

Town & Country Planning (EIA) Regulations 2017  
**Secretary of State Screening Direction – Written Statement**

Application name:	Form Farm – Solar Farm proposal
SoS case reference:	PCU/EIA/N1730/3267106
Schedule and category of development:	3 (a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity steam and hot water.  The area of the development exceeds 0.5 hectare

**Full statement of reasons as required by 5(5)(a) of the 2017 EIA Regulations including conclusions on likelihood of significant environmental effects.**

The Secretary of State has considered whether the above proposal is likely to have significant environmental effects. He has undertaken this screening taking into account the criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

The land comprises approximately 105 hectares (260 acres) of mixed farmland (arable and grazing) between Long Sutton / White Hill to the south and Odiham Airfield to the north; Alton Road (B3349) to the west and Long Lane to the east.

The whole area sits below Odiham Airfield and generally slopes from north to south. The topography and vegetation allow limited views into the site, including from the highways and footpaths that pass adjacent to and through the area proposed for development.

The fields are, typically for the area, large and separated by hedgerows and mature trees. Potential exists to impact footpaths: one running east to west through the south western field; and two running adjacent to / through the site area in the south east. The latter paths run north eastwards / north from Long Sutton / White Hill towards Odiham Airfield.

The solar farm would comprise rows of solar panels mounted on frames fixed into the ground using non-corrosive metal poles / legs. The panels would be connected using cables fixed under the rows, linking to inverters also fixed under the rows. Groups of inverters would be connected to substations, housed in prefabricated metal buildings, using underground cables. Switchgear, also housed in prefabricated metal buildings, would connect and manage the energy produced from the solar panels. The housings would be sited on concrete plinths. A high voltage cable would run underground from the site to the Fleet Electrical Sub Station at Mill Lane to the north east.

The site would be enclosed using 2 to 2.4m high deer fencing or other 'non industrial' fencing and security cameras positioned on poles of similar height at the perimeter to monitor activity within the site. A communication tower of approximately 3m in height would be located within the boundary. Panels and the supporting structure would be made of non reflective and non corrosive materials. Housings for inverters, switchgear and substations would be prefabricated using sheet metal in a colour, typically green, that would be inconspicuous in the setting.

The installation would utilise the areas between hedges, trees, footpaths and highways, with substantial set back of approximately 5 metres where necessary. This will limit visual impact and allow enhancement of wildlife corridors. The Secretary of State considers there is no likely significant environmental impacts as a result of the construction, operation or decommissioning of the proposal.

The installation would provide up to 49MW of energy to the National Grid for a temporary period of approximately 40 years. Materials for construction would arrive in the area using a

variety of vehicles including large HGVs and specialist haulage vehicles. The access route from the M3 would be the B3349 Alton Road.

Construction would take place over a period of approximately six months, with an intensive period in the middle and less intensive activity at the beginning and the end of that period. The majority of highway traffic and site noise would occur during months 2 to 4. The highways running north west and north east out of Long Sutton pass through the site and the road running eastwards out of Long Sutton to White Hill passes the site boundary in the south east. I consider that although patterns of road use will be affected, the proposal is not likely to be a significant generator of new trips onto the network.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), through its indicative criteria and thresholds, states that for projects for Energy Industry – Industrial installations for the production of energy, steam and hot water, significant environmental effect is more likely for sites with a thermal output of more than 50MW, and that the main matters to be addressed would be, level of emission to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel, and any visual impact.

The Secretary of State has screened the proposal having regard to this advice while noting the particular nature and characteristics of this project. He has also considered Schedule 3 selection criteria for Schedule 2 development refers: 1 (a) – (f) regarding characteristics of development 2 (a)-(c) (i) – (viii) regarding location of development and 3(a) –(e) regarding characteristics of potential impact. The site is not within a 'sensitive area' as defined in the EIA Regulations. Although the site itself is not within a designated area, the Secretary of State has consulted both Natural England and Historic England on the proposed development due to the proximity of the sites and features of interest described above. Natural England did not respond to our consultation request, although they did respond to the council saying that on the basis of the material provided there is potential likely significant effects on Greywell Tunnel and South Downs National park , however they give no detail or assessment on these matters and say that further assessment is required by the council and they have not assessed the significance of any impacts themselves. The Council's ecology officer considered potential impact on commuting and foraging bats. Given the nature of the proposed development and the sensitivities of these designated habitats it is considered likely that nationally and internationally designated habitats are sufficiently distant to not experience any significant impacts during the construction, operational or decommissioning phases. From evidence provided I do not consider any likely impacts would be so significant to result in EIA being needed.

Historic England commented that in reviewing the information given, it appears likely that the proposed development would have a minimal impact on the historic environment and therefore an EIA may not be required in relation to the historic environment. The Secretary of State having regard to the information and HE's response concludes there are no significant effects on the environment.

In relation to potential cumulative impact, Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014) requires the Secretary of State take into account the potential cumulative impacts of a proposal. It states each application (or request for a screening opinion) should be considered on its own merits. It goes on to state that there are occasions where other existing or approved development may be relevant in determining whether significant effects are likely as a consequence of the proposed development. Local planning Authorities should have regard to the possible cumulative effects arising from other built and approved developments in the vicinity as these are also important considerations.

The Secretary of State has carefully assessed all the evidence before him, and has had particular regard to the comments of HE and NE. Natural England express various concerns about the proposed development and consider it could have significant effects in relation to matters within their remit.

Overall although there is some likely impacts on footpaths, wider area designations and sensitive areas as well as potential impacts on function of RAF site and risk of accidents – none of these result in significant impacts on the environment that would require EIA. From the

information before him, noting the comments from both the Secretary of State has concluded that the nature and characteristics of the proposed development, in this particular location, is not likely to result in significant effects on sensitive designated ecological and historic sites and features in the vicinity. For this reason, the Secretary of State concludes that an EIA is not required.

Is an Environmental Statement required?	No
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