

14/01/2022
SMD/2021/0384

Ms Swara Shah
Town Planner
Third Revolution Projects

By e-mail: swara.shah@thirdrevolutionprojects.co.uk

Dear Swara

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

Request for an EIA Screening Opinion for a proposed solar photovoltaic (PV) farm development with continued agricultural use, ancillary infrastructure and security fencing, landscaping provision and ecological enhancements **Totmonslow Farm Draycott Road Totmonslow Upper Tean Staffordshire ST10 4JJ**

SMD/2021/0384 screening response

In response to your submission dated 10th June 2021 and subsequent correspondence an EIA screening assessment has been undertaken as requested. Thank you for agreeing to extend the time for this decision to be issued today 14th January 2022.

The proposed development falls within the description of development given at Column 1, Section 3 (a) of Schedule 2 to the 2017 Regulations, namely: Energy industry – industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water. In cases where such development exceeds 0.5ha in area a screening assessment is required.

The proposal site occupies some c.40 hectares. On this basis the proposal significantly exceeds the threshold. The proposal is therefore 'Schedule 2 development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations and needs to be screened by the LPA to determine whether significant effects on the environment are likely and hence whether Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

In preparing this screening opinion the LPA has had regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations. The LPA has also had regard to the Indicative thresholds and criteria set out in the Planning Practice Guidance. This advises that key issues to consider for this description of development are levels of emission to air; arrangements for the transport of fuel, and any visual impacts. It also refers to an indicative threshold for output of more than 50 MW. It is noted that in this case the anticipated output is given as c.15MW.

The LPA has used the recommended Screening Matrix to prepare this opinion.

Characteristics of the development

The size of this proposal is significantly larger than the threshold area which may suggest an EIA could be needed. However there would be no significant emissions to air and the export of the energy generated would be transmitted via a new sub station on site to the grid. The

main impacts would be to landscape, heritage and ecology. At least one public footpath right of way crosses the proposal area. The site is part bounded by the A50 along the southerly edge and is crossed by at least two public footpaths.

It is noted that the proposed solar panels would be 3.0 m off the ground, and fixed not rotating. Post and wire deer-proof fence approximately 2.4m high is proposed to site perimeters.

The site has a low undulating profile rising from between 170m AOD and c.189m AOD with a trend towards a central high point to the north west of the site. This is likely to accentuate the noticeability of the development both nearby and in the wider local area.

Overall the visual impact is considered unlikely to lead to significant environmental effects in terms of the EIA Regulations but this is a proposal which will require detailed scrutiny at the planning application stage and visual impact on landscape character and public amenity would be a key consideration requiring a comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

There are no nearby heritage assets likely to be affected although a number of non-designated heritage assets recorded in the Staffordshire Heritage Environment Record are present within the site and in the vicinity – these are chiefly records of ridge and furrow field systems. Appropriate heritage assessments to consider the implications for these would be expected to accompany any application but would not trigger the EIA requirement.

The implication of reduced agricultural production of the land will need to be considered noting that it is recorded Grade 3 'good to moderate quality' but again this would not trigger the EIA requirement.

Ecology of the site is not known and will need to be surveyed and assessed including potential for significant species of ground nesting birds such as Curlew and Lapwing to be present as breeding species. Part of the site is recorded as a County Site of Biological Interest reference 93/99/53 'north east of Newton'. This is understood to be chiefly on account of floristic diversity. As a non-statutory designation this would not trigger EIA requirement. An appropriate high standard of biological assessment would however be needed to accompany any application. Map and air photo surveys reveal a number of small ponds within and nearby the site. Subject to further appropriate surveys for protected species and mitigation in the form of buffers/stand-off distances, avoidance of sensitive areas and/or compensatory measures and the opportunity for biodiversity enhancement/management it is considered that significant impacts in terms of the EIA Regulations would be unlikely.

The proposal has a significant positive environmental benefit in that its core purpose is to generate energy sustainably from the naturally available light resource. The applicant says the output is estimated to be circa 15MW.

In terms of cumulative impact there is an existing solar farm at within c.200m to 0.5km to the SW at Lower Newton. Whilst in terms in particular of landscape impact this would be a significant consideration in any planning application submitted it appears unlikely for the most part – if at all – that the two sites could be seen in conjunction. Again the significance is judged not to trigger EIA requirement.

There will be some traffic and associated noise impact during construction but it would be expected that this can be mitigated/minimised through a Construction and Environmental Management plan and is not considered likely to give rise to significant effects.

Location of the development

The site is not within a Sensitive area in terms of the Regulations. The site is within open countryside in a rural area characterised by isolated farmhouses and dwellings. The character of the landscape will completely change for the lifetime of the development. Although it is reversible the submission indicates a life of 40 years. The matter of landscape character will be a key consideration in the planning application. It will need to be addressed as part of the comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment referred to above. For the purposes of the Regulations however significant effects are considered to unlikely.

Characteristics of the potential impact

A full comprehensive LIVIA would be required with an application to consider landscape impacts. There would be no trans frontier impact.

The impacts are specific and judged relatively limited in the EIA assessment context so as not be considered complex. Although the life of the project is given to be 40 years, which would represent a significant proportion of people's lives, the impacts are likely in the main to be readily reversible should the development be brought to an end and removed. Overall, the LPA is of the opinion that any potential impacts would not be of a magnitude to suggest that an environmental statement is required.

For the reasons above it is considered that the development would not be likely to have EIA significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location. The development would not be of more than local importance and would not involve unusually complex and potentially hazardous environmental effects. There would be no significant cumulative effect.

Under regulation 6(9) it is hereby confirmed that in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the above development is not EIA development in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

Yours sincerely,

14/01/2022

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

Head of Development Services

