

Developments of National Significance Pre-Application Advice Meeting
DNS Case Reference - 3250903 - Pentir Solar Farm
Tuesday 21st February 2023 at 14.00
Via Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Lightsource bp

Katy McGuinness
Robin Duncan

RPS

Emily Avery
Andrew Lucas

Stantec

Thomas Edmunds

**Planning and Environment
Decisions Wales**

Marloes Holtkamp – Planning
Officer

Robert Sparey – Planning &
Environment Manager

Apologies:

James Nicol - Stantec

Meeting Note:

Representatives from Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW) met with the above-named project team regarding a proposed solar farm located at Fferm Cae Ysgubor & Tyddyn Heily, South of Bangor, Gwynedd.

The applicants provided an overview of engagement to date. An inception meeting with PEDW was held in April 2020. Due to an issue with the transfer of data in October 2021 when the functions of the former Planning Inspectorate for Wales transferred to PEDW, PEDW does not hold documents of this meeting. The applicants confirmed that in addition to their notes of that meeting provided, they will also share with PEDW the presentation slides from that meeting.

Pre-application meetings were held with Gwynedd Council and Isle of Anglesey County Council in June / July 2020. They raised that the site identified is not within the joint Local Development Plan 'Opportunity Areas' and therefore exceptional circumstances need to be identified. No key environmental constraints were identified that would rule the development out.

The site is adjacent to Pentir Substation.

CADW flagged a Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in the southern part of the site. The site boundary was therefore revised and this land is no longer included.

There are four landowners across the site. It has natural visual containment, being situated in a shallow depression. Visual impacts including glint and glare are being considered, as are agricultural land impacts. The site is close to but outside any designated special landscape and historic landscape areas. There are no sensitive or important ecological features / species.

The land is currently in agricultural use, classed as a mix of 3a, 3b and grade 4 land. The Land Quality Advice Service (LQAS) in Welsh Government has confirmed they are content with the survey methodology used and provided an in-principle response to indicate they would have no objections.

The applicants provided an overview of the location and choice of the land. The development will include battery storage which will sit within the solar farm area, which will be connected to the existing Pentir substation. The solar farm is expected to power approximately 19,000 homes. Sheep grazing is envisaged to continue during operation.

The project has evolved, with the original site boundary having been narrowed down. The northern and central blocks remain. However, the southern areas were removed due to several issues including topography, historic landscape and grade 3a land.

The applicants are looking to exclude some 3a graded parcels of land and refine the parcels for landscape and visual reasons. They will undertake further environmental assessments and look at the landscape impact. There will be further refinements to mitigate any environmental impacts and to look at opportunities to enhance the land. It is expected there will be opportunities for biodiversity and other enhancements, including to improve the lower quality land areas and land drainage considerations to improve land for continued agricultural use.

The applicants indicated that access is extremely challenging. This will be further assessed, but they are looking at one way access through the site, rather than two-way access. Current considerations are to access via the existing substation access, which will have the lowest impact.

Constructability is also challenging and an alternative means for affixing the panels is required, to cope with the rock substrate.

This development is running in parallel, but two to three months behind, the development of Plas Power Solar Farm (DNS/3253253).

EIA Scoping is well progressed but will be expanded to incorporate new land to the east. The assumption was made that this will likely be an EIA development and as such no formal

EIA Screening was undertaken. Comprehensive responses were received from the Local Planning Authorities.

The following key environmental topics are expected to be included:

- Landscape and visual
- Land and agriculture – this may be scoped in, also from the point of view of proposed improvements.
- Heritage and archaeology
- Ecology – there is not a great deal of ecological interest within the site, which has many stone walls rather than hedgerows.
- Flood risk and drainage – particularly drainage, given the underlying substrate is rock.
- Transport – The applicants noted that this will be limited to construction, and they may therefore seek to scope this out and look to submit a Construction Traffic Management Plan with the assessment. PEDW advised that the applicants may wish to scope it in, just for construction and decommission stage, as access has been identified as a challenging matter.

The applicants confirmed their next steps:

- Request for a Scoping Direction to be submitted to PEDW in May 2023. This will take the standard scoping approach as opposed to the addendum approach agreed for Plas Power Solar Farm DNS.
- Assessments and identification of mitigating measures. There is a lot of opportunity for improvement from an agricultural point of view for sheep grazing or from a biodiversity point of view.
- Non-statutory stakeholder and community engagement

The applicants aim to undertake statutory consultation around October 2023 and submit the DNS application towards the end of the year.

PEDW queried whether there would be any secondary consents. The applicants confirmed this has not yet been fully defined and is under review but is not thought likely. PEDW highlighted that it could assist with any procedural queries regarding this aspect.

PEDW asked to be given a few weeks advance notice in the run up to the scoping submission and for the applicants to include the shape file. PEDW confirmed that scoping is taking longer than usual due to staffing constraints. However, a realistic estimate will be provided when the scoping request is received.