



# **Botley West Solar Farm**

Preliminary Environmental Information Report

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**Volume 1**

**Chapter 4: Approach to Environmental Assessment**

30 November 2023

## Approval for issue

Christopher Lecointe

30 November 2023

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## Glossary

Term	Meaning
The Applicant	SolarFive Ltd
The Project	The Botley West Solar Farm (Botley West) Project

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Meaning
DAS	Design and Access Statement
DCO	Development Consent Order
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ES	Environmental Statement
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
PEIR	Preliminary Environmental Information Report
PINS	Planning Inspectorate

## 4 Approach to Environmental Assessment

### 4.1 Introduction

#### The EIA Process

- 4.1.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the process undertaken to identify and evaluate the likely significant effects of a proposed development on the environment and to identify measures to avoid, reduce, mitigate or manage any likely significant negative effects. The EIA should be informed by consultation with statutory consultees, other interested bodies and members of the public. As explained in Chapter 3, the EIA process allows applicants to improve projects iteratively, through feedback loops of impact assessment and appropriate design responses, informed by consultation feedback, and to identify significant effects in order to ensure decision makers are able to make an informed judgement on the environmental impacts of a project.
- 4.1.2 The key elements in EIA are:
- a) Iterative project design, taking feedback from consultation and applying it to the development design process on an ongoing basis throughout the EIA process;
  - b) Scoping and ongoing consultation, including consideration of responses and how these should be addressed as part of the EIA process;
  - c) Technical environmental impact assessments, including baseline studies, input to the design process, and identification of potential significant environmental effects;
  - d) Proposed measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate, where possible, to prevent or reduce likely significant adverse effects;
  - e) Consultation on a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR); and
  - f) Preparation and submission of the Environmental Statement (ES).
- 4.1.3 EIA for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects requires applicants to consult on the preliminary environmental information obtained and assessed as part of the EIA of the Project, which is summarised in a PEIR.
- 4.1.4 Using a single agreed description of the project parameters, each of the technical assessments follows a systematic approach, with the principal steps being:
- a) description of baseline conditions collected by desk study and/or survey;
  - b) assessment of likely significant effects;
  - c) identification of appropriate mitigation measures, including design changes;
  - d) assessment of residual (likely) environmental effects that remain following mitigation; and

- e) assessment of cumulative effects when considering the Scheme along with other planned developments in the area.

## **EIA Scoping**

- 4.1.5 Scoping is the process of identifying the issues to consider within the EIA process (establishing the scope of the assessment). Scoping is therefore an important preliminary procedure, which sets the context for the EIA process. Through scoping, the key environmental issues are identified at an early stage, which permits subsequent work to concentrate on those environmental topics for which significant effects may arise as a result of a proposed development.
- 4.1.6 For each technical assessment, the scope and methodology used have been agreed through the EIA Scoping process described in Chapter 2. This can vary widely from numerical modelling used to quantify possible effects to a qualitative judgement by the author.
- 4.1.7 The EIA will be conducted in accordance with the agreed scope that was set out in the Scoping Report and the Secretary of State's Scoping Opinion that includes the formal responses received from consultees.
- 4.1.8 Key issues raised in the Scoping Opinion are summarised at the start of each technical chapter of this PEIR. The agreed breadth of technical assessments remains as per the Scoping report as follows;
- Chapter 7: Historic Environment;
  - Chapter 8: Landscape and Visual Resources;
  - Chapter 9: Ecology and Nature Conservation;
  - Chapter 10: Hydrology and Flood Risk;
  - Chapter 11: Ground Conditions;
  - Chapter 12: Traffic and Transport;
  - Chapter 13: Noise and Vibration;
  - Chapter 14: Climate Change;
  - Chapter 15: Socio-economics;
  - Chapter 16: Human Health;
  - Chapter 17: Agricultural Land Use and Public Rights of Way;
  - Chapter 18: Waste and Resources;
  - Chapter 19: Cumulative Effects and Inter-relationships;
  - Chapter 20: Summary of Significant Effects.

4.1.9 The Botley West Solar Farm Scoping Report (Volume 3, Appendix 4.1) concluded that several topics did not require a full chapter within the PEIR and a standalone report would suffice, this includes:

- Glint and Glare Report (Volume 3, Appendix 4.4); and
- Air Quality Report (Volume 3, Appendix 4.5).

## 4.2 Proposed Approach to the EIA Process

### Rochdale Envelope

4.2.1 The Project design is still under development and therefore a number of technical parameters have yet to be finalised for the Project, meaning it is necessary to make assumptions in the EIA to define and set the parameters that the Project will be contained within.

4.2.2 Assessing a Project by reference to maximum and minimum design parameters, where flexibility needs to be retained, is commonly referred to as the 'Rochdale Envelope'. This approach is to ensure a robust assessment of the likely significant effects of the Project, in accordance with the Planning Inspectorate's Advice Note Nine: The Rochdale Envelope (Planning Inspectorate, 2018 version 3). This EIA has assessed maximum (and, where relevant, minimum) design parameters based on the Illustrative Masterplan in Volume 2 (see Figure 1.2), and the design parameters set out in Chapter 6: Project Description. In this way, the Applicant preserves the flexibility, where necessary, to decide on detail matters post consent, but without undermining the robustness of the environmental assessment of the Project and the ability to mitigate effects and provide enhancements to the area.

4.2.3 Where technical assessments have needed to make assumptions about the Project, a reasonable worst-case assessment is undertaken in order to predict the worst-case overall impacts. The reasonable worst-case is then used in the assessment of significance of effects. This could mean, for example, making conservative assumptions about energy generation and carbon payback, or overestimating construction traffic. In each case, the technical authors will set out what assumptions have been used to inform the assessment.

4.2.4 The Project, as described in Chapter 6: Project Description, is further supplemented by a set of 'Design Principles' that were established from the earliest stages in the development of the Project. The Design Principles will be appended to the Design and Access Statement (DAS), which will form part of the DCO Application.

### Relevant EIA Guidance

4.2.5 The EIA process will take into account relevant government or institute guidance, including:

- National Policy Statements (designated and emerging);

- Department for Communities and Local Government (2021) Planning Practice Guidance at <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk>;
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) (1997) Mitigation Measures in Environmental Statements. HMSO;
- National Highways et al. (2020) Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, LA 104: Environmental assessment and monitoring;
- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2004) Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment;
- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2015a) Environmental Impact Assessment: Guide to Shaping Quality Development;
- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2015b) Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation;
- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2016) Environmental Impact Assessment: Guide to Delivering Quality Development;
- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2017) Health in Environmental Impact Assessment: A Primer for a Proportional Approach;
- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2020) IEMA EIA Guide to: Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation;
- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2022) IEMA Guide: Assessing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Evaluating their Significance;
- Department for Communities and Local Government (2015) (2015) Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process for major infrastructure projects;
- PINS (2017a) Advice Note Three: EIA consultation and notification;
- PINS (2016) Advice Note Six: Preparation and submission of application documents;
- PINS (2020a) Advice Note Seven: Environmental Impact Assessment: Preliminary Environmental Information, Screening and Scoping;
- PINS (2018a) Advice Note Nine: Rochdale Envelope;
- PINS (2020b) Advice Note Twelve: Transboundary Impacts and Process;
- PINS (2019) Advice Note Seventeen: Cumulative Effects Assessment; and
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, National Planning Policy Framework (Sep 2023).

4.2.6 Other topic-specific specialist methodologies and good practice guidelines are reported on, as necessary, in the relevant chapter(s).

## Methodology and Assessment Criteria

- 4.2.7 Each topic chapter of the ES will provide details of the methodology for baseline data collection and the approach to the assessment of likely significant effects. Details of the proposed approach for each topic are provided in Chapters 7-19 of this PEIR. Each identified environmental topic will be considered by a specialist in that area. The identification and evaluation of effects will take into account relevant topic-specific guidance where available.

## Baseline Conditions

### Existing Baseline Conditions

- 4.2.8 The existing and likely future environmental conditions, in the absence of the Project, are known as 'baseline conditions'. Each topic-based chapter will include a description of the current (baseline) environmental conditions. The baseline conditions at the site and within the study area form the basis of the assessment, enabling the likely significant effects to be identified through a comparison with the baseline conditions. It is important to identify the baseline conditions to understand the current site. The baseline information for the PEIR have been gathered from multiple sources including online resources, data registers, council maps and site surveys.

### Future Baseline Conditions

- 4.2.9 The ES will include a description of the future baseline, i.e. the baseline conditions without the implementation of the Project. In doing so, consideration has been given to any likely changes between the time of survey i.e. existing baseline environment and the likely future baseline conditions.
- 4.2.10 Environmental topics have considered the future baseline scenarios with respect to their subject and applied professional judgement based on reasonable assumptions and limitations. A description of future baseline conditions is provided within 'Baseline Conditions' section of each topic chapter (Volume 1, Chapters 7 to 18).

### Assessment Years

- 4.2.11 The assessment considers the environmental impacts of the Project at key stages in its construction, operation and, as far as practicable, its decommissioning. The scenarios for assessment will be developed during the EIA process. These will include assessment years to allow for identification of the likely significant effects during the phased construction process and during operation of the Project. At this stage, the following assessment years are under consideration:
- Existing Baseline: this is the principal baseline against which environmental effects will be assessed;



- Construction phase: currently planned to occur during period 2025 to 2026; The peak construction year for the purpose of the EIA is anticipated to be 2026; this assumes commencement of construction in 2025 and that the Project is built out rapidly over a 24-month period, with all sites constructed concurrently. This is a likely worst case from a traffic generation point of view because it compresses the trip numbers into a shorter duration and represents the greatest impact on the highway network. A lengthened construction phase would likely result in lower traffic, air quality and noise impacts; therefore, the likely worst case scenario has been assessed within the PEIR;
- First full year of opening: this assumes that the Project is currently planned to be operational in 2027;
- Decommissioning: the Project is anticipated to be 42 years in total and decommissioning is expected to take place during that period, albeit the operational life may extend beyond this date. The decommissioning assessment will be high level and qualitative. Uncertainty around the design life of the Project and how this affects the assessment conclusions will be described in the relevant chapters.

4.2.12 Each topic-based chapter may also identify additional years to be included in the assessment work, in accordance with topic-specific good practice guidance.

### **Changes to Baseline Conditions as a Result of Climate Change**

4.2.13 The consideration of future baseline conditions will also take into account the likely effects of climate change, as far as these are known at the time of writing. This will be based on information available from the UK Climate Projections project, developed by the Environment Agency and Met Office, which provides information on plausible changes in climate for the UK and on published documents such as the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 (HM Government, 2017b) and subsequent updates.

### **Assessment of Effects**

4.2.14 The EIA Regulations require the identification of the likely significant environmental effects of the Project. The evaluation of the significance of an effect is important; it is the significance that determines the resources that should be deployed in avoiding or mitigating a significant adverse effect, or conversely, the actual value of a beneficial effect. The overall environmental acceptability of the Project is a matter for the Secretary of State to determine, having taken into account, amongst other matters, the environmental information that is set out in the ES, including all likely beneficial and adverse environmental effects. Each topic chapter will take into account both the sensitivity of receptors affected and the magnitude of the likely impact in determining the likely significance of the effect.

## Sensitivity or Importance of Receptors

4.2.15 Receptors are defined as the physical resource or user group that would be affected by a proposed development. The baseline studies will identify potential environmental receptors for each topic and will evaluate their sensitivity to the Project. The sensitivity or importance of a receptor may depend, for example, on its frequency or extent of occurrence at an international, national, regional or local level. As a general rule, the receptor sensitivity levels have been defined as set out in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Definitions of Receptor Sensitivity (based on Highways England *et al.*, 2020)**

Sensitivity	Typical Descriptors
Very High	Very high importance and rarity, international scale and very limited potential for substitution.
High	High importance and rarity, national scale and limited potential for substitution.
Medium	High or medium importance and rarity, regional scale, limited potential for substitution.
Low	Low or medium importance and rarity, local scale.
Negligible	Very low importance and rarity, local scale.

## Magnitude of Impact

4.2.16 Impacts are defined as the physical changes to the environment attributable to the Project. For each topic, the likely environmental impacts will be identified. The magnitude of the impact will be described using defined criteria within each topic chapter.

4.2.17 The categorisation of the impact magnitude may take into account the following four factors:

- Extent;
- Duration;
- Frequency; and
- Reversibility.

4.2.18 Impacts will be defined as either adverse or beneficial. Depending on discipline, they may also be described as:

- Direct: Arise from activities associated with the Project. These tend to be either spatially or temporally concurrent; or
- Indirect: Impacts on the environment which are not a direct result of the Project, often produced away from the Site or as a result of a complex pathway.

4.2.19 Impacts will be divided into those occurring during the construction phase and those occurring during operation. Where appropriate, some chapters may refer to these as temporary and permanent impacts.

4.2.20 Magnitude has generally been described using the following scale:

- high;
- medium;
- low; and
- negligible.

4.2.21 In some cases, a further category of ‘no change’ has been used.

4.2.22 As a general rule, magnitude levels have been defined as set out in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2: Definitions of Impact Magnitude (based on Highways England *et al.*, 2020)**

Magnitude	Typical Descriptors
High	Loss of resource and/or quality and integrity of resource; severe damage to key characteristics, features and elements (Adverse).
	Large scale or a major improvement of resource quality; extensive restoration or enhancement; major improvement of attribute quality (Beneficial).
Medium	Loss of resource but not adversely affecting the integrity; partial loss of/damage to key characteristics, features or elements (Adverse).
	Benefit to, or addition of, key characteristics, features or elements; improvement of attribute quality (Beneficial).
Low	Some measurable change in attributes, quality or vulnerability; minor loss of, or alteration to, one (maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements (Adverse).
	Minor benefit to, or addition of, one (maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements; some beneficial impact on attribute or a reduced risk of negative impact occurring (Beneficial).
Negligible	Very minor loss or detrimental alteration to one or more characteristics, features or elements (Adverse).
	Very minor benefit to or positive addition of one or more characteristics, features or elements (Beneficial).
No change	No loss or alteration of characteristics, features or elements; no observable impact in either direction.

### Significance of Effects

4.2.23 Effect is the term used to express the consequence of an impact (expressed as the ‘significance of effect’), which is determined by correlating the magnitude of the impact to the sensitivity of the receptor or resource.

4.2.24 The magnitude of an impact does not directly translate into significance of effect. For example, a significant effect may arise as a result of a relatively modest impact on a resource of national value, or a large impact on a resource of local value. In

broad terms, therefore, the significance of the effect can depend on both the impact magnitude and the sensitivity or importance of the receptor.

4.2.25 Levels of significance that will be used in the assessment include, in descending order:

- Substantial;
- Major;
- Moderate;
- Minor; and
- Neutral.

4.2.26 Where an effect is described as 'neutral' this means that there is either no effect or that the significance of any effect is considered to be negligible. All other levels of significance will apply to both adverse and beneficial effects. These significance levels will be defined separately for each topic within the methodology sections. In all cases, the judgement made as to significance will be that of the author of the relevant chapter with reference to appropriate standards/guidelines where relevant.

### **Mitigation and Monitoring**

4.2.27 Regulation 14 of the EIA Regulations require that where likely significant effects are identified 'a description of any features of the proposed development, or measures envisaged in order to avoid, prevent or reduce or, if possible, offset likely significant adverse effects on the environment' should be included in the ES.

4.2.28 The development of mitigation measures is part of an iterative EIA and Project development processes. Therefore, measures are being developed throughout the EIA process in response to the findings of initial assessments and consultation and engagement feedback. When the DCO Application is submitted, the Project will include a range of measures designed to reduce or prevent significant adverse environmental effects arising, where practicable. In some cases, these measures may result in enhancement of environmental conditions. The assessment of likely significant effects will therefore take into account, as part of the assessment, the mitigation and design measures that form part of the Project.

4.2.29 The individual topic assessments will therefore take into account all measures that form part of the Project, including:

- Measures included as part of the Project design (sometimes referred to as primary or embedded mitigation);
- Measures to be adopted during construction, to avoid and minimise environmental effects, such as pollution control measures. These measures would be implemented through the Code of Construction Practice (an Outline version of which will be developed as part of the ES); and

- Measures required as a result of legislative, policy and guidance requirements.

4.2.30 Where required, further mitigation measures will be identified within topic chapters. These are measures that could further prevent, reduce and, where possible, offset any residual adverse effects on the environment.

4.2.31 In some cases, monitoring measures may be appropriate, for example, to ensure that proposed planting becomes established. Where appropriate, monitoring measures will be set out.

### 4.3 Structure of the PEIR and Environmental Statement

4.3.1 Although there is no statutory provision as to the form of an ES, it must contain the information specified in Regulation 14(2), including any information specified in Schedule 4 of the 2017 EIA Regulations.

4.3.2 The information to be presented in the ES will provide a clear understanding of the likely significant effects of the Project upon the environment.

4.3.3 The ES will be structured logically, enabling all relevant environmental information to be found quickly and easily.

4.3.4 Table 4.3 below summarises the scope of the EIA process for the Project in the context of the Regulation 14(2) and Schedule 4 of the 2017 EIA Regulations. For each of the requirements, location within the PEIR has been provided. The same structure will be used for the ES for ease of reference.

**Table 4.3: Regulation 14(2) and Schedule 4 of the 2017 EIA Regulation Requirements**

Required Information	Location within PEIR
<b>Project Description</b>	
A description of the proposed development comprising information on the site, design, size and other relevant features of the development (Regulation 14(2)).	Volume 1, Chapter 6: Project Description provides a description of the Project and the parameters used for assessment within this PEIR. This includes details of the construction, operation and maintenance and decommissioning phases.
A description of the development (Schedule 4, paragraph 1).	
<b>Consideration of alternatives</b>	
A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the applicant, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the development on the environment (Regulation 14(2)).	Volume 1, Chapter 5: Need for the Project & Alternatives Considered sets out details of the site selection undertaken to date. This includes a description of the alternatives considered by the Applicant, and the environmental aspects taken into account.

Required Information	Location within PEIR
A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer (Schedule 4, paragraph 2).	
<b>Baseline conditions and assessment of effects</b>	
A description of the likely significant effects of the proposed development on the environment (Regulation 14(2)).	Details of the baseline environmental conditions, methodologies used, mitigation measures and likely effects are provided in each of the topic chapters set out within Volume 1, supplemented by figures in Volume 2 and Appendices in Volume 3.
A description of any features of the proposed development, or measures envisaged in order to avoid, prevent or reduce and, if possible, offset likely significant adverse effects on the environment (Regulation 14(2)).	<p><b>Volume 1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 1: Introduction</li> <li>• Chapter 2: Existing Baseline</li> <li>• Chapter 3: Consenting Process</li> <li>• Chapter 4: Approach to Environmental Assessment</li> <li>• Chapter 5: Need for the Project, National Planning Policy, and Alternatives Considered</li> <li>• Chapter 6: Project Description</li> <li>• Chapter 7: Historic Environment</li> <li>• Chapter 8: Landscape and Visual Resources</li> <li>• Chapter 9: Ecology and Nature Conservation</li> <li>• Chapter 10: Hydrology and Flood Risk</li> <li>• Chapter 11: Ground Conditions</li> <li>• Chapter 12: Traffic and Transport</li> <li>• Chapter 13: Noise and Vibration</li> <li>• Chapter 14: Climate Change</li> <li>• Chapter 15: Socio Economics</li> <li>• Chapter 16: Human Health</li> <li>• Chapter 17: Agricultural Land Use and Public Rights of Way</li> <li>• Chapter 18: Waste and Resources</li> <li>• Chapter 19: Cumulative Effects and Inter-relationships</li> <li>• Chapter 20: Summary of Significant Effects</li> </ul> <p><b>Volume 2:</b> Figures</p> <p><b>Volume 3:</b> Appendices</p>
A description of the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment (baseline scenario) (Schedule 4, paragraph 3).	
A description of the factors likely to be significantly affected by the development (Schedule 4, paragraph 4).	
A description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment (Schedule 4, paragraph 5).	
A description of the forecasting methods or evidence used to identify and assess the significant effects on the environment (Schedule 4, paragraph 6).	
A description of the measures envisaged to avoid, prevent, reduce or, if possible, offset any identified significant adverse effects on the environment (Schedule 4, paragraph 7).	
A description of the expected significant adverse effects of the development on the environment deriving from the vulnerability of the development to risks of major accidents and/or disasters (Schedule 4, paragraph 8).	
<b>Non-Technical Summary</b>	
A non-technical summary of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (a) to (d) (Regulation 14(2)).	A non-technical Summary is provided as a standalone document, summarising the findings of the EIA process in non-technical language.
A non-technical summary of the information provided under requirements 1-8 (Schedule 4, paragraph 9).	

Required Information	Location within PEIR
<b>Additional information</b>	
Any additional information specified in Schedule 4 relevant to the specific characteristics of the particular development or type of development and to the environmental features likely to be significantly affected (Regulation 14(2)).	See above for Schedule 4 requirements which are covered in Volume 1, 2 and 3.
A reference list detailing the sources used for the descriptions and assessments included in the Environmental Statement (Schedule 4, paragraph 10).	References are provided at the end of each chapter in this PEIR.

## 4.4 Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 4.4.1 Alongside the EIA process, if required, a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) will be undertaken to meet the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The report of this process will be provided alongside the ES as part of the application for development consent.
- 4.4.2 Although the ES and the HRA report will form two separate reports, corresponding to separate legislative requirements, the authors of the HRA report will work alongside the authors of relevant assessments forming part of the EIA process (such as ecology and air quality) to ensure consistency of data use and to allow the findings of each assessment to inform the other, as appropriate.