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Response to Planning application from Hertfordshire County Council (T and CP GDP Order 2015)

Director of Planning

North Hertfordshire Council
Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

District ref: 24/01666/SO
HCC ref: NH/21914/2024
HCC received: 8 August 2024
Area manager: Manjinder Sehmi
Case officer: Senober Khan

Location

Land To The South Of Wymondley Substation And South Of Sperberry Hill, St Ippolyts, Hertfordshire

Application type

Screening/Scoping Opinion

Proposal

Screening Opinion : Proposed solar farm measuring 35.5 hectares with associated battery storage and ancillary infrastructure

Recommendation

OTHER

Brief Description in support of Proposed Development by the applicant:

The Applicant requests a formal Screening Opinion under Regulation 6 (1) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the EIA Regulations) is requested in relation to the proposed development of a 25MW solar farm and 12.5MW battery storage facility on land south of Sperberry Hill, Wymondley, North Hertfordshire (the Site). The proposed development includes a grid connection / cabling to the nearby National Grid Wymondley Substation.

To assist in your adoption of a Screening Opinion we have provided a summary of the Proposed Development location and a brief description of the nature and purpose of the Proposed Development.

The Council will be aware that a planning application (ref: 22/00709/FP) for a proposal with the same description of development, and located on exactly the same site, was refused by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) on 22nd November 2023, for two reasons relating to Green Belt policy and harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. We do not dwell on

the merits of that decision other than to note that the Officer Report acknowledged the decision to refuse was: "... very finely balanced ...".

This previous application, hereafter referred to as the '2023 Scheme', was made by RNA Energy Ltd. That company has subsequently been acquired by Brockwell Energy Limited and now exists as BSSL.

BSSL has now elected to submit a revised planning application for the 2023 Scheme, with some specific design changes.

The Resubmission Scheme is described as follows:

- i. The Application Site is identical to that for the 2023 Scheme and remains at 35.5 hectares.
- ii. It is proposed that the description of development is identical to that for the 2023 Scheme.
- iii. The proposal includes the same scheme components as the 2023 Scheme, including solar panels, 8 no. battery storage units; string inverters; a DNO substation; a switchroom; a control room; a grid connection / cabling to the nearby National Grid Wymondley Substation; internal stone tracks; 2 No. improved existing access points off Little Almshoe Lane, and an access point from Stevenage Road; fencing; CCTV cameras; and a combination of woodland and hedgerow planting. The 2023 Scheme also had 5 no. transformer stations, this is now reduced to 4 no. transformer stations for the Resubmission Scheme.
- iv. For the 2023 Scheme, the individual solar panels had a power rating of 640 watts. Since the formulation of that application panel technology has continued to advance, and for the Resubmission Scheme it is proposed to install panels with a rating of 700 watts (noting a limited number of suppliers now offer an even greater power rating). The panel size, mountings, spacing and distance above ground level at the front (lower) and back (higher) edges would all be the same as the 2023 Scheme. However, with the greater power rating per panel, the Resubmission Scheme would deliver exactly the same 25MW output to the point of connection as the 2023 Scheme, but with an overall reduction in the area of solar panels of just over 8.5%. In short, the overall area of solar panels now proposed in the Resubmission Scheme is circa 8.5% less than the 2023 Scheme.

The Resubmission Scheme comprises a reduction in built development when compared to the 2023 Scheme, and specifically reduces the effects of the development on identified sensitive receptors, all whilst maintaining precisely the same renewable energy benefits. Thus, the Applicant believes it is demonstrably the case that the Resubmission Scheme does not constitute EIA development.

Schedule 3 sets out three main criteria against which the development should be considered, as follows:

A number of sub-criteria are also provided, and these are considered below in the context of the EIA Screening Matrix, referenced above.

9. Transport and Access

There would be no direct impacts on public rights of way (PROW) as these would be maintained within landscaped corridors through the site. There would be visual impacts on users of the PROWs that pass through the Site until mitigation hedgerow planting establishes.

Construction and maintenance traffic would access the site directly from the Sperberry Hill and/or Little Almshole Lane Road and would use existing farm access points, where practical.

Traffic generated during construction traffic would be modest and would be short term and temporary. As such, the Proposed Development is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects associated with increased traffic on the public highway.

The planning submission will be accompanied by a series of assessments setting out the details of the proposed scheme and comprise the (highway related) following:

- Glint and Glare Assessment;
- Transport Statement.

EIA Screening Opinion for 2023 Scheme

Screening opinion relates to the above proposal and is based on information contained within application reference 21/02628/SO

Hertfordshire Highways Consultation Response:

No objection in principle but noting the context of the site and type of proposed development, a Transport Statement would be required to demonstrate the suitability of access points from Sperberry Hill and suitability of roads for HGVs or larger vehicles. A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) is also required to support any planning applications. Detailed advice is contained in the attached note from the highway authority. It is also noted that a glint and glare assessment would be included to support any planning application in the context of highway safety. A Section 278 agreement will be required for any new or altered access points.

Highway comments:

The applicant will be submitting a Transport Statement (in compliance with HCC's Local Transport Plan 4) and a Construction Management Plan (routing should be supported with swept path track drawings and all movements in and out to be controlled by banksman where needed), consequently the HA acknowledges the scope and level of detail of the information to be provided.

It should be noted that a full application was submitted, ref.no. 22/00709/FP, for which the HA recommended no objection subject to listed conditions.

Given that the Screening opinion relates to the above revised proposals, and based on the information provided and that contained within application reference 21/02628/SO, the changes proposed are not expected to impact on highways relative to the HA's comments for PA ref no. 22/00709/FP.

The submission seeks to confirm that the proposals would not require an EIA, the Highway Authority has no comments on the requirements on an EIA.

Signed

Senober Khan

29 August 2024