

SCREENING CHECKLIST AND OPINION

1. APPLICATION DETAILS			
Application Reference	22/04248/SCR	Brief description of the project / development	Request for Screening Opinion for proposed solar farm development and energy battery storage system on land north of the M56 and east of Thornton Green Lane (B5132)
Applicant	Anesco		
Site Address	Land At Cryers Lane Thornton Le Moors Chester		
2. EIA DETAILS			
Is the project Schedule 1 development according to Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations?		No.	
If YES, which description of development (THEN REQUIRE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT)		N/A	
Is the project Schedule 2 development under the EIA Regulations?		Yes.	
If YES, under which description of development in Column 1 and Column 2?		3a (Energy Projects) (a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (unless included in Schedule 1.	
Will any part of the development be carried out in a 'sensitive area'? (see Regulation 2 of the EIA Regulations)		Yes	
If YES, which area?			
Are the applicable thresholds/criteria in Column 2 exceeded/met?		Yes	
If yes, which applicable threshold/criteria?		31 (Energy Projects) The area of the development exceeds 0.5 hectares.	
3. ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT (ES)			
Has the appellant supplied an ES for the current or previous (if reserved matters or conditions) application?		No.	

<p>Question</p>	<p>(Part 2a) / (Part 2b) – Answer to the question and explanation of reasons (Yes/No or Not Known (?) or N/A)</p> <p>Briefly explain answer to Part 2a and, if applicable and/or known, include name of feature and proximity to site (If answer in Part 2a / 2b is 'No', the answer to Part 3a / 3b is 'N/A')</p>	<p>(Part 3a) / (Part 3b) (only if Yes in part 2a) – Is a Significant Effect Likely? (Yes/No or Not Known (?) or N/A)</p> <p>Is a significant effect likely, having regard particularly to the magnitude and spatial extent (including population size affected), nature, intensity and complexity, probability, expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact and the possibility to effectively reduce the impact? If the finding of no significant effect is reliant on specific features or measures of the project envisaged to avoid, or prevent what might otherwise have been, significant adverse effects on the environment these should be identified in bold.</p>
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1. NATURAL RESOURCES

<p>1.1 Will construction, operation or decommissioning of the project involve actions which will cause physical changes in the topography of the area?</p>	<p>Yes</p>		<p>No</p>	<p>The proposal has a site area that merits consideration for EIA. The site is existing agricultural land in the countryside in an area assessed by the Council as having a high sensitivity to landscape impacts from large solar farm development. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) will need to be undertaken with any application for planning permission.</p>
<p>1.2 Will construction or operation of the project use natural resources above or below ground such as land, soil, water, materials/minerals or energy which are non-renewable or in short supply?</p>	<p>Yes</p>		<p>No</p>	<p>The proposal has a site area that merits consideration for EIA. The site is existing agricultural land in the countryside. However, it is not considered that the project would be associated with the loss of agricultural land to the extent that would merit an EIA. The proposal would generate renewable energy from natural resources in a sustainable manner.</p>
<p>1.3 Are there any areas on/around the location which contain important, high quality or scarce resources which could be affected by the project, e.g. forestry, agriculture, water/coastal, fisheries, minerals?</p>	<p>No</p>		<p>No</p>	<p>The site is existing agricultural land in the countryside. It is not considered that the project would be associated with the loss of high quality or scarce resources.</p>

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2. WASTE				
2.1 Will the project produce solid wastes during construction or operation or decommissioning?	No		No	Solar farm development only generating renewable energy from natural resources. Any potential waste from decommissioning is not considered to be extensive enough to warrant an EIA.
3. POLLUTION AND NUISANCES				
3.1 Will the project release pollutants or any hazardous, toxic or noxious substances to air?	No		No	Solar farm development only generating renewable energy from natural resources. During the construction and decommissioning period, the proposal would generate HGV/delivery traffic, but this would be unlikely to generate air pollution to the extent that an EIA would be required.
3.2 Will the project cause noise and vibration or release of light, heat, energy or electromagnetic radiation?	Yes		No	The proposed large solar farm development may result in an impact on nearby settlements and isolated residential properties from glint and glare. A Glint and Glare – Reflectivity Assessment would need to be submitted with the application with details of mitigation measures to prevent any amenity impact. The development would generate noise during the construction period from HGV/delivery vehicles, and there would be potential light pollution from the use of floodlighting. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would need to be submitted with the application with details of mitigation measures to prevent any amenity impact. Solar farms generate a low-level of electromagnetic radiation which would not warrant an EIA.

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<p>3.3 Will the project lead to risks of contamination of land or water from releases of pollutants onto the ground or into surface waters, groundwater, coastal waters or the sea?</p>	No		No	<p>The site is greenfield land in the countryside and the development would not be expected to encounter any contamination issues.</p>
<p>3.4 Are there any areas on or around the location which are already subject to pollution or environmental damage, e.g. where existing legal environmental standards are exceeded, which could be affected by the project?</p>	Yes		No	<p>A small part of the site is within an area which has a potential history of land contamination. A Phase 1 Contaminated Land Assessment would need to be submitted with the application for planning permission with details of mitigation and remediation measures to prevent any harm to human health, although it is unlikely that any groundworks undertaken during the construction phase would be sufficiently invasive as to warrant an EIA. There are no other areas on or near the site which are already subject to pollution or environmental damage.</p>
<p>4. POPULATION AND HUMAN HEALTH</p>				
<p>4.1 Will there be any risk of major accidents (including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge) during construction, operation or decommissioning?</p>	No		No	<p>It is not considered that the project would be associated with the risk of accidents to the extent that would merit an EIA. A Glint and Glare – Reflectivity Assessment would need to be submitted with the application with details of mitigation measures to prevent any impact.</p>

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<p>4.2 Will the project present a risk to the population (having regard to population density) and their human health during construction, operation or decommissioning? (for example due to water contamination or air pollution)</p>	No		No	<p>The site is located on agricultural land in the countryside. The proposed large solar farm development may result in any impact on nearby settlements and isolated residential properties from glint and glare. A Glint and Glare – Reflectivity Assessment would need to be submitted with the application with details of mitigation measures to prevent any amenity impact. The development would generate noise during the construction period from HGV/delivery vehicles. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would need to be submitted with the application with details of mitigation measures to prevent any amenity impact</p>
<p>5. WATER RESOURCES</p>				
<p>5.1 Are there any water resources including surface waters, e.g. rivers, lakes/ponds, coastal or underground waters on or around the location which could be affected by the project, particularly in terms of their volume and flood risk?</p>	Yes		No	<p>There are several ponds and waterbodies on or close to the application site. Details of the impact on habitats and protected species in an Ecology Survey would need to be submitted with any application. Whilst the majority of the site is in Flood Zone 1, since the development would be over 1 hectare a Flood Risk Assessment would also need to be submitted with any application. Any parts of the site within Flood Zone 2/3 would require liaison with Environment Agency and an application for planning permission would need to be accompanied by a sequential site search. It is not considered that the impact on water resources would warrant an EIA.</p>

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6. BIODIVERSITY (SPECIES AND HABITATS)				
<p>6.1 Are there any protected areas which are designated or classified for their terrestrial, avian and marine ecological value, or any non-designated / non-classified areas which are important or sensitive for reasons of their terrestrial, avian and marine ecological value, located on or around the location and which could be affected by the project? (e.g. wetlands, watercourses or other water-bodies, the coastal zone, mountains, forests or woodlands, undesignated nature reserves or parks. (Where designated indicate level of designation (international, national, regional or local))).</p>	Yes	<p>The Mersey Estuary RAMSAR, Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest is approx. 2.6km from the site.</p> <p>The Gowy Meadows and Ditches Local Wildlife Site is adjacent to the development site.</p>	Yes	<p>Wintering bird surveys carried out confirms significant numbers of Teal and Wigeon, which are species associated with the designations, to be present on site. The percentages present are likely to classify the site as functionally-linked land, which is not addressed by the applicant.</p> <p>Although an ecological mitigation plan has been provided, this does not address wider issues of disturbance from the development, or carrying capacity and sightlines and there is no ecological basis for the mitigation areas.</p> <p>Natural England maintain their assessment that there are potential likely significant effects on the Mersey estuary designations.</p> <p>The Gowy LWS has numerous plant, habitat and animal reasons for designation, some of which could be directly or indirectly be affected by the proposed development. This has not been addressed.</p> <p>The above factors mean that the proposal is liable to have potentially adverse effects on protected sites (RAMSAR, SPA, SSSI and LWS), and these would be significant enough to merit an EIA.</p>

Question	(Part 2a) / (Part 2b) – Answer to the question and explanation of reasons (Yes/No or Not Known (?)) or N/A		(Part 3a) / (Part 3b) (only if Yes in part 2a) – Is a Significant Effect Likely? (Yes/No or Not Known (?)) or N/A	
<p>6.2 Could any protected, important or sensitive species of flora or fauna which use areas on or around the site, e.g. for breeding, nesting, foraging, resting, over-wintering, or migration, be affected by the project?</p>	Yes	<p>Wintering birds could be directly affected by habitat loss and indirect disturbance effects.</p> <p>Other species associated with the LWS could also be affected.</p>	Yes	<p>Likely, due to regular presence and number of bird present during wintering bird surveys.</p> <p>Likely, due to unknown impacts, proximity and scale of development.</p> <p>The above factors mean that the proposal is liable to have potentially adverse effects on protected sites (RAMSAR, SPA, SSSI and LWS), and these would be significant enough to merit an EIA.</p>
<p>7. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL</p>				
<p>7.1 Are there any areas or features on or around the location which are protected for their landscape and scenic value, and/or any non-designated / non-classified areas or features of high landscape or scenic value on or around the location which could be affected by the project?¹ Where designated indicate level of designation (international, national, regional or local).</p>	Yes		Yes	<p>The proposal would be classed as a very large solar farm according to the Council's Landscape Sensitivity Study (2016). The site is located within the Cheshire Plain West (9a Dunham to Tarvin Plain) in the Landscape Strategy (2016), which is designated an area with a high sensitivity to large solar farm development. The Cheshire Plain West is particularly sensitive to a medium, large or very large solar farm that would be out of scale with the medium to small scale field pattern, that may involve the removal of traditional agricultural landscape features and that may bring a perception of human influence in a landscape with limited built development and man-made structures and a perceived naturalness. The likely impact of this very large solar farm development located in an area designated with high landscape sensitivity would therefore be significant enough to merit an EIA.</p>

¹ See question 8.1 for consideration of impacts on heritage designations and receptors, including on views to, within and from designated areas.

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<p>7.2 Is the project in a location where it is likely to be highly visible to many people? (If so, from where, what direction, and what distance?)</p>	Yes		Yes	<p>Solar farms do have a potential to be visually very prominent in the landscape due to their reflective nature. There is also a Public Right of Way (PROW) to the north of the site (Thornton-le-Moors FP2). The site is located within the Cheshire Plain West (9a Dunham to Tarvin Plain) in the Landscape Strategy (2016) which is designated an area with a high sensitivity to large solar farm development. The change in character is likely to be adverse and significant. Considering the scale and reflective nature of the development it is considered significant enough to merit an EIA and a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should accompany any application for planning permission.</p>

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8. CULTURAL HERITAGE/ARCHAEOLOGY				
<p>8.1 Are there any areas or features which are protected for their cultural heritage or archaeological value, or any non-designated / classified areas and/or features of cultural heritage or archaeological importance on or around the location which could be affected by the project (including potential impacts on setting, and views to, from and within)? Where designated indicate level of designation (international, national, regional or local).</p>	Yes		No	<p>There are two Grade II listed buildings approximately 100 metres to the north of the site boundary (Yew Tree House and Church House), and the proposal would be adjacent to the Thornton-le-Moors conservation area</p> <p>In relation to archaeology, a Scheduled Ancient Monument comprising a moated site, fishpond and associated drainage channel is located approximately 500 metres to the north-east of the site.</p> <p>A Heritage and Archaeological Assessment of the impact of the development on these designated heritage assets and archaeology would need to be submitted with any application for planning permission. However, it is not considered that the development would result in an impact to the extent that would merit an EIA.</p>
9. TRANSPORT AND ACCESS				
<p>9.1 Are there any routes on or around the location which are used by the public for access to recreation or other facilities, which could be affected by the project?</p>	Yes		No	<p>There is a Public Right of Way (PROW) to the north of the site (Thornton-le-Moors FP2). The applicant will need to consider this as a part of any application including potential mitigation measures. Consideration will also need to be given to views between other adjacent public rights of way across the site. However, it is not considered that the development would result in an impact to the extent that would merit an EIA.</p>

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<p>9.2 Are there any transport routes on or around the location which are susceptible to congestion or which cause environmental problems, which could be affected by the project?</p>	Yes		No	<p>The construction and dismantling of the site would involve large volumes of vehicle movements and any application would need to address this. The accompanying Transport Assessment would therefore need to demonstrate that the access and the route into the site is, or can be, made suitable for use by the HGVs and that suitable visibility splays are achievable. However, the proposal is unlikely to have a significant effect which would warrant an EIA.</p>
<p>10. LAND USE</p>				
<p>10.1 Are there existing land uses or community facilities on or around the location which could be affected by the project? E.g. housing, densely populated areas, industry / commerce, farm/agricultural holdings, forestry, tourism, mining, quarrying, facilities relating to health, education, places of worship, leisure /sports / recreation.</p>	Yes		No	<p>The land is currently agricultural land in the countryside. There are several nearby dwellings and settlements in the vicinity of the site, but these would not be close enough for any direct land use impacts to occur. The proposed large solar farm development may impact isolated residential properties from glint and glare. A Glint and Glare – Reflectivity Assessment would need to be submitted with the application with details of mitigation measures to prevent any amenity impact. The development would generate noise during the construction period from HGV/delivery vehicles. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would need to be submitted with the application with details of mitigation measures to prevent any amenity impact.</p>
<p>10.2 Are there any plans for future land uses on or around the location which could be affected by the project?</p>	No		No	<p>The site and surroundings are agricultural land within the countryside and there are no land use designations for future land use in the area.</p>

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11. LAND STABILITY AND CLIMATE				
11.1 Is the location susceptible to earthquakes, subsidence, landslides, erosion, or extreme /adverse climatic conditions, e.g. temperature inversions, fogs, severe winds, which could cause the project to present environmental problems?	No		No	The site and surroundings are agricultural land within the countryside and is not susceptible to earthquakes, subsidence, landslides, erosion, or extreme /adverse climatic conditions.
12. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS				
12.1 Could this project together with existing and/or approved development result in cumulation of impacts together during the construction/operation phase?	No		No	The site and surroundings are agricultural land within the countryside. There are no other large developments in the vicinity of the site which could generate cumulative impacts.
13. TRANSBOUNDARY EFFECTS				
13.1 Is the project likely to lead to transboundary effects? ²	No		No	The site and surroundings are wholly contained within the borough of Cheshire West.

² The Regulations require consideration of the transboundary nature of the impact. Due to the England's geographical location the vast majority of TCPA cases are unlikely to result in transboundary impacts.

5. CONCLUSIONS – ACCORDING TO EIA REGULATIONS SCHEDULE 3

The likely impact of this very large solar farm development located in an area designated with high landscape sensitivity, and which provides strong ecological links to protected sites, would be significant enough to merit an EIA.

Overall, having viewed the criteria under Schedule 3, and having taken into account all relevant and available evidence, facts and matters pertinent to this development and having considered the provisions of the above regulations and government guidance, it is proposed that this proposed development is EIA development within the provisions of the above regulations and accordingly does merit the preparation of an Environmental Statement.

6. ASSESSMENT (EIA REGS SCHEDULE 2 DEVELOPMENT)	OUTCOME	
Is likely to have significant effects on the environment	ES required	✓
Not likely to have significant effects on the environment	ES not required	
More information is required to inform opinion	Request further info	

NAME	Edward Bannister
DATE	18/08/2023

If ES required:

This screening opinion will be sent to the following consultation bodies. The applicant should contact them as well as the Council to determine if any relevant information is held for the Environmental Statement.

Organisation	Address	Email