

6th March 2024

Chichester District Council
Planning Department
East Pallant House
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1TY

Dear Sirs,

REQUEST FOR A FORMAL SCREENING OPINION UNDER REGULATION 6 OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017 (AS AMENDED)

PROPOSED SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC FARM (UP TO 20MWac) AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE, ON LAND TO THE EAST OF B2133, BETWEEN ROUNDSTREET COMMON AND NEWPOUND, WISBOROUGH GREEN, WEST SUSSEX RH14 0AN

Introduction

The proposal is for a solar photovoltaic farm (up to 20MWac) and associated infrastructure on land to the east of the B2133, as referenced above. The solar farm will comprise 6 distinct parcels of land covering an area of approximately 25.6 hectares. The overall planning application area is circa 48.48 hectares encompassing land for biodiversity net gain, landscape mitigation and ecological enhancements.

The current draft layout is attached. While the red line boundaries are relatively fixed, the layout has yet to go through the iterative design process. The physical development will include solar arrays and associated infrastructure to connect to the grid. The development will also include drainage infrastructure, alongside ecology and biodiversity enhancement designed to achieve the mandated 10% net gain, as a minimum.

We are currently working with relevant stakeholders to refine the proposals. This includes managing the construction stage of the development while maintaining safe access to the network of public rights of way and bridleways in the area. We are also in the process of managing other constraints and defining appropriate easements and buffers and access around them.

We are also developing an appropriate landscape and ecological mitigation strategy.

The following drawings are attached:

RCN1003-SP-01 Revision 3 – Site Location Plan

RCN1003-PLE-02 Revision 6 – Indicative Proposed Site Layout

The request is submitted on behalf of my client, Renewable Connections Developments Limited.

Formal Screening Opinion

Prior to preparation and submission of the formal planning application, your Authority's views are sought on the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in connection with the proposals. This letter is a formal request for a 'Screening Opinion' under Regulation 6(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) (hereafter referred to as the EIA Regulations).

Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations sets out descriptions of development and applicable thresholds and criteria for the purposes of defining Schedule 2 development. The proposed development falls under part 3, Energy Industry and specifically 'part a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water'. The site area exceeds the applicable 0.5 hectare threshold.

The Site and Surroundings and Sensitive Geographical Areas

The Site lies to the east of Roundstreet Common and to the north Newpound and Wisborough Green, which is approximately 500 metres in distance at its nearest point. The site is partially bound to the west by B2133 Road. Newpound is located approximately 720m to the south of the nearest panelled area.

The total red-line site area is approximately 48.48 hectares in size and located in open countryside, formed of 6 field parcels.

The Site benefits from an onsite point of connection into an existing 33kV overhead cable.

The B2133, (Roundstreet Common and Newpound) runs north-southeast to the west of the Site. There are farm buildings, associated with Malham Farm, located centre-east of the site.

The development parcels, 6 in number, comprise agricultural land used for arable crops. The immediate area comprises a mosaic of agricultural fields, interspersed with mature woodland blocks and individual farmsteads and dwellings.

There is evidence of solar development circa 2.2km to the east.

There are a number of designated heritage assets within 1km of the site, all of which are Grade II listed buildings. A number of listed buildings sit in proximity to the development parcels. The Wey and Arun Canal, a non-designated heritage asset, runs parallel to the eastern development parcel.

Coppedhall Hanger SSSI is located circa 1.4km south east of the site, at its nearest point. The Mens SSSI and SAC is located circa 2.3km to the southwest. The site is located within the associated SSSI impact zones. Upper Arun SSSI is located circa 2km to the south.

The South Downs National Park Valued Landscape is located to the south and west of Wisborough Green.

The nearest residential properties to the development parcels are:

Area 1

Oakwood Farm – 100m east

Trenchmore Farm – 95m northeast

Malkinsons Farm - 130m west

Bonnington Farm - 180m southeast

Holmbush Cottage - 290m west

Area 2

Toll Gate - 200m northwest

Anstead Farm – 310m southwest

The Lunns – 380m southwest

Malham Oak/Malham View – 400m southwest

Malham Lodge – 440m southwest

Danmore – 210m northeast

Area 3

Brinkhurst Cottages - 280m north

Malham Bungalow – 350m north

Malham Farm – 350m northeast

Area 4

Malham View – 50m northwest

Malham Oak – 60m northwest

Malham Lodge – 80m northwest

The Lunns - 150m northwest

Durbans – 125m south

Buthchett's Farm Cottages 50m west

Dewa Bungalow – 255m south

Durbans Farm – 310m south

Area 5

Smale Farm - 290m southwest

Area 6

Smale Farm - 220m south

Durbans Copse - 350m southwest

There is one PROW within the Site and four that border the Site. While PROWs intersect with the red line boundary, they do not cross through panelled areas.

The PROWS are as follows:

Bridleway 1300 1 – This PROW runs east to west along the access track to Malham Farm.

Bridleway 433 1 – This PROW runs east to west and parallel to the northern parcel.

Bridleway 433 2 – This PROW runs north to south and along the farm track that provides access to the

south eastern parcels. It runs between the south eastern parcel.

Bridleway 805 1- This PROW runs between the B2133 and Dungwick Lane. It will cross the proposed access the most northerly parcel.

Footpath 804 – This PROW runs around the north eastern corner of the northernmost parcel.

The Site lies mainly within Flood Zone 1 (low probability of flooding). A small part of the Site, within the red line boundary, on the south eastern boundary of the site lies within Flood Zones 2/3.

The solar elements of the development are categorised as 'less' vulnerable under NPPF guidance, however, the proposed layout of the solar arrays is designed to site outside Flood Zones 2/3.

The land is shown provisionally as Grade 4 and 3 agricultural land on the ALC Map. However, the Map does not differentiate between 3a (good quality) and 3b (moderate quality). The majority of the site is not anticipated to be best and most versatile agricultural land. However, an Agricultural Land Classification Survey is schedule in the coming weeks to determine the detailed quantities of land grades across the site.

Ancient Woodland is present around the site.

Description of the Development

The proposal is for a solar photovoltaic farm (up to 20MWac) and associated infrastructure on land to the east of the B2133, as referenced about. The solar farm will comprise 6 distinct parcels of land covering an area of approximately 25.6 hectares. The overall planning application area is circa 48.48 hectares encompassing land for biodiversity net gain, landscape mitigation and ecological enhancement.

The illustrative layout is shown on Drawing RCN1003-PLE-02 Revision 6 – Indicative Proposed Site Layout

The layout has been informed by topography and site constraints. This includes a 15m buffer from identified Ancient Woodland.

The northern two areas are located to the north of Anstead Farm and separately accessed. The central area comprises one parcel adjacent to the B2133, south of Malham Lodge. Lunns Copse, Furze and High Copse separates this from the remaining parcels to the east.

As a general design principle for the ground mounted solar, the arrays will be laid out in multiple parallel rows running east to west across the various field enclosures. The mounting structure and solar panels will be static. The distance between the arrays would respond to topography but would typically be circa 3 metres.

An array is a galvanised steel mounting structure with the solar panels attached to it.

The maximum top height of the arrays will be circa 2.95m. The minimum height of the lowest part of the arrays will be circa 0.8m. The panels will sit at a 25 degree angle.

All solar panels will be south facing and will be dark blue, grey, or black in colour.

The transformers (Power Stations) will be 5.8m long x 3.8m wide and 3.85m high. The customer substation will be 6.06m long x 2.44m wide x 2.90m high. The DNO substation will be 5.6m long x 5.1m wide and 3.85m high.

A 33kV point of connection is proposed in the central, southernmost parcel of panels, alongside the DNO and customer substations. Transformer stations would be located around the solar panels.

The construction of the development would take around 20-24 weeks and would involve the creation of a site access points, tracks, service trenches, fencing, CCTV and gates. A temporary construction compound would be

created on site.

The proposed development would, typically, have a life of up to 40 years at the end of which the modules would be decommissioned and removed from the site.

It is anticipated, subject to successful grant of planning permission, that development will commence in quarter 2 / 3 of 2026.

Access to the northern parcel, to the east of Drungewick Lane, is proposed via a new access circa 15m north of the existing gated field access.

A new access will be created to the west of Drungewick Lane to provide access to the most northerly panels. A track is proposed along the inner field boundary to access the most northerly field parcel.

Access to the remaining parcels is proposed via an existing access track which provides access to Malham Farm and residential dwellings. An existing field access, off the access track, will provide access to the southwestern parcel.

Construction traffic will follow an enforced route, to and from the south using the B2133 and onwards to A272/A20 and conversely for return journeys.

The only vehicles required to attend the site when the facility is operational would be those associated with security and maintenance. This is anticipated to be no greater than 1 4x4 or small van per month.

The Planning Application

It is anticipated that the forthcoming planning application will comprise a detailed Planning Statement supported by the following technical reports:

- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (including photomontages);

- Glint and Glare Assessment;

- Historic Environment Desk-based Assessment and Geophysical Survey;

- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Phase 2 Surveys, including protected species (Great Crested Newt and others);

- Biodiversity Impact Assessment and Biodiversity Net gain Statutory Calculator;

- Arboricultural Impact Assessment;

- Agricultural Land Classification Assessment;

- Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy;

- Transport Assessment;

- Environmental Noise Impact Assessment;

- Alternative Site Assessment, and

- Minerals Resource Assessment.

In addition, the following would also accompany the Planning Statement:

Crime and Security Statement;
Construction Traffic Management Plan, and
Community Engagement Statement.

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 and Planning Practice Guidance, the application will be accompanied by the following national requirements:

Necessary plans and drawings at the appropriate scale;
Ownership Certificates and Agricultural Land Declaration.

EIA Screening: Regulatory Requirements

In relation to a development where an application for planning permission is to be submitted, Regulation 6(2) of the EIA Regulations requires the following to be submitted with a screening opinion request:

- (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.

EIA Screening: Relevant Criteria

The EIA Regulations set out Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 development, defined as follows:

Schedule 1

“Schedule 1 Development” means development of a description mentioned in Schedule 1.

The proposals do not fall within Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations, where EIA would be mandatory.

Schedule 2

“Schedule 2 Development” is development of a description mentioned in Column 1 of the table in Schedule 2 of

the EIA Regulations, where either:

- (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” is defined in the EIA Regulations as:

- (a) land notified under section 28(1) (sites of special scientific interest) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981;
- (b) a National Park within the meaning of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949;
- (c) the Broads;
- (d) a property appearing on the World Heritage List kept under article 11(2) of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage;
- (e) a scheduled monument within the meaning of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979;
- (f) an area of outstanding natural beauty designated as such by an order made by Natural England under section 82(1) (areas of outstanding natural beauty) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 as confirmed by the Secretary of State;
- (g) a European site;

In this case, the proposed development is not in a “sensitive area” as defined in the EIA Regulations. The proposal is not considered to fall under sub-clauses referred to above under the definition of “Schedule 2 Development”.

It is necessary to consider the descriptions of development and applicable thresholds and criterion in Schedule 2 to inform a view on the necessity for EIA. For Schedule 2 Development to be EIA Development it must be the case that the development is “likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location”. The very fact that the proposal falls within a Schedule 2 Development category and exceed the thresholds are not in themselves reasons to conclude that EIA is necessary.

The development is of a type listed in Schedule 2 section 3(a) in that it consists of an industrial installation for the production of electricity, steam and hot water.

This request for a screening opinion is submitted under Schedule 2 section 3(a) as the area of the development exceeds 0.5 hectare.

Likely Significant Effects

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations sets out the selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 Development. This falls under three categories:

Characteristics of the development;

Location of the development, and

Types and characteristics of the potential impact.

The characteristics of development must be considered with particular regard to the size and design of the whole scheme, cumulation with other existing and/or approved development, the use of natural resources (in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity), the production of waste, pollution and nuisances, the risk of accident and the risk to human health.

The environmental sensitivity of the geographical areas likely to be affected must also be considered with particular regard to the existing and approved land use, due consideration of natural resources and the absorption capacity of the natural environment.

It is necessary to consider the likely significant effects of the development in the context of the above with regard to:

Population and human health

Biodiversity

Land, soil, water, air and climate

Material assets, cultural heritage and landscape

The interaction of the above.

A Screening Matrix is attached as an Appendix to this letter and addresses the environmental considerations, taking into account the above.

It concludes that:

The nature, scale and characteristics of the development are considered not likely to give rise to significant effects.

The proposed location of the development does not have the potential to impact upon a defined sensitive area.

There is no potential for likely significant effects that would trigger the need for EIA.

Accordingly, the outcome of the assessment is that an Environmental Statement is not required in this case.

Final Remarks

EIA Regulation 6(6)(a) states that authorities must adopt a screening opinion within 21 days from the date of receipt of the request, or such longer period not exceeding 90 days as may be agreed in writing with the person making the request (Regulation 6(6)(b)).

We trust that the enclosed information is sufficient to enable you to consult as required and to issue a formal Screening Opinion within these prescribed timescales.

We would be grateful if you could formally acknowledge receipt of this request and notify us of the expiry date of the statutory period.

Yours sincerely



Maureen Darrie
Director