

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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18th October 2021

[REDACTED]
DLP Planning Ltd
Unit 107, Clerkenwell Workshops
27-31 Clerkenwell Close
Farringdon
London EC1R 0AT

Our ref: UTT/21/0597/SCO

Please ask for [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017.

PROPOSAL: Request for a Screening Opinion in relation to a proposed solar energy scheme

SITE: Land to the north/west of Bishops Stortford, Farnham Road, Farnham.

I write further to the request for a screening opinion in respect of a development proposal on the above site. The site comprises around 115ha of agricultural land. The proposal relates to the erection of a solar farm along with upgraded access and landscaping. This letter provides a screening opinion for the above proposal under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the EIA Regulations) under Regulation 6 of the stated Regulations.

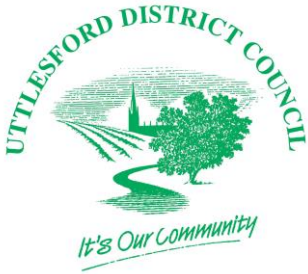
The 2017 Regulations provides guidance in regard to procedures which are required in establishing whether an EIA is required. This guidance requires the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to consider whether the proposed development is described in Schedule 1 or 2 of the Regulations.

Schedule 1 identifies 20 different categories of development of which none relate to the proposed development in the LPA's opinion.

Schedule 2 identifies 13 different categories, of which Class 3 is 'Energy Industry' and a) relates to 'Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (unless included in Schedule 1)'.

The proposal exceeds the thresholds. The proposal is not, however located in wholly or partly within a 'sensitive area' as defined by the Regulations.

Uttlesford DC as Local Planning Authority conclude that the proposal does constitute a Schedule 2 form of development as defined by the Regulations. Under these circumstances it is necessary to establish whether or not the proposal is likely to give rise to 'significant effects' on the environment by virtue of its nature, size or location.



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Schedule 3 of the Regulations sets out selection criteria which must also be taking into account in determining whether the development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. These criteria are identified under 3 separate headings and I shall deal with each in turn.

Characteristics of development

The site consists of approximately 115ha of grade 2 and 3 agricultural land. The site also lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. At the present time, only an indicative plan of the proposals layout has been provided and there are no details of drawings referring the scale or design other than descriptions of the proposed equipment contained within the supporting letter.

A project of this scale would require the use of natural resources, most notably the use of Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land and an application of this proposal is of such a scale that Natural England would be consulted on the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, and the impacts of the proposal on the landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors.

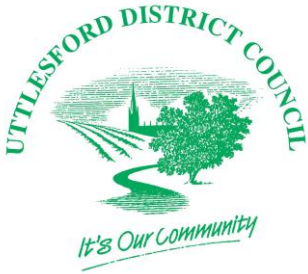
Soil surveys should be commissioned to assess the grading of the land. The results should be presented in a report that will accompany any future planning application. However, due to the large amount of BMV land within the authority and clear unprecedented need to rapidly increase the amount of renewable energy schemes, this helps to provide weight in support of the proposals.

The location of the site and the current use of the land the proposals are likely to result in less than significant impacts in respect of biodiversity. However, it is noted that mature hedgerows and trees are position centrally within and along the boundaries of the site. The hedgerows bordering the arable fields are likely to meet the criteria for priority habitat.

The site is located close to 'Bloodhounds' Wood and High Wood Local Wildlife Site (LWS) ancient woodland and its features are on the southern and south-eastern site boundaries, Bailey Hills on the north eastern boundary and Moorfield Spring to the north, Parkfield Spring copse within the site and Newwood Spring Copse close to Hadham Hall. The closest national designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is Patmore Heath which is approximately 2.5km to the north west of the site. This is an outstanding example of grass heathland.). Impacts on these sites should be avoided and biodiversity including any species it supports e.g., bats, reptiles, should be conserved and enhanced where possible.

In Highways and Transportation terms, the application needs to be supported by a Transport Statement (TS); further, Essex County Council as Local Highway Authority recommend early pre-application consultation with them, in order to scope out the TS. Furthermore, any future planning application should be accompanied by a Construction Traffic Management Plan.

Public Rights of Way – (Bridleway Routes 9 and 36) and is bounded by the Hertfordshire Way strategic footpath (Bridleway route 10). Within Uttlesford the site affects bridleway 14 (path number 20). An undeveloped corridor is proposed to be maintained along the alignments of the PRow network and landscape enhancements are included.



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The A120 runs to the north around Bishops Stortford and to the east of the project site. The M11 and Stansted Airport lie to the east of Bishops Stortford. The A120 Little Hadham Bypass runs to the south east of the site.

The project would be immediately visible from these routes. The impact on visual amenity would be fully assessed as part of a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. The project would not appear to physically impact the PRoW and as such would be unlikely to result in a significant impact for EIA purposes in this regard.

The production of waste is unlikely to be significant. Noise, dust and vibration nuisances are highly probable during the construction phase. Some of the impacts can be mitigated by way of a Construction Environmental Management Plan, although this hasn't been stated in the Screening Opinion. Noise would be generated as part of the construction phase, but this is unlikely to be significant.

The risks of accidents should be low given the nature of the development. The site is not located within or adjacent to a Flood Zone and therefore, subject to appropriate mitigation measures, should not give rise to increased flooding risks. The risk of accidents is considered to be low. The risks to human health are required to be considered as part of the application. Whilst risks arising from potential pollution or water contamination are likely to be low, the main impact is likely to arise from noise during the construction phase. As noted above, the impacts are likely to be low.

In terms of cumulative developments, it is considered unlikely that the project would result in significant environmental effects for EIA purposes, either in isolation or in conjunction with the other uses / activities in the locality given the nature and scale of the project.

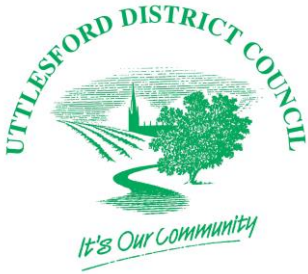
Location of development

The site is located on the Wickham Hall estate to the north-west of Bishops Stortford, partly within East Hertfordshire and partly in Uttlesford.

As identified above, the site is in reasonable proximity to a number of SSSI's and residential properties. The impacts of the proposals on these landscape elements will need to be considered as part of the application process, although they are not envisaged to be significant. However, careful consideration of the layout and ensuring appropriate buffer zones to the most sensitive areas are likely to mitigate any potential impacts. These are appropriate mitigation measures for these types of impacts.

The south-eastern part of the site is identified as an Archaeological site having potential for archaeological interest. There are no conservation areas on or around the project site however there are a number of listed buildings around the site.

Whilst the Screening Opinion Request notes that an assessment of heritage assets will need to be undertaken as part of the application, it should be noted that the proposed development area contains potentially significant archaeological remains.



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Initially a desk-based assessment will be required and, depending on its results, there is the potential that a programme of archaeological ground truthing evaluation will be needed to assess the significance of any heritage assets on the site to inform the planning application.

As part of the desk-based assessment it is recommended that the cropmarks be digitally rectified as part of this process. Also, there should also be an assessment of the proposed construction technique to be used for the solar farm and how much ground disturbance is proposed. The retention of all cables above ground can significantly reduce the heritage impact on below ground deposits for instance.

Whilst Uttlesford DC note your identification of Heritage Assets within the submitted Screening Request, The development has the potential to impact both designated and non-designated heritage assets. The impact of the proposal development on the setting and significance of the designated heritage assets will require a robust assessment. A detailed heritage impact assessment will be required to support the application.

In any event, I note that you will be submitting a Heritage Assessment, which should include reference to built Heritage Assets and Archaeology.

Types and characteristics of the potential impact

The project seeks to install a solar farm with a capacity to generate up to 49.9MW of electricity. The environmentally sustainable nature of the project is recognised.

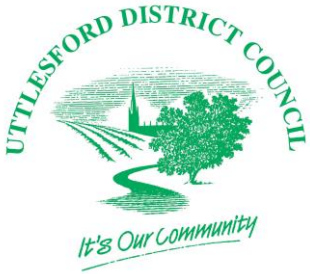
The impacts are predicted to be localised, although cumulative visual impacts could arise from various vantage points within the landscape, in particular from the public rights of way, surrounding highways and the wider landscape. The most significant impacts are likely to be visual but not significant in terms of EIA impacts. No transboundary effects are envisaged.

The primary environmental impacts of the project centre upon the externalities which arise from the construction stage of the project consisting of vehicle movements associated with the construction of the development. It is understood that the construction stage of the project would avoid any significant use of hazardous materials.

Conclusion

Overall, the probability of a significant environmental impact upon human beings, flora, fauna, soil, water, air and the wider climate is considered to be low given the scale, nature and location of the development. It is considered that the proposals would not give rise to significant adverse effects. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required to be submitted with the application. This Screening Opinion is given on the basis of the documents listed in the Screening Opinion request being submitted with the application. A Transport Statement, together with a Construction Environmental Management Plan, Heritage Statement, Flood Risk Assessment, shall be submitted alongside the Technical Assessments you identify within the Scoping Request.

In addition, you should ensure that you submit the documents required to be submitted in line with the Uttlesford District Council's Validation Checklists.



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Yours sincerely



Tracy Colemon
Director of Public Services