

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

17th June 2024

Dear Declan,

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

We have been instructed by Innova Renewables Developments Limited (the “applicant”) to submit amended plans and additional information in relation to the above planning application.

This submission follows the consideration of the application by the Planning Committee of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council on Thursday 23rd May. At that meeting, the Members of the Committee voted to defer the determination to enable further discussions by the applicant with officers to achieve a buffer zone around Blythe House. There were also discussions at the meeting surrounding a number of issues for which clarification is provided in this letter.

2. Site layout

This letter is accompanied by the following plans:

- Layout Plan: BF/613/01 Rev O and extract
- Landscape Plan: BF/613/11 Rev E

As discussed above, Members of the Planning Committee requested that the layout of the proposed solar farm be amended to include a buffer of 100m between the edge of the solar farm, i.e the fence and Blythe House, a Grade II Listed Building. This was to ensure consistency between the consideration of this and other recent solar farm planning applications.

The layout and landscape plans have been amended to include this buffer. This has resulted in a reduction of the export capacity, from 17MW to 16.6MW.

The layout has not been amended to remove or relocate panels from fields 1 and 2 to field 7. As discussed within the Committee Report (paragraph 7.60), this is due in part to the location of a portion of field 7 being within a flood zone and in part due to the suitability of field 7 for ground nesting bird mitigation.

In addition, and as previously discussed within our letter dated 4th April, the export capacity of the proposed development has been reduced following the omission of panels from the Flood Zone. The addition of a 100m buffer from Blythe House has reduced the capacity further. The applicant is seeking to maximise the capacity available at the agreed Point of Connection and further reductions in export capacity may impact upon the viability of the development.

3. ALC Report

At the Planning Committee, the independent reporting of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) was raised by Members.

As with any planning application, the technical assessments submitted with a planning application are funded by the applicant, however they are produced by consultants who adhere to the relevant professional standards in their field. In respect of the ALC assessment, this was produced by Kernon Countryside Consultants Limited. Within the methodology section of the assessment, the following is stated at paragraph 2.2:

“The work has been carried out by a Chartered Scientist (CSci), who is a Fellow (F. I. Soil Sci) of the British Society of Soil Science (BSSS). In addition, this ALC survey has been carried out by a soil scientist who meets the requirements of the BSSS Professional Competency Standard (PSC) scheme for ALC (see BSSS PCS Document 2 ‘Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales’1). The BSSS PSC scheme is endorsed, amongst others, by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Natural England, the Science Council, and the Institute of Environmental Assessment and Management (IEMA).”

This consultancy also produced the ALC assessment that accompanied the previous solar farm planning application (SMD/2022/0160) at Blythe which was considered by the Planning Committee.

Cumulative capacity

Members of the Planning Committee discussed the combined export capacity of the operating solar farm at Lower Newton, the previously approved solar farm (SMD/2022/0160) and the proposal. There was concern that the combined exports capacity would be over 50MW and a solar farm of that size, could not be determined by the Council.

For context, in accordance with the Planning Act 2008, solar farms with an export capacity of 50MW and above are “Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects” (NSIPs) and are determined by the Planning Inspectorate rather than Local Planning Authorities. The Act does not set any thresholds for NSIPs in respect of the extent of land within the same ownership.

Lower Newton Solar Farm is the constructed solar farm that was approved by Staffordshire Moorlands on 26th August 2014. This development is a subsidy based scheme and is owned by RES Limited. The approved planning application allows for a 11.5MW solar site which connects into the 33kV network on the Simplex substation - Tean substation circuit.

Blythe Solar Farm and the extension will provide a 44.3MW solar and 30MW energy storage development that will connect into the 132kV network via the overhead lines within the development area. This development is subsidy free and is to be owned by Innova. The 132kV overhead lines are on the Rugeley Grid Supply Point (GSP) -Cellarhead GSP circuit.

Whilst these two sites are adjacent to each other, they are electrically separated, under separate ownership and are not linked in any way. Both sites have their own grid connection agreement and connect into separate circuits at different voltage levels. They do not share any equipment and are not impacted if the other site stops operating for any reason.

4. Conclusion

We trust that the amended plans and the clarification on various issues within this letter will enable Members to support the Officer recommendation when the application return to the Planning Committee. However, if there is any additional information required, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Donnelly

Associate Director (Planning)

for Corylus Planning & Environmental Ltd