



Inception Meeting note

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| Project name | Sedgeby Solar Farm |
| Case reference | EN0110026 |
| Status | Final |
| Author | The Planning Inspectorate |
| Date of meeting | 16 September 2025 |
| Meeting with | Meeting with Sedgeby Solar Limited |
| Venue | Microsoft Teams |
| 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 Planning Act). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

The proposed development

A Development Consent Order (DCO) will be sought by Sedgeby Solar Limited (the applicant), a subsidiary of BayWa r.e. UK Ltd, for the construction and operation of a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) solar farm. The proposed development will consist of ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with a storage capacity of 350 megawatts (MW), and associated infrastructure such as underground cabling and biodiversity enhancement. If consented, the proposed development is expected to have a generating capacity of 350 MW with an operational lifespan of 40 years.

BayWa r.e. UK Ltd recently obtained development consent for the Oaklands Farm Solar Park NSIP in Derbyshire and has been promoting other renewable energy projects in the UK since 2011.

Location

The proposed development site is located on approximately 420 hectares (ha) of agricultural land near Little Sessay, North Yorkshire, within the administrative area of North Yorkshire Council. The land is currently used for producing energy crops and cattle feed. Two main solar array development areas are proposed at Sessay Park in the west and Briar Hill in the east, either side of the East Coast Main Line (Network Rail's Strategic Route G railway line serving towns and cities between London King's Cross station and Edinburgh Waverley). Some isolated farms and farm buildings fall within the draft Order Limits, all of which are financially involved in the project. The

settlements of Sessay and Birdforth are nearby. 600m from Briar Hill (at its closest point) is the A19 road, leading to Sowerby to the north. The nearest cities are York and Ripon.

The applicant explained that it is in early talks with Network Rail about potential protective provisions in the DCO for safeguarding the East Coast Main Line. It was exploring Network Rail's preferred option for horizontal directional drilling (HDD) for burying the connection cables beneath the railway line, as well as other crossing solutions. The applicant added that it was also treating the East Coast Main Line, and drivers of trains on that railway line, as sensitive receptors for its glint and glare assessment. It was considering mitigation measures such as a 10m buffer between the solar panels and the railway line, as well as using the topography of the land and the position of panels, as part of its early concept design.

Grid connection

As per the signed grid connection offer, the proposed development is expected to connect to a new National Grid substation. Consent for the Thormanby 400kV Substation will be sought separately by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET).

The location of the Thormanby 400kV Substation and point of connection with the proposed development is currently unknown. Consequently, the applicant said that it would not include the cable route corridor within its Scoping Report. It is likely that a broad cable route corridor area may be presented with different corridor options until it can be refined (dependent on the extent of information available on the siting of the new substation). The applicant said that it hoped to finalise its preferred grid connection corridor route as part of the DCO application at the point of submission. The applicant added that it was undertaking early discussions with NGET about its proposals for the substation, with details on the substation siting expected in late 2026/ early 2027, before statutory consultation takes place.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to review other Solar projects in examination where this issue arises, to see how it is addressed through the Examining Authorities' questions and evidence requested, as well as how the Secretary of State determines such matters. The Inspectorate also advised the applicant to provide as much detail as possible on its intended cable corridor route at the statutory consultation stage, to enable consultees to provide informed responses under the Gunning Principles.

Consenting programme

The applicant shared its anticipated project timeline to submission of the application, being:

- non-statutory consultation – September to November 2025
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Request – late November 2025
- consultation with the Council on its draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) - mid 2026
- statutory consultation - late 2026
- Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AOCM) statement – end of 2026
- further targeted consultation (if needed) – early 2027
- application submission – August 2027.

The project timeline may need to change to take account of any amendments to legislation under the government's proposed Planning and Infrastructure Bill, if enacted, and to reflect information

available from National Grid regarding the point of connection.

Early engagement with statutory bodies, local authorities, and other stakeholders

The applicant has been engaging with local authorities, landowners, and statutory consultees on its proposed development and launch the project in September. It planned to hold a workshop with local representatives and near neighbours initially and establish a Working Group with parish and ward councillors, local businesses and community groups, to discuss the early design masterplan and proposed access routes in order to obtain early feedback and local knowledge. The applicant is intending to hold two public exhibitions in the area in mid-October 2025, with consultation material and different modes of communication used to further illustrate its development to the community. The applicant added that it plans to use this initial feedback to help refine its development's design and to inform material for the statutory consultation phase.

The applicant said it was also seeking to engage with the Council on its proposed consultation programme and development plans, with regular contact throughout the pre-application stage. The applicant said it would discuss and agree a Planning Performance Agreement as soon as practicable. The applicant is also starting early engagement with statutory parties such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, National Highways and Historic England under their own charging regimes and pre-application advice services.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to clearly document and show what consideration is given to feedback received during consultation and how this has led to any design changes, mitigation or use of the land within a Design Approach Document (as explained in the Inspectorate's published Advice on Design and associated webinar, and in view of the criteria on design in the National Policy Statements and guidance issued by the National Infrastructure Commission).

In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant said that it had identified approximately 10 residential properties within or adjacent to the draft Order Limits, which it was seeking to directly consult the occupants on its design proposals and to obtain early insight on any potential effects from the proposed development. It was also seeking to consult and provide leaflets to occupants in nearby villages accordingly.

Environmental constraints and issues

The site context is predominantly rural and in agricultural use, the applicant explained. The Pilmoor Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) adjoins the Sessay Park (west) development area, which is designated for its fen vegetation. An area of Ancient Woodland is adjacent to the Briar Hill (east) site and small watercourses run through the site, with limited parts of the site said to be within Flood Zones 2 and 3 associated with those watercourses. The Howardian Hills National Landscape is approximately 2.5km to the east of the development area, with various listed buildings within the vicinity of the site. Additionally, two Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) run through the Briar Hill parcel. The nearest European site is North York Moors Special Protection Area, approximately 10km away to the east of the site.

The applicant said that it was looking to include appropriate buffers and offsets between residential properties and the solar infrastructure, where needed, and to Ancient Woodland. Electrically sensitive infrastructure would also be located within Flood Zone 1, with the retention of PRoWs where feasible. Habitat management measures and landscaping to create Biodiversity Net Gain were also being planned, together with additional planting and screening measures.

In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant added that it was not expecting that diversions to PRowS would be needed, though it had removed infrastructure and panels from adjacent overhead lines and one PRow in its early concept design. The applicant also explained that, from its initial discussions, Natural England seemed amenable to its approach to assessing any effects on the SSSI and designated assets but would provide a fuller response at scoping. The applicant's Scoping Report would cover any effects on watercourses.

EIA scoping

EIA scoping is anticipated in late November 2025. The Inspectorate advised that scoping should not overlap with the applicant's non-statutory consultation period, as it can lead to confusion and to give statutory bodies more time to respond. The applicant said that it was looking to separate scoping from its non-statutory consultation phase, where possible, and to provide appropriate communication to consultees to help distinguish the different consultation activities taking place. The applicant said that it would also submit its GIS Shapefile at least 10 working days before its scoping request, in line with the Inspectorate's published advice.

The Inspectorate referred to its published advice on scoping for solar development, which the applicant said it was having regard to in drafting its Scoping Report. The Inspectorate also advised the applicant to have cost recovery agreements in place with relevant statutory consultees before the scoping request is made, to enable consultation bodies to respond to the scoping process.

The Inspectorate also advised that if the draft Order Limits do not contain a cable corridor at the time of the scoping request, that this will affect the consultation bodies that are identified and consulted on the scope of the Environmental Statement. Equally, where the Order Limits expand to include additional land after scoping, the applicant may need to consider whether it needs to rescope the project and reconsult statutory parties, as it may draw in further prescribed consultees under a revised GIS Shapefile.

The draft development consent order

The applicant considers that the proposed development is likely to cover common issues for solar as shown in other examined NSIP solar cases, and is unlikely to raise any novel, complex or cross sector issues or novel drafting in the DCO.

The applicant is looking to provide an Issues Tracker and Potential Main Issues document as part of its application. No supplementary components are expected to be sought by the applicant as part of its pre-application activities.

Land rights

The applicant is seeking to secure voluntary agreements with landowners in the first instance, for obtaining the land required for development. The applicant explained that an option agreement has been signed for the main solar array development areas, with Heads of Terms signed for a possible cable route corridor to join the two development parcels together. Compulsory acquisition of land or rights over land may be sought as a fallback position in the DCO under sections 122 to 134 of the Planning Act, the applicant added, if voluntary agreements cannot be reached within the pre-application stage and having consulted those with an interest in relevant land.

The pre-application service offer

Based on the issues above, the applicant is seeking the 'standard' pre-application service. The applicant and applicant's consultants have experience of the DCO planning process but may seek a review of selected draft documents under the Inspectorate's service. The Inspectorate advised that the service tier would be confirmed shortly after the meeting, together with information about the email address for the project, launch date for the Inspectorate's project page, and the appointment of a Case Manager.

Feedback on the applicant's initial Programme Document (post-meeting advice)

The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document before the Inception Meeting in line with the Inspectorate's published 2024 Pre-application Prospectus.

Having reviewed the document, the Inspectorate considers that it sets out relevant information about the site, the proposed development, applicant, approach to consultation and policy regime, in view of the government's pre-application guidance on the content of Programme Documents at paragraph 10. However, the Programme Document should also contain a list of main issues and the activities proposed against these, even at this early stage, as well as how any risks are to be managed. The programme timetable should also include indicative dates for the draft document review stage, as well as timescales for project update meetings with the Inspectorate, as well as dates for multiparty meetings and / or evidence plans if pursued. Additionally, it is helpful if information is provided on whether any other licences or consents may be needed and whether its Programme Document and the proposed programme has been shared with relevant statutory bodies. It is also helpful if the applicant can state whether it intends to submit a Design Approach Document and a Policy Compliance Document with its application.