

# SCREENING OPINION



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## SCREENING OPINION TO DETERMINE WHETHER ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT IS REQUIRED FOR A PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

Location	Proposed Solar Farm to the west of Berrington, Shrewsbury
Proposed Development	Proposed 30MW Solar PV Array
Reference No.	22/00006/SCR
Date Received	15 <sup>th</sup> December 2022
Applicant	Ecoenergy International Ltd

### 1. Screening opinion of the Local Planning Authority

- 1.1 The proposed development has been considered against the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations and the advice contained in 'Planning Practice Guidance on Environmental Impact Assessment'. It is not considered that the proposed development would be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location.

### 2. Decision

- 2.1 Under Regulation 5 of the 2017 Regulations it is determined that the proposal does not constitute EIA development. A statutory Environmental Statement will not be required.

### 3. Summary of proposed development

- 3.1 The proposal is for the erection of a solar photovoltaic (PV) array with associated infrastructure and a total export capacity of up to 30 MW. The proposal would involve the construction of a new access point off Cliff Hollow to the west of the site, as well as internal access tracks for vehicular and pedestrian movements within the site. The development would have an estimated lifespan of 40 years at the end of which it would be decommissioned, and the land would revert to agricultural use.

3.2 The site comprises of two field parcels to the south west of the settlement of Berrington and approximately 3.3 km from the A5 which defines part of the built edge of Shrewsbury. It is located to the immediate east of an existing smaller solar park which was approved in 2014 (13/03519/FUL).

#### **4. Category of development**

4.1 The proposed development does not meet any of the categories of development in Schedule 1 of the Regulations for which EIA is mandatory. However, it does fall under Class 3 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations (Energy Industry - Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water). This stipulates that the need for EIA should be considered where the development area would exceed 0.5 hectares. The area of the proposed development exceeds this threshold so the need for EIA must be considered.

#### **5. Reasons for not requiring Environmental Impact Assessment**

##### **5.1 Selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 development**

The selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 development is set out in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations and is considered below.

##### **A. Characteristics of development**

###### **i. Size and design:**

The development footprint will be limited to two field parcels partially bounded by hedgerows. The applicant confirms that internal structures such as inverters / switch rooms will be located as close to each other as possible to reduce the overall built footprint.

###### **ii. Use of natural resources:**

Climate change: As a renewable energy project the proposals would help to address climate change by reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

Soils: The site would affect some best and most versatile agricultural land but any effects would be temporary (albeit relatively long-term) and reversible.

Ecology: The site is not subject to any local or national ecology designations and would be unlikely to affect any designated wildlife sites given that the nearest of these (Berrington Pool SSSI) is located 2.6km to the north and there are no obvious source-receptor relationships to the proposals. A preliminary ecological survey has not identified any wildlife habitats which would indicate the potential for significant ecological adverse effects to arise from the proposed development. The applicant confirms that further surveys and ecological mitigation measures will be included as part of any planning application.

Waste: The development will produce limited waste whilst operational. Upon decommissioning the development components would be recycled where possible.

Pollution and amenity: The applicant has indicated that the scheme will not result in any complex or hazardous effects during either the construction or operational phases of the development. It is stated that the arrays and inverters will not generate any significant noise and the array construction materials are designed to absorb rather than reflect light. Air pollution is not anticipated given the proposed use and the construction work would not involve the use of any toxic or hazardous materials. Existing planting will provide screening from the public highway and the nearest dwellings. This has the potential to be augmented by proposed planting.

Construction management: The supporting statement confirms that the operations would be subject to a construction environmental management plan to minimise potential for risks to the environment and / or human health. This would include proposals to manage construction traffic.

B. Location of development (sensitivity with respect to historic and natural environment)

- i. The land within the site is currently used for arable farming with limited ecological value and is not affected by any nature conservation designations. Taking the site out of intensive agriculture have the potential to deliver a nett biodiversity gains relative to the current situation.
- ii. The site is not located within an area of flood risk. A Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy would be submitted with the planning application. The soil beneath the arrays would still be available for infiltration purposes. Proposed ancillary / control buildings within the site will be elevated slightly above the ground level.
- iii. There are no designated sites in the vicinity which have the potential to be adversely affected by the proposed development. The site is not in an area where there has been a failure to meet environmental quality standards in relation to air or water quality.
- iv. The site is situated in a rural area and is generally remote from sensitive receptors. The settlement of Berrington is located some 250m from the site boundary.
- v. The site is not affected by any heritage designation such as Conservation Areas. The nearest listed structure (an historic pump) is located 119m from the site. There are 6 listed buildings / structures within 300m of the site. The applicant confirms that these are generally screened from the site by vegetation and topography. Any application would be accompanied by an Archaeology and Built Heritage Assessment and a Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal.

C. Characteristics of the potential impacts

- i. The development will be contained within established field boundaries with limited views available from the immediate surrounding area due to undulating topography and existing field boundary vegetation. The extent and size of the impact is likely to be restricted to the local vicinity of the site.

- ii. The proposal may result in some effects on the environment, but these will be localised and minimised through the proposed design and mitigation measures. There will be no transboundary impacts.
- iii. The complexity of the development is low, as it comprises a single main component (the panels) with limited associated infrastructure. The probability of a significant adverse impact is also considered to be low. This is due to the nature of the development and the fact that the technology is well established, and the associated effects are generally well understood.
- iv. The proposal has a life span of 40 years, after which the solar panels and ancillary infrastructure can be removed, and the site readily be returned to its existing agricultural use.
- v. The proposal does not form part of a wider development scheme which could potentially lead to cumulative or in-combination effects. An existing smaller solar installation is located nearby to the west of the site with a further installation to the south-south east. However, available evidence suggest that there would be no or very limited inter-visibility between existing and proposed sites.

**6. Conclusion:**

- 6.1 The character, location and potential effects of the proposed solar park have been assessed for the purposes of the EIA Screening Request. Any potential effects would be expected to be simple and relatively localised. Any planning application would be accompanied by a range of reports providing further information and, where appropriate, mitigation proposals on specific issues. The schedule of proposed reports listed in Section 4.11 of the supporting statement is supported.
- 6.2 It is not considered on the basis of available information that the proposals would be likely to raise potentially complex cross / boundary and /or in combination effects which would indicate the need for EIA.

Officer:



Grahame French  
Principal Planner

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Notes:

- i. *Please note that should any details of the proposed development change, or if new information comes to light as part of the application process, including the visual impact assessment, then an Environmental Statement may be necessary if the development is then judged to raise significant environmental impacts. If you wish to alter any aspect of the development you are advised to contact the Local Planning Authority to discuss whether this screening opinion would remain valid for the amended development.*
- ii. *This decision and the reasons for it are provided without prejudice to the outcome of any subsequent planning application.*
- iii. *A copy of the screening opinion will be placed on the Public Register.*