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 Our Reference: 23/01010/SCREIA
 Date: 8 June 2023



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Mr. Andrew Mott
 Exagen
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Dear Andrew Mott,

Town and County Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the "EIA Regulations") - Request for Screening Opinion

Reference Number: 23/01010/SCREIA
Development: EIA Screening Opinion request for a proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage development
Location: Land North off Leake Road, Gotham, Nottinghamshire

I am writing in response to your Screening Request that seeks to determine if the proposals are EIA Development having regard to Regulation 6(2) of the Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended).

The proposals relate to the formation ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and an electrical substation together with underground cabling, ancillary grid infrastructure and associated works. The proposed development would be temporary with an operational period of 40 years.

It is considered that the information submitted with the request for a screening opinion complies with Part 2 (Screening) – section 6(2) of the Regulations and that as such the Borough Council has sufficient information to allow it to adopt a screening opinion.

The application site is in open countryside broadly between the settlements of Wysall and Costock. The site comprises of a series of open agricultural fields which are generally flat. The land extends to some 97 hectares (ha) that is split across two separate land parcels.

The northern parcel comprises of 9 medium to large fields. A linear woodland, known as Old Wood, forms the northern edge of the northern parcel and Bradmore Road forms (in part) its eastern boundary. It is otherwise adjoined by other agricultural fields.

The southern parcel is located some 325m to the south of the northern parcel and is separated by a series of adjoining agricultural fields and small areas of woodland. The southern area includes 4 small to medium fields. The southern boundary is alongside Wysall Road / Costock Road where there is an existing agricultural access but is otherwise adjoined by other agricultural fields.

It should be noted that the majority of the adjoining fields to the west of the site form part of a consented ground mounted solar installation (Ref: 22/00303/FUL) which has not yet been implemented but remains extant.

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The closest dwelling to the site is at Lodge Farm that is within the red line boundary, there are other residential properties to the south along Wysall Road / Costock Road, and to the east at Bradmore Road. To the west of the site is Highfields Farm farmhouse and the building associated with Holy Cross Convent.

In terms of public access and public views of the site, there are a number of Public Footpaths (PROWs) that converge at Wysall and traverse the elevated landscape around the village, and across the northern parcel. The Midshires Way crosses the site and follows the elevated Bradmore Road, which follows the eastern edge of the northern parcel. There is also a leading from the northern parcel of land to the south of Wysall Road, between Rempstone Lane and Wysall's western settlement edge. There are also a number of Public Rights of Way (PROW) in the vicinity of the site, most notably to the north through Old Wood.

The site is identified as being within Flood Zone 1 (at little or no risk of fluvial or tidal / coastal flooding) on the indicative national flood risk maps.

It is stated that part of the site does form the best and most versatile' agricultural land (Grade 3b / 4) and that a detailed Agricultural Land Classification assessment would be undertaken as part of the planning application. The site is not located within or is adjacent to an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).

The proposed solar farm does not lie within any statutory environmental designated sites, and within a 5km radius there are no internationally designated sites.

Whilst there are no Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on the application site, however it is noted that 8 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) (locally designated) are identified to lie within 2km of the Site. Bunny Old Wood SINC is the closest non-statutory site, immediately adjacent to the northern boundary of the northern parcel. This is an ancient broadleaved woodland, dominated by ash, with pedunculate oak and wych elm, a dense understorey and ground flora including sanicle, wood-sedge and bluebell. The wood is of importance to butterflies, including white-letter hairstreak. The initial screening survey identified two ponds within the site area in addition to 13 further ponds within 250m of the Site. The Kingston Brook flows through the southern parcel of the Site, whilst further wet and dry ditches were also identified within the two site parcels.

It is stated that the results of all protected species surveys and any required mitigation or enhancements would be reported in an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) to be submitted as part of any future planning application and would seek to enhance habitat. It is agreed that the proposed development is likely to have a neutral or net positive effect on habitat resources.

There are no designated heritage assets within the boundary of the site, therefore it is considered that no direct effects will occur on known designated assets. I would advise however, that you contact Nottinghamshire County Council Heritage Team to establish their requirements as there may be records of archaeology on the site and therefore there may be a requirement trial trenches to be dug before a decision can be issued,

In terms of heritage assets beyond the site boundary, the submission noted that "the north-western extent of the Wysall Conservation Area lies c. 215m to the south-east of the northern parcel and the south-western extent of the Conservation Area lies c. 295m east of the southern parcel. The Conservation Area contains one Grade I Listed Building (the Church of Holy Trinity c. 510m east of the southern parcel (1259980)) and four Grade II Listed Buildings. The Grade II Listed Highfields lies c. 435m west of the northern parcel and 670m west of the southern parcel (1260277). Thorpe in the Glebe medieval settlement, including church site and open field system, a scheduled monument, lies approximately 1.3km to the south east of the southern site parcel.

It is accepted that the existing woodland areas, tree lines and buildings would obstruct most views between the application site and the Listed Buildings and Conservation Area and there would be limited potential for significant effects on the heritage assets or their settings. However, it is stated that a detailed Heritage Assessment would be submitted with the application to consider these matters in greater detail.

In terms of non-statutory assets, it is stated that “there is scarce activity of prehistoric date within the study area, limited to a single residual find of Bronze Age data c. 100m east of the southern site. There is no evidence to suggest that prehistoric activity was focussed within the Site and therefore the archaeological potential for significant remains of prehistoric date within the Site is considered to be low.” It is also stated that a Heritage Assessment would be carried out in order to assess potential direct impacts resulting from the proposals (prior to submission), including the potential impacts upon unknown sub-surface archaeology. It is noted from the submission that the actual footprint of solar farms typically results in a surface area of circa 5% of the site and therefore significant impacts upon unknown archaeological remains within the site are limited.

In terms of the visual and landscape impacts, the proposed development primarily relates to the development of solar panels mounted on frames c3.5m high. Given the relative flat topography of the site combined with existing hedgerows enclosing the site together with the mixed wooded elements around it, would mean that the visual and landscaping effects of the proposals are likely to be localised and within the defined landscape character area – primarily the appearance and character of the large-scale arable fields.

As stated in the submission, it is accepted that the extent of these views could be reduced by appropriate setbacks from field boundaries; the nearest residential properties and further by screening provided by existing trees and hedgerows present within the intervening landscape alongside the mitigation measures. Therefore, it is considered that the anticipated landscape and visual affected would not be so significant to define the proposals as EIA development, considering a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and landscaping plan would need to be provided as part of the submission to consider and mitigate any potential harm. The cumulative impact would also be considered as part LVIA (including the consented solar installation adjacent to the site), but given the nature of the development, the wider impact of the proposed development would be limited.

Clearly there would be close range views from PRowers within and adjacent to the site and the potential effects would be high, however there is potential that impacts could be mitigated, to a degree, through imposing set back margins from the rights of way and sensitive planting and landscape mitigation. Moreover, it would be considered as part of the landscape assessment as part of any future application, as confirmed in the submission.

In summary, it is therefore considered that the proposed development does not constitute Schedule 1 development as defined in the Regulations. Instead, the proposed development falls within the Schedule 2 list of developments under Category 3 – Energy Industry, part a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water. The scale of the development exceeds that set out in Column 2 and therefore the proposal requires screening, and the Borough Council must therefore take into account the criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations.

Schedule 3 – Selection Criteria for Screening Schedule 2 Development set out the criteria against which developments should be assessed to establish whether the proposal is likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to; the characteristics of development, the location of development, the characteristics of potential impacts, *et al.*

Given that the site is not located within a sensitive area for the purposes of Environmental Assessment as set out in the Regulations, that the potential environmental effects would be limited (as detailed above); the temporary and reversible nature of the proposals; that

specific matters can be further considered as part of detailed assessments (as stated in the submitted information), and further mitigation could be provided, it is considered that proposals do not constitute EIA development.

A separate screening checklist as recommended by the National Planning Practice Guidance on Environmental Impact Assessments has been completed which arrives at the same conclusion.

This screening opinion relates only to the EIA Regulations and does not imply that a favourable recommendation or decision would be forthcoming. This screening opinion is based purely on the information supplied by yourself as assessed against the Regulations current at the date of this response. Should there be any material change in relevant circumstances before an application is submitted, or you become aware that any information is incorrect, it is advised that you write to us again to allow the details to be re-checked as the planning authority is able, in exceptional cases, to request an EIA at a later stage should it subsequently become evident that such a proposal does require such an accompanying submission.

Yours faithfully,



Principal Planning Officer