



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Arrow Valley Solar
Case reference	EN0110033
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	24 February 2026
Meeting with	Meeting with Arrow Valley Solar Limited (applicant), Atkins Réalis and Cavendish Consulting
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 (PA2008). 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 Arrow Valley Solar Limited (the applicant), a Special Purpose Vehicle owned by Island Green Power Limited, for a new solar farm generating station in England with an anticipated generating capacity of over 100MW (proposed development). The proposed development is expected to comprise of ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and associated mounting structures, arranged across approximately 1,062 hectares of land within four main solar array site areas located along the Warwickshire and Worcestershire border. The site in totality falls within the administrative areas of Wychavon District Council, Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Redditch District Council, as well as Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire County Council. In addition to the solar arrays, the proposed development will include a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), substation infrastructure, grid connection works, access arrangements, and all associated development required for the construction, operation, and eventual decommissioning of the proposed development.

The applicant confirmed that the project's point of grid connection is at the existing National Grid 400kV Feckenham Substation, situated approximately 8km north of the nearest solar array site in Worcestershire. The solar array sites will be connected via underground cables. The applicant noted that the length of the cable route corridor extents between each of the main four sites varies: from Feckenham Substation to Site One is approximately 8km, from Site One to Site Two is approximately 1km, from Site Two to Site

Three is approximately 3km, and from Site Three to Site Four is approximately 3km. The connection strategy remains under development at this stage, including the extent and width of the cable route corridor, but the applicant said that some works at the existing National Grid substation may be required to enable the connection to the national electricity network (i.e. a cable sealing end compound). The applicant is also continuing to refine its “other consents and licences” approach.

The applicant added that the site area near South Littleton contains land identified for substation-related works, with further land parcels allocated for solar array development. The applicant also noted several environmental constraints, including the River Arrow, which runs adjacent to the easternmost boundary of Site Two, and the need for the cable route corridor to cross the River Avon between Sites Two and Three. It was confirmed that no railway lines are present within or adjacent to the development boundary. Additionally, two major crossing points under the Strategic Road Network (SRN) have been identified: the A46, located adjacent to Site Two, and the A422, located between Site One and the Feckenham Substation. There are existing overhead lines in the vicinity, in proximity to Site One.

The Inspectorate asked the applicant to clarify the anticipated capacity of the proposed development, which the applicant stated was expected to be approximately 500MW of solar generation with an additional 250MW of battery storage, as part of its grid connection agreement. However, the anticipated electricity generating installed capacity is subject to ongoing review and refinement, as part of the overall development of the scheme.

Consenting programme

The applicant is working to the indicative timescale below, subject to any changes needed:

- Inception Meeting – 24 February 2026
- EIA Scoping Report Submission – 27 March 2026
- EIA Scoping Opinion – April 2026
- Public Consultation – Q3/Q4 2026
- PINS Project Update Meeting (Post-Consultation) – Q4 2026
- PINS Project Update Meeting (Pre-Submission) – Q1 2027
- DCO Submission – April 2027

The applicant explained that its Programme Document has been prepared in accordance with the template set out within the Planning Inspectorate’s Pre-Application Prospectus, which will be published on the applicant’s website before Scoping submission on 27 March 2026. The applicant stated that it would be discussing its proposed consenting programme with the host local authorities at the next set of meetings in March.

The Inspectorate reaffirmed the importance of the applicant maintaining and regularly updating its Issues Tracker as the proposed development progresses through pre-application. The applicant should seek to hold relevant discussions with the statutory parties (where necessary) as early as possible to agree the scope of surveys and assessments needed as well as any mitigation required arising from potential impacts from the proposed development. This will assist the Inspectorate to understand the extent of issues and resolution provided by the applicant and agreements reached before the application is submitted for acceptance, and what if any specific s51 advice might be needed beforehand.

The Inspectorate also advised the applicant to review any relevant issues and the type of questions asked by Examining Authorities in current solar examinations to assist with the applicant's planning of its pre-application activities and preparation of the application. The applicant confirmed that it was already reviewing issues arising in current solar examinations, within industry, and on made Solar DCOs.

In respect of changes to consultation under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, the applicant said that it was continuing to follow the current requirements until the commencement regulations and new government guidance are enacted.

The Inspectorate stressed the importance of receiving the GIS ShapeFile at least 10 working days before the Scoping request is made, which the applicant acknowledged.

Engagement with statutory bodies, local authorities, and other stakeholders

The applicant explained that early engagement has commenced with the host and authorities. To date, the applicant has held introductory meetings with Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Wychavon District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcestershire County Council, and Warwickshire County Council. The applicant confirmed that it intends to hold further meetings with host authorities at six-week intervals throughout the pre-application stage. Draft Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) have been shared with these authorities for consideration.

The applicant stated that it has undertaken initial engagement with Natural England and Historic England, and discussions are ongoing regarding the establishment of service level agreements and an enhanced advisory agreements with these bodies respectively. The applicant has not yet contacted the Environment Agency but confirmed that they intends to do so as part of its forthcoming engagement programme.

The Inspectorate asked whether the host authorities have had experience with the DCO process and whether they had identified any potential cumulative effects with other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and other existing or proposed developments in the local area. The applicant explained that there are currently no other nearby NSIPs in the vicinity of the proposed development and are currently in the process of developing its short and long list of developments. The applicant confirmed that the host authorities have no prior DCO experience and confirmed that the project team have provided briefings on the DCO process to assist with their engagement and was working with them on whether any specialist technical support is needed as part of the PPAs.

The applicant has identified the Bidford Gliding and Flying Club as a stakeholder, as the red line boundary will run close to its operations. Engagement will be undertaken to understand any potential impacts on operations. The applicant also confirmed that it will consider the implications of the solar project for the wider operations of the Ragley Hall Estate.

The Inspectorate reiterated the importance of clear and effective early engagement to ensure that all interested parties, including inexperienced members of the public, are adequately informed as the project progresses.

Environmental constraints and issues

The applicant outlined the principal environmental considerations identified at this stage and noted that further assessment will be undertaken through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. As part of its initial review, the applicant said that there are nearby Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) such as Broom Railway Cutting SSSI, in addition to local nature reserves, ancient woodland, and other priority habitats. The applicant also noted the presence of heritage assets in proximity to the proposed development, including Ragley Hall Registered Park and Garden, Cleeve Prior Conservation Area, and a number of scheduled monuments and listed buildings. The applicant intends to progress detailed assessment work to determine potential impacts on these assets and their settings and will continue to work closely with Historic England and the affected local authorities on its approach to assessment and any proposed mitigation.

The applicant also explained that the proposed development will be designed sensitively to minimise landscape and visual impacts, with the solar panels also allowing livestock grazing throughout.

In respect of watercourses and flood risk, the applicant stated that parts of the proposed development lie within Flood Zones 2 and 3, and that elements of the project will interact with existing flood defences and watercourse crossings. Crossings of the River Arrow and River Avon will require further assessment. The applicant noted that early engagement with the Environment Agency will be undertaken to help shape the flood risk and drainage strategy.

The applicant is currently evaluating potential sensitive residential receptors in proximity to the site, as well as understanding the wider community and land-use implications. This includes continued engagement with affected landowners and local groups.

Scoping

The applicant confirmed that its Scoping Report is scheduled for submission to the Inspectorate on 27 March 2026. The Applicant explained that the Scoping Report will be prepared in accordance with Regulation 10(3) of the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, and that it will describe the proposed scope and methodology for the Environmental Statement. The Inspectorate is expected to then issue its Scoping Opinion in May, following consultation with the relevant statutory bodies.

Environmental surveys

The applicant confirmed that wintering bird surveys are currently ongoing across the site and are anticipated to conclude by the end of March 2026. Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys were completed during January and February 2026, providing initial information on soil quality and agricultural land grades within the proposed development boundary.

The applicant stated that geophysical surveys are currently being undertaken across the solar PV sites. Depending on the outcomes of these surveys, and following discussions with key stakeholders, further heritage-related investigations may be required later in

2026. The applicant identified that a broader programme of seasonal surveys will be undertaken throughout Spring, Summer, and Autumn 2026, including:

- landscape surveys, comprising a summer survey in Summer 2026, followed by winter and winter viewpoint surveys in Winter 2026
- baseline noise surveys, expected to be undertaken in Autumn 2026
- heritage site visits, including visits to Ragley Hall and Rous Lench, scheduled for Autumn 2026
- EA UK Habitat Classification surveys and protected species assessments during Spring 2026, followed by targeted protected species surveys.

The applicant confirmed that the results of these surveys will inform the Environmental Impact Assessment and guide the development of appropriate mitigation measures.

The development consent order

The applicant stated that its legal representatives will be preparing the draft DCO.

Separately, the Inspectorate advised that the applicant should clearly demonstrate the evolution of the design of the proposed development in its application documentation, such as a Design Approach Document, in terms of how it has followed design principles and the criteria on design in the designated National Policy Statements and associated guidance as well as responding to consultation feedback, demonstrating an understanding of place, and/or mitigation development. The applicant was reminded that setting out a transparent design process would be essential for the examination.

Land and rights

The applicant confirmed that Options for Lease Agreements have been entered into with landowners for the solar array and BESS sites. Non-intrusive surveys are underway across these areas and will continue through Spring and Summer 2026. Initial contact with potentially affected parties along the cable route corridor is planned for March–April 2026, with further non-intrusive surveys beginning from April/May 2026. The applicant stated that it was seeking to reach voluntary agreements with affected persons, where feasible.

Section 42 and Section 48 notices will be issued to all known land interests ahead of statutory consultation in Q3/Q4 2026. Heads of Terms for Easements are expected to be provided to landowners in Q4 2026, following the final design fix. The applicant confirmed that the DCO will seek compulsory acquisition powers across the Order Limits, to be used only where voluntary agreements cannot be reached. Temporary possession is expected in parts of the cable corridor to minimise permanent acquisition.

In response to questions, the applicant confirmed that the land is largely agricultural, although full grading results are still being processed. Agricultural Land Classification surveys have been undertaken, and will be reflected in the EIA Scoping Report should processing of survey data be completed in time.

Consultation

The applicant would seek relevant host authorities views on the draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) in line with Part 5 of the Planning Act 2008, until any policy or legislative changes are enacted. Pre-consultation activity will take place ahead of the main consultation period to inform key political stakeholders and in support of developing the SoCC.

The applicant intends to carry out a six-week statutory consultation during Autumn/Winter, which will include mailing local stakeholders and properties, producing accessible pre-recorded materials, and undertaking additional engagement with hard-to-reach groups. A good level of environmental information will be published to support meaningful participation.

The Inspectorate noted that the evolving policy landscape may result in changes to consultation requirements, and section 51 advice will be provided at the relevant time to help clarify approaches. The applicant confirmed that it will only adjust its approach if necessary and said if policy did change they may adopt a hybrid system.

The Inspectorate advised that the applicant should clearly explain what is being consulted on, why consultation is taking place, and the timeline for when further information will become available, particularly where questions cannot yet be fully answered. The applicant said it intends to undertake targeted consultation later in the process, when more detailed project information will be available.

Submission date

The expected date for submitting the DCO application is April 2027.

The pre-application service offer

The service tier requested by the applicant, including justification

The applicant explained that it has extensive experience of the DCO process having sponsored other Solar NSIPs, and considered that the proposed development is unlikely to involve novel or complex issues (given the use of established technology). There are also relevant and up to date National Policy Statements in place. On this basis, the applicant thought that the basic pre-application service tier was proportionate to its proposal and the level of experience within its team.

The Inspectorate noted the information provided by the applicant at the meeting and considered that confirming the basic tier was likely (which it would seek to do shortly after the meeting). The Inspectorate would also set up its project website page, once the proposed development had been launched.

Primary service features (and availability of templates)

The applicant confirmed that an Issues Tracker will be prepared following the Inspectorate's template and provided in time for the first Project Update Meeting. It will be informed by consultee discussions and ongoing environmental assessments and will

ultimately form the list of Potential Main Issues for examination submitted with the DCO application.

The applicant will also produce a Land and Rights Negotiations Tracker, aligned with the Inspectorate's template, later in the pre-application process. The Inspectorate advised aiming to provide the detailed version by the next project update meeting, though this is less critical than the Issues Tracker.

Risks, including change requests

The applicant confirmed that no project risks have been identified at this early stage, and the Risks section of the Programme Document will be updated as any risks emerge. The Inspectorate advised that, to achieve an efficient examination process, the applicant should seek to resolve, as far as reasonably possible, the main issues arising from the proposed development. This will reduce the number and significance of unresolved issues emerging in the consenting process as well as the need for change requests.

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

The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document before the Inception Meeting in line with our request under the 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. Having reviewed the document, the Inspectorate considers that it satisfactorily covers most of the expected content as set out in the government's pre-application guidance at paragraph 10 as well as the Inspectorate's Programme Document template. In particular, the Programme Document provides enough detail about the proposed development, its pre-application timetable, and the applicant's approach to early engagement with statutory consultees and other parties.

However, the applicant should set out its view on the main issues, even at this early stage, and the activities it will undertake to address those. The applicant should also set out its identification of any risks to achievement, in addition to how these risks will be tracked and managed.

It would also be useful to include an indication as to whether the applicant intends to submit a Design Approach Document and a Policy Compliance Document with its application.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operational Lead, National Infrastructure Team
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead, Environmental Services Team
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager, National Infrastructure Team
Planning Inspectorate	Case Manager, National Infrastructure Team
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer, National Infrastructure Team
Planning Inspectorate	Senior Environmental Advisor - Environmental Services Team
Arrow Valley Solar	Project Development Manager,
AtkinsRéalis	DCO Manager,
AtkinsRéalis	Senior Planner,
Cavendish Consulting	Senior Account Director / Comms Lead,
AtkinsRéalis	Associate Director in Environment Team