

Gareth Roberts
Pegasus Group
Pegasus House
Querns Business Centre
Whitworth Road
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 1RT

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Officer: Sam Williams

☎ 01305224225

✉ sam.williams@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Dear Mr Roberts,

THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017: EIA SCREENING OPINION

P/ESC/2021/00237 CONSTRUCT AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION (INCLUDING SUI GENERIS AND CLASS E USES) WITH ALL ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT, TOGETHER WITH A SOLAR FARM AND BATTERIES, ACCESS FROM THE A354 AND ALL ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT AND NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE.

Thank you for requesting that Dorset Council, as the Local Planning Authority, undertakes an EIA screening opinion for the proposed upgrade of the A35/B3162 junction with the formation of a roundabout, to replace the construction of an electric vehicle charging station and solar farm, as described in your letter dated 29th January 2021.

In response, this letter provides the EIA Screening Opinion adopted by Dorset Council for the proposed development and gives the main reasons for the decision in accordance with Regulation 5(5) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Regulations) 2017 ('the EIA regulations').

The proposed development does not fall within Schedule 1 of the EIA regulations, but it does fall within Paragraph 3(a) of Schedule 2 the EIA regulations, as "industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water".

The threshold for development under Paragraph 3(a) of Schedule 2 is:

"The area of the development exceeds 0.5 hectare".

The development area of the proposed roundabout comprises approximately 29.59 hectares of agricultural land.

In light of this, the proposed development would qualify as Schedule 2 development. It is therefore necessary at the EIA screening stage to consider whether or not the development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. In coming to this judgement, Regulation 4(6) of the EIA Regulation requires the selection criteria for screening presented in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations to be taken into account, and includes:

1. Characteristics of development;
2. Location of development; and
3. Characteristics of the impact.

1. Characteristics of development

The proposed development comprises the installation of; an Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Station; a ground mounted Solar Farm together with all associated equipment and infrastructure; and battery storage. In order to connect the development with the existing network, a below-ground cable runs from the southern end of the site to a substation on West Street, Winterborne Kingston, approximately 1.57km south.

The Planning Practice Guidance on Environmental Impact Assessment provides an indicative threshold above which development is more likely to require EIA, which is installations with a thermal output of more than 50MW. The total output of the proposed development has been estimated at 18MW in total.

There is a requirement to consider the cumulative effects of the development in accordance with Paragraph 1b of Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations. The impacts of the proposed development will be considered in combination with the existing and approved development in the areas surrounding the site. At the time of writing, three Solar Farms are operational and connected to the National Grid nearby, which include:

- North Farm Solar Farm (2/2014/0825/FUL) which lies approximately 3.3km to the east of the site;
- Canada Farm Solar Farm (2/2013/0770/PLNG), east of Lady Caroline's Drive/south of Fair Mile Road which lies approximately 4km to the north of the site; and
- The Down House Littleton Solar Farm (2/2014/1066/FUL) is south west of Blandford St Mary which lies approximately 5.2km to the north east of the site.

South Farm Solar Farm (2/2019/0850/PAEIA), which lies approximately 3.8km to the west of the site, has received Planning Permission.

Schedule 3 also imparts, in Paragraph 1c, a requirement to consider the use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity.

Land

The site comprises undefined Grade 3 'Good to Moderate' land. The loss of this agricultural land to the development is considered to be reversible, as the solar farm and EV Charging Station will be decommissioned after a period of 40 years, and the site will be returned to its former agricultural use.

Soil & water

The nature of the development is such that it is unlikely that the construction phase would lead to the loss of soils as appropriate construction techniques will be implemented to reduce below ground works. Any soil removed when digging the cable route will be replaced when burying the cable. However, there is likely to be some use of water as is standard with construction works.

Biodiversity

It is anticipated that at least one section of hedgerow will be removed in order to provide access to the site from the A354. Aside from this there are not anticipated to be any other uses of biodiversity as a resource.

It is therefore considered unlikely that the proposed development will result in the significant use of natural resources, for the purposes of EIA.

Access to the development site is proposed to be created from an existing layby on the A354. Construction traffic associated with the development is unlikely to be significant and will be managed through implementation of a Construction Traffic Management Plan. This is considered sufficient in preventing a significant risk of accidents during the works.

During the operational phase of the development, there is potential for an increase in vehicle movements on the A354 as EV users opt to use this route over other routes, due the presence of the EV Charging Station. However the generation of novel trips is unlikely to be significant. In addition, correct Health and Safety signage will be displayed on the site to inform of the potential risk from working near electrical equipment and to discourage trespass. The EV Charging Station will adhere to all electrical standards and safety specifications applicable. Therefore the development is not expected to give rise to significant impacts in relation to the risk of accidents.

Considering the nature, scale and location of the proposed development, it is not considered to be vulnerable to, or give rise to significant impacts, in relation to the Risk of Accidents and Major Disasters.

The greatest potential for nuisance during the construction phase of the development is likely to be as a result of noise and dust, typical of construction works. These impacts are considered short term and temporary, and the implementation of best practice construction methods is considered likely to reduce the potential impact to the extent that significant impacts for the purposes of EIA are considered unlikely. During the operational phase, the nature of the development is such that a large majority of vehicle movements associated with the EV Charging Station are expected to be EV, and emissions to air will be limited to non-EV and the limited deliveries to the site. There will also be no emissions generated by the Solar Farm development. As such, there are not anticipated to be any significant nuisance or pollution effects, for the purposes of the EIA.

2. Location of development

The site is located south of Blandford Hill (A354), to the east of Winterborne Whitechurch, and is approximately 6km southwest of Blandford Forum.

The site and immediate surroundings are largely rural and undeveloped, with the exception of the settlement of Winterborne Whitechurch which lies close to the site, to the west.

The site does not fall within any 'sensitive areas' as defined in Regulation 2(1) of The EIA regulations, however it is considered sit within the setting of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which is approximately 300m northwest at its nearest point.

Nearby ecological designations also defined as 'sensitive areas' include:

- The Higher Houghton SSSI lies approximately 4.3km northwest of the site.
- The Black Hill Heath SSSI, Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA and Ramsar site lie approximately 5.5km to the south of the site.
- The Bryanston SSSI lies approximately 7km northeast of the site. The site therefore lies within the 10km 'consultation zone' for this SSSI. As such it may be necessary to consult Natural England to establish whether the development is likely to have an effect on the foraging or commuting behaviour of greater horseshoe (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) bats, for which the SSSI is designated.

Environmental designations which are not defined as 'sensitive areas' but are still important in determining whether or not EIA is required include:

- Low Risk (Zone 1) Flood Zone within which the site falls. Land near the River Winterborne, which lies to the east and south of the site, forms the closest Flood Zone 2 and 3 land.
- The Winterborne Whitechurch Conservation Area is approximately 380 metres to the west of the site. Within the conservation area are a number of listed buildings including the Grade I Listed Church of St Mary and Whatcombe House which is Grade II* Listed.

Scheduled monuments include a number of bowl barrows to the south, southeast and east of the site, as well as the 'Deserted medieval village at West Farm', which lies approximately 100m west of the site.

3. *Characteristics of the impact*

The Planning Practice Guidance on Environmental Impact Assessment ('the guidance') gives an indication of the key issues to consider for projects and an indicative threshold which can be used to help determine whether EIA is necessary.

As previously mentioned, the indicative threshold above which development is more likely to require EIA for installations with a thermal output of more than 50MW. The total output of the proposed development has been estimated at 18MW in total.

The guidance indicates that the key issues for development of this type are the level of emissions to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel and any visual impact. In light of the location of the development, impacts upon heritage assets and the landscape are also likely to be a key consideration.

Emissions

The emissions to air during the construction phase of the development will result predominantly through the emissions of construction vehicles. Best practice construction techniques are likely to limit these effects as far as possible, and the residual effects are not considered significant particularly given the short term, temporary nature of the impact.

Significant increase in emissions to air are considered unlikely during the operational phase, due to the nature of the development, in that a majority of vehicles using the development are EV and emissions to air will be limited to non-EV and the limited deliveries to the site.

Transport of fuel

The nature of the development is such that there are unlikely to be any significant environmental impacts arising from the transport of fuel.

Landscape and Visual Impacts

The site lies within the setting of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a 'sensitive area' as defined in Regulation 2(1) of The EIA regulations, which is approximately 300m to the northwest at its nearest point. The site is also within the setting of the Winterborne Whitechurch Conservation Area, which lies approximately 380 metres to the west of the site.

The Dorset AONB Partnership were consulted to provide comments on the likely impacts of the development on the AONB. They concluded that "relevant visual effects on the nationally designated AONB will fall into two categories – these being views into the AONB from locations such as the public rights of way to the south of the site; and views of the development from within the designated area."

Whilst the topography of parts of the site, and the presence of mature hedgerows, limit visual connectivity between the site and its surroundings to an extent, "the western portion of the site includes landform that slopes to the west. The use of this area foreseeably increases the potential for effects upon designated assets, including the nearby Winterborne Whitechurch Conservation Area and wider AONB". They also added that "introducing development that breaks the skyline, which broadly follows the course of the A354 to the north of the site, would foreseeably exacerbate visual effects arising from the development and also risk drawing attention to the development within a relatively rural context." It was therefore recommended that "vertical structures within the site that are obtrusive (such as pole-mounted CCTV), should be sited and designed so as to ensure that the development is as discreet as possible".

Significant landscape impacts are not anticipated during the construction or operational phases of the development, for the purposes of the EIA, however a detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment will be required.

Heritage

Additional sensitive areas, according to the EIA Regulations, include Scheduled Monuments. The nearest Scheduled Monument is the 'Deserted medieval village at West Farm', which lies approximately 100m west of the site. Further scheduled monuments includes bowl barrows, the nearest of which is 'Bowl barrow 25m south of Whitechurch Hill Barn' approximately 350m south of the site.

Whilst direct physical impacts upon these heritage assets are not considered likely given the type of development, and the distance of these Scheduled Monuments, the setting of these heritage assets is a key consideration. The intervening distance between the scheduled monuments and the development site are such that it is considered that significant impacts upon these heritage assets are unlikely, for the purposes of EIA.

Conclusion

Following consideration of the relevant selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 development presented in Schedule 3 of the EIA regulations, the Planning Authority conclude that the proposed development is not likely to result in significant environmental impacts. Therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred on it by Regulation 6(6) of the EIA Regulations, the Planning Authority hereby adopts an EIA screening opinion that an EIA is not required in this instance.

If you have any questions about the information submitted in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me,

Yours sincerely,

Sam Williams