



Inception Meeting note

Project name	South Kent Energy Park
Case reference	EN0110035
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	24 April 2026
Meeting with	Meeting with South Kent Energy Park 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 (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 South Kent Energy Park Limited (the applicant), a Special Purpose Vehicle owned by Low Carbon Limited, for a large-scale solar generating station in England (the proposed development) with a 40 year operational lifespan and a capacity output of up to 500 megawatts (MW), along with a co-located Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).

The proposed development will comprise ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), sub-distribution switch rooms, conversion units, onsite substations, site access and access tracks, fencing and CCTV, inter-array connecting cables, storage containers, highway improvement works, landscape and ecological mitigation and enhancement areas, grid connection infrastructure, and other infrastructure integral to the construction, operation (including maintenance), and decommissioning of the proposed development.

The scheme benefits of a Gate 2 offer, however, at this time, the exact Point of Connection (PoC) isn't known. In response to the Inspectorate's question, the applicant stated that no timescale for determination for the location of the PoC is available at this stage. For the purposes of defining the scope of the proposed development and undertaking a meaningful environmental impact assessment, the applicant has adopted a reasonable working assumption that connection would be achieved via a technically deliverable onsite point on connection within the order limit. This approach will be kept under review as necessary information becomes available.

The proposed development lies around the village of Old Romney and approximately 1km west of New Romney, and 2.4 km north of Lydd in Romney Marsh, South Kent, within the administrative boundaries of Kent County Council and Folkstone and Hythe District Council. The nearest main settlements are Ashford, approx. 14km to the north, and Folkstone, approximately 17km to the northeast. The site boundary is roughly split into two main areas either side of the A259.

The site comprises approximately 750 hectares of land, with additional land being used for inter-array underground cabling, resulting in an initial red line of approximately 850 hectares.

Consenting programme and engagement

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

- Planning Inspectorate Inception Meeting - April 2026
- Initial consultation with host local planning authorities, landowners and key stakeholders – Commenced March 2026
- Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report to the Planning Inspectorate – May/June 2026
- Planning Inspectorate’s Scoping Opinion – June/July 2026
- Interim environmental report completion – November/December 2026
- Consultation for the public and other stakeholders – January/February 2027
- Submission of the DCO application – August 2027

The applicant discussed its approach to consultation. In light of ongoing legislative changes, the applicant stated that its approach to engagement and consultation with the local community, key local stakeholders and technical consultees would continue to be guided by four key pillars. These pillars are intended to ensure that engagement is consistent, targeted, transparent and timely, and that sufficient time is provided for review and feedback. The applicant stated that although the statutory requirements for consultation may change, the principle of good consultation will remain.

The Inspectorate noted that there are other solar farm NSIPs proposed in the immediate area and advised the applicant to ensure that its consultation and engagement are clearly distinguishable. This includes providing clear information to the public and making clear when it is their time to provide information.

The applicant confirmed they have already undertaken some community consultation between November 2024 and January 2025 when the project was originally launched. The applicant intends to undertake a second, more comprehensive consultation with key environmental information in January/February 2027. The applicant stated that early engagement with landowners has commenced, and that inception meetings are being scheduled with Folkstone & Hythe and Kent County Councils.

The applicant confirmed that a Cost Recovery Agreement is in place with the Environment Agency. An inception meeting was held in March, with technical meetings scheduled in April. Cost recovery is also to be set up with Natural England and Historic England in April.

From April/May onwards, the applicant will expand its engagement activities with community and representative stakeholders on the project, including parish councils, elected members at ERYC and a range of other stakeholders.

In response to a query raised by the Inspectorate, the applicant confirmed that hard-to-reach groups will be contacted during the consultation process. This includes engagement with the relevant Gypsy and Traveller liaison officer, and a commitment to accessible methods of consultation.

Environmental constraints and issues

The land within the DCO site boundary predominantly comprises arable farmland, principally used for the cultivation of crops such as wheat and oilseed rape, with smaller pockets of grazing land also present. Overall, the site is characterised by its agricultural land use and rural setting.

There are no international, national, regional or locally designated nature conservation designations located within the DCO boundary. Notwithstanding this, some areas of land within and surrounding the site are considered to be functionally linked land, which may provide supporting habitat and ecological connectivity for species associated with nearby designated or non-designated sites.

The applicant covered the main environmental constraints within proximity of the site:

- The closest ecological constraint is Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Ramsar site, and Special Protection Area (SPA), and is located within 5km of the site boundary. Romney Warren Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Dungeness National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Romney Sands SPA are statutory designations within 5 km of the site boundary.
- Kent Downs National Landscape is just under 6km north of the site boundary.
- The site is predominantly Flood Zone 3 with some Flood Zone 2 to the southeast of the site.
- There is one Scheduled Monument, and one Grade II Listed Building located within the site at the southern end of the scheme around the Ruins of Midley Church. There is also the old Romney Conservation Area, located adjacent to the site which extends to the north and south of the Conservation Area.
- Some Grade 1 agricultural land is included within the site boundary, it is believed that there will be some temporary or long-term loss of BMV land as a result of the proposed development. The applicant stated it would be looking into methodologies of how to best preserve these lands.
- The Inspectorate asked whether the impact of glint and glare for air traffic at the local Lydd Airport, and HGVs using the A259 which passes through the site had been considered. The applicant confirmed screening would be used to mitigate this. The applicant also stated in response to the Inspectorate that it is looking at suitable entry and exit points for the construction and operation of the proposed development, and Traffic Regulation Measures would form part of the draft DCO. The applicant confirmed there were several Public Rights of Way affected by the

project, and that it would propose improvements as part of the design. The Inspectorate suggested that the applicant should not only rely on map-based assessments for assessing Public Rights of Way, but to also visit them to see how these paths would be affected by the project, and to understand how frequently people use and interact with these Public Rights of Way. Early engagement would also be useful to obtain this knowledge.

Regarding archaeology, the Inspectorate advised the applicant to review the Archaeology and Solar Farms Good Practice Guide which provides advice for developers, archaeological advisors, consultants and contractors. The applicant confirmed it is aware of the document and that Historic England can provide the 'Heritage at Risk Register' as well.

Scoping

The applicant provided an update on the status of scoping. It was confirmed that the project's design principles are currently being developed and that the scoping boundary for the purposes of the EIA has been confirmed.

As part of the early evidence-gathering process, KMBRC was contacted in July 2022 to obtain pre-existing information relating to non-statutorily designated sites, priority habitats, protected and notable species, and invasive and non-native species (INNS), covering records from the preceding ten years.

Initial contact has also been made with the statutory consultees, including the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England, as well as the host local authorities. It was advised that further meetings will be arranged with these bodies to discuss key environmental receptors, survey requirements and proposed methodologies, in order to inform the scope of the EIA.

An inception meeting with the Environment Agency was held in March 2026, and the first technical meeting relating to flood risk is scheduled to take place in April 2026. The Inspectorate advised the applicant to review the Examining Authority's questions on flooding arising during the examination of the One Earth Solar Farm project, to help guide the applicant on key issues relevant to the assessment of flood risk.

The applicant advised that it intends to submit an EIA Scoping Report to the Inspectorate in May/June 2026. The Scoping Report is expected to set out the proposed approach to EIA and assessment methodologies, provide a description of the scheme, identify environmental topics proposed to be scoped out and scoped in, and outline the proposed approach of cumulative effects. It was advised by the Inspectorate that the Scoping Report be kept concise; any complex assessments would be better placed within the Environmental Statement (ES).

The applicant outlined the programme of environmental surveys being undertaken to inform the EIA. Ecological surveys include UKHab surveys, macroinvertebrate surveys and spring mammal surveys, which are programmed to take place between March 2026 and August 2026. Surveys for Great Crested Newts are scheduled between April and June 2026. Wintering bird surveys are also being carried out, with Year 1 completed in April 2026. A second survey season (Year 2) is planned to be undertaken between October 2026 and April 2027.

Landscape and visual assessments are being informed by walkover surveys and initial photography undertaken in December 2025. The agreement of viewpoints is scheduled between April 2026 and July 2026, with summer photography proposed between July 2026 and September 2026.

Arboricultural surveys comprise an initial walkover survey programmed between April 2026 and July 2026, with targeted arboricultural surveys to be undertaken in October 2026. Further walkover surveys relating to ground conditions, the water environment and cultural heritage assets are planned to be carried out during 2026. Heritage surveys will include geophysical surveys of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) areas prior to harvest, with surveys of the remaining areas to take place post-harvest, between August 2026 and October 2026.

Access and traffic assessments will be informed by baseline traffic surveys scheduled for October 2026. Noise assessments will include targeted noise monitoring, which is proposed to be undertaken between June 2026 and July 2026.

The Inspectorate enquired to the mitigation regarding panel replacement. The applicant stated it is aware this needs addressing and will be considering this during the process.

Draft Development Consent Order

The applicant advised that the principal purpose of the draft DCO will be to grant development consent for the construction, operation and maintenance of the proposed generating station (solar), together with associated energy storage infrastructure in the form of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).

The draft DCO is expected to include a range of ancillary powers necessary to facilitate the delivery of the project. These include powers in respect of street works and, where required, the alteration of streets. Provision will also be made for Traffic Regulation Measures and, if applicable, the temporary restriction or diversion of Public Rights of Way.

In addition, the draft DCO may include powers relating to the removal of hedgerows and the undertaking of works to trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders, where such measures are required to deliver the scheme. Powers for the compulsory acquisition of land will also be sought through the draft DCO.

Land and Rights

The applicant outlined the proposed scope of land and rights to be secured for the project, including the extent of compulsory acquisition and temporary possession powers to be sought. It was confirmed that the draft DCO will seek powers for the compulsory acquisition of land and rights over land, as well as temporary possession, where necessary, in accordance with the Planning Act 2008.

The applicant advised that most of the land required for the PV elements of the scheme is already subject to option agreements with landowners. However, ongoing site selection and technical work is continuing, including the identification of appropriate locations for the BESS and substation infrastructure, as well as refinement of the inter-array and interconnecting cable routes.

While the applicant confirmed that it will continue to seek to secure land interests through voluntary agreements wherever possible, it was noted that compulsory acquisition powers are required to ensure that the project can be consented and delivered in a timely and coordinated manner. Land interests potentially affected by the proposals include those of private landowners, statutory undertakers and other special category land interests relevant to the DCO process.

Application submission date

The applicant intends to submit its DCO application to the Inspectorate in August 2027.

The pre-application service offer

The applicant advised that it proposes to proceed with the basic level of pre-application service offered by the Planning Inspectorate, in accordance with the 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. This reflects the applicant's view that the project can be appropriately progressed within the parameters of the basic service, having regard to the experience of the applicant and the wider project team.

In support of this position, the applicant noted that the project engages designated National Policy Statements, proposes the use of established and tested solar technology, and follows a development approach that is generally well understood within the NSIP regime. The applicant also advised that the principal issues associated with the project are broadly similar to those encountered on other solar DCO projects. It was further noted that ongoing design iteration will seek to minimise potential effects, with impacts considered and reduced where possible through the application of the mitigation hierarchy throughout the pre-application process.

The Inspectorate advised that it would consider the applicant's comments and confirm the appropriate service tier following the meeting.

The Inspectorate also advised that the project reference code and project email address has been set up and will be shared in due course, with the project website page to be launched at a date to be determined ahead of scoping.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operational Lead – National Infrastructure Team
Planning Inspectorate	Operational Lead – Environmental Services
Planning Inspectorate	Associate Environmental Advisor
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager – National Infrastructure Team
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager – National Infrastructure Team
Planning Inspectorate	Case Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Low Carbon	Project Development Manager
Low Carbon	Senior Stakeholder Manager
Low Carbon	
AECOM	DCO Lead
AECOM	Planning Lead
AECOM	Planning Lead