Scoping Consultation
PLANNING ACT 2008, as amended.
The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

Scoping Consultation Response on behalf of **Feckenham Parish Council**, a local Council, in relation to the possible National Significant Infrastructure Project application for the proposed 'solar photovoltaic electricity generating station and associated battery energy storage system with associated Cable Route Corridors and ancillary infrastructure and substation', known as '**Arrow Valley Solar and BESS'**, located on 1,762 hectares of land which lies within Redditch Borough Council, Stratford upon Avon District Council and Wychavon District Council areas across the Counties of Warwickshire and Worcestershire, using Planning Inspectorate reference EN0110033).

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This **Scoping Consultation Response** on behalf of **Feckenham Parish Council**, a local Council, is in relation to the possible National Significant Infrastructure Project application for the proposed 'solar photovoltaic electricity generating station and associated battery energy storage system' with associated Cable Route Corridors and ancillary infrastructure and substation, known as 'Arrow Valley Solar and BESS', (the Proposal) located on 1,762 hectares of land which lies within Redditch Borough Council, Stratford upon Avon District Council and Wychavon District Council areas across the Counties of Warwickshire and Worcestershire (the Site), using Planning Inspectorate reference EN0110033.

1.2. This Consultation Response is submitted on behalf on **Feckenham Parish Council** (FPC or the Parish Council). The submission has been prepared by Dr Christopher Ford, a Chartered Town Planner specialising in the spatial aspects of energy systems and energy policy.

1.3. This Consultation Response covers the Proposal and its Site, matters suggested for scoping out by the developer, alternative being considered by the developer, the landscape and visual effects, cumulative effects assessment and other projects seeking to utilise the same transmission infrastructure in the local region (Feckenham substation). The Consultation Response closes with conclusion.

2. THE PROPOSAL AND SITE DISPERSAL

2.1. The Proposal Site is an extensive area of mainly farmland. The Site is highly dispersed with seven disconnected development blocks spread across an area stretching over some 11.5km north to south and 10.5km east to west. This extensive dispersal over a large area with pockets of development will inevitably increase the landscape and visual effects and other adverse impacts of the project, more than had the acreage been focused in a single location. Such a dispersed approach shifts the balance of adverse effects arising from the Proposal against the potential energy value resulting in unnecessary effects than would usually be required to achieve a given level of energy output. The developer should consider whether all of these separate blocks are really necessary and whether a more balanced approach would be to concentrate the developments into two or three concentrated blocks, if not a single block, rather than this extensive dispersal.

2.2. Unfortunately, developers frequently take an approach, which may be seen as gaming the planning process, of initiating schemes by presenting a high level of or maximised environmental effects and then later removing the worst excesses of the scheme. Such reductions are often presented as 'responding to community concerns'. In practice this is a cynical misuse of the public participation process. It demonstrates that the developer(s) have not genuinely engaged in the required public participation process and their conduct through the subsequent planning process should be judged accordingly. Understandably the 'interested public' become sceptical of the planning process generally and trust it lost when developers adopt such an approach. If a developer adopts such an approach, as is evident in this case, they should reasonably be responded to by the 'interest public' as not worthy of trust.

3. SCOPED OUT MATTERS

3.1. This section considers the matters, specified by the developer, to be scoped out of the proposal EIA. The developer seeks to scope out various matters (at chapter 5). These matters include waste, accident, socio-economic, water environment, EMF as well as other issues.

3.2. In relation to **waste**, at some point the equipment used in the development (such as solar panels, frames, battery storage, electrical equipment, power cables) will need to be replaced and / or removed on decommissioning. As such all of these items will create waste. Given the size of the development the volume of this waste will be considerable. Accordingly, waste should not be scoped out and the environmental assessment should specify what effect will arise from the disposal of waste of the materials used permanently and in the construction of the Proposal.

3.3. In relation **accidents** BESS are known to be hazardous and liable to thermal runaway, resulting in contamination of soils and water courses as well as other pollution effects. Such matters should be scoped into the EIA. Accordingly, accidents should be scoped in.

3.4. The **socio-economic** effects of the proposed development are unclear and accordingly cannot be pre-judged as to whether or not the Proposal will have significant effects. Accordingly socio-economic effects should be considered within the EIA.

3.5. The scoping report identifies areas of the Site as being subject to some flooding potential. Therefore, the effects of the development on the **water environment** should be considered within the EIA.

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3.6. The proposed development includes extensive lengths of high voltage cables which could involve several circuits laid in close proximity linking distributed parts of the dispersed site as well as the Site generally to the national electricity transmission system. It is therefore inevitable that **EMF** will arise. It is also usual for any high voltage power transmission development to include consideration of EMF. The defined cable routing offers considerable uncertainty in relation to receptors. Given the extent, voltage, the likely number of cables and the considerable uncertainty of potentially affected receptors as well as that EMF is more complex where multiple cables are involved, EMF should not be scoped out of the EIA. The EIA should particularly where cables may be located in proximity to sensitive receptors.

4. ALTERNATIVES.

4.1. The developer sets out, at 2.8.3, their expected consideration of alternatives. They note that this will not consider 'no-development' (2.8.4) as an alternative as they consider this to be "*being unreasonable*". Whilst the developer's preference for approval of the development is understandable, it would be major failure of environmental assessment and planning judgement were the outcome of any decision on the proposed development to presume that the project had to be consented and there cannot be no development. Logic dictates that 'no development' is an alternative that the developer has considered.

4.2. In practice the development is not inevitable as there are many alternatives to achieving the claimed or implied benefits of the proposal, presuming that these benefits are required. Delivering Policy objectives can be met by many different ways including alternative technologies, alternative locations and alternative formats for the developer chosen technology (solar and BESS) as well as alternative scales of development. Accordingly, a balanced view of the environmental assessment and the planning judgement in this case would consider the inevitable possibility of no development as an alternative.

5. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACTS.

5.1. The developer sets out, at section 12 of their report, their expected consideration of landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposal at this Site. This includes minimal consideration of lighting and the possibility of a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) together with visual effects at "*publicly accessible locations*" (12.7.3).

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5.2. Whilst RVAA will be determined based on the extent of the Proposal, given the level of inhabitation in the vicinity of the Proposal it is likely that an RVAA will indeed be required.

5.3. In respect to coverage the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) generally it should be noted that the Site and the surrounding area are gently undulating. Consequently, the landscape and visual effects are likely to be considerable. Given the extensive inhabitation in the area around the Site the LVIA should not be restricted to 'publicly accessible locations' only. Many private properties and dwelling are like to be affected. Therefore, any LVIA which considers public areas only would fail to address the significant effects of the Proposal and thus fail to meet the necessary standard of LVIA.

5.4. The EIA should fully address the effects of the Proposal at nighttime. This should take account of the security lighting (as well as security fencing) when fully switched on. A 'high-level' approach will not provide sufficient detail to meet the requirement.

6. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ASESSMENT.

6.1. The developer undertakes to prepare a cumulative effects assessment, following appropriate guidance. The Feckenham Parish and surrounding area is being inundated by solar and BESS proposals. Like this Proposal these seek to connect to the Feckenham substation.

6.2. The developer's cumulative assessment should list and consider all solar and BESS, including projects which are for dedicated solar or dedicated BESS project proposals. All of these projects should be included in the developer's cumulative assessment.

6.3. The Cumulative Effects Assessment should take account of EMF as well as other effects such as landscape and visual, heritage, ecology and the cumulative socio-economic effects of the fundamental change this area is undergoing. Whilst the energy transition is important this should not be at the expense of fundamental change to the character and historic value of the area.

7. TRANSMISSION INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY IN THE LOCAL REGION.

7.1. As well as identifying and take account of all these other projects the developers cumulative effects assessment the EIA should assess the capacity available at the

Feckenham substation. It is apparent from even simple analysis, that the number of solar and BESS projects, seeking to connect to the Feckenham substation, far exceeds the capacity of the substation and is required in this region. The developer should explicitly assess the substation's capacity and explain how their Proposal fits within this capacity when other projects are taken into account.

7.2. Where the cumulative capacity of all the BESS and solar projects exceeds the Feckenham substation capacity, the EIA should, either: a) explain what scale of development would be required for the substation and the transmission line connection to the substation; and / or, b) explain in comparative terms the balance of effects and benefits arising from their development when compared to all the other projects for the given level of capacities offered. The Proposal developer should seek to show whether or not their Proposal produces greater or lesser effects of the alternative cumulative projects in the area seeking to connect to the substation.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. The Feckenham Parish Council wish to record their concerns regarding the scale and potential environmental impacts of the Proposal. The Council will await to see the developers EIA before coming to final conclusions on the Proposal. However, as has been set out here it is apparent that the Proposal will produce considerably higher levels of landscape and visual effects, including upon the local residents, because it contains substantial dispersal into many distinct blocks. This unavoidably creates more adverse effects than would arise were the same capacity of solar generation to be concentrated into a single block of land. Consequently, the Proposal appears to be unnecessarily wasteful in creating adverse effects. Feckenham Parish Council expect to see this balance between minimal adverse effects and the Proposal's adverse effects made transparent within the EIA.

8.2. Overall, the Feckenham Parish Council are not encouraged by the developer's approach evident in their Scoping Report. It is not apparent that the effects of the Proposal will be appropriately addressed in the EIA.

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