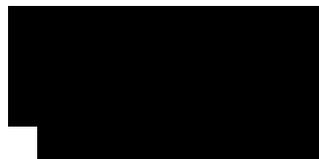


19th October 2020

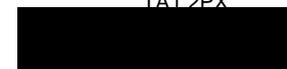


The Planning Inspectorate
Crown Building,
Cathays Park
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

(by email)



Kingston House
Blackbrook Business Park
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 2PX



Our Ref: NB/ TRP 2216
Your Ref:

To whom it may concern,

Proposed Renewable Energy Hub - Land at Brynwell Farm, Leckwith ('the Site')

Request for a EIA Screening Opinion in accordance with Regulations 6 and 14 of Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2017

I write to formally request an EIA screening/scoping opinion in respect of the abovementioned proposals. The Site measures approximately 78.7 acres of agricultural land situated at Brynwell Farm, Glamorgan. The site boundary is outlined on the location plans submitted with this inquiry.

Proposals

The application proposes the erection of a subsidy-free solar farm development with an installed generating capacity of 21MW, accompanied by associated works and infrastructure. The proposed development will consist of the following components:

- Fixed solar panels in rows mounted on a frame system which is fixed into the ground on steel piles.
- Small substation buildings and associated small scale plant.
- Grid connection infrastructure approximately 1.7km to the east of the site connected via trenched cables

The solar farm will comprise rows of fixed (non-rotating) solar panels set out over 78.7 acres of land together with associated plant, cable routing and works. The solar panels will be spaced to avoid shadow and elevated on a pivoted frame supported by stakes erected with minimal disturbance to the ground and sited to achieve optimum exposure for sunlight absorption. The photovoltaic panels will not emit noise, dust or vibration.

The electricity generated from the proposals will feed directly into the local electricity distribution network as and when required thus maximising the benefits of the energy generated from a renewable energy source. The development proposed will remain in position for 40 years after which the site will be returned to agriculture; accordingly the proposals are fully reversible. It is intended that the land will remain available for livestock to graze between the panels in order to enhance biodiversity and retain some agricultural use. Existing hedgerows may be reinforced with native species to deliver improved habitats and ecological benefits whilst screening views into the site from local PROW's.



Site Location

The Site is indicated on the attached location plan and lies within the administrative area of Vale of Glamorgan, in an area of elevated land to the west of Cardiff. The Site is set on agricultural land situated at Brynwell Farm, Leckwith - Grid Reference ST 14468 74918.

Policy Context and EIA regulations

The proposed development represents a station/plant for the purposes of generating electricity and would have an installed generating capacity of between 10 and 50 megawatts. As such, the proposals would constitute a 'Generating Station' with reference to The Developments of National Significance (Specified Criteria and Prescribed Secondary Consents) (Wales) Regulations 2016.

In accordance with Part 2 (5) of the Developments of National Significance (Procedure) (Wales) Order 2016 of the DNS process, the responsibility for EIA screening and scoping lies with Welsh Ministers and not the Local Planning Authority (LPA). Therefore, this letter now seeks to satisfy to procedural requirements of the EIA (Wales) Regulations 2017 in seeking a formal screening and scoping direction from the Planning Inspectorate in Wales, on behalf of Welsh Ministers.

Screening Request

I wish to request a formal Screening Opinion from Welsh Ministers, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the EIA Regulations (Wales) 2017.

In accordance with the EIA Regulations we have provided the following information:-

- a) a plan sufficient to identify the land;
- b) a description of the development, including in particular—
 - (i) a description of the physical characteristics of the development and, where relevant, of demolition works;
 - (ii) a description of the location of the development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;
- c) a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;
- d) to the extent the information is available, a description of any likely significant effects of the proposed development on the environment resulting from—
 - (i) the expected residues and emissions and the production of waste, where relevant; and
 - (ii) the use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and
- e) such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make, including any features of the proposed development or any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment.

Policy Basis

Planning Practice Guidance confirms that the aim of EIA is to assess the likely environmental effects of certain types of development. Information is provided and has been carefully considered in order to assist your assessment.

Schedule 1 Development

Planning Policy Wales confirms that the aim of EIA is to assess the likely environmental effects of certain types of development. In preparing this request I have considered whether an EIA is required with reference to the relevant legislation in order to assist your assessment.

Schedule 2 Development

The EIA Regulations (2017) specify the range of development which fall under Schedule 2 and include proposals that are:

- *Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water where the area of works exceed 0.5 hectare.*

The proposals include a station/plant for the purposes of generating electricity and would have an installed generating capacity of 21 megawatts. The site area exceeds 0.5 hectares. The development would therefore represent Schedule 2 development, in accordance with the Regulations.

Paragraph 5.5.9. of Planning Policy Wales states that:

“Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required for those developments which fall within Schedule 1 to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 and may be required for development falling within Schedule 2 to the Regulations. Schedule 2 development means development, other than exempt development, of a description mentioned in Column 1 of the table in Schedule 2 where:

- a. any part of that development is to be carried out in a sensitive area; or*
- b. any applicable threshold or criterion in the corresponding part of Column 2 of that table is respectively exceeded or met in relation to that development.*

A sensitive area, for the purposes of the Regulations, includes, among other things, a SSSI, a proposed or listed Ramsar site, a potential or classified SPA or a candidate or designated SAC. EIA will be required for Schedule 2 development where that development is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. The fact that a development would affect a sensitive area would not, of itself, justify the requirement for EIA although it would increase the possibility of EIA being required. That judgement must be taken on the particular merits of each case. Local planning authorities should consult Natural Resources Wales if uncertain about the significance of a project’s likely effect on the environment.”

Schedule 3 Selection Criteria

In determining whether a development proposal is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, Schedule 3 identifies three broad criteria which should be considered:

- The characteristics of the development
- Location of development
- The types and characteristics of the potential impact

The characteristics of the development

The proposed development is large in scale and would alter the immediate character of the rural, agricultural site, in its present form. The development would not result in a significant accumulation of other existing or approved development. The site will not consume resources (besides solar energy) and would actually beneficially reduce the intensity of the agricultural use of the land, allowing the ground to rest and restore nutrients as it is grazed. The proposed development would not produce any waste or arisings such as dust or noise nor result in any localised pollution besides some small impacts during the construction and decommissioning phases. The development would not cause risks of major accidents nor risks to human health, particularly as the solar panels are inert structures, which would be fenced off and on private land.

Location and the environmental sensitivity of the site

The Site lies within the Cwrt-yr-Ala Special Landscape Area. However, noting the ‘Primary Landscape Qualities and Features’ listed in the evidence base to the development plan, it is considered that the development of the site would have the potential to preserve these qualities. The development would have a relatively low profile

within the landscape, sitting among existing hedgerows, which could be strengthened in order to provide improved screening of the site and wider enhancement to the SLA and its constituent habitat. The Site is not identified as a Special Protection Area and no Site of Special Scientific Interests would be affected by the proposal. This assertion is supported by the findings of a suite of ecological surveys which have been undertaken over a period of three months prior to the submission of this inquiry.

The grading of the agricultural land has been determined through a detailed and robust survey of the site and has shown that the land is not of 'best and most versatile' quality.

Despite being of poor and deteriorating condition, Brynwell Farmhouse and its outbuildings are grade II listed and are located within proximity to the Site. It is not considered that the proposal would significantly affect the settings of these buildings.

The proposal would be sited within field margins and avoid hedgerows, trees and belts of woodland. There would also be minimal ground disturbance with the framework piled into the ground with no excavation other than the cable trenches.

Types and Characteristics of potential impacts

The potential effects on the site and the surrounding environment have been considered within this section using the criteria set out within Schedule 3.

a) *the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).*

The proposed development would consist of a solar farm with an installed capacity of 21MW within an area of 78.7 acres. The solar panels would be mounted in frames set at an angle of between 15 -25 degrees and would face south. The lowest part of the arrays would be approximately 0.5 - 1m high, with the highest part being likely to be no higher than 2.8m. Other infrastructure on site would include inverters to convert the current for export to the electricity distribution network. Approximately 1.7km to the east of the solar farm (and technically part of the site for this application) a substation would be built to facilitate connection to the local electricity distribution network. Despite the large scale of the development, the construction period will be relatively short, expecting to last approximately 3 - 4 months. Component parts would be delivered on HGV lorries with no abnormal loads. The average daily number of delivery vehicles throughout the construction period would be expected to be relatively low, likely in the region of 5-20 per day, utilizing points of access to the major road network immediately adjacent to the site. Hedgerows around the site would be maintained to screen the development from external views, and also provide biodiversity benefit

The passive and inert nature of the proposed development, together with existing hedgerows and proposed landscape and biodiversity enhancement measures would minimise the extent of any impact on residential amenity or the local biodiversity.

b) *the nature of the impact*

There will be a temporary landscape impact and an increase in traffic movements through the construction and decommission phases of the development. The panels would be mounted on steel frames and pile-driven into the earth. The site's archaeological potential would be established prior to construction to ensure potential impacts are avoided.

c) *the transboundary nature of the impact.*

The development would sit discreetly within the existing field boundaries. There are not likely to be any regional or international transboundary effects.

d) *the intensity and complexity of the impact.*

Construction / Decommissioning Period

The landscape impacts through construction will be localised, temporary and limited through the construction period and until landscape mitigation (to include hedgerow strengthening and additional planting) becomes established.

Traffic impacts accessing and egressing the site will be at their optimum through the construction and commissioning phases and will then reduce to those strictly limited movements associated with the operation and maintenance of the facility.

Operations Period

The landscape impacts will be reduced as a consequence of design and landscape mitigation. The Site lies within a flat landscape views across the site are limited and local to its immediate setting. Mitigation measures will largely address any residual landscape impacts and these impacts will diminish as the proposed planting and boundary strengthening matures over the life term of the proposal.

The operational traffic impacts will be de-minimis and isolated to those associated with operations and maintenance.

e) *the probability of the impact.*

Limited localized landscape impacts will occur but these are predictable and unlikely to change during the duration of the consent. In relation to (e) the impact will run from initial construction through to a period of 40 years of consent followed by decommissioning of site and returning to previous state, agricultural farmland.

f) *the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;*

The proposed is for a temporary (40 years) consent to use the Site as a large-scale solar farm.

g) *the culmination of the impact of other existing and or approved development.*

There is an existing solar farm immediately adjacent to the solar farm on the northern boundary of the site. Besides this, there are no other identified solar farms within a 5km radius of the site. There are five solar farms identified within a 10km radius. The low profile form of development means that landscape impacts are localised. There would be no wider cumulative impact issues with the other identified developments.

h) *the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.*

The impacts will be reduced in the design process with landscape mitigation which will similarly enhance on site biodiversity.

Summary

Preliminary appraisals indicate that the relevant impacts will be localised and limited in duration. It is considered that these impacts will be largely resolved with careful design and landscape mitigation measures, together with well-conceived and observed construction and transport methodologies and biodiversity enhancements.

The application will be supported with reporting to demonstrate how the proposal will be developed to ensure appropriate mitigation so that no significant adverse effects upon the natural and historic environment arise. This will include the following assessment work

- Full suite of ecology survey work and reporting
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Heritage Statement
- Transport Statement



- Flood Risk Assessment
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- Glint and Glare assessment

The benefits of the proposal lie in the reduction of greenhouse gases in line with international, national and local plan policy and the economic benefits that arise in the local and wider economy. The Site holds significant potential and this will be fully discussed in reporting supporting the proposed application.

It is our view that the proposal is NOT development requiring EIA however, a formal opinion is sought from the LPA for completeness.

I look forward to receiving your screening opinion in due course and thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Nick Beddoe BSc (Hons), MSc, MRTPI
Associate - Planning