

Meeting note

Project name	Mylen Leah Solar Farm
File reference	EN0110002
Status	Draft
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	10 May 2024
Meeting with	Quod and Statkraft
Venue	Microsoft teams
Meeting objectives	Inception meeting
Circulation	All attendees/ additional contacts to share meeting note

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

The Applicant introduced itself, its team, and its background. This will be Statkraft's first Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) application, although it has taken renewable energy projects through the Town and Country Planning Act process. A separate subsidiary company – Mylen Leah Solar Ltd – has been set up for this project and will be the Applicant.

The Applicant explained that the expected capacity of the Mylen Leah Solar Farm (SF) will be approximately 500MW, and it will connect to the Thornton Greener Grid Park substation and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), which the Applicant has obtained consent for under the Town and Country Planning Act. Consented works currently being undertaken at Thornton substation will facilitate this connection. No BESS is proposed as part of the Mylen Leah Development Consent Order (DCO) application. The Inspectorate asked whether there were any risks associated with this approach, for example, if any delays in these works could cause a need for significant design changes to the Applicant's NSIP. The Applicant did not believe so, but agreed to seek further information from their project team and confirm to the Inspectorate at a future update meeting.

The Applicant described the application site and its indicative red line boundary, which comprises an area of approximately 1,100 ha, and confirmed that this area incorporates mitigation land, an on-site substation and associated infrastructure as well as the areas for solar panels. The Applicant confirmed that the site is in the jurisdiction of East Riding of Yorkshire, outside the York Green Belt and near small village settlements, with York approximately 12km northwest. The proposed connection cable route area of search extends approximately 4.5km from the site.

There are 22 landowners affected, excluding those relating to the cable corridor who are yet to be confirmed. A significant landowner is that of Melbourne Airfield, a former WWII airfield operating as a business. The remainder of the site is mainly agricultural land. The Applicant confirmed that cabling will be underground from the application site to Thornton Greener Grid Park.

The Applicant outlined that the majority of agricultural land within the application site is Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Grades 3 or 4, and the main on-site constraints are small areas of Flood Zones 2 and 3 towards the southeast of the site and an overhead cable running roughly north-south. It has also identified a Scheduled Ancient Monument close to the boundary of the southern area. The Applicant confirmed that the application site and wider study area are not covered by any national landscape designations.

European nature conservation sites associated with the River Derwent are located to the north and northwest of the site. The Inspectorate advised that for Habitats Regulations Assessment purposes, the Applicant would need to establish any use of the application site and surrounding area by the European sites' qualifying features, and the Applicant confirmed they would be undertaking detailed ornithological surveys of the area.

The closest other NSIP is East Yorkshire Solar Farm, which is approximately 1.3km from Mylen Leah at its closest point. The Applicant explained that it is looking at layout options to minimise the cumulative impact of the two projects.

At present, the areas scoring highest for solar panel siting are the middle parcel of the site, the area around Melbourne Airfield and the large western area. Areas towards the northwest and parts of the southern area are intended for environmental mitigation. The on-site substation is expected to be sited in an area close to other industrial or large-scale buildings.

Current ongoing work and surveys

The Applicant outlined the main areas of work currently taking place, including ongoing land negotiations, Preliminary Environmental Assessment, targeted ecological surveys, soil surveys, heritage desk survey work, and layout and design optioneering.

The Inspectorate recommended that consideration of any heritage significance associated with the WWII airfield be included in further survey work.

Approach to stakeholder engagement

The Applicant confirmed that stakeholder engagement is in early stages and the project is not yet in the public domain, apart from landowner discussions. An initial meeting with East Riding of Yorkshire Council (EYRC) has been held and a briefing to local councillors is planned prior to public launch.

The Applicant intends to launch the project website in May/June 2024, via a press release and its communication channels. Engagement with statutory consultees is upcoming. It has taken advice from ERYC and intends to take a targeted and localised approach to non-statutory consultation, including focussed workshops with community representatives and face-to-face meetings with local groups, such as parish councils and businesses, and near neighbours (within 50m of the red line boundary) in June and July 2024, avoiding summer holiday times. The Applicant stated that there is a broad awareness of the East

Yorkshire Solar Farm in the local area, with some pockets of objections. The process from current stages to statutory consultation is expected to take 12-18 months overall.

The Inspectorate advised that other NSIPs have found that using local input to help shape the masterplan has been helpful, and that the timescales should allow for thorough consultation to avoid surprises at later stages of the process. It noted the importance of being clear during consultation on what is fixed and what can be influenced, and flagged that it would soon be issuing an advice page on good design, which will also reflect the importance of local input. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to ensure it keeps a note of where consultation has influenced its proposals. The Applicant confirmed its approach is intended to be aligned with this advice.

The Inspectorate noted the trend in recent applications for use of online digital mapping tools. The Applicant explained it had not yet made a decision on this, but noted it is intending to have tablets at events to assist consultation.

Programme

The Applicant outlined its broad programme for submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment scoping request to the Inspectorate in Q3 2024 (Sept/Oct), statutory consultation in mid-2025, and application submission in Dec 2025.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to be aware of issues around holiday periods, particularly in terms of consultee responses for Acceptance. It also advised that accurate dates for key parts of the programme are expected and requested this information when available. The Applicant confirmed, when asked, that it was considering use of the draft documents process and would like to discuss scope at a later stage.

AOB

The Inspectorate raised National Infrastructure reforms, noting that guidance from DLUHC was to be published shortly and the Inspectorate's Prospectus would follow (see post-meeting note). The Inspectorate advised this would involve changes to the service it offers at pre-application.

It was agreed that a meeting following the upcoming consultation workshops would be useful, and the Applicant confirmed that by this stage they should be able to give a detailed programme for submission of the EIA scoping request.

Summary of actions and follow-up

The following actions were agreed:

- The Inspectorate to notify when information on the reforms to the NSIP process and pre-application services is available.
- The Inspectorate to confirm timescales for good design advice page if possible.
- Agreement of next meeting and key contacts.

Since the meeting, various items related to the NSIP reform and pre-application service have been published and/or updated, as follows:

- DLUHC guidance on the pre-application process ([Planning Act 2008: Pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-act-2008-pre-application-stage-for-nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects)) published 30 April 2024
- DLUHC guidance on the fast-track process for NSIPs ([Planning Act 2008: Fast-track process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-act-2008-fast-track-process-for-nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects)) published 30 April 2024
- The Inspectorate's pre-application prospectus ([Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-2024-pre-application-prospectus)) published 16 May 2024
- The Inspectorate's advice on frequently asked questions regarding the pre-application process ([Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus - Frequently Asked Questions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-2024-pre-application-prospectus-frequently-asked-questions)), published 16 May 2024