



Inception Meeting note

Project name	South Brooks Solar Farm
Case reference	EN0110027
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	8 October 2025
Meeting with	Meeting with Blue Planet Solar Farm 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 Blue Planet Solar Farm Limited, a subsidiary and joint venture of EDF power solutions (formerly EDF Renewables) and PS Renewables, for the South Brooks Solar Farm (the proposed development). For the purposes of sections 14 and 15 of the Planning Act, the proposed development would constitute a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP), being an onshore solar generating station in England with an expected output of approximately 500 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy to the National Grid. The site for the proposed development will be on approximately 1,094 hectares (ha) of land, near the town of Lydd and the former Dungeness Power Station on the Dungeness headland in the south of Kent, within the administrative areas of Folkestone and Hythe District Council, Kent County Council, Rother District Council and East Sussex County Council.

The proposed development will be comprised of ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), and other infrastructure to enable the construction, operation and decommissioning of the NSIP. The site is expected to comprise six main land parcels for the solar array areas, named Sites A to F, which will connect to the existing National Grid Dungeness substation (approximately 3km away from the nearest solar array site boundary). In answer to a question from the Inspectorate, the applicant is not anticipating that additional works would be needed to the grid substation to facilitate the connection but said it was in ongoing talks with National Grid about engineering options and connection requirements for the development.

The applicant and applicant's team stated that it has knowledge and experience of the DCO process, having sponsored other NSIPs such as the Springwell Solar Farm, Longfield Solar Farm, Sunnica Energy Farm, and One Earth Solar Farm.

The proposed development is near other NSIPs in the south of Kent, namely Shepway Energy Park and the South Kent Energy Park. The applicant said that it was considering possible cumulative impacts that may arise from its NSIP and other developments, as part of its initial assessment and is considering any mitigation that may be required.

The applicant's connection agreement with National Grid is to produce up to 500MW of renewable energy and the land needed for solar panels and associated infrastructure may reduce as the proposed development progresses through pre-application consultation and any redesign. The applicant also said it was aware of the operation and setting of the nearby Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch passenger railway line and the use of the wider tourist area, which it was taking into account in its assessments.

Consenting programme

The applicant's proposed consenting programme for the pre-application stage includes:

- project launch – September 2025
- non-statutory consultation – September to October 2025
- scoping – November 2025
- consultation on the draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) - Q1 2026
- publication of the SoCC – Q2 2026
- statutory consultation – Q2 2026
- Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM) statement – Q1 2027
- DCO application submission – Q1 2027.

The applicant said that it would follow the current legislative requirements for its pre-application stage and its consenting programme, until any changes are enacted by the Planning Act under the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (should it receive royal assent).

Early engagement with statutory bodies, local authorities, and stakeholders

The applicant said that it had begun its engagement with relevant local authorities to introduce its proposed development and design concept and discuss draft Planning Performance Agreements. The applicant is also engaging with National Grid, statutory bodies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and local stakeholders such as Lydd airport and Kent Fire and Rescue services, to obtain initial feedback. The Office for Nuclear Regulation has also been consulted owing to the nearby Dungeness Power Station. The applicant is also holding public events in the area and early discussions with parish and town councils, to gain insights and comments from the local community to understand how the landscape and built and natural environment is used, and to ensure all relevant parties are appropriately consulted on its plans.

The Applicant said that it has received a diverse range of feedback from stakeholders so far. While some understood the need for the proposed development in principle, others

expressed concern about potential effects on the local area. The applicant said that it would engage positively with all stakeholders and share information as it undertakes its consultation phases.

Environmental constraints and issues

A small part of the site is located within the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which includes features of the international designation and additional habitats (such as saltmarsh and dunes) for flora, invertebrates, birds and geological features. The proposed development also borders the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Ramsar site and may contain functionally linked land, which is designated for annual vegetation of drift lines, natural shingle wetlands (saline lagoons, freshwater pits and basin fens), bryophytes, vascular plants and invertebrates, water vole, non-breeding bird assemblage, mute swan and shoveler, and aquatic warbler. The site is in close proximity to the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) (designated for Bewick's swan, bittern, golden plover, hen harrier, ruff, shoveler and non-breeding assemblage), as well as the Dungeness Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Dungeness National Nature Reserve (NNR) (both designated for annual vegetation of drift lines, perennial vegetation of stony banks, and great crested newts). Further away from the Order Limits is the High Weald National Landscape.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to be clear in its Environmental Statement on the boundaries between different designated sites and their respective features, and how the respective effects (where arising from the proposed development) will be mitigated, and consequently, to denote and separate the different EIA and HRA considerations.

The applicant added that Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land and flood risk were key considerations. For example, provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) data shows the northwest portion of the site is classified as Grade 1 BMV, with Grades 2 and 3 BMV land dispersed across and around the site. The land has been historically used for agricultural purposes, with some mineral extraction, the applicant said. There are said to be no known wildflower plots across the site.

In respect of flood risk, the site lies predominantly within Flood Zones 2 and 3, with tidal influences. The applicant explained that the area benefits from an existing network of flood defences along the Kent coast and is undertaking early engagement with the Environment Agency on flood data. The Inspectorate advised that the applicant's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should include the lifespan and history of these flood defences. The applicant should be clear in the Environmental Statement where discussions have taken place with national and local statutory bodies and any agreements reached on its proposed methodology and assessment outputs, especially in taking account of tidal risks. The applicant said it was aware of the Environment Agency's latest flood risk data modelling and would discuss any additional assessments that might be needed.

The Inspectorate asked whether any particular consideration would need to be given to protecting the solar panels from saltwater, given the proximity of the site to the Kent coastline (such as salt build up and corrosion affecting the lifespan and performance of the panels). The applicant said that its engineers did not currently consider that any additional cleaning regime or extra protection for the solar panels would be needed from the effects of saltwater, though this will be considered as the design progresses.

The Inspectorate queried the classification of Lydd Airport. The applicant explained that the airport is designated for private use and had been engaged to understand flightpath safety as well as glint and glare issues. The Inspectorate advised the applicant to review the examinations for Botley West and Frodsham in respect to issues arising from solar schemes and airfields.

EIA scoping

The applicant said its draft EIA Scoping Report is well advanced and is expected to be submitted to the Inspectorate in November 2025. A bespoke approach is being adopted in relation to biodiversity matters, with a focus on identifying and incorporating potential environmental enhancements. Key project parameters have been developed collaboratively across engineering, environmental, and wider technical disciplines, the applicant added. The applicant's Scoping Report would also include different potential connection cable corridor options, which will be refined as the application progresses through the pre-application stage. The applicant also said it was aware of the Inspectorate's published Advice on Scoping for Solar and would include a Solar Scoping Table in its Scoping Report and would provide the GIS ShapeFile at least 10 working days before submission.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to submit its Scoping request in early November, if possible, to avoid the Festive period. This would enable relevant statutory consultees sufficient time to provide full, informed responses.

The applicant is also seeking to submit a draft Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report (Stage 1) to Natural England early in the scheme development. The HRA Screening Report will identify relevant designations and potential pathways of effect, enabling early input from Natural England and the Environment Agency. Design development is being informed by field survey data, with assumptions tested in collaboration with engineering teams and mitigation and compensation measures integrated into the evolving design.

Environmental surveys

The applicant reported that several surveys were underway since November 2023. These include geophysical, wintering bird, bat activity, breeding bird, and invertebrate scoping. Ecological surveys were said to have identified greater numbers of bird species forming part of the qualifying features of designated sites in the surrounding area, with limited target species within the Order Limits. The applicant said it will continue with ongoing surveys for agricultural land classification (ALC), traffic, rights of way, and trial trenching as needed, along with noise baseline assessments and surveys for great crested newts, Macrophyte and aquatic invertebrates.

These surveys will support the environmental assessment and design refinement of the proposed development. The applicant stated that they have published a news page on their website to notify the public about the types of surveys being undertaken.

Design

The applicant has created a set of preliminary design principles that will inform and guide the evolution of the proposed development and demonstrate how it has taken account of

the criteria on design in the National Policy Statements and relevant local planning policy, as well as guidance issued by the National Infrastructure Commission and the advice of the Inspectorate on design.

The Inspectorate was informed that the applicant's non-statutory consultation masterplan has proactively sought to embed offsets from environmental assets and designated landscapes, as well as offsets from residential properties and around villages. The applicant was also assessing considerations to be given to landscape views and use, in terms of enhancing existing public rights of way and elevations (where the public may view solar panels from an elevated embankments).

The draft Development Consent Order (DCO)

The DCO is expected to be informed by the most recently made solar DCOs available at the time of application submission.

The applicant is actively monitoring solar DCO applications that are currently progressing through the planning system, to identify where approved approaches are being taken. They are also reviewing decisions issued by the Secretary of State to ensure that best practice in DCO drafting is adopted.

Land rights

The applicant said it would undertake a comprehensive DCO land referencing process across all areas of interest to ensure the accuracy of land ownership and interest data. The applicant intends to acquire all necessary rights through voluntary agreements wherever possible. However, in line with standard practice, compulsory acquisition powers will be sought within the DCO to ensure the project can be delivered.

Phase One Consultation (non-statutory)

The applicant delivered a newsletter about the proposed development to approximately 8,000 addresses across the parishes of Lydd, Camber, Old Romney, New Romney, and Ivychurch on 9 September 2025. Consultation materials, including a 36-page booklet and questionnaire, were made available online and in printed form at a community access point. The applicant said it had held five public events in New Romney, Littlestone, Lydd, and Camber, supported by advertising in local newspapers, social media, and press releases.

Submission date

The Inspectorate advised that applicants are now expected to provide a specific month for when a DCO application might be submitted. The applicant confirmed during the meeting that the expected submission month is March 2027, which like other NSIPs, may be subject to change.

The pre-application service

The service tier requested by the applicant, including justification

The applicant has requested the basic tier of service, having taken account of its extensive experience with the DCO process, the design of the scheme and early assessment work undertaken, and in consideration of the designated National Policy Statements EN-1 and EN-3.

The Inspectorate agreed the choice of tier seemed appropriate in this instance but would confirm this after the meeting.

Feedback on the applicant's Programme Document (post meeting note)

The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document before the inception meeting was held, in line with the Inspectorate's 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. The Inspectorate noted that it provides the expected content and structure of a Programme Document as set out in the government's pre-application guidance at paragraph 10. In particular, the applicant has provided a clear and comprehensive summary of potential main issues arising from the proposed development at this initial stage and the activities proposed to resolve these, which will greatly assist the Inspectorate, statutory parties and members of the public in understanding the context of the site and the type of mitigation that might be needed. The applicant should ensure it updates its main issues table at appropriate points in the pre-application stage, with high level information provided on any significant developments from its assessments and consultation feedback / design evolution, as well as any agreements reached with relevant statutory parties on its proposed methodology and mitigation.

It would be helpful if the applicant could provide the estimated generating capacity of the proposed development in its Programme Document, as well as whether other licences or consent are needed. It would also be helpful to include indicative dates for project update meetings with the Inspectorate in the programme timetable and provide an indication as to whether the applicant intends to submit a Design Approach Document and a Policy Compliance Document with its DCO application.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	NSIP Student Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Senior Environmental adviser
Planning Inspectorate	NSIP Case manager
Planning Inspectorate	Environmental Advisor
Applicant	DWD
Applicant	EDF power solutions
Applicant	Pershing
Applicant	Logika Consultants
Applicant	SEC Newgate
Applicant	Quod