from Newport and Monmouthshire combined. It is also equivalent to meeting the total power demand of 8% of Wales' 1.3 million households.

The Applicant stated that the proposals will seek to reverse the decline of the SSSI (Gwent levels) reens from their current and long standing “unfavourable status” to a “favourable status” and achieve a biodiversity net gain to support Wales’ Nature Recovery objectives.

It is estimated that the proposals will generate work for around 5,000 Wales-based employees and contractors including around 200 new job roles created due to expansion of local businesses.

## **Engagement**

The Applicant plans to commence statutory consultation in Autumn 2024, and has already engaged with local stakeholders to notify them on early design plans for the solar farm. This was aimed at better helping stakeholders to understand how the site was selected, what benefits it will bring and how the environmental impact will be assessed.

The Applicant ‘soft launched’ the project on 16 January 2024, which consisted of letters notifying statutory political stakeholders of the project’s launch and an invitation to a briefing, a press release, the project website launch, and a project contact centre was established.

Engagement with residents and stakeholders has consisted of an introductory call undertaken with Monmouthshire County Council and Newport City Council. As well as this, a project introduction leaflet was sent to primary consultation zone residents, those within 2km of the project site boundary.

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant may wish to consider consultation of local communities not currently included in mapping, who would use the site for recreational purposes. The Inspectorate also advised that engagement with Network Rail to discuss protective provisions in view of the nearby rail line. It also encouraged early discussions with Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, CADW and Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust.

## **EIA scoping**

A Scoping request is currently being prepared and due to be submitted May 2024. The inspectorate noted the request set out in the inspectorate’s advice notes for applicants to provide a shp. file for the proposed development at least 10 working days prior to submission of the request.

## **Surveys**

Surveys will include:

- Ecology
- Landscape and visual photography
- Highways – tracking and on-site assessment
- Noise monitoring
- Heritage walkover surveys

The Inspectorate advised that, where seeking to scope aspects or issues out of the EIA, suitable supporting evidence should be provided within the applicant's scoping request. Examples of the types of evidence that may usefully inform the scoping process include initial desk-based assessments, a preliminary zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) or evidence of liaison and agreement on the proposed methodologies with relevant consultees.

The Applicant indicated the intention to scope out the need for archaeological trial trenching. The Inspectorate requested that evidence be provided as to the archaeological potential of the site and any reasoning for excluding the need or effectiveness of trial trenching, and noted that consultee responses would be a relevant factor in determining whether such an approach could be agreed through the scoping process.

The Applicant notes that limited discussion had been held to date with relevant consultees such as NRW, but that they intended to follow approaches agreed in relation to other nearby solar farm applications pursued under different consenting regimes. The Inspectorate noted that given the time that has elapsed, the relevant policy framework and updates, and that each site will have its own unique issues, that clear justification of the methodologies proposed is required, and that these would be considered in light of consultation responses received.

The Inspectorate advised that landscape and visual photography may be useful from locations in England, opposite the site subject to the level of intervisibility.

## **Compulsory Acquisition**

Although land referencing has been completed to cover the whole site, and discussions commenced with the 27 landowners, the Applicant is likely to seek Compulsory Acquisition Rights within the draft Development Consent Order as a fall back. This is likely to include land for the cable corridor to connect with the National Grid substation.

## **Key Dates**

The Applicant gave an overview of its programme and highlighted the following key dates:

- EIA scoping – May 2024
- Statement of Community consultation – June/July 2024
- PEIR – Summer 2024
- Commence Statutory consultation – Autumn 2024
- Completion of EIA – Winter 2024
- DCO submission – Spring 2025

The Inspectorate advised that if the Applicant is planning on submitting draft documents for review, to let the Inspectorate know in good time to allow for resourcing; a review usually takes 6-8 weeks.