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Screening Request

Summary:

Reason for issue / Nature of Change:

Identify Stakeholders / Who does this change affect?
Planning team

Distribution List:

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**REQUEST FOR SCREENING REQUEST
PROPOSED BERKELEY VALE SOLAR PARK**

PREPARED FOR STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

JUNE 2010

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Ecotricity are currently investigating the suitability of a Solar Park at Berkeley Vale as shown in Appendix 1. This site has been identified by Ecotricity as having good potential for PV generation due to its location within the British Isles and the absence of sensitive receptors such as landscape designations.
- 1.2 Before progressing further with this application we wish to obtain a formal screening opinion in order to determine the Council's view on whether or not an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

Background

- 1.3 Under Part II, Section 5 of the 1999 Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations a person who is minded to carry out a development may request the relevant planning authority to adopt a screening opinion as to whether that development is an EIA development.
- 1.4 The Regulations require that a screening opinion request be accompanied by a plan sufficient to identify the land; a brief description of the development and of its possible effects on the environment; and such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to make or provide. This document and its appendices comprise such a submission.
- 1.5 In determining whether or not the proposed development requires EIA, the local planning authority is required to follow Part II, Section 4 of the Regulations and the relevant schedules.
- 1.6 As you will be aware, section 5 (4) of the Regulations states that the local planning authority shall adopt a screening opinion within three weeks of the date of the receipt of request, and we look forward to receiving a response within this time scale.

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

- 1.7 The proposal is to install up to 1MW of solar panels on land in the Stinchcombe parish to the east of Cam, but the west of the M5 which lies within the Stroud District. The location of this site is shown within the wider district context is shown in Appendix 1. It should be noted that the detail of any PV panel layout may alter for any final planning submission, but it would be within the area delineated by the blue line.
 - Installation of PV panels; with a maximum height of 3m from ground level;
 - Construction of ancillary works include access tracks;
 - Temporary construction compound;
 - Substation.
- 1.8 The panels used in the site design are the 48MC model and are designed and manufactured by Day4 Energy. The final PV panel to be used on this site has not yet been formally determined as detailed technical site investigations are currently being completed. The findings of these investigations will determine the final layout and PV

panel choice, but as stated above all panels will be located within the area delineated by the red line on Appendix 1.

CONSIDERATION AGAINST EIA REGULATIONS

1.9 Schedule 1 of the Regulations identifies development 'types' requiring EIA and Schedule 2 identifies development types where, if the relevant criteria are exceeded a formal assessment must be undertaken against Schedule 3 in order to determine if an EIA is required. The installation of PV panels is not listed as a Schedule 1 activity and therefore consideration to this proposed development needs to be made against Schedule 2 and 3. Again installing PV to any scale is not referenced within the table of developments where applicable thresholds for a project are defined neither for a Schedule 2 development nor in the further clarifications of Circular 2/99: Environmental Impact Assessment. Due to the fact that such a development is not classified as requiring an EIA under either Schedule 1 or 2 of the Regulations consideration against Schedule 3 is not strictly necessary. However, we have reviewed the proposal against these guidelines to offer you greater clarification of the project in relation to the Regulations.

1. Characteristics of development

1.10 Schedule 3 states that the characteristics of the development must be considered having regard, in particular, to:

- (a) the size of the development;
- (b) the cumulation with other development;
- (c) the use of natural resources;
- (d) the production of waste;
- (e) the risk of accidents, having regard in particular to substances or technologies used.

1.11 It is not considered that this proposal would have a significant effect on the environment with reference to these criteria, for the following reasons:

- The size of the development will consist of approximately 27 rows of panels of which none will exceed 3m in height. (Number of rows will vary depending on final site design).
- There is no cumulative impact, as there are no other solar parks within the locality. While the proposal must be considered against the backdrop of the existing wind turbines on site, the difference in technology and dimensions of the energy generating technologies should not lead to a cumulative environmental effect being considered to be significant;
- Natural resources are used in a sustainable way, namely the production of electricity from a renewable resource. The electricity generated would be supplied directly to the local grid and used by the local community. Due to the electricity generated by the panels entering the local grid system energy losses through transmission distances will be minimised making the installation as efficient as possible;
- No waste would be produced by on site processes; and,

- The technology has an exemplary safety record.

2. Location of development

- 1.12 Schedule 3 states that the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by development must be considered, having regard, in particular, to:
- (a) the existing land use;
 - (b) the relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area;
 - (c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment with particular reference to certain defined areas.
- 1.13 The PV panels will be located on agricultural landholdings with the area currently being used for dairy farming. The site itself does not fall within any statutory or local areas designated for landscape quality but the site is close to the western edge of the Cotswolds AONB, separated from it by the M5 motorway. There are some Grade II* Listed Buildings near the site that would be considered in any application, but there are no Grade I or SAM's within the immediate vicinity. The site does therefore not represent a sensitive environment designated for its national landscape value or ecological or historical importance; neither does it fall within any such wider area.
- 1.14 The land uses surrounding the PV site include: agricultural landholdings used for the production of dairy cattle; a road network including the M5 and some woodlands, the AONB is near to the site but is separated by the presence of the M5. The nearest residential properties to the proposed site are clinger cottages which are approximately 0.16km from the area delineated in blue.
- 1.15 Having regard to the above, it is not considered that the site is located within an environmentally sensitive area as defined in the Regulations.

3. Characteristics of the potential impact

- 1.16 Schedule 3 states the potential significant effects of development must be considered in relation to the criteria set out above, and having regard in particular to:
- (a) the extent of the impact (geographical area and size of the affected population);
 - (b) the transfrontier nature of the impact;
 - (c) the magnitude and complexity of the impact;
 - (d) the probability of the impact;
 - (e) the duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact.
- 1.17 Due to the panel height not exceeding 3m the visual impact of this proposal on the wider landscape will be limited. Assessment of the visual implications of this development on the local area can be considered as part of the planning submission. Any visual impact from this development will be a matter for the Council as local planning authority to consider at application stage, with the applicant to provide an assessment in a full supporting statement, including photomontages from locations in the immediate area.

- 1.18 There are no mechanical parts with the panels so there will be no noise generated by their presence on the site and so there will definitely be no noise impact on even the nearest local residents which are over 160 meters away and an Environmental Impact Assessment on these grounds is not likely to be required.
- 1.19 While there is likely to be some ecological interest in the vicinity of the site, this is not considered to be so sensitive as to trigger the requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment. The effects upon local flora and fauna due to the existence of a solar park will be examined within the ecological assessment which will accompany the application.
- 1.20 The hydrological impact and its flood risk potential due to the land take of the proposal being over 1ha will be submitted in conjunction with any planning application and alone should not be considered a significant ground to require EIA assessment.
- 1.21 In terms of the other criteria, no transfrontier impact is expected; the magnitude and complexity of the impact is expected to be limited and confined to the local area, and is predictable. The probability of the impact is also predictable and localised and can be mitigated in terms of appropriate conditions, such as access and noise levels. The duration and frequency of the potential impacts are not significant and, with the removal of the panels after 25 years, are largely reversible.
- 1.22 In conclusion, the proposal is not a defined Schedule 2 development further consideration against the criteria in Schedule 3 has determined that a significant environmental impact are not likely to arise and an Environmental Impact Assessment is not likely to be necessary in this case. In support of any planning application that would be made various environmental topics will be considered to determine if the presence of PV panels at this site would have any significant impact.

Public Consultation

- 1.23 Should this proposal be developed further, a programme of public consultation would be arranged, in line with the requirements of Stroud District Council's Statement of Community Involvement for a development of this scale. The purpose of this would be to inform local residents of our proposed development.
- 1.24 As with all applications that Ecotricity progress through the planning process, consultation with statutory bodies and interested parties will take place to ensure that the application covers the items that will need to be considered for the application to be determined.

Planning Application

- 1.25 Ecotricity intends to submit a detailed application that would include a Planning Statement and Environmental Report setting out relevant environmental information relating to the solar panels. The scope of this report would be agreed in advance with the Local Planning Authority and would include an independent visual assessment on landscape; cultural heritage features such as any listed buildings or conservation areas; the flood risk potential of the development and traffic implications during the construction process. Such assessment and communication with the Local Planning

Authority should allow for any needed mitigations to be agreed through planning conditions attached to a planning consent.

Climate Change Policy Framework

- 1.26 The Chancellor's 2009 Treasury budget included the UK's first carbon budget, summarised in the table below¹.

Carbon Budget- Chancellor of the Exchequers 2009 Treasury Budget

	Budget 1 (2008 - 2012)	Budget 2 (2013 – 2017)	Budget 3 (2018 – 2022)
Proposed budget (MtCO ₂ e)	3018	2782	2544
Annual equivalent percentage reduction below 1990 levels	22	28	34

- 1.27 The 80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions is greater than the previous 60% cut target derived from the 2000 Royal Commission report. In their statement to the House of Commons when introducing the legislation, the Secretary of State for the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) explained that this was because independent assessment had shown that since 2000, emissions have risen faster than anticipated, and the severity of the forecasted impact of each degree of climate change is greater.
- 1.28 In order to achieve the ambitious targets set out in the Climate Change Act, the Government has released a number of documents which explain how the targets can be reached. The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan; National Strategy for Climate Change and Energy (2009), shows sector-by-sector what savings can be achieved and how every department across government will take responsibility. A particular figure of significance is that by 2020, 40% of our electricity must come from low carbon sources.
- 1.29 Published alongside the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan was The UK's Renewable Energy Strategy (2009). The Department for Energy and Climate Change details how the UK will hit its target of getting 15% of energy (electricity, heat and transport) from renewable sources by 2020. In order to achieve this, 30% of electricity must come from renewable energy sources (a five-fold increase from today's rate of ~5%). It also emphasises the need for the planning system to speed up and become more predictable so as to enable renewable deployment in the right places at the right time and in a way that gives businesses the confidence to invest.
- 1.30 The Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10) provides a spatial strategy within which local authority development plans should be prepared. It also contains strategic policies for development within the region. RPG10 is currently in the

¹ DECC press release 22 April 2009 <http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/news/pn047/pn047.aspx>

process of being updated by The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RSS-SW) 2006-2026 which was published in June 2006. The full strategy was has not yet been published. Both documents form material considerations in planning applications.

- 1.31 The draft RSS-SW (published in June 2006) contains targets for renewable energy across the region. Renewable energy production is broken down into individual forms of energy production each of which has its own generation target within counties and contributing to the overall regional targets.
- 1.32 The indicative regional overall renewable energy target in 2010 amounts to a total electricity generating capacity of 509-611MW (inclusive of existing schemes), of which Gloucestershire should contribute 40 to 50MW. The Draft Spatial Strategy also sets a minimum installed capacity of 850MW by 2020².
- 1.33 The adopted Stroud District Local Plan contains Built Environment Policy BE21 covering renewable energy development proposals. The accompanying text acknowledges the vital role of increased renewable energy development to delivery of commitments on climate change.³

CONCLUSION

- 1.34 Consideration of the proposed development against the Environmental Impact Regulations 1999 has determined that the proposal is unlikely to result in significant effects in the environment and consequently an environmental impact assessment is not required.
- 1.35 Whilst it is considered that there will be impacts on the area over and above those which already exist due to the installation of PV on agricultural land, such as flood risk and visual impact to the immediate locality, these are matters that can be dealt with as part of the planning application. This is supported that the development is not within, adjacent or in close proximity to and sensitive environmental features.
- 1.36 If there are further topics that the Local Planning Authority would like considered in the supporting Planning Statement / Environmental Report, please outline these within your response.

² SWRA (2006). Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West

³ Stroud District Local Plan, adopted 10 November 2005.