



## Inception Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	<b>Shepway Energy Park</b>
<b>Case reference</b>	<b>EN0110011</b>
<b>Status</b>	<b>FINAL</b>
<b>Author</b>	<b>The Planning Inspectorate</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>13 December 2024</b>
<b>Meeting with</b>	<b>Meeting with SSE Renewables (SSER)</b>
<b>Venue</b>	<b>Microsoft Teams</b>
<b>Circulation</b>	<b>All attendees</b>

### 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 Planning Act). 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 Inception Meeting note could be delayed by up to 6 months, if required by the developer for commercial confidentiality/sensitivity reasons, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

### The proposed development

Shepway Energy Park is a proposed Solar Farm with Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) by SSE Newchurch Solar Limited, a Special Purpose Vehicle of SSE Renewables (the Applicant). The proposed development will enable a photovoltaic (PV) solar generation of 200MW of renewable energy and 400MW of BESS. Owing to the size of the scheme's energy generating capacity, an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) will be sought.

The project is located on land across the borders of Ashford and Folkestone & Hythe councils. Kent County Council is the highways authority and county planning authority. The suitability of approximately 500ha of land is currently being assessed, and discussions with several landowners are taking place. There are also plans for an on-site substation with SSER owned high voltage equipment, areas for cable routing and areas for environmental mitigation.

A new National Grid substation will be built to facilitate a grid connection to the Shepway Energy Park development. Work to identify the most suitable location for the new substation is ongoing. National Grid may seek consent for the new substation separately, or it may be included in the DCO application if the location is confirmed by National Grid in

sufficient time and National Grid agrees with that approach. Several existing large overhead lines are located near to the proposed site.

Another applicant, Low Carbon, are also developing proposals for a solar and energy storage park in Kent, named South Kent Energy Park, which is following a similar development timeline. The Stonestreet Green Solar project is also a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP), located north-east of the proposed site, which is currently in examination.

The Applicant advised that the array areas are likely to be distributed across four distinct parcels of land.

### **Consenting programme**

- Meetings with local planning authorities and key stakeholders – **November 2024**
- Inception meeting with the Inspectorate – **December 2024**
- Project launch – **Early March 2025**
- Submission of EIA Scoping Opinion Request – **Early March 2025**
- Early (Non-statutory) Consultation – **March/April 2025**
- Expected receipt of EIA Scoping Opinion – **April 2025**
- Statutory Consultation – **October/November 2025**
- Submission of Application – **June 2026**

### **Early engagement with statutory bodies, local authorities, and stakeholders**

The Applicant held meetings with Folkestone and Hythe District Council, Ashford Borough Council, and Kent County Council during November 2024 and met Historic England in December 2024.

Meetings with Natural England and the Environment Agency are also planned for December 2024. The Applicant has set up charging agreements with Natural England and the Environment Agency ahead of the planned upcoming meetings.

### **Environmental constraints and issues**

The land within the proposed Order Limits is mostly arable land with a small area of sheep grazing, forming what is expected to be best and most versatile land at Grades 1, 2 and 3a (subject to survey). The Applicant advised that there are some European Sites within the vicinity of the proposed development, with a nature reserve crossing part of the chosen site.

Ecology surveys are underway to help inform the project design, together with Wintering Bird surveys and initial assessments of protected species, Agricultural Land Classification, Geophysical, views, noise and traffic.

The Applicant advised that the whole proposed site is within a high-risk flood zone, and this will be discussed with the Environment Agency.

## **EIA Scoping**

The Inspectorate advised that the GIS shape file needs to be submitted at least 10 working days before the Scoping request is made and the pre-application fee invoice will need to be paid before the scoping review can be started. The Inspectorate requested that the Applicant gives an indication as to when the Scoping request can be expected to assist with resourcing.

The Inspectorate explained that avoiding overlap between non-statutory consultations and the Scoping Review is advantageous, as it can cause confusion for Local Authorities and impact on the resources of relevant statutory consultees.

The Applicant advised that they could submit the search areas for the cable corridors with the Shape File if this would be beneficial for the Inspectorate's review.

The Inspectorate advised that Advice Note 7 provides relevant information and good practice in relation to the Environmental Impact Assessment process .

The Inspectorate aims to upload the Scoping Report into the public domain the same day where possible.

## **Preparing the draft Development Consent Order**

The Applicant advised that the draft Development Consent Order for this project will be based on the model provisions and any precedents established by recently granted solar DCOs, while the Explanatory Memorandum will explain why each provision is included. Further consideration will be given to the Inspectorate's Advice Note 15, the recent government guidance on Content of a DCO and Statutory Instrument Practice.

## **Land and rights**

Compulsory Acquisition powers will be sought for this project under the Planning Act. The Applicant said it had acquired Land Registry data to confirm land ownership within the proposed Order Limits, along with land registry titles to identify any potential additional affected persons. The Applicant is planning to issue Land Interest Questionnaires ahead of statutory consultation to confirm such interests under these desktop referencing exercises. Additionally, the relevant local authorities will be contacted by the Applicant to confirm the highway boundaries and public rights of way within the vicinity of the proposed development.

The Inspectorate advised to engage early with relevant statutory undertakers regarding the inclusion and agreement of protective provisions to reduce the amount of work that might otherwise be required on this matter during the Examination stage (where the application is accepted for examination).

The Applicant advised an airbase is located near to the site and is operated by the military. The Applicant will be considering how to assess and mitigate any issues arising from the proposed development on the airbase, such as undertaking appropriate glint and glare assessments.

## **Consultation**

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant should consider capturing any tourist / visitor feedback during its consultation, if the area is a tourist location. This could be achieved by timing consultation during peak tourist times. The Applicant advised that the East of the site may stretch towards tourist areas, and this will be taken into consideration.

## **Submission date**

The application is expected to be submitted to the Inspectorate for acceptance in June 2026.

## **The pre-application service offer**

### **The service tier requested by the applicant**

The Applicant has requested the Standard tier service for their pre-application, owing to the experience of the consultation team and planning knowledge around the consenting for solar projects. However, the Applicant's team may seek a review of certain draft documents by the Inspectorate as part of the Standard service offer. Owing to the number of solar projects that have proceeded through the DCO process, the Applicant intends to supplement the support provided by the Inspectorate under the Standard tier with learning taken from these other projects and any consented DCOs. The Inspectorate advised that there is a 6-week timeframe of it to review any draft documentation, followed by a feedback meeting if required.

### **The position of affected statutory bodies in relation to the requested service tier**

To date, statutory bodies have not expressed an opinion in relation to the chosen tier, the Applicant reported. However, the Applicant has not yet discussed their preference of service tier with local authorities.

### **Primary service features**

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant would be entitled to 6 meetings per year throughout the pre-application period and encouraged the Applicant to provide agenda items ahead of time, to ensure the best efficiency of these meetings and to enable the Inspectorate to appropriately prepare for the provision of any specific advice.

The Inspectorate also advised that an advice log is now used rather than longer form meeting notes to capture advice given to the Applicant by the Inspectorate.

The Inspectorate signposted to the [Prospectus](#) in relation to other features of its pre-application service and associated costs.

## **Practical Arrangements**

### **Confirming the pre-application tier service and invoicing**

The Inspectorate will confirm this with the Applicant following the inception meeting.

### **Updates to project information for Find a National Infrastructure Project**

The Inspectorate will set-up the project page on their internal systems but will not publish it until the Applicant confirms the project has gone live.

### **Project email account**

The Project email account is: [shepway@sse.com](mailto:shepway@sse.com)

The Project website: [www.sserenewables.com/solar-and-battery/solar/shepway-energy-park](http://www.sserenewables.com/solar-and-battery/solar/shepway-energy-park)

## **AOB**

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant should take note of the new [Advice Note on “Good Design”](#) and ensure the guidance is incorporated into the project plan as much as possible.

The Inspectorate requested that the Applicant provides future updates on the new substation being planned by National Grid.

The Inspectorate advised that the criteria to be applied in appointing the Examining Authority is set out in the Planning Act 2008: Pre-examination stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects guidance. Therefore, it would not be possible at this time to confirm the size of the Examining Authority. The Applicant can however look at similar projects which are geographically close or of similar size, as a guide for budgeting purposes.

The Inspectorate confirmed that a project page on the National Infrastructure Planning website would be created shortly after the Inception Meeting, in addition to a project email account for future correspondence with the Applicant.