



Botley West Solar Farm

Programme Document

Planning Inspectorate

**Guidance: Planning Act 2008: Pre-application stage for
Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects**

10 July 2024

Contents

| | | |
|----------|--|----------|
| 1 | INTRODUCTION | 2 |
| | Overview..... | 2 |
| 2 | PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS..... | 3 |
| | Consultation..... | 3 |
| | Environmental Information | 3 |
| 3 | MAIN ISSUES | 5 |
| 4 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT | 7 |
| | Stakeholder Engagement..... | 7 |
| 5 | PRE-APPLICATION STAGE RISKS | 9 |

1 INTRODUCTION

Overview

- 1.1 On 29 May 2024, the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) issued an Expression of Interest Form to the project team for the Botley West Solar Farm (the “**Project**”) and requested a response by close of business on 10 July 2024. This Programme Document (‘Response Element 1’) has been prepared on behalf of SolarFive Ltd (the “**Applicant**”) for the purpose of that response. The Applicant, under separate cover, has also supplied the Basic Information (‘Response Element 2’).
- 1.2 The Applicant has liaised with PINs in relation to the Project and is advanced into the pre-application process, with an anticipated submission date of 1 November 2024 for the application for a development consent order (DCO). To that extent, many of the PINS’ support services which are covered as part of the new pre-application guidance¹ and prospectus² have already been utilised, or are no longer applicable or required by the Applicant. The Applicant considers that the Standard tier of service is appropriate on that basis.
- 1.3 This Programme Document has been prepared to identify the engagement and application preparation activities that have been carried out by the Applicant during the pre-application process so far, as well as setting out the main steps that the Applicant expects in the remaining pre-application process.
- 1.4 The Applicant will host and maintain this Programme Document on its website and update it as necessary during the remaining pre-application period. A link to this ‘Programme Document’ can be found on the Applicants website: https://botleywest.co.uk/document_library.html

¹ Planning Act 2008: Pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

² Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus

2 PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS

2.1 The Applicant sets out below a timetable of main events and dates in relation to its pre-application process. This includes activities undertaken to date as well as the further events that the Applicant anticipates during the remainder of the pre-application process. The Applicant has split this information into two tables, to identify the main events and dates for the purposes of consultation and those for the purposes of its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Consultation

2.2 The Applicant’s key milestones in respect of consultation activity are set out below:

| Event | Date/Period | |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Inception meeting with PINs | 19 October 2022 |
| 2 | Informal Consultation | 3 November 2022 to 22 December 2022 |
| 3 | Preparation of the SoCC | May to August 2023 |
| 4 | Publication of the SoCC | 16 November 2023 |
| 5 | Statutory Consultation (PEIR) | 30 November 2023 to 2 February 2024 |
| 6 | Further Targeted Consultation | 14 June 2024 to 28 July 2024 |
| 7 | Preparation of Consultation Report | Ongoing |
| 8 | Adequacy of Consultation notification | August / September 2024 |

2.3 The Applicant’s statutory consultation activities have been in compliance with the Project’s Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) published in November 2023, following consultation with relevant local authorities during July and August 2023. The statutory consultation period was extended to ten weeks from eight weeks, six weeks longer than the minimum statutory requirement, to account for the 2023 festive period. The Consultation Report to be submitted as part of the DCO application will explain in detail how the Applicant has complied with the statutory, regulatory and policy requirements.

2.4 The Applicant is aware of the latest guidance in respect of identifying an early adequacy of consultation milestone but notes that further targeted consultation is ongoing until 28 July 2024 (item 6 in table above). The Applicant therefore considers that the early adequacy of consultation milestone will appropriately follow the conclusion of that further targeted consultation.

2.5 Further details on specific stakeholder engagement is set out at Section 4 of this Programme Document.

Environmental Information

2.6 The Applicant is advanced with its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process and the production of the Environmental Statement that will accompany the DCO application. Key milestones in respect of the production and reporting of relevant environmental information is set out in the table below.

| Event | Date/Period | |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Commencement of Environmental Surveys | Started in 2020 and ongoing |
| 2 | Submission of Scoping Report | June 2023 |
| 3 | Receipt of Scoping Opinion | 24 July 2023 |
| 4 | Publication of PEIR | 30 November 2023 |
| 5 | Final Design Freeze for Commencement of Environmental Statement | May 2024 |

REPORT

| | | |
|----|---|----------------------|
| 6 | Production and Agreement of Statements of Common Ground | Ongoing |
| 7 | Production of Environmental Statement | Ongoing |
| 8 | PINs Review of ES document | Ongoing |
| 9 | Legal and client review of ES | July to October 2024 |
| 10 | Completion of Environmental Statement | October 2024 |

3 MAIN ISSUES

3.1 The Project has developed over time in response to commercial requirements, environmental considerations, consultation feedback, and legal and land ownership discussions.

3.2 The Applicant considers that the main issues that may be the likely subject of discussion and resolution during Examination are as set out in the table below:

| Issue | | Comment | Proposed Action |
|-------|---|---|--|
| 1 | Ecology | Most survey work has now been completed for the Project. Further survey work is being undertaken in respect of certain species including bats and dormice, following design changes and at the request of Natural England. Any new survey data will supplement the existing data that is available. | The Applicant continues to engage with Natural England (NE) over the type and scope of ecology surveys considered necessary. The results of the surveys will be reported with the ES along with a range of mitigation measures, as necessary. For example, the Applicant is developing an outline Landscape Ecology Management Plan and soil management plan. In the event that any survey data is outstanding at the time of submission, the Applicant will make any necessary presumptions required to ensure that the ES reflects a robust worst-case assessment. |
| 2 | Cultural Heritage | The Applicant has worked very closely with the County Archaeologist to develop a method to assess underground archaeology. Setting has also been discussed and methods applied to assess and report such effects on identified heritage assets, including upon the Blenheim Palace World Heritage site (WHS). In parallel with this assessment, is a separate and ongoing exercise using specific WHS methodology to assess impacts upon WHS's. | The Applicant has worked closely with Historic England to identify and apply the WHS assessment methodology to allow it and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) to understand and report its own view as to the effect that the Project will have on the WHS. Discussions between the parties are ongoing and the Applicant awaits inputs from ICOMOS. The Applicant is developing its own Heritage Impact Assessment to consider the relationship with the WHS. |
| 3 | Best & Most Versatile agricultural land (BMV) | The Applicant understands that BMV land is of political and public interest and is therefore likely to become a relevant matter for discussion throughout Examination. | The Applicant has undertaken soil sampling in accordance with a methodology agreed with NE. The Applicant will report on the assessment of effects in its ES. |
| 4 | Green Belt | The Applicant understands that Green Belt land is of political and public interest and is therefore likely to become a relevant matter for discussion throughout Examination. | The Applicant will set out its case in light of the latest National Policy Statements. |
| 5 | National Grid Substation | A new substation is required for the Project but the exact location of the new substation is not confirmed. | The Applicant is in discussions with National Grid in relation to the location of the new substation. The Applicant will seek consent under the DCO for the substation to be constructed on land within the Applicant's control to ensure the grid connection is secured. |
| 6 | Landscape and visual | The Applicant understands that landscape impacts are of significant | The Applicant will produce a Landscape Masterplan, presenting the visual impacts of |

REPORT

| | | | |
|---|---------|---|--|
| | | public interest, with interest being taken in how the Project may look following construction. | the Project. New and reinforced planting will be committed to across the site. This document will accompany the ES. |
| 7 | Traffic | The Applicant understands that there will be additional movements of traffic in the area, primarily during the construction phase of the Project. | The Applicant has been engaged with Oxfordshire County Council in its capacity as the local highway authority about vehicle movements, access and the construction of cables in the public highway. The Applicant is also developing management plans including a Construction Traffic Management Plan and Construction Environmental Management Plan. |

4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 As set out in Section 2, the Applicant has undertaken a series of consultation activities, including statutory consultation and the preparation and publication of the SoCC (pursuant to section 47 of the Planning Act 2008). The Applicant sought early feedback from West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council (as the host authorities) in May 2023 and then sought formal feedback between 14 July 2023 and 14 August 2023.
- 4.2 The Applicant has also sought to proactively engage with other key stakeholders throughout the pre-application process and will continue to do so during the remainder of the pre-application process and onwards. The table below sets out the work undertaken in respect of engaging with statutory consultees and local authorities during the pre-application period as well as relevant agreements that the Applicant is seeking to enter with these stakeholders. The Applicant will continue to engage with each of these stakeholders in order to resolve any outstanding matters.
- 4.3 In order to formalise the previous process of discussions and engagement with the host authorities, a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) was signed in 2024. This provides a structured approach to resourcing key activities, identifying key project gateways, commitments to review timings, and organising monthly meetings.
- 4.4 In addition, the Applicant is engaged in discussions with various statutory undertakers for the purposes of negotiating bespoke protective provisions and side agreements (as may be required). The Applicant is providing costs undertakings where appropriate to facilitate engagement with these various statutory bodies.

Stakeholder Engagement

| Stakeholder | Topic of discussion | Proposed Action | Planned Date for Resolution |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1 Natural England | The Applicant has engaged with Natural England (NE) using its Design Advice Service and through meetings and email correspondence since July 2023, including meetings to discuss the type and scope of ecology surveys and to agree the soil sampling methodology. | The Applicant is continuing its discussions with NE and both parties are seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground which will include details of the surveys and soil sampling as appropriate. | The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission. |
| 2 Historic England and ICOMOS | The Applicant has engaged closely with the County Archaeologist since February 2023, and with Historic England (HE) since July 2023, in relation to the strategy for archaeological surveys and fieldwork and the World Heritage Site assessment methodology. | The Applicant has agreed a strategy for trial trenching with the County Archaeologist and is continuing its discussions with HE. The Applicant and HE are seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground on assessment methodology. | The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission. |
| 3 Environment Agency | The Applicant has been meeting with the Environment Agency (EA) since July 2023 to understand and consider impacts of the Project on flood risk, | The Applicant is continuing its discussions with the EA and both parties are seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground. | The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to |

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| | | drainage, water quality, biodiversity and environmental capital. The design approach and proposed mitigations are being progressed to suitably accommodate the EA's requirements. | The parties are also in discussions around bespoke protective provisions as may be required. | submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission. |
| 4 | Host Planning Authorities | <p>The Applicant has engaged closely with the host planning authorities on a variety of matters including consultation requirements, Green Belt land, local energy strategy and planning policy since September 2022, and is working closely with Oxfordshire County Council in its capacity as local highway authority to agree vehicular access detail and methodology for assessment of traffic and highway effects.</p> <p>The Applicant has entered into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with the host authorities to facilitate these discussions.</p> | The Applicant is continuing its discussions with the host authorities and is seeking to agree a Statement of Common Ground, with the existing intention that a single Statement of Common Ground will be entered on behalf of all host authorities. | The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and intends to submit a draft Statement of Common Ground as part of its submission. |
| 5 | National Grid Substation | The Applicant is in discussions with National Grid in relation to the location of the new substation which will provide the grid connection for the Project. Regular discussions about the nature and location of this new substation have been underway since July 2023. | The Applicant is seeking to agree a statement with National Grid setting out an agreed position between the parties on the approach to the new substation location. | The Applicant is seeking to agree a statement with National Grid and intends to submit this with its DCO application if this is finalised in advance of submission. |
| 6 | Statutory undertakers and local network services | Meetings have been held between the Applicant and Network Rail, Southern Electric, Southern Gas Network, Thames Water and other network service providers who have assets in proximity to or may otherwise be affected by the proposals – in particular where underground cables will cross those assets. | The Applicant issued a letter to all statutory authorities that it is seeking to work collaboratively to understand the location and nature of their assets and likely requirements for working methods. The Applicant will seek to enter into Statements of Common Ground and agree bespoke protective provisions and side agreements as may be necessary. | The Applicant will seek to progress matters as much as possible prior to submission and anticipates that negotiations will continue during Examination. |

5 PRE-APPLICATION STAGE RISKS

- 5.1 The Applicant is far into the pre-application process and is therefore confident that it is able to meet its intended submission date of 1 November 2024. However, the Applicant recognises that there are various factors, largely outside of its own control, which may influence its ability to achieve the remainder of the pre-application stage in accordance with the intended programme. The below therefore provides a high-level summary of the potential pre-application process risks and how the Applicant intends to manage them:
1. **Targeted consultation** – the Applicant is committed to ensuring that consultation responses are taken into account and reflected in the scheme design where appropriate but recognises that some unexpected requests or comments may be made during the ongoing targeted consultation. The Applicant is regularly monitoring the communication channels and feedback submissions throughout the targeted consultation period to allow early identification of any such requests so that they can be considered properly. The Applicant has also left sufficient time after the close of the consultation for any such requests to be considered as necessary prior to the application submission. Finally, the Applicant notes that the consultation that is currently live focusses on specific, limited changes to the order limits. Many of the changes that are subject to the targeted consultation resulted from further assessment and ongoing engagement with various stakeholders and therefore it is expected that many of the proposed design changes are a welcome response to earlier discussions.
 2. **Stakeholder engagement** – the Applicant has been (and will continue to be) proactive in engaging with stakeholders to facilitate the early identification of any specific requests of those stakeholders, so that the Applicant can seek to incorporate the necessary measures into its application, as appropriate. This early engagement will also ensure that the potential for any further survey works is controlled, allowing the Applicant to progress with its environmental assessment.
 3. **Landowner discussions** – the Applicant has engaged land agents to have discussions with landowners and tenant farmers to ensure that any land access can be acquired as seamlessly as possible.
 4. **Cumulative impacts** – the Applicant is unable to control what other developments are proposed in the nearby area although the Applicant is carrying out regular monitoring to identify any proposals that may impact its assessment, to allow the assessment to be updated as soon as cumulative effects are identified.
 5. **Design** – the Applicant's internal design and engineering team are continuing its technical work to ensure that any design and technical information required for the purposes of the application submission or stakeholder discussions is as accurate and detailed as possible based on existing design information.
- 5.2 On a more general basis, the Applicant monitors its internal pre-application programme on a regular basis and ensures that there is consistent communication between all disciplines contributing to the DCO application submission. This will enable the Applicant to identify and manage any programme risks such that the required pre-application activities can continue towards the intended submission date.