

Anna Woodward
DWD
6 New Bridge Street
London
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Our ref: EIA/23/0005
Your ref: 16365
Date: 21st Sept 2023

Dear Anna Woodward

Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended)

Land at Cobwood Solar Farm, Burnthouse Lane, Cowfold, West Sussex

Thank you for your request of 23 August 2023 for the Council to provide a formal Screening Opinion to determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required in respect of a potential planning application for a solar farm installation on a 73.3ha area of land west of Cowfold.

Following a review of the information provided, this Council considers the proposals to fall under Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations, item 3a (Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water). The proposal exceeds the criteria outlined in Schedule 2 of the Regulations and is therefore necessary to consider whether the development would be likely to have significant effects on the environment. In making this assessment the Council has taken into account Schedule 3 of the EIA regulations paying attention to the development characteristics, location, and nature of the impacts. The results of this assessment are included with this letter for information. When forming this Screening Opinion, the Council has drawn on information set out in your EIA Screening Request report, and other available guidance.

Whilst the proposed site area of 73.3ha exceeds the threshold set out in Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations (2017), the effects of development on the environment are considered not to be significant in isolation, or in combination with existing and approved development. There would be some impact on natural resources including biodiversity, and traffic movements, however with appropriate mitigation in place, these are considered to not be significant in relation to the types and characteristics of the potential impact. In light of Natural England's September 2021 Position Statement, the potential impact of the development on water resources will need to be acknowledged to ensure that the site is water neutral. A supporting Water Neutrality Statement should set out what, if any, additional water demand would arise as a result of the development over and above the existing baseline use of the agricultural fields. This should confirm that no adverse environmental impact from additional water usage would be likely.

Whilst the site is located within a pastoral landscape setting, the proposed development is unlikely to have a significant impact on any wetlands, riparian areas, ancient woodlands, or the historic environment (subject to appropriate assessment, design, layout and other necessary mitigation). Any landscape impact would be assessed through the planning application process and any necessary mitigation would be secured through the normal channels.

The development would not have any significant impacts on river mouths, coastal zones or the marine environment; and will not affect the qualities or protected characteristics of the South Downs National Park or High Weald AONB. There would be no transboundary effects.

The proposed works associated with the installation of the solar farm and ongoing operations would not result in unusually complex or hazardous environmental effects. Most effects of the proposed development would be of local significance only and can be addressed in supporting information to accompany a planning application. These effects are capable of being carefully considered as part of the normal planning application process through careful masterplanning, and appropriate mitigation secured by condition or legal agreement.

During construction, the potential increases in traffic, emissions and noise would be temporary, and commensurate with a typical construction site. Construction phase effects, including on the Cowfold Air Quality Management Area, would be mitigated through the standard implementation of a Construction Environment Management Plan and best practice. Traffic and emission impacts during the operation phase would be considered through the planning application process to ascertain whether any additional mitigation is required on an ongoing basis.

Despite its proximity to Cowfold, the development of this site for a solar farm would have no likely significant effects in isolation, or cumulatively with approved nearby development, and therefore, it is the opinion of this Council that it would not require an Environmental Statement. It is therefore considered that, whilst the development is Schedule 2 development, it has been demonstrated that the proposed development would be unlikely to cause significant environment effects (either in itself, or cumulatively), and in this case, EIA is not required.

I confirm that this letter forms Horsham District Council's formal EIA screening opinion and will be placed on the public register. The information and conclusions drawn from this assessment does not prejudice the Council's future decision making regarding any planning application(s) that may be submitted on this site.

Yours sincerely,

Nic Pettifer
Senior Planning Officer