



Inception Meeting note

Project name	West Oxfordshire Energy Park
Case reference	EN0110047
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	07 September 2026
Meeting with	Meeting with West Oxfordshire 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 the Find a National Infrastructure Project website.

Any section (s) 51 advice given in connection with the application during the meeting would be duplicated in a Section 51 Advice log. The s51 Advice Log would be updated with all s51 advice given in connection with the application to the applicant, and others, during the pre-application stage. The applicant is requested to use the s51 Advice Log to demonstrate regard to the advice given in connection with the application to it, and others, during the pre-application stage.

Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which the applicant, or others, could rely.

The Inspectorate explained that it is responsible for producing and retaining the official meeting note. Meetings are not recorded, and participants must not create, use, or retain any audio, video, screen, transcription, note-generation, or AI-assisted recording of the meeting.

The proposed development

A Development Consent Order (DCO) will be sought by West Oxfordshire Energy Park Limited, a subsidiary of Low Carbon, for a proposed solar energy development with an anticipated generating capacity exceeding 100 megawatts (MW). The proposed development is expected to comprise of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, battery energy storage, an onsite substation and associated infrastructure. Based on the anticipated generating capacity, the project is expected to constitute a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008 and would require development

consent before it could be constructed and operated. The applicant referred to the policy support for new low-carbon energy infrastructure contained in the energy National Policy Statements.

The proposed site comprises approximately 979 hectares of predominantly arable agricultural land across two principal land parcels. It is located entirely within West Oxfordshire District and within the administrative area of Oxfordshire County Council, between the towns of Lechlade and Carterton. It is close to the administrative boundaries of the Cotswolds and Vale of White Horse districts. The applicant indicated that the order limits are not currently expected to extend into those adjoining authority areas, although relevant effects would be assessed where appropriate.

The majority of the site is contiguous and located within the central project area. A more linear parcel lies to the north. The applicant's broad intention is to locate the principal generating and storage infrastructure within the larger central area, with the northern land principally contributing biodiversity mitigation and enhancement. The applicant identified Langford, Little Faringdon, Kelmscott, Grafton and Little Clanfield as settlements adjacent or close to the site. Broughton Poggs lies towards the north, while Carterton is the larger and more densely developed settlement in the surrounding area. The wider site was described as relatively sparsely populated.

The Planning Inspectorate asked whether the water features to the south-west formed part of the Cotswold Water Park. The applicant referred to a triangular water feature and its ecological designation (Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)) and did confirm the Cotswold Water Park was shown on the plan.

At the time of the meeting, the applicant understood there to be four other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects in the public domain with Oxfordshire including Bottley West Solar Farm, White Horse Reservoir, East West Rail and Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange. There are additional smaller Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) scaled applications which are being monitored by the applicant along with the development of the West Oxfordshire local plan.

The applicant advised that it had applied to National Grid for a 500 MW grid connection and that the project had achieved Gate 2 status under the connections reform process. While the final peak generating capacity is still being refined, the installed generating capacity is expected to exceed the available grid export capacity, reflecting a degree of overplanting within the design. The proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) would have a capacity of up to 500 MW.

The applicant anticipates that the grid connection point would be located within, or adjacent to, the order limits, and will be the working assumption for the scoping submission. Although existing high-voltage infrastructure passes through the site, the final connection design and point of connection have yet to be confirmed.

The Inspectorate asked whether connection to the existing overhead line would require alterations to existing transmission towers. The applicant explained that National Grid would determine the connection design and the works required at the point of connection. Subsequently, it is not yet known whether tower alterations would be necessary.

The applicant expects to receive further connection offers in January 2027, which is relatively close to the proposed application submission programme. The Planning Inspectorate advised the applicant to monitor this matter closely and to reflect any implications promptly in the project design, environmental assessment and draft order limits.

Consenting programme and introduction to the pre-application programme document

The applicant presented the following indicative programme:

- Early engagement with statutory bodies and local planning authorities: commenced July 2026 and continuing
- Submission of EIA Scoping Request: 30 September 2026
- Public launch and initial consultation: September 2026
- Receipt of Scoping Opinion: anticipated November 2026
- Design development and project engagement: September 2026 to March 2027
- Project consultation: February 2027
- Design freeze: March 2027
- Environmental Statement (ES) production and application finalisation: spring 2027
- DCO application submission: summer 2027

Any early engagement with statutory bodies and local authorities, and other stakeholder engagement to date

The applicant stated that it was pursuing an issue-led and proportionate approach. Early engagement had commenced with the host authorities, parish councils and statutory bodies and would continue as the project developed.

The Inspectorate advised that, although certain statutory pre-application requirements had been removed, the applicant would still be required to notify the Planning Inspectorate under section 46 of the Planning Act 2008. The applicant indicated that a section 48 notice was expected to be published in November 2026 to align with paragraph 2.10 of the guidance on preparing an application.

The Inspectorate identified that there are private and permanent gypsy and traveller pitches around West Oxfordshire. The applicant has classed these as hard to reach groups and will look to engage via the council to source the correct representative of these groups. The Inspectorate also highlighted the presence of local interest groups, including cricket clubs, equestrian centres, and wedding venues. The applicant confirmed local businesses have been included in scoping but will confirm whether this covered the local cricket clubs.

The Inspectorate advised that the pre-application period is applicant led and should be used to inform the design evolution of the project. It should be clear to all how the project has been designed and the factors that have been taken into account. It is important to understand how the site is currently used and using the consultation process to gain this understanding. The Inspectorate advised of the importance of issue trackers being used

and updated to assist in identifying the information that needs to be considered and potential aspects that need further exploration to justify or decide a particular approach.

Environmental constraints and issues

The applicant identified a range of environmental considerations within and surrounding the site, including:

- the proximity of RAF Brize Norton;
- scheduled monuments within and around the site, including three within the current site boundary;
- conservation areas and listed buildings in nearby villages;
- areas of ancient woodland and other woodland parcels
- Langford Brook and Broadwell Brook, other watercourses and field drainage ditches;
- areas within Flood Zones 2 and 3;
- statutory biodiversity designations, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- several public rights of way crossing the site;
- and residential and settlement receptors, including Langford, Little Faringdon, Kelmscott, Grafton and Little Clanfield and Broughton Poggs.

EIA scoping

The applicant proposed a number of topics be included within its scoping report, the following topics include:

- cultural heritage;
- soils and agriculture;
- landscape and visual effects;
- ecology and biodiversity;
- the water environment;
- construction noise and vibration;
- operational noise and vibration;
- construction traffic noise;
- transport and access effects arising from construction traffic;
- socio-economic effects; and
- climate change.

The Inspectorate noted that Glint and Glare is proposed to be “scoped out” and that the site is near two airfields (Fairford and Brize Norton). The applicant confirmed glint and glare would be assessed separately and discussed in the “other environmental matters” chapter of the ES and that appropriate engagement will take place with the MOD of the issue.

For the EIA Scoping, the Planning Inspectorate advised that the GIS shapefile should be provided at least 10 working days before submission of the Scoping Report.

Environmental surveys

The applicant highlights to the Inspectorate it had carried out a number of the surveys. Several surveys had already been completed, including:

- the badger survey,
- dormouse survey,
- great crested newt eDna survey,
- phase 1 habitat survey,
- agricultural land classification survey,
- veteran trees,
- contaminated land survey,
- heritage desk-based assessments supplemented by aerial photography and lidar assessment,
- hydrological walkover survey.

The applicant further highlighted surveys currently being carried out or will be undertaken imminently:

- Geophysical survey (magnetometry),
- Traffic Survey,
- Noise Survey,
- Topographical Survey
- Winter, Summer and Residential Photography.

Further surveys may be undertaken following engagement with stakeholders as and when required. There has been an inception meeting with Natural England, and the applicant

has been asked to review their comments of the Bottley West and Rosefield schemes. The applicant is currently arranging the use of the free discretionary advice service with Natural England.

Preparing the draft development consent order, including any novel approaches to drafting

The draft DCO will use the standard Statutory Instrument format and recently made DCOs will be observed.

Land and rights: Scope of compulsory acquisition etc powers sought and potential constraints and issues

The applicant stated that the principal development site was subject to voluntary option agreements with the relevant landowners. At this stage, the applicant did not anticipate a need to acquire interests from third-party landowners, however, the land position would be kept under review as the order limits and grid connection arrangements are refined.

Submission date

The applicant confirmed that they intend to submit the application for development consent in summer of 2027. The applicant went on to confirm they will narrow down their submission to a specific month, following pre-application engagement discussions with the Host Authorities in due course.

The pre-application service offer

The applicant requested the basic tier service, stating that this is proportionate to its proposal and the level of experience within its team. The Inspectorate stated that the basic pre-application service tier was likely to be agreed to, and it would confirm so in writing shortly after the meeting.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Environmental Services Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Case Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Senior Environmental Advisor
LDA Design	Planning Lead
LDA Design	Project Manager
LDA Design	EIA Lead
Low Carbon	Development Director – Low Carbon
Low Carbon	Communication and Engagement Lead