

DELEGATED REPORT

APPLICATION NO.

20/01807/EIA

LOCATION

Bunkers Hill Farm Reading Road Rotherwick Hook Hampshire RG27 9DA

PROPOSAL

Request for screening opinion for a proposed Solar Farm and Batteries together with all associated equipment and infrastructure

APPLICANT

Simon Chamberlayne (Pegasus Group)

CONSULTATIONS EXPIRY

18 August 2020

APPLICATION EXPIRY

24 August 2020

RECOMMENDATION

EIA Not Required

CONSULTEES RESPONSES

HCC Local Lead Flood Authority

To view this comment please go to the documents tab

County Rights Of Way Group

To view this comment please go to the documents tab

NEIGHBOUR COMMENTS

CONSIDERATIONS

Hart District Council Local Plan (Replacement) 1996 – 2006

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TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS, 2017 (AS AMENDED)

EIA Screening Opinion under Regulation 5(1) of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017 - Proposed Solar Farm, Batteries and Associated Equipment and Infrastructure, Bunkers Hill Farm, Reading Road, near Rotherwick.

Thank you for your letter dated 03.08.2020 and enclosures relating to the proposed development of a solar farm, batteries and associated equipment and infrastructure at the above site. This letter provides the Local Planning Authorities (Hart District Council) EIA Screening Opinion pursuant to Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended), hereafter referred to as the 'EIA Regulations'.

The Site:

The site has a stated area of 92 hectares and comprises of rolling agricultural land as identified on the Location Plan provided (P20-0535-02 Rev A Site Location Plan). It includes land to the east of Reading Road (B3349) and the west of the River Whitewater and extends northwards to the south of Bartlett's Farm. The boundary of the site is approximately 400m north east of Hook and 500m south of Mattingley. The site includes limited built form but does include two large agricultural buildings positioned centrally on Bunkers Hill Farm. Bunkers Hill Farm itself and nearby agricultural and employment buildings are excluded from the site but would be located centrally to it and surrounded by the proposed development.

Proposed Development:

The proposed development would consist of a solar photovoltaic farm (SVF) comprising rows of solar photovoltaic panels together with battery, inverter and transformer blocks. The photovoltaic arrays would consist of panels on metal tables.

Associated development would include: storage container for spare parts; boundary fencing with pole or fence mounted CCTV system; internal access tracks; communication and monitoring equipment, new/upgraded access points from Reading Road; and a substation.

The SVF would have a capacity of 49.9 megawatts (MW) of energy per annum.

EIA Regulations Schedules and Guidance:

Having considered the information provided, the proposed development is not considered to fall within Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations.

The proposed development is considered to fall within Part 3(a) of Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations as an industrial installation for the production of electricity where the area of development would exceed 0.5 hectares.

Accordingly, this EIA Screening Opinion has been undertaken in accordance with the 'Selection Criteria for Screening Schedule 2 Development' at Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations which comprise: characteristics of development; location of development and types and characteristics of the potential impact.

Guidance on undertaking EIA Screening for Schedule 2 projects is provided in the Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 4-018-20170728), which states the following and to which the Council has had due regard:

"When screening Schedule 2 projects, the local planning authority must take account of the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations. Not all of the criteria will be relevant in every case. Each case should be considered on its own merits in a balanced way. When the local planning authority or Secretary of State issues its opinion they must state the main reasons for their conclusion with reference to the relevant criteria listed in Schedule 3. Where it is determined that the proposed development is not Environmental Impact Assessment development, the authority must state any features of the proposed development and measures envisaged to avoid, or prevent what might otherwise have been, significant adverse effects on the environment (see regulation 5)."

Relevant comments from consultees have also been considered and incorporated within this Opinion.

In accordance with Regulation 28(2) of the EIA Regulations, a copy of this screening opinion will be displayed on the Council's website.

Characteristics of Development:

The characteristics of development must be considered having regard, in particular, to:

- (a) the size and design of the whole development;
- (b) accumulation with other existing development and/or approved development;
- (c) the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity;
- (d) the production of waste;
- (e) pollution and nuisances;
- (f) the risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge;

(g) the risks to human health (for example, due to water contamination or air pollution).

In this instance, it is not considered that there are any other developments proposed in the vicinity that would trigger any significant cumulative impacts when considered together with the proposed development.

The proposal should not result in any significant use of natural resources and in contrast, proposes to generate renewable energy.

Due to the use proposed, it is not considered that the proposed development would generate waste to any significant level.

During the operational phase, any pollution and nuisance would be likely be minimal given the limited maintenance regime and associated vehicle movements associated with such developments. Any noise from the solar panels and supporting equipment for such development would likely be low. No external lighting is proposed.

There is greater potential for there to be some pollution and nuisance during construction and decommissioning stages. This would be from vehicle movements and installation/decommissioning works. Such impacts would be temporary and not to a level where there would likely be significant environmental effects. It is anticipated that management plans would be secured to ensure impacts are minimised.

The development would not pose any significant risk of major accidents or disasters, nor would it be vulnerable to the same. Perimeter fencing is proposed alongside the erection of appropriate health and safety signage to warn of any potential risks from electrical equipment. No risks to human health are envisaged.

The characteristics of the proposed development are not such that significant environmental impacts are anticipated.

Location of the Development:

The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by development must be considered, having regard, in particular, to:

- (a) the existing and approved land use;
- (b) the relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground;
- (c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas:
 - (i) wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths;
 - (ii) coastal zones and the marine environment;
 - (iii) mountain and forest areas;
 - (iv) nature reserves and parks;

- (v) European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation;
- (vi) areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure;
- (vii) densely populated areas;
- (viii) landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance.

The site is not a within or adjacent to a 'sensitive area' as defined by the EIA Regulations.

Hazeley Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (HHSSSI) is located approximately 1.3km to the north east of the site.

The comments of Mattingley Parish Council in relation to the potential for leakage and resultant ecological impact on the Whitewater River are noted. Whilst the Whitewater River is not a sensitive area as defined by the EIA Regulations, any potential impacts (including those from accidents) would need to be fully assessed at part of any future planning application.

Comprehensive survey and ecological assessment would be required to accompany any future planning application and a biodiversity net gain would be sought.

The site is largely in Flood Zone 1 (which is the lowest risk Zone) but the eastern part of the site around the River Whitewater is within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The SVF proposed is not identified as a high or more vulnerable use within the Planning Practice Guidance and it is stated by the applicant that any sensitive development would be located within Flood Zone 1. Neither the Local Lead Flood Authority nor Council's Drainage Engineer has identified any specific potentially significant environmental flooding or drainage effects such that an EIA is required. Given the site area, flood risk zones and that the land immediately adjacent to the river such that the ground is at risk of groundwater flooding, any planning application would require a Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy to demonstrate that the development will be safe from flooding and not increase off site flood risk.

The site is not within any, nor does it contain, any designated heritage assets. The conservation areas of Mattingley Green and Rotherwick are located to the north and west of the site respectively. There a number of listed buildings in relatively close proximity to the site boundary including; the farmhouse and barn at Bunkers Hill Farm, Bunkers Hill Cottage, Stokers Farm Bungalow, the farmhouse, barn, cartshed and granary at Bartlett's Farm (all Grade II listed) and Borough Court (Grade II* listed). Based on the information provided, there would be no direct impacts on these assets but there may be impacts upon their settings. Such impacts are not considered to be significant in EIA terms but would need be considered in a Heritage Assessment to accompany any future planning application.

There are no archaeological assets on or adjacent to the site.

The site is within the Whitewater Valley Landscape Character Area (WVLCA). This proposed development would introduce built development on a greenfield site over a significant area. The characteristics of the development and potential impacts on the landscape are considered in the following section.

The site is not environmentally sensitive such that significant environmental impacts are anticipated.

Types and Characteristics of the Potential Impacts:

The potential significant effects of development must be considered in relation to criteria set out under the above considerations, and having regard in particular to:

- (a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- (b) the nature of the impact;
- (c) the transboundary nature of the impact;
- (d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;
- (e) the probability of the impact;
- (f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;
- (g) the accumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development;
- (h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

As identified above, the proposed development would change the visual appearance of the area and result in some impact upon the landscape.

The site has a sloping topography and is part of the valley for the River Whitewater with varying degrees of visibility from Reading Road. There are three public rights of way (PRoW) that cross the site: PRoW16 running north/south through the northern part of the site then past Barlett's Farm; PRoW17 running east/west through the central part of the site past Neville's; and PRoW23 running east/west across the southern part of the site south of Bunkers Hill Farm.

Landscape impacts would largely be confined to the site whilst visual impacts would be wider. Coverage of the site would be over a large area but at low level. These impacts would be temporary and reversible and would be reduced through the retention of landscape features such as trees and hedges, hedging would be reinforced in places, although any such mitigation measures would likely vary in effectiveness given seasonal changes in foliage.

There would be a need to fully assess impacts on landscape and visual amenity through a comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that would be required with any future planning application.

With due regard to the above, it is not considered that landscape or visual impacts would be significant in EIA terms but comprehensive assessment would be required, particularly in relation to public views from the PRoW's with due regard to the sensitivity of these receptors.

Whilst noting the requirements for the requisite planning assessment in relation to potential impacts upon highways, public rights or way and flood risk/drainage respectively, the Local Highway Authority, County Countryside Planning Team and Lead Local Flood Authority have not identified any potential significant environmental effects such that an EIA would be required. The comments of Rotherwick and Hartley Wintney Parish Councils are also noted but do not raise any specific items related to potential significant effects.

As identified elsewhere in this report, construction and decommissioning impacts would be temporary as would the proposed development itself.

The characteristics of the proposed development are not such that significant environmental impacts are anticipated.

Conclusion:

This EIA Screening Opinion is provided pursuant to Part 6 of the EIA Regulations in relation to the proposed development of a SVF at Bunkers Hill Farm. The development does not fall within Schedule 1 but does fall within Part 3(a) of Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations.

Taking into account the characteristics and location of the development and the types and characteristics of potential impacts and with due regard to consultation comments, the scale, nature and location of the proposed development and associated proposed assessments to accompany a planning application, it is not anticipated it will result in significant environmental effects. Accordingly, the Local Planning Authority considers that based on the information provided, the proposed development is not EIA development.

REASONS FOR REFUSAL

INFORMATIVES

