

Green Hill Solar Farm

Programme Document

Revision 1

Prepared by: Lanpro

Date: January 2025

PINS reference: EN010170



Contents

<u>1</u>	<u>Introduction</u>	<u>2</u>
1.1	Overview	2
1.2	Purpose of the Programme Document	2
<u>2</u>	<u>The Pre-Application Timetable</u>	<u>4</u>
2.2	Key Milestone Events - Completed to Date	4
2.3	Future Milestone Events	5
<u>3</u>	<u>Stakeholder Engagement Approach</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>4</u>	<u>Identification of Main Issues and Risks</u>	<u>9</u>



1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This Programme Document has been prepared by Green Hill Solar Farm Limited ('the Applicant'). The Programme Document presents the key steps being taken by the Applicant during the preparation of the application for development consent (the 'Application').

The Scheme

1.1.2 Green Hill Solar Farm (the Scheme) is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project ('NSIP') which consists of an electricity generating station with a capacity of over 50 megawatts ('MW') comprising ground mounted solar arrays and associated development, including energy storage, grid connection infrastructure and any other infrastructure as well as works integral to the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of the Scheme.

1.1.3 The Scheme will deliver approximately 500 MW of renewable energy generation across eight solar array sites located in and around the areas of Walgrave, Mears Ashby, Earls Barton, Grendon and Lavendon. The Scheme is located within the administrative boundaries of North Northamptonshire Council, West Northamptonshire Council and Milton Keynes City Council.

1.2 Purpose of the Programme Document

1.2.1 In April 2024, the Government published "Guidance on the pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects", supplemented in May 2024 by the Planning Inspectorate's 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus'. The Guidance introduced a new pre-application service for NSIPs such as the Scheme.

1.2.2 This Programme Document has been prepared to reflect the Government Guidance on the pre-application stage for NSIPs and the Pre-Application Prospectus. The Guidance advises that the Programme Document should include:

- The date the applicant intends to submit their application;
- A comprehensive timetable of the applicant's pre-application process, the main events with dates and milestones demonstrating how the pre-application process will be completed;
- The applicant's view on the main issues for resolution and activities they will undertake to address those;
- The applicant's proposals for engaging with statutory consultees and local authorities during the pre-application period and any intended financial support agreements, such as Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs);
- The applicant's identification of risks to achievement of the pre-application stage and the process by which these risks are tracked and managed; and
- Cross references to the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) required by Section 47 of the Planning Act.

1.2.3 Once the Programme Document is agreed with the Planning Inspectorate it will be hosted and maintained on the project website (www.greenhillsolar.co.uk). The Programme Document is considered to be a 'live' document to be reviewed and updated throughout the pre-application process.

1.2.4 The Programme Document is not a statutory requirement and is not for consultation.

1.2.5 The Applicant will communicate updates to the Programme Document to the Planning Inspectorate proactively throughout the pre-application period to publicise the completion of significant stages and demonstrate progress in the preparation of the application.

Structure of the Programme Document

1.2.6 This Programme Document will follow the following structure:



- Section 2: The pre-application timetable, outlining key milestones for the scheme and how the pre-application process will be carried out;
- Section 3: Applicant's view on the main issues;
- Section 4: Stakeholder engagement approach; and
- Section 5: Identification of risks, including approaches to manage potential risks.



2 The Pre-Application Timetable

2.1.1 The Applicant intends to submit the Application in May 2025.

2.1.2 The key milestones up to submission of the Application are set out below.

2.2 Key Milestone Events - Completed to Date

December 2023 – Initial contact with North and West Northamptonshire Councils

2.2.1 In December 2023, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils were contacted by the Applicant inviting them to virtual meetings to be introduced to the Scheme.

January 2024 – Public launch

2.2.2 The Applicant's website www.greenhillsolar.co.uk was launched, and virtual meetings were held with local authority officers, councillors and parish councillors to provide information on the Scheme and the Applicant's programme. Letters issued to 'near neighbours' (identified as properties within 50m of the boundary of the Scheme) to provide information on the proposals and contact details for the Applicant.

February 2024 – PINS Inception Meeting

2.2.3 The PINS inception meeting was held on Monday 5th February 2024. During this meeting, representatives of the project team met with PINS to present an overview of the Scheme, a summary of activities carried out to date, the indicative consenting programme proposed by the Applicant, the EIA scoping process, environmental surveys, the stakeholder engagement carried out to date and discuss practical arrangements for the PINS submission and consenting process.

March to May 2024 – Non statutory consultation and changes to the Scheme

2.2.4 Five co-design workshops were held with political, community and technical stakeholders consisting of a presentation, a question and answer session, and an interactive masterplanning workshop.

2.2.5 The boundary of the Scheme was updated in late April 2024 to include a new area of land (Green Hill G) after the Applicant was contacted by the landowner. Green Hill G is located in the administrative area of Milton Keynes City Council and the Applicant contacted Milton Keynes City Council to introduce the Scheme and hold a further co-design workshop.

2.2.6 Consultation with local planning authorities has been undertaken on a regular and monthly basis to provide information on the Scheme, and discuss and agree the use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs).

June 2024 – Newsletter sent to local residents

2.2.7 A newsletter was produced informing local residents about Green Hill Solar Farm including details of the location of the Scheme, the planning process, information regarding the Applicant and the engagement undertaken to date.

July to November 2024 - EIA Scoping Report and Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)

EIA Scoping Report

2.2.8 On 24 July 2024, the EIA Scoping Report was formally submitted to the Planning Inspectorate requesting a Scoping Opinion, in accordance with Regulation 10(1) of the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the 'EIA Regulations').

EIA Scoping Opinion

2.2.9 The Secretary of State's Scoping Opinion was received from the Planning Inspectorate on 30 August 2024. The Scoping Opinion has informed the ongoing surveys and design work to date.



Statement of Community Consultation

- 2.2.10 In August 2024, a 28-day consultation period with West Northamptonshire Council, North Northamptonshire Council and Milton Keynes City Council on the proposed Statement of Community Consultation was carried out in accordance with Section 47(2) of the Planning Act 2008.
- 2.2.11 The feedback received from the Councils was used to update the Statement of Community Consultation, setting out the detail of how the Applicant would consult the local community on the proposed Application.
- 2.2.12 The Statement of Community Consultation was published on .

November to December 2024 – Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) and Statutory Consultation (sections 42 and 47 of the Planning Act 2008)

- 2.2.13 Under section 46 of the Planning Act 2008, the Applicant has a duty to supply the Secretary of State (via the Planning Inspectorate) with information relating to the statutory consultation. A section 46 letter was sent to the Planning Inspectorate on 30 October 2024, notifying the Planning Inspectorate of the proposed Application, sharing the consultation documents, and confirming that statutory consultation under section 42 of the Planning Act 2008 was taking place for a period of 6 weeks, between 7 November 2024 and 19 December 2024.
- 2.2.14 Prior to the commencement of the statutory consultation, notices were sent to consultees pursuant to section 42 of the Planning Act 2008 and published in local and national newspapers in accordance with section 48 of the Planning Act 2008.
- 2.2.15 During the statutory consultation period, the Applicant consulted the local community in accordance with the Statement of Community Consultation, as prescribed by section 47(7) of the Planning Act 2008.
- 2.2.16 The consultation materials including the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) were published on the Applicant's website at the start of the statutory consultation period and were also made available at six local information points specified in the statutory consultation notices. The PEIR provides the preliminary environmental information necessary to enable consultation bodies to develop an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the Scheme in accordance with Regulation 12(2)(b) of the EIA Regulations. A non-technical summary of the PEIR was also made available as part of the consultation materials.
- 2.2.17 During the statutory consultation period, the Applicant held four in-person events and three virtual events, where more information about the Scheme was provided and members of the local community had the opportunity to ask questions.

2.3 Future Milestone Events

The proposed key milestones for the Scheme are set out below.

December 2024 to April 2025 – Completion of design and assessment work, preparation of the Application

- 2.3.1 Over 500 responses were received during the statutory consultation period. The feedback received from statutory consultees, landowners and the local community is now being reviewed and will be taken into account as the design of the Scheme is updated and the environmental assessment work completed.
- 2.3.2 Consultation is being undertaken with the three host local planning authorities and neighbouring Bedford Borough Council in the form of monthly meetings with the project team, and planning performance agreements are being discussed and agreed with the planning authorities to assist in their resourcing of the project.
- 2.3.3 As the design of the Scheme is refined, further targeted consultation will be carried out with relevant and affected stakeholders, as needed. The Application materials, including the Environmental Statement, will be finalised for submission.



February 2025 - Adequacy of Consultation Milestone Report

- 2.3.4 The Adequacy of Consultation Milestone report will be issued to the Planning Inspectorate in February 2025, three months before the submission of the Application. This report will provide additional detail regarding the statutory consultation that has been undertaken, and provides an opportunity for the Planning Inspectorate to satisfy itself that appropriate consultation in accordance with the statutory requirements has been carried out.

May 2025 – Development Consent Order Application submitted for acceptance

- 2.3.5 The Application will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in May 2025.



3 Stakeholder Engagement Approach

3.1.1 The Applicant has undertaken a programme of engagement since the end of 2023.

January 2024

3.1.2 Ahead of the public launch of Green Hill Solar Farm in January 2024, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils were invited to virtual meetings with the project team who provided information on the project and the Applicant's programme.

3.1.3 Green Hill Solar Farm was first made public in January 2024 with the launch of www.greenhillsolar.co.uk which provides details of the Scheme, the consultation process, frequently asked questions, how members of the public can have their say, relevant documents and news and the Applicant's contact details. The website will be updated as the Scheme progresses, with information added to the documents library and news section.

February 2024

3.1.4 An inception meeting was held with PINS in February 2024 and, it is anticipated that consultation with PINS will continue through the pre-application process.

3.1.5 Following the launch of the website and introductory meetings with the Local Planning Authorities, non-statutory consultation was undertaken in March 2024 in the form of four co-design workshops with political, technical and community stakeholders relevant to North and West Northamptonshire. The workshops included a presentation from the project team, a question and answer session and a collaborative interactive session to inform the emerging design of the Scheme.

3.1.6 Following the addition of Green Hill G to the scheme in Spring 2024, a further co-design workshop was held in May 2024 for stakeholders in the Milton Keynes administrative area. The workshop was in the same format as the earlier workshops. Virtual meetings were offered to the local councillors, parish councils and Milton Keynes City Council to provide them with information on the Scheme, to reflect the approach adopted with engagement in North and West Northamptonshire.

3.1.7 Following the conclusion of the co-design workshops, a Workshop Summary Report (September 2024) was produced and published on the project website summarising the consultation, the feedback received and how this will be used to help inform the Scheme's proposals.

3.1.8 A second meeting was held with PINS in May 2024 following the addition of Green Hill G to provide an update on the Scheme and the consequential changes to the project programme as a result of including the additional land.

June 2024

3.1.9 In June 2024 a newsletter was sent to local residents to provide an update on the Scheme. Communication to the Applicant's email address and freephone telephone number from members of the public are logged and responded to by the Applicant regularly.

3.1.10 The Applicant's consultant team is currently undertaking consultation with relevant stakeholders to discuss the proposed approach to data collection and assessment. This includes engagement with (but not limited to) Local Authority officers (such as conservation officers, ecology officers and landscape officers), Natural England, Historic England, the Environment Agency, Lead Local Flood Authorities, local aerodromes and mineral operators.

3.1.11 Discussions will continue through the pre-application process to identify the issues and areas of disagreement. Statements of Common Ground will be pursued as necessary with key stakeholders, as discussions and the design and assessment processes progress through to finalising the scheme proposals.

3.1.12 The Applicant will issue the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM) report to PINS in February 2025, approximately three months before the submission of the Application (May 2025).



3.1.13 A Consultation Report will be submitted with the Application to provide evidence of how the Applicant has had regard to the advice that PINS, local authorities and affected statutory bodies have issued during the pre-application stage, and to highlight changes to the Application arising from the advice and consultation responses received (or set out the reasons why this has not led to an amendment).

November to December 2024

3.1.14 The statutory consultation period has taken place. It was held between 7th November and 19th December 2024. The Applicant is currently in the process of analysing all responses received as part of the statutory consultation and will produce a Consultation Report as part of the DCO application.

3.1.15 The report will be produced in accordance with s37(3)(c) of the Act and will evidence the consultation responses have been taken into account during the preparation of the application.

3.1.16 All the feedback received during the consultation period will be considered directly by the Applicant.

3.1.17 The feedback will be categorised into 'issues' to enable the Applicant to respond to the issues raised in the Consultation Report.



4 Identification of Main Issues and Risks

- 4.1.1 The Applicant will maintain an issues and actions tracker as part of the design and assessment process during the pre-application phase. The issues and actions tracker will be informed by consultation and discussions with stakeholders and the professional judgement of the Applicant's project team.
- 4.1.2 The tracker will also identify the Applicant's approach to addressing and seeking to resolve the issue.
- 4.1.3 The issues tracking process will culminate in a list of Potential Main Issues for the Examination (PMIE) which will be entered into the examination as an Application document.
- 4.1.4 The following areas of concern have been raised by stakeholders during discussions with the Applicant and in the feedback received during statutory consultation:
- Site selection and use of agricultural land.
 - Construction traffic impacts affecting local residents, including use of local roads by construction vehicles.
 - Change in the landscape setting due to the introduction of solar panels and infrastructure.
 - Scale of development.
 - Increase in flood risk around areas currently experiencing flooding issues.
 - Glint and glare effects on aviation receptors.
 - Battery energy storage system – pollution and safety risks in the event of a fire occurring.
- Responding to identified project issues
- 4.1.5 At the time of writing, the Applicant is evaluating feedback received from the statutory consultation period. A programme of sustained engagement has been underway with local authorities and technical stakeholders, with discussions progressing across a number of technical matters which will continue through to the submission of the Application.
- 4.1.6 The Applicant is seeking to address and resolve or minimise these issues where practicable through the following actions:
- Updating and reviewing key design principles.
 - Design roundtable workshops with all environmental topic leads to discuss how the design, layout, mitigation measures can respond through avoiding or reducing effects raised by the issues.
 - Hosted four in-person public consultation events with large scale maps to encourage discussions on the project issues with members of the public.
 - One-to-one meetings with consultation bodies and affected landowners to discuss project scheme design and project issues raised.
 - Recording, coding and sharing all responses through the statutory consultation period to design and environmental team to inform the design.
 - Reviewing management plans to capture construction, operational and decommissioning actions that can resolve raised issues.
- 4.1.7 The potential main issues for the examination document will set out where in the Application documents the issues have been responded to through the design, management plans and other commitments.