

Meeting note

Project name	Sunnica Energy Farm
File reference	EN010106
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	18 January 2019
Meeting with	Sunnica Ltd
Venue	Temple Quay House
Meeting objectives	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 Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months if requested by the Applicant, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

Introduction to the project

The project consists of two energy farms (Sunnica East located south of Worlington in West Suffolk district and Sunnica West, located south of Chippenham in East Cambridgeshire district) with an anticipated maximum capacity of 500MW. The project will also include battery energy storage units. The project will connect to the grid at a substation at Burwell. The project will have two cable corridors, one to connect the Sunnica East Site with the Sunnica West Site and the other to connect from the Sunnica West Site to the National Grid substation at Burwell. The cables will all be underground. The cable corridor will cross various statutory undertakers' land and apparatus.

The Applicant intends to seek flexibility to address current uncertainties in project design and will apply a Rochdale envelope assessment approach. The Applicant stated that there would be clearly defined parameters for the environmental impact assessment and specific elements such as the battery energy storage units would be located in broadly identified areas of the proposed development site.

The draft Development Consent Order (DCO) will be sought under s105 of PA2008, with the energy national policy statements being important and relevant considerations.

Compulsory acquisition and Crown Land

The land needed for the solar farms and cable corridor is owned by various land owners and the Applicant is currently in discussions with many of them. There is currently no issue with obtaining access to the land needed for the project and the Applicant is not currently intending to request access under s53 of PA2008.

Surveys

Preliminary ecological surveys and cultural heritage desk based assessments have been completed. Wintering bird surveys are currently ongoing. Initial Zone of Theoretical Visibility modelling has been undertaken and viewpoints selected, which will be presented for consultation in the EIA Scoping Report.

Scoping

The Applicant has done an initial assessment of what it considers are the main environmental issues. The Inspectorate emphasised the importance of using the scoping process effectively to focus the aspects and matters for assessment. There was a discussion regarding details of the proposed design including proposed drainage and security arrangements for the sites. There was also discussion about how the proposed solar farms might impact on the nearby extant land uses. The scoping request is likely to be submitted in March 2019.

Programme

The Applicant intends to undertake non-statutory consultation in summer 2019, followed by a statutory consultation in winter 2019 and is aiming to submit the application in summer 2020.

Any Other Business

The Applicant confirmed that there is good access to the sites via main roads and expressed an intent that the main construction traffic routes would avoid roads in the surrounding villages.

The construction laydown area will be on the site but the location has not yet been finalised.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The Applicant will send its shapefile 10 working days prior to the scoping request.
- The Inspectorate will launch its project page at the same time as the Applicant's project page goes live.
- The Applicant will redact documents to remove personal information in line with GDPR before sending them to the Inspectorate.