

Declan Cleary
Planning Department
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Moorlands House
Stockwell Street
Leek
Staffordshire
ST13 6HQ

4th April 2024

Dear Mr Cleary,

Subject: Planning application for installation of a solar array, substation and associated works forming an extension to Blythe Solar Farm (ref: SMD/2022/0160) on land at Blythe House Farm, South of the A50, ST10 4JN.

Ref: SMD/2023/0594

1. Introduction

Further to our recent discussions, the following amended plans accompany this letter:

- Site location plan: BF-613-09 Rev G
- Layout plan: BF-613-01 Rev M
- Ecological and landscape plan: BF-613-11 Rev D

The plans have been amended following feedback received during the course of the application as set out within the sections below:

2. Flood Risk

A small area of solar panels and the western access road were within Flood Zone 3. Although solar panels are considered to be “essential infrastructure”¹, to provide clarity regarding the issue of flood risk, the Applicant has chosen to omit them from the proposed site layout.

The proposed capacity is 17MW.

The southern access route has also been omitted, and a new access route, travelling through the previously approved Blythe solar farm is shown on the proposed layout. This has necessitated a

¹ Annex 3 of the National Planning Policy Framework

revision to the red line of the site location plan. A Section 73 application will be required to amend the layout of application SMD/2022/0160 to accommodate this new access route.

3. Comments of the Landscape Consultant

In our previously submitted letter, dated 16.02.2024, we replied to the initial feedback of the LPA's Landscape Consultant (Ryder Landscape Consultants) and advised that the proposed tree belt would be widened and *Quercus robur* added to the planting mix. These changes have been made to the amended plans.

The comments of the Landscape Consultant, dated 20.02.2024 have been reviewed by the Applicant. The most significant amendment as recommended by the Landscape Consultant is the omission of the two fields at the northern part of the Site, referred to by the Consultant as Fields 1 and 2. The suggestion is that these fields could be utilised for ecological mitigation and the field currently proposed for mitigation (Field 7) is instead used for solar panels.

While the Applicant appreciates the concerns of the Consultant regarding the impact of the development on views across the wider area, the suggested amendment has not been undertaken for two reasons. Firstly, the proposed mitigation area within Field 7 will support the current proposal and the previously approved solar farm. It is a larger area than Fields 1 and 2. The mitigation area is primarily intended to support ground nesting birds, which prefer larger, open fields where there is less risk from birds of prey.

Secondly, part of Field 7 lies within Flood Zone 2 and it would therefore be preferable to avoid this area.

Following the omission of panels from the Flood Zone and in terms of the viability of the proposal, the solar panels in Fields 1 and 2 need to be retained. The pending application is an extension of Blythe solar farm as permitted under SMD/2022/0160 and is required to maximise the capacity available to the Applicant at the agreed Point of Connection (PoC). The Applicant will construct both the extension and Blythe solar farm at the same time, and both developments will be operated as one solar farm. Therefore, the extension area must be located in close proximity to the PoC and to Blythe solar farm. The Applicant has been limited in terms of the land available due to the A50 to the north and the railway line to the south, both of which would incur costs associated with cable route crossings to the PoC which would impact upon the viability of the development. The Applicant has also been further limited in their search area as other nearby land formed part of the nearby Upper Leigh solar farm proposal.

4. Public Rights of Way

In our previous letter, dated 16.02.2024, we addressed comments of the Ramblers Association and the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society. We also advised that the Definitive Routes of the PRoWs within the Site have been reviewed and the amended plan, corrects the alignments within the red line area. We acknowledge that there is a discrepancy with the alignment of PRoW Checkley 7, close to its intersection with Checkley 5. We have shown the "as walked route" which follows a logical route adjacent to the hedgerow. However, the route as shown on the Definitive Map appears to cross the corner of the field. Nevertheless, this section is within the red line of the Blythe solar farm planning permission and will be addressed within the Section 73 to amend that planning permission.

5. Ecology.

We have instructed our ecological consultant to update the Biodiversity Net Gain calculations and they will be submitted in due course.

The Applicant has engaged with the Naturespace Partnership regarding the Great Crested Newt license and will be submitting a report to the LPA prior to determination

6. Conclusion

We trust that the amended plans have overcome any outstanding concerns and that the application can now proceed to the May Planning Committee meeting with a positive recommendation. However if there is any additional information that you need, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Donnelly', with a stylized, cursive script.

Helen Donnelly

Associate Director (Planning)

for Corylus Planning & Environmental Ltd