

Our Ref: 20/04580/SCREEN

Your Ref:

tim@regener8power.com

Dear Tim

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 EIA Screening Opinion in relation to a proposed solar farm at Parcel 4642, Stowey Road Stowey

The Local Planning Authority (LPA) has assessed whether there are likely to be significant environmental impacts as a result of this proposal. You will be aware that in cases where significant effects are likely to occur, the subsequent planning application will need to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

The LPA is of the opinion that the proposed development does not fall within Schedule 1 of the above Regulations. The proposed development is however within the following Schedule 2 of the regulations:

3. Energy Industry

a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (unless included in Schedule 1).

As the site is greater than the 0.5Ha threshold a formal assessment is required against Schedule 3. The indicative thresholds and criteria suggest that development with a thermal output of more than 50 MW is more likely to be EIA development.. However, the development must be considered against Schedule 3. Responses to this selection criteria are detailed below

The development has therefore been screened for EIA, using the selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 as a guide. The fundamental test to be applied in each case is whether the development and its specific impacts are likely in that location to result in direct or indirect significant effects on the environment.

The proposal

The proposed site is located off on land at Stowey Road, Bishop Sutton, and the site is likely to be accessed northeast of the site via the current farm access on Stowey Road. The development proposal is for the temporary erection of a series of ground mounted solar panel arrays and associated infrastructure for a duration of up to 40 years. The footprint of the proposed development area covers approximately 58.1 hectares (ha). The photovoltaic (PV) panels would be lifted approximately 0.8m off the ground and not exceed 3m in height. The development will require the installation of a number of inverter cabinets of up to 3m in height and a power transformer cabin and the installation of a new 2.5m high paladin (fine mesh) or post and wire 'deer fence' is proposed within the site boundary with access gates.

Natural Resources

The principal natural resource expended by the development will be the land itself, which is agricultural in nature and currently used for grazing. Given the nature of the development and its temporary lifespan, the loss of agricultural land as a result of the proposal can be reversed following decommissioning of the solar farm.

Sunlight will be used to generate electricity through the PV panels, but this will not result in any depletion of that resource. Other natural resources used are likely to be limited to those used in the construction process. There will not be any unusual use of natural resources in the construction and future operation of the site. The impact on natural resources will not be significant in EIA terms.

Waste

The proposed development will result in construction and demolition waste produced for a limited period. The operation of the completed development will not give rise to any unusual production of waste beyond that typically associated with a small-scale industrial use. A Waste Management Plan should accompany any future planning application. Given the scale and nature of the proposed development, significant environmental effects in respect of the production of waste are not considered likely.

Population and Human Health

The site is within a rural area which is not particularly densely populated. There are however nearby residential properties. However, the site is separated from the main areas of residential development and the risk of accidents, having regards to substances or technologies used, will be low and minimal with regard to impacts on the environment. The risk to human health associated with contaminated land is considered very low to negligible and remedial works can be carried out where necessary.

Pollution and Nuisance

The proposed development will not produce any notable pollution or nuisance. The operation of the completed development will not generate any emissions. The proposal has the potential to reduce CO₂ emissions by replacing fossil fuel energy sources elsewhere.

The installation of the solar panels, framework and the construction of related associated infrastructure will give rise to elevated traffic levels. However, given the nature of the proposed development, following the construction phase traffic levels associated with the development will be low. The development is not within or adjacent to an AQMA.

There is potential for some noise and disturbance arising from the development, however such effects will be of limited duration and localised in nature. Overall, the impact on pollution and noise will not be significant in EIA terms

Biodiversity

The site or adjacent land is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations. The site may be occupied by protected species but there is no overriding ecological constraints to the development of the site. It is however within an SSSI impact zone and close to a number of SNCIs. However, any impact is considered to be localised and any application can seek to deliver net biodiversity gain.

Appropriate ecological studies will be undertaken during the planning process and mitigation measures can also be applied where necessary.

Landscape/Cultural Heritage and Archaeology

The proposal is for a 58.1 ha solar farm located in close proximity to the Mendip Hills AONB, the boundary of which follows the line of Sutton Hill Road approximately 400m to the west of the site.

Guidance from the BRE National Solar Centre (Planning guidance for the installation of large scale ground mounted solar PV systems) states that 'in general, an EIA is likely to be needed for Schedule 2 developments if the solar PV development is in a particularly environmentally sensitive location.'

The close proximity to the AONB makes this a 'particularly environmentally sensitive' location. Notwithstanding that the ZTV mapping indicates there will be no visibility from the nearest parts of the AONB, it confirms potential visibility over a very wide area, including parts of the AONB that are approximately 3.5 km from the site.

There are numerous Public Rights of Way within the zone of theoretical visibility, both inside and outside the AONB, including some named long distance routes.

One photograph has been provided from within the AONB at a distance of approximately 5.3km. Due to the large size of the installation, even at this distance the development will be very clearly visible, so given that some AONB views may be possible at a distance of only 3.5 km, and other views not within the AONB but much closer to the development will also be possible, significant landscape and visual effects are highly likely.

It is noted that there is at least one locally listed heritage asset adjacent to the site and within the ZTV (61118: possible Roman settlement near Stowey Quarry).

Therefore, due the large size of the installation, the sensitivity of its location close to the Mendip Hills AONB and the anticipated extent of visibility from Public Rights of Way, it is likely that there will be significant landscape and visual effects.

Transport and Access

The proposed development will create a change in the highway network, particular during the construction phase. Whilst the development may give rise to localised traffic impacts, there is no reason to conclude that the development and the change itself will have a significant environmental impact. The submission of a Transport Statement, Construction Management Plan and Travel Plan is anticipated, and this will limit the impact of the development further.

Land Stability and Climate

The site is not known to suffer from land stability issues nor be susceptible to significant impacts from climate effects. Full details of sustainable construction methods and design would be considered at detailed design stage.

Due to the size of the site, the proposed development has the potential to alter and affect drainage patterns, with the possibility of increased run-off rates and levels of overland flow. However, these effects would be localised and would be likely to be able to be mitigated within the site itself. The site falls within Flood Zone 1 and therefore any drainage problems are unlikely to be critical.

Conclusion

Due to the large size of the installation, the sensitivity of its location close to the Mendip Hills AONB and the anticipated extent of visibility from Public Rights of Way, it is likely that there will be significant landscape and visual effects and therefore an EIA is required.

It is concluded, for the reasons set out above, that the development constitutes EIA development. Any future application must be accompanied by an Environmental Statement. You may now wish to submit a Scoping Opinion.

Please note that the above is **not** an assessment of the planning merits of your proposal rather it is purely an assessment of whether significant environmental impacts, under the terms of the EIA regulations, would be likely to occur.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tessa Hampden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Tessa Hampden
Senior Planning Officer**