

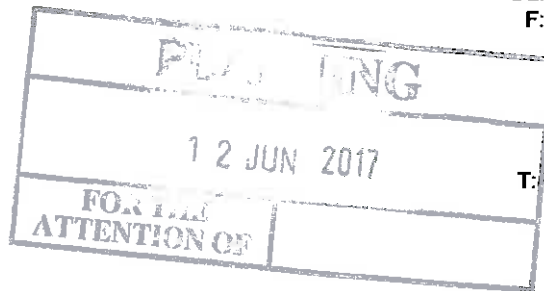
8 June 2017
Screening Opinion Letter 090617

320170533P savills

Ribble Valley Borough Council
Planning and Building Control
Council Offices
Church Walk
Clitheroe
Lancashire
BB7 2RA

Sarah Bevan
E: sbevan@savills.com
DL: +44 (0) 1202 856947
F: +44 (0) 1202 856801

Wessex House
Priors Walk
East Borough
Wimborne BH21 1PB
T: +44 (0) 1202 856 800
savills.com



Dear Sir or Madam,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017

REQUEST FOR A SCREENING OPINION IN RESPECT OF THE PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF PHOTOVOLTAIC ARRAYS AT HODDER WATER TREATMENT WORKS, BENTHAM ROAD, SLAIDBURN, NR. CLITHEROE, LANCASHIRE, BB7 3AQ

I write to seek a formal Environmental Impact Assessment screening opinion in respect of a proposed installation of a ground mounted solar array development to provide renewable electricity to the existing, operational water treatment works on behalf of United Utilities.

The site has been identified by United Utilities, as having good potential for the development of a ground mounted solar array, due to its ability to accommodate this type of low scale development.

I wish to obtain a formal screening opinion from Ribble Valley Borough Council to confirm the opinion that an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required in this instance. The water treatment works was subject to a previous EIA Screening Opinion for a ground mounted array in February 2016 (Ref: CS/CMS/3/2015/0662/P) which advised that an EIA would not be required. The site remains the same as that previously assessed, but has reduced significantly in size since that previous Screening Opinion and occupies a small area of hardstanding. The previous Screening Opinion and plan has been attached for ease of reference.

Site Location and Context

The site is located approximately 2.2km north of the settlement of Slaidburn, which is a small village within the Ribble Valley district. The surrounding area comprises open countryside, a number of isolated farms with associated commercial and residential buildings. The site was purchased on 19th May 1916.

The site comprises an area of 0.36ha of operational land (the previous Screening Opinion occupied an area of 0.79ha) located to the south-west of the Hodder reservoir and water treatment works. The reservoir is situated at the head of the Hodder valley in the Forest of Bowland, Lancashire, which is classified as being an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) within the adopted 2014 Core Strategy and saved policies of the District Wide Local Plan.

The site is extensively screened via area of mature woodland located to the south, east, north, and west. As such the site is not highly prominent in landscape terms. It also benefits from its close association with the Hodder water treatment works and reservoir which contain a number of notable and prominent man made structures.

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The site is enclosed to the south and east by areas of woodland that provide screening to the site. To the south west of the site, is the existing, operational Hodder Water Treatment Works.

The site is accessed via a road called 'The Skaithe'. From this road, the site would be accessed by existing tracks from a junction west of Phynis Wood, where the site would be accessed by internal tracks serving the water treatment works.

The nearest Listed Building (LB) is Hammerton Hall (Grade II* listed), which is located approximately 800m to the south. It is a Grade II Listed Building built originally in the sixteenth century and comprises slobbered rubble with sandstone dressings and slate roof.

A footpath is situated south-east of the site, running across Ten Acre Hill. To the north of the footpath is established woodland, which would limit views towards the site. A permissive footpath runs across the eastern and south-eastern boundary of the reservoir, which further runs across the northern and southern perimeter boundary of the wider reservoir area. There could be potential for views towards the site from this permissive footpath receptor.

Requirement for an EIA

Under Part II, Section 6 of the *Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017* (the Regulations) a person who is minded to carry out development may request the relevant planning authority to adopt a screening opinion as to whether that development is EIA development.

The Regulations require that a screening opinion request be accompanied by a plan sufficient to identify the land; a description of the development, a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected, the extent of information available and such other information or representations the person making the request would like to make. This letter and the enclosed plan (Reference: Hodder WTW / 77000000xxxx / 01 / 20 / 10001 Rev A) comprises such a submission.

In determining whether or not the proposed development requires EIA, the local planning authority is required to follow Part II, Section 6 of the Regulations and the relevant schedules. Guidance on 'Screening Schedule 2 projects' and the EIA process is provided in the National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) at ID: 4-017-20140306.

As you will be aware, section 6 (6) of the Regulations states that the local planning authority shall adopt a screening opinion within three weeks of the date of receipt of a request, and we look forward to receiving a response within this timescale.

Consideration of the development proposal against the Regulations is set out in the sections below.

Description of the development

The proposed development comprises an array of free-standing solar panels to generate approximately up to 248.40kWp of electricity (the previous Screening Opinion proposed 750kW of electricity) from a renewable source to feed directly into the water treatment plant to meet part of its electricity demand.

The solar panels would be arranged in rows comprising a series of panels facing south. Each panel would be inclined to between 20 and 30 degrees with the lower part approximately 60-80cm from ground level, and the highest part up to 3m from ground level. The panels would be mounted on aluminium frames supported by upright poles which would be driven into the ground. No concrete foundations are required and little excavation is therefore necessary. The distance between each row of panels would be between 4m and 6m to avoid the potential for overshadowing.

The existing United Utilities sludge press house LV Switch room would be used as the new low voltage point of connection for the new solar array. It should be noted that previously, up to two inverter station and switchgear structures were required.

CCTV will be positioned at regular intervals along the site's boundary, typically every 100 metres and up to 4 metres in height.

- **Noise and Vibration:**

There is the potential for noise and vibration impacts during the construction of the solar array development. However, given that these would be limited to the construction period alone these are not considered likely to be significant. Operational noise is likely only to occur from the inverter structure, although this is not anticipated to be significant on the basis that the inverter would produce a low level of noise and would be located within an acoustically insulated structure meaning that any generated noise would not exceed 35db at the site boundaries. It is also noteworthy that solar panels only operate during daylight hours, and will not therefore generate any noise during twilight hours. No potential noise impacts are therefore anticipated, although as an additional precaution the inverter would be positioned to maximise the separation distance from residential properties.

- **Cumulative Impacts:**

The proposed development could have cumulative impacts if there are any existing or consented solar array schemes in the area and any other developments which could lead to cumulative impacts, particularly with relation to landscape and visual impacts. However, according to our most up to date cumulative search, we are not aware of any nearby proposals which might reasonably be considered for cumulative effects.

Consideration against Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations

The EIA regulations detail developments in two Schedules. These are:

- Schedule 1 – identifies development types *requiring* EIA;
- Schedule 2 – identifies development types where, if the relevant threshold criteria are exceeded, a formal assessment must be undertaken against Schedule 3 in order to determine whether an EIA is required.

The proposed solar park does not fall within any of the categories within Schedule 1.

Schedule 2 of the regulations identifies development types which need to be screened against Schedule 3 of the regulations. Solar array development does not fall within any specific category within Schedule 2, although the most appropriate category is considered to be 3 (a) which states:

- Energy industry

3.—(a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (unless included in Schedule 1);

Schedule 2, category 3(a) development needs to be screened as to whether the proposal is an EIA project if the area of development exceeds 0.5ha, or if any part of the development is to be carried out in a 'sensitive area' (as defined in Regulation 2(1)). If the planning authority's screening against Schedule 3 finds that a proposal is likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as nature, size or location, it is EIA development and requires an assessment. The site is within a 'sensitive area' (Forest of Bowland AONB), as defined in the regulations.

PPG (Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 4-018-20140306) highlights that:

'Only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an assessment. While it is not possible to formulate criteria or thresholds which will provide a universal test of whether or not an assessment is required, it is possible to offer a broad indication of the type or scale of development which is likely to require an assessment. It is also possible to provide an indication of the sort of development for which an assessment is unlikely to be necessary...However, it should not be presumed that developments above the indicative thresholds should always be subject to assessment, or those falling below these thresholds could never give rise to significant effects, especially where the development is in an environmentally sensitive location. Each development will need to be considered on its merits.'

The proposed development would employ the use of sunlight and daylight for the generation of electricity, an energy source which is abundant. Given the relatively unobtrusive construction methods used for the ground mounted development, the site would regenerate quickly following the cessation of the solar array use.

c) *the absorption capacity of the natural environment;*

The surrounding area is suitable for this development given the limited height of the solar panels proposed. It is considered that the environment has the capacity to suitably absorb this development into the landscape fabric, particularly given the lack of other similar projects in the area impacting upon its capacity for further development.

3) Characteristics of the potential impact

a) *the extent of the impact (geographical area and size of the affected population);*

The extent of the potential impacts would generally be limited to the site and the immediate surroundings given the relatively low level nature of the development.

b) *the transfrontier nature of the impact;*

No transfrontier impacts are anticipated.

c) *the magnitude and complexity of the impact;*

The potential effects of the development are quantifiable and not considered to be complex.

d) *the probability of the impact;*

All of the potential impacts are quantifiable. None of the potential impacts are considered to be significant enough to require an EIA.

e) *the duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact.*

The proposed floating solar array development would be operational for 25 years, with any impacts fully reversible upon the cessation of operation.

Conclusion

Consideration of the proposed development against the Environmental Impact Regulations 2017 and the PPG. Despite the site being located within a sensitive area (Forest of Bowland AONB), the site is screened by boundary vegetation and the existing water treatment works. Therefore, it has been determined that the proposal is unlikely to result in significant effects on the environment. Consequently, it is of my opinion that an environmental impact assessment is not required.

I trust that the above information is sufficient to enable you to issue a screening opinion within the statutory three week period allowed for this task.

If you require any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,



Sarah Bevan
Senior Planner BSc (Hons), MSc, MRTPI