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17th May 2023

Andrew Dowell
Third Revolution Projects
Build Studios 203 Westminster Bridge Road
London
SE1 7FR

Dear Mr. Dowell,

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017
SMD/2022/0528 Screening request for proposed Solar Farm
New Buildings Farm, Cresswell Road ST15 8SL.

I refer to your letter dated 16th September 2022 in connection with the above proposal and your request therein for a Screening opinion under regulation 6 (1) of the above Regulations as to whether the proposal is EIA development requiring the submission of an Environmental Statement.

As already confirmed to you, this opinion is restricted to land that falls within Staffordshire Moorlands DC. I have provided you with a copy of the response from East Staffordshire BC (ESBD) dated 26th April 2023 and you have confirmed by e-mail dated 15th May 2023 that you will seek a separate Screening opinion from them for land within their jurisdiction.

The proposal is for a solar farm. Including the land within ESBC the combined site would extend to approx. 83 hectares with an installed capacity of 40MW. Such development falls within the description of development in 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. Column 2 confirms the threshold for such development to be 0.5 hectares. The proposal exceeds this 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 impact. It also refers to an indicative threshold for output of more than 50 MW. It is confirmed that the site is not in a sensitive area. The LPA has used the recommended Screening Matrix to prepare this opinion and this letter should be read in conjunction with that.

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 it is stated that the point of connection would be to the 132KV overhead line to the west of the site (your e-mail of the 13th April 2023). The main impacts would be l a n d s c a p e , visual and

ecological. The development is r e l a t i v e l y large scale but the panels are low in height, maximum 3m height from the ground and are fixed not rotating. There are thus no moving parts.

The proposal would be at the expense of the agricultural productivity of the land but there is an opportunity to graze underneath the panels as suggested in the submission and in any event the proposal is regarded as temporary and is wholly reversible. The land is stated to be Grade 3 but there is no available data on the actual classification within this grade. It is understood that you are seeking an Agricultural Land classification survey to establish the actual grade of the land. This should accompany the application. You are reminder that in accordance with national and local policy use of land of Grade 3A or above (BMV) should be minimised/avoided.

In terms of landscape/visual impact, a solar farm of this scale has the potential to have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of this rural area, introducing as it would an urban form of development. Although the impacts in this case are not anticipated to be at a level leading to significant environmental effects in terms of the Regulations, the landscape and visual impact of the proposal will need to be thoroughly considered and assessed at the planning application stage. To this end a comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact assessment and detailed Landscaping scheme will be required to demonstrate that landscape/visual impact can be mitigated to an acceptable level. Similarly in terms of ecology significant effects are not expected. However, there are ecological considerations that need to be addressed through the planning application regardless. We would expect the following to be included with a planning application

- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of the proposed sites and surrounding habitats where potentially affected, including existing and potential Local Wildlife Sites, irreplaceable and priority habitats.
- Any additional phase 2 surveys identified by the initial PEA
- Any other requirements identified e.g. species mitigation, compensation
- Species surveys (in addition to any identified during the PEA)
    - o Ground nesting bird surveys.
    - o Great crested newt surveys of ponds.
    - o Otter surveys.
    - o Badger surveys.
    - o Brown hare impacts and enhancements.
- Biodiversity Impact Assessment (BIA) to ensure a net gain is achieved.
- Detailed landscaping plan with habitat enhancements.
- Long-term management plan.
- Tree survey/arboricultural impact survey/adequate Root Protection Areas.
- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- Sustainable drainage plan (if additional drainage is proposed).

In terms of heritage, the HER notes a moated site on the southern boundary close to Bromley Wood. It is recorded as Moated site, Draycott in the Moors and summarised as the earthwork remains of a medieval moated site. A Heritage Impact Assessment should accompany the planning application to assess this. There should be scope to mitigate any impact on this site by buffer and /or landscaping.

In terms of cumulative impact there is another solar farm within 5km at Newton Heath Farm to the north. This is considerably smaller and it is already in operation. Planning permission has

been granted for a further solar farm on land at Upper Newton Farm which wraps around and extends the Lower Newton Heath scheme. The reference is SMD/2022/160. It is not expected to come on stream until 2027. There are also pending applications for further solar farms as follows; SMD/2023/0197 Totmonslow Farm and SMD/2023/0059 at Lower Tean Leyes, 3km to the north east (as the crow flies) of the subject site. It is considered that owing to distance, topography and intervening landscaping that it is perhaps unlikely that these built, approved or pending schemes would have intervisibility with the subject proposal although the perception of the area may change. The potential for adverse cumulative impact should be thoroughly assessed in the planning application

Matters of waste, noise, air pollutants, flooding, contamination, traffic, loss of natural resources, risk of accidents or risks to the population are not considered to be significant issues in this proposal in terms of the Regulations. There will be some traffic and associated noise, vibration and dust impact during construction but 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 not within the Green Belt but 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. It is however 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 be unlikely.

Characteristics of the potential impact

This large scale development would be a quite unusual feature to this landscape and not in character. A full comprehensive LIVIA would be required with an application to consider impacts in more detail as discussed above. 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 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 Regulations

Yours sincerely

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X B.J. Haywood

Signed by: Ben Haywood

Head of Development Services