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Date: 14 December 2020

Your Ref:

Our Ref: WP/20/00786/SCR

FAO Mr James Cook

Dear Mr Cook

Application No. WP/20/00786/SCR

Proposal: EIA Screening Opinion under Regulation 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 for Proposed Solar Farm

Location: Land to The South of The Gypsy Lane (B570) Irchester, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire

Thank you for your letter dated 23 November 2020 received 24 November 2020 requesting a screening opinion. The detail contained within this statement is based on Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the '2017 Regulations').

Your letter requested a Screening Opinion on the need for an Environmental Statement to accompany a planning application for the installation of a solar farm.

The Proposed Development

It is proposed to develop the site for a 26MW solar farm on 25HA of open countryside. The solar panels would be secured by metal piles with a maximum height of 3 metres. The site would be surrounded by 2-metre high security fencing. The solar panels would be distributed at a ratio of between 40-60% (ground cover ratio), dependent on topography and other requirements.

The Site and constraints

The site is located to the east of the A509, south of Irchester Country Park, west of Irchester. It is surrounded on three sides by agricultural land. The site itself is in agricultural use, having previously been worked for ironstone and backfilled.

The site constraints are as follows,

Adjacent to a local wildlife site and country park

Close proximity to Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact zone

Special Protection Area (SPA)

**Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SSI/SPA/ Ramsar Site
Former Urban Development Corporation landfill site (WR/53/109)
Close to Wollaston Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

Regulations and Process

Under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (“the EIA Regs”) Regulation 2, a Screening Opinion is defined as a written statement of the opinion of the relevant planning authority as to whether development is EIA development (as defined in the EIA Regs) for which an Environmental Statement (ES) must be submitted with a planning application.

Development listed within Schedule 1 of the EIA Regs requires an EIA to be carried out in all instances, while development listed in Schedule 2 of the EIA Regs will only require an EIA to be carried out if in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) it is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

The EIA Regs do not require an EIA or ES if the proposal is for a form of development that falls into neither Schedule 1 nor Schedule 2, irrespective of the anticipated or perceived environmental impacts.

Planning Policy Guidance indicates that if a proposed development is listed in the first column on Schedule 2 of the 2017 Regulations and exceeds the relevant thresholds or criteria in the second column the proposals need to be screened by the local planning authority to determine whether significant effects on the environment are likely and hence whether an EIA is required.

The guidance also states that project listed in Schedule 2 which are located in, or partly in a sensitive area may also need to be screened even if they are below the thresholds or do not meet the criteria.

The proposed development does not fall within Schedule 1.

On receipt of consultation responses from all interested parties, it is the view of the Local Planning Authority that the proposal does not fall within most of the descriptions of development wholly identified in the Schedule 2 of the Regulations.

However, the scheme proposed does fit into Schedule 2 (part 3 Energy Industry) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 as it is over 0.5 hectare and would have a substantial visual impact.

Thresholds and criteria for the identification of Schedule Development requiring Environmental Impact Assessment contained within the Indicative Screening Thresholds of Planning Practice Guide states that Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (Unless included in Schedule 1) over 0.5 hectares, have a thermal output of 50mw.

Although the proposal does not meet all these triggers, the local planning authority are of the opinion that the proposal does constitute EIA Development the explanation for this decision is outlined below.

Decision. EIA development

The local planning authority has given consideration, to the request for a screening opinion in relation to the above proposed development. Having regard to the information you have supplied and having undertaken a number of consultations the local planning authority has concluded that the proposal detailed in your submission **is EIA development**.

Reason

The proposal falls within Schedule 2 (part 3 Energy Industry) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 as it is over 0.5 hectare and would have a substantial visual impact (Other issues would require scoping) due to its scale, it is adjacent to a sensitive area, natural England have concerns, it would have an impact on land use and grading and potential ecological and biodiversity impacts.

Please note this reason is not exhaustive and other matters may arise at scoping stage. This decision is reached using planning policy practice guides Indicative Screening Thresholds table. The proposal would have significant environmental impacts.

Consultation

Consultation was undertaken on the request to seek the views of a number of consultees as to whether they considered the proposal to constitute EIA development under the assumption of the applicant that this was Schedule 2 development. The consultation responses received can be summarised as follows:

Natural England

It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that there are potential likely significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes and further assessment is required.

Schedule 3(2) of the Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 requires consideration of the selection criteria for Schedule 2 EIA development and identification of 'environmental sensitivity'.

The proposed development is located within/partly within or has the potential for adverse effects on the following designated nature conservation sites or designated landscapes:

- Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site
- Wollaston Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

NCC Archaeology

NCC Archaeology consider the likelihood of archaeological remains to be extremely low due to the fact that the site was subject to quarrying.

Environment Agency

No comments.

Environmental Protection

The report has rightly identified (page 2) that the area in question was subject to ironstone quarrying and has identified that the area has largely been backfilled with inert quarry spoils. However, within the proposed area there is also a small linear parcel of the land which has been identified as a former Urban Development Corporation landfill site under the ref WR/53/109 dating back to c.1953. The site is largely unknown and undisturbed but may have received general household wastes and more than just inert waste as identified. This may have

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implications if the ground is to be broken out for installations and for any on site buildings/confined spaces.

Historic England

Historic England consider that there may be an impact on the historic environment. In particular, they would draw your client's attention to scheduled monuments 'Roman villa' (National Heritage List for England 1002902) and 'Roman town of Irchester and preceding Iron Age settlement; including remains of the medieval hamlet of Chester on the Water' (NHLE 1003892), known as 'Chester Farm'. These monuments sit within a rich wider landscape evidencing Romano-British settlement, farming and industry in the form of both designated and non-designated archaeological remains.

Any heritage assessment should also consider (although not exclusively):

- Scheduled monument 'Beacon Hill motte castle' (NHLE 1013142)
- Grade II* listed building (LB) the Church of St Mary, Wollaston (NHLE 1286637)
- Grade I LB Church of St Michael and All Saints, Farndish (NHLE 1114345)
- Grade I LB Church of St Katherine, Irchester (NHLE 1040713)
- Grade II* LB Church of St Nicholas, Great Doddington (NHLE 1189920).

They recommend that your client seeks confirmation from the relevant local authority Historic Environment staff for an informed local opinion of need.

Whether the assessment is carried out through the EIA process or as a stand-alone Heritage Impact Assessment as part of a planning application, your client should be asked to provide information on heritage assets likely to be affected, including designated heritage assets and their settings together with potential impacts on non-designated features of historic, architectural, archaeological or artistic interest, since these can also be of national importance and make an important contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of an area and its sense of place. This covers buildings, historic open spaces, historic features and the wider historic landscape including below-ground archaeological remains and sub-surface stratigraphy.

They advise that the local authority's conservation and archaeology advisers are closely involved in considering the screening report and, if an EIA is required, throughout the preparation of the Environmental Statement. They are best placed to advise on: local historic environment issues and priorities (including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record); how the proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

Scoping Opinion

It is determined that the proposed development is "EIA Development". The proposed development is likely to have a significant impact on the landscape and has the potential to impact on biodiversity and ecology.

Developers can write to the local planning authority requesting an opinion on what information should be included within an environmental statement, but your client should provide an assessment of what they consider should be included in an Environmental Statement.

Any requests for scoping should be accompanied by:

- a sufficient plan to identify the land
- a brief description of the proposed development's nature, purpose and possible effects upon the environment
- any information or representation from the developer

The local planning authority recommend that a scoping opinion is requested for all applications subject to environmental impact assessment. This helps to identify key areas which should be covered as well as avoiding subsequent delays in processing the application.

Please note further consultation with internal and external consultees will take place at this time.

Hopefully this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Yours faithfully,



Martyn Swann
Principal Planning Manager

See the privacy statement at www.wellingborough.gov.uk.