Lime Down Solar Park

Stage One Consultation- Online Community Webinar

Wednesday 27 March 2024, 17:30pm – 19:00pm

Purpose of this document

This document is intended to answer unanswered questions regarding the Lime Down Solar Park proposals and/or Stage One consultation submitted to the project team during the Q&A portion of the webinar session held on 27 March 2024.

To avoid duplication and maximise the usefulness of this document, questions have been grouped together where possible.

1. How does solar compare to other means of generating energy?

A: Our goal is not to advocate for the exclusion of any particular technology from the future energy mix in Great Britain. Instead, we recognise the importance of diversifying our energy sources.

By supporting the development of alternative renewable technologies alongside solar Photovoltaic (PV) generation, for example offshore wind, we aim to ensure a robust and reliable supply of electricity to meet demand across a wide range of future scenarios, I.e. considering the possibility that long-lead time, currently unconsented or unfunded technologies are either delayed in delivery or cannot ultimately be delivered.

The National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) published in January 2024 articulates the prudence of planning infrastructure development on a conservative basis to ensure we reach our goals for a diversified future energy mix. This supports the Government's identification "*for sustained growth in the capacity of onshore wind and solar in the next decade*" and further that a Net-Zero consistent [energy] system in 2050 "*is likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar*" (Paragraph 3.3.20 of EN-1).

With regard to Solar PV Generation, paragraph 2.10.9 of the January 2024 National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) details that the Government "*has committed to sustained growth in solar capacity to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions by 2050. As such, solar is a key part of the government's strategy for low-cost decarbonisation of the energy sector".* Indeed, paragraph 2.10.11 states the government need for deployment of "*large scale ground-mount solar deployment across the UK, looking for development mainly on brownfield, industrial and low and medium grade agricultural land".*

2. How was the land identified as suitable for a solar development?

A: Lime Down Solar Park made a grid connection application to National Grid for connection at Melksham Substation and an offer was made for 500MW. The grid connection we received for the Melksham Substation POC was not site-specific, and we have proceeded to look at sites that could accommodate a solar project to support the grid capacity available at Melksham Substation up to approximately 20 kilometres from the Substation.

We have not yet finalised the layout of Lime Down Solar Park at this early stage in the development process, as this will evolve based on the findings from environmental and technical surveys we are carrying out and feedback we receive through consultation and engagement.

We have identified the five solar park development sites as suitable for a number of reasons alongside the grid connection offer we have received. These include the following:

- They comprise large arable fields of regular shape

- Gently undulating topography makes the sites technically suitable for solar development and maximising the efficiency of panels
- Existing hedgerows, tree belts and woodland around and across the sites mean they are well screened
- Most of the sites are located in Flood Zone 1 which is defined as having low risk of flooding
- There are only a small number of residential properties in proximity of the sites and effective landscaping and screening could be employed to offset or reduce any visual impacts
- The land is predominantly classified as Grade 3b or below (moderate quality agricultural land)
- There are existing accesses for construction vehicles

When we submit our Development Consent Order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate, we will outline the environmental research that guided our decision-making process regarding land suitability for solar development. This comprehensive assessment will set out the factors that justify or exclude specific parcels of land from our proposals.

3. Who will be operating Lime Down Solar Park if it is agreed?

A: The Lime Down Solar Park will continue to be operated by the statutory undertaker as specified in the Development Consent Order (DCO). If ownership of the company changes hands, all obligations related to site management and operation will still apply and must be adhered to. In essence, the responsibilities and compliance requirements remain the same regardless of ownership.

4. If built, would the project have any significant impact on local residents electricity bills?

A: The national grid is not set up in a way that allows renewable energy generated in one place to specifically benefit the area it was generated in. However, by generating 500 megawatts of clean electricity, Lime Down Solar Park will increase the amount of solar energy generation in the UK's energy mix, which helps to drive down the price of electricity as solar is currently the most affordable form of electricity in the UK (National Grid, 2024). Further, unlike other renewables that require significant investment and have lengthy build times, solar power has much lower construction costs and is the quickest method to get energy into the system, all while being a highly predictable source of power. In the long term, having more solar generation like Lime Down Solar Park will help increase the amount of affordable electricity and contribute to reducing household energy bills.

Our proposals also include plans for on-site storage facilities, known as a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), which could also help contribute to a long-term reduction of household energy bills. This is because such energy storage systems provide an important balancing service for the national grid whereby electricity generated by the solar panels can be stored at times when demand for electricity is low, then exported on when demand peaks. It can also be used to import and store electricity from the national grid until it is needed, and balance out fluctuations in power generation which improves the interaction between supply (generation) and demand (consumption). BESS helps regulate the national supply of renewable energy, allowing energy to be used more flexibly while improving the reliability, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of our home-grown supply.

As part of our proposals we are also committing to a tailored package of community benefits, and want to engage with local communities to understand how we can best contribute. Community benefits contributions associated with Lime Down Solar Park could, for example, go towards local fuel poverty charities to help directly reduce bills for those near the site who need help most.

We welcome hearing from you at any time with ideas and suggestions for locals schemes or projects we could support or deliver, and are directly inviting suggestions on this during the first stage of consultation we hold (14 March – 26 April 2024).

5. How deep and how wide would trenching be to accommodate underground cabling?

A: The electrical design for the cable routes is currently being undertaken so is not yet final and depths and widths will depend on the number of cables required and factors such as geology and hydrology. The trench for the cable route to Melksham substation will be at a depth of approximately 1.5 metres (m) and a width of 7m. The trench for the cabling between the solar arrays will be at a depth of approximately 1.5m and a width of between 2-3m.

6. What are the expected HGV routes? How many movements per day are expected?

A: We are currently considering roads that comprise the construction vehicle routes from Junctions 17 and 18 of the M4.

We will assess the potential impact on traffic, and we will produce an outline construction traffic management plan to outline how we will minimise impact on local traffic during construction and operation. This plan will provide a framework for the management of construction vehicle movements to and from the Site (including the Primary Cable Route once finalised), to ensure that the effects of the temporary construction phase on the local highway network are minimised.

The plan will also set out our proposed framework for construction access arrangements, construction vehicle routing, construction vehicle trip generation, and the management/mitigation measures. We will be able to share more details of this plan in our Preliminary Environmental

Information Report (PEIR), which will be made available prior to our second stage of consultation to help inform your consultation response.

7. How long is the construction period expected to last?

A: The overall construction is estimated to take approximately 2 years. The construction will be phased so not all parcels of land will be constructed at the same time. Further detail of the way the construction will be phased will be provided when the application for the Development Consent Order is submitted. This plan will provide a framework for the management of construction vehicle movements to and from the Site (including the Primary Cable Route once finalised), to ensure that the effects of the temporary construction phase on the local highway network are minimised.

We will be able to share more details of this plan in our Preliminary Environmental Information Report, which will be made available prior to our second stage of consultation to help inform your consultation response.

8. Will the landowners in receipt of leasing revenue be required to contribute to any community fund?

A: No. Any community fund or benefits associated with the project are at the sole discretion of the developer. Island Green Power (IGP), the developer for Lime Down Solar Park, seeks to offer a community benefits package with the renewable energy schemes that it promotes and are responsible for fully funding this package.

IGP believes that those closest to the project should benefit from it, and believe these communities are best placed to recommend what this community benefit should be. During this ongoing early stage of community consultation (Stage One, closing on 26 April), we are therefore inviting local residents and key stakeholders to make suggestions for local schemes and projects we could support, including both on-site and off-site initiatives.

We are committed to working together to identify and define community benefits and look forward to receiving feedback on this topic. To read examples of the kinds of benefits currently under consideration, please visit our project-dedicated webpage *Additional Considerations*

9. Would it be possible to deliver a project that generates less than 500 megawatts?

A: Lime Down Solar Park made a grid connection application to National Grid for connection at Melksham Substation and an offer was made for 500MW and the intention would be to fulfil the grid connection agreement if possible. The grid connection offer we received for the Melksham Substation Point of Connection was not site-specific, and we have proceeded to look at sites that

could accommodate a solar project to support the grid capacity available at Melksham Substation up to approximately 20 kilometres from the Substation.

10. How do we propose to manage pollution or hazards related to the BESS?

A: The Battery Energy Storage System (or BESS) facility proposed as part of our plans for Lime Down Solar Park will be designed to be safe, efficient and in compliance with all regulatory standards. Battery Energy Storage Systems are manufactured to meet strict safety regulations and are widely used due to their reliability and safety profile. Further, BESS technology includes various safety systems to mitigate risks, such as fire control, smoke detectors, and temperature control systems. The design of the BESS facility will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders including Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Environment Agency.

Because Lime Down Solar Park is classified as an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development, we are required to assess the potential significant environmental impacts of our plans in line with the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. The purpose of the EIA process is to make sure that wherever we do identify any significant effects, we then put in place appropriate measures to avoid or reduce negative impacts, while also seeking to enhance positive effects where applicable.

The Lime Down Solar Park project includes plans for the installation of BESS and we are therefore currently in the process of assessing and identifying any potential effects this may have on the environment (both positive and negative) as part of the EIA process. These assessments will examine whether there is pollution or fire hazard risk (along with other potential risks) and, if any such risks are identified, then determine appropriate mitigation for us to include as part of the design for the project. The details of this environmental work will be included in the Development Consent Order (DCO) application we submit to the Planning Inspectorate.

11. What are the factors that would lead to an unsuccessful Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) solar project application?

A: The development consenting regime for an NSIP comes under the Planning Act 2008. This means that we need to submit an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to build, operate and decommission Lime Down Solar Park and this is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), rather than the local planning authority. In the case of energy related NSIPs, PINS acts on behalf of the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

The DCO application will include evidence of how we have met the requirements set out by the Planning Act 2008, and our DCO application could be deemed unsuccessful if PINS determines we have not satisfactorily met these requirements.

Alternatively, the Planning Inspectorate could accept the DCO which means it will then carry out an examination of our application and then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State on whether or not to grant consent. The Secretary of State will then make the final decision on whether to grant consent for Lime Down Solar Park and makes this decision at their own discretion, meaning the factors they considered are not made available to either the public or project developer. The DCO for this NSIP project could therefore be unsuccessful as a result of the Secretary of State's final decision on the application.

12: How can we be confident in the environmental findings presented by the developer?

A: As the developer of a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), it is Island Green Power's responsibility to ensure that the Development Consent Order (DCO) application for Lime Down Solar Park meets the requirements of the Planning Act 2008. These requirements include provisions for us to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of our proposals, meaning we are required to carry out extensive environmental research to identify any significant impacts (positive and negative) the plans could have on the environment. The technical consultants appointed on the developer's behalf are experts who are required to produce their findings on the basis of their own professional and technical standards.

Further, as Lime Down Solar Park is free of government subsidies, Island Green Power is responsible for funding the research associated to its projects.

Feedback we receive from the community and statutory stakeholders (more details on this below) are fed into the development design process up until the point of DCO submission, and the final results of the EIA will be set out in detail in the DCO application for the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) to consider when they decide whether or not to accept the application for examination.

During the six-month examination period, PINS will then organise a series of activities to further probe the details of the application, including the EIA. This typically involves activities such as onsite inspections, hybrid hearings (in person with online options available) and the digital submission of additional written materials from a variety of stakeholders (both statutory and non-statutory).

As defined by Government[i], statutory consultees are organisations or individuals that are legally required to be consulted on NSIPs, as listed in Schedule 1 of the Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009. The Schedule also sets out the circumstances in which statutory consultees are to be consulted; for example, whereas the Environment Agency must be consulted on all NSIPs, the Office of Rail Regulation is consulted only on NSIPs which are likely to affect the rail transport industry.

We are therefore required to consult on our proposals with a number of statutory stakeholders as part of the DCO and EIA process to help ensure that any potential impacts are appropriately identified. This means bodies including the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Natural England, the Commission for Sustainable Development, the relevant fire and rescue authority, police

authority and highways authority will all be consulted on our proposals and we will use the feedback they provide to help inform and shape the design for Lime Down Solar Park, as is done for consultation feedback we receive from members of the local community.

[i] Planning Act 2008: Development Consent Order Fact Sheet. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a751191ed915d60d3b90de7/Fact_Sheet_Planning_Act_2008_DCO_Final.docx#:~:text=Statutory%20consultees%20are%20deemed%20to,take%20part%20in%20the%20Examination.