



# Programme Document

## The Drovers Solar Farm

January 2025

## 1.0 Introduction

### Background

- 1.1 The Scheme comprises the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating station and associated development, including Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), Ancillary Infrastructure, a Customer Substation and Grid Connection Infrastructure (including a new National Grid Substation). The Scheme would allow for the generation and export of over 50 megawatts (MW) of Alternating Current (AC) of renewable energy, connecting to the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS) overhead line that passes through the Site. As the Scheme would have a generating capacity in excess of 50MW, it is considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. This pre-application Programme Document sets out the main steps that The Droves Solar Farm Limited (the 'Applicant') anticipates taking during the preparation of the application.

### The Proposed Development

- 1.2 The Scheme overview:
- Ground-mounted solar PV arrays and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated development
  - Onsite grid connection via existing 400kV overhead lines
  - New Customer Substation
  - New National Grid substation
  - Green Infrastructure

### The Purpose and Structure of the Programme Document

- 1.3 In May 2024, the Government published its 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus', which introduced a new pre-application service for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects ('NSIPs') such as the Proposed Development. The new pre-application service is supported by updated guidance published on the Government's 2024 National Infrastructure Planning Guidance Portal.
- 1.4 The Pre-application Prospectus introduces three pre-application tier options reflecting different levels of service that applicants may receive from the Planning Inspectorate ('PINS') ahead of submitting an application for an NSIP. These are:
- basic;
  - standard; and
  - enhanced.
- 1.5 PINS has confirmed the Applicant's choice to select the 'Basic' pre-application service tier.
- 1.6 The guidance states (Paragraph 009 Reference ID 02-009-20240430) that the pre-application process for NSIPs is applicant-led. To deliver a good pre-

application process, including effective engagement and a well-prepared application, applicants should put together a Programme Document at the outset of the pre-application stage for submission to PINS.

- 1.7 The guidance states that the Programme Document will enable all those engaged in the pre-application process, particularly statutory consultees, to understand the timescales and ensure their contribution is programmed into the pre-application stage at the most effective point. It will also assist the applicant in managing the preparation and subsequent submission of the application documents for consideration by PINS at the acceptance stage.
- 1.8 This document will be maintained by the Applicant throughout the pre-application stage. A public pre-application Programme Document will be published on the Applicant's website.
- 1.9 The Applicant will communicate updates to the Programme Document to PINS proactively throughout the pre-application period to publicise the completion of significant stages and demonstrate progress in the preparation of the application.
- 1.10 While the Programme Document is not a statutory requirement and so is not for consultation, the Guidance states that it should include (Paragraph 010 Reference ID 02-010-20240430):
  - 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 (using the maximum target of 2 years as a benchmark);
  - 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 PA 2008.
- 1.11 This Programme Document is structured as follows:
  - Section 2 outlines the pre-application timetable, including the planned submission date and timetable of activities;
  - Section 3 sets out the anticipated pre-application issues and potential risks;
  - Section 4 outlines the Proposed Development's approach to stakeholder engagement; and
  - Section 5 sets out how the Applicant will manage risk during the pre-application stage.

## 2.0 Pre-application timetable

### Overview

- 2.1 This section will summarise the activities that have taken place to date and the activities planned before submission of the DCO application.

### Planned Submission Date

- 2.2 The applicant intends to submit its DCO application in November 2025.

### Timetable of Activities

- 2.3 The main events and dates during the pre-application period are set out below:
- Non-Statutory Consultation: September 2024 – December 2024
  - EIA Scoping Report Submitted: 7 November 2024
  - EIA Scoping Opinion Received: 18 December 2024
  - Statement of Community Consultation Published: 31 March 2025
  - Anticipated Statement of Community Consultation Period (minimum 28 days): April 2025 – May 2025
  - Statutory Consultation Period: 21 May 2025 – 02 July 2025
  - Preparation of Statements of Common Ground: Ongoing
  - Adequacy of Consultation Milestone: End of August 2025
  - Application Submitted: 19 November 2025
- 2.4 Further programme details on engagement with relevant statutory consultees and other stakeholders throughout the pre-application period are set out in Section 4.

### Scoping Opinion

- 2.5 In request to the Scoping Report submitted on 7 November 2024, the Secretary of State published a Scoping Opinion for The Drovers Solar Farm on 18 December 2024. The opinion can be found at [EN0110013-000011-EN0110013 - The Drovers Solar Farm Scoping Opinion 2017 EIA Regs.pdf](#)

## 3.0 Pre-application Issues and Potential Risks

### Overview

- 3.1 This section sets out the main issues identified by the Applicant during the pre-application stage, including the activities that will be undertaken to address those issues. It also identifies potential risks during the pre-application stage.
- 3.2 The main issues that will be identified in the pre-application process are set out in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Main Issues Identified by the Applicant

Topic	Description of Issues	Management of Issue
Design	The potential size of the Scheme.	<p>The Scheme will undergo several design evolution phases, which will be based on survey results, consultation feedback, and stakeholder engagement. The Scheme design is environmentally led and is considering the surrounding landscape and how to protect local heritage sites through this process.</p> <p>The Site Selection process was carried out to minimise the impact on the environment and community.</p>
Ecology and Biodiversity	Presence of protected species and their movement across the site.	<p>The Scheme aims to deliver biodiversity net gain and nature recovery through its design.</p> <p>The Applicant has undertaken habitat and species surveys, including birds, bats, reptiles, amphibians and badgers. Additional habitat and species surveys are continuing to be conducted. The Applicant is committed to mitigate adverse impacts where possible.</p> <p>The Applicant is continuing to engage with landowners, key technical specialists, councillors</p>

		<p>and community stakeholders to support the early design process. Their insight and feedback will help to refine the Scheme and develop a green infrastructure and mitigation strategy. The Applicant is also engaging with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Norfolk County Council and Breckland Council to gather feedback and explore options for biodiversity and ecological enhancements.</p>
Cultural Heritage	Proximity to heritage assets located within the Nar Valley.	<p>As a part of the ongoing cultural heritage assessments, the Applicant is undertaking surveys from important heritage sites, including Castle Acre Priory and Castle Acre Castle. Surveys and engagement with key stakeholders such as Historic England, Norfolk County Council and Breckland Council will enable a better understanding of local heritage assets.</p> <p>The initial findings and further engagement and surveys will provide the information the Applicant needs to identify appropriate mitigation strategies if required.</p>
Landscape and Visual	<p>Landscape character and visual impacts.</p> <p>Lighting of the substations</p>	<p>The design process is environmentally led and the Applicant will seek to take advantage of natural screening, topography and landform, existing hedgerows, and woodland, informed by the Breckland Local Landscape Character Assessment. The Applicant will use the IGP Design Principles to help deliver a scheme with good design. These are core design principles that are applied to any project within the UK and form part of the</p>

		<p>development brief to the project team. These principles take account of the NICs Principles of People, Place, Climate and Value.</p> <p>Existing screening would be retained and enhanced with new planting, using native species to retain the landscape fabric of the Proposed Order Limits ('Site'). As the solar panels are low profile compared with other forms of infrastructure, they can be more easily screened, aiding integration of the Scheme into its context.</p> <p>CCTV with night vision would reduce lighting needs, and low-level lighting at substations and BESS would activate only in an emergency. All lighting would be designed to minimise light pollution and local impact.</p>
<p>Transport and Access</p>	<p>Potential impact on highway and public right of way users.</p>	<p>The A1065 and A47 will be the primary routes for any traffic associated with the construction and decommissioning of the Scheme, which will mitigate potential impacts on local road users and respect the amenity of residents.</p> <p>Once the Scheme becomes operational, the Applicant anticipates minimal vehicle movements to and from the site, during routine maintenance activities. A larger number of vehicle movements will take place during any replacement activities, but these will be less than during construction.</p> <p>The Applicant is continuing to undertake surveys and assessments of local routes to</p>

		<p>assess traffic flows and inform the preferred route for construction and access points to the Site.</p> <p>The DCO application will include a comprehensive Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) and Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to ensure appropriate construction activity control.</p>
Noise	There is a possibility of noise being emitted from solar PV arrays and BESS infrastructure.	Solar PV arrays generally emit only minimal noise; however, the Applicant is continuing to conduct noise monitoring and surveys at the Site to assess and confirm any potential impacts on surrounding areas and inform siting of infrastructure.
Health, safety and wellbeing	<p>Fire risk associated with BESS infrastructure</p> <p>Physical and mental health, particularly during the construction phase.</p> <p>Supply chains and sourcing of materials</p>	<p>The BESS will adhere to applicable safety standards and regulations. An outline battery safety management plan will be submitted with the DCO application, which, among other measures, will outline how the risk of fire will be reduced and identify how safety requirements have been met.</p> <p>Protecting and enhancing public health is also a priority. The Applicant will seek to support local communities and provide new ways for people to access the local area.</p> <p>The Applicant is also conducting a Local Needs Assessment to identify specific local needs and will be working with the local community to deliver impactful and tailored benefits where possible.</p> <p>The Applicant has yet to confirm the contracts for suppliers of the</p>



		<p>equipment for the Scheme, and an appropriate assessment will be conducted as the proposal progresses into the next stages.</p> <p>To ensure supply chains are as ethical and sustainable as possible, the Applicant has pledged to support the independent auditing of all UK solar supply chains and is a signatory to Solar Energy UK's Supply Chain Statement.</p> <p>This is an industry-led traceability protocol that aligns with internationally recognised standards.</p>
<p>Public Rights of Way (PRoW)</p>	<p>Impact on PRoW and byways.</p>	<p>The Applicant recognises the value of PRoW, and restricted byways, and is committed to retaining and enhancing routes where possible.</p> <p>Led by Norfolk's Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Applicant will help ensure that communities can continue to access and enjoy the local environment and its amenities.</p> <p>In response to feedback provided during the early engagement workshops, the Applicant has gathered information on PRoWs from sources such as information points, leaflets, and maps provided by local organisations.</p> <p>The Applicant has sought to engage with the West Acre Rewilding Project to explore ways to enhance connectivity and improve signage, maps and leaflets for local residents and visitors.</p>

Socio-Economics	<p>Loss of arable farmland.</p> <p>There is value in creating employment and educational opportunities, such as apprenticeships, to bring young people into the area and support green jobs growth.</p>	<p>The Applicant aims to make efficient use of the land through optimising generation and export capacity of the Scheme within the constraints of the Site.</p> <p>The Applicant is committed to minimising the potential impact on versatile and high-quality land and will avoid solar infrastructure within fields consisting entirely of Grades 1 and 2 land where practicable.</p> <p>The Applicant will also ensure that local contractors and suppliers have the opportunity to work on the Scheme wherever possible. If the DCO is granted, most of the training, employment, and contractor opportunities would be available during the Scheme's construction phase. The Applicant will assess local employment and educational opportunities as part of our Local Needs Assessment to establish how we can offer targeted support for local communities. The Scheme will use this information to ensure the delivery of social value and community benefits.</p>
Cumulative Impact	Cumulative impact of multiple developments proposed in the local area.	<p>The Applicant is aware of other projects in the county, including several proposed solar developments and NSIPs.</p> <p>The Applicant has open lines of communication with other developers and will continue to address concerns collectively where appropriate. The Applicant is also considering ways to work together to maximise any potential positive impact from mitigation efforts or community benefit initiatives.</p>



		<p>The Applicant will be required to undertake a cumulative assessment as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This will be submitted as part of the DCO application.</p>
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## 4.0 Approach to Stakeholder Engagement

- 4.1 This section sets out the Applicant's proposals for pre-application consultation, including engagement with statutory consultees and local authorities during the pre-application stage. It includes cross-references to the SoCC, where appropriate.
- 4.2 We continue to engage widely with stakeholders, landowners and the local community. Engagement will be targeted at the following groups:
- Statutory Consultees:
    - Host and neighbouring local authorities;
    - Prescribed Consultees;
    - Relevant Statutory Undertakers; and
    - Persons with an interest in the land.
  - Landowners.
  - The Community:
    - Environmental groups;
    - Local residents;
    - Elected representatives; and
    - Community Groups.
- 4.3 Each of these will have different interests in the Proposed Development and wish to engage with the Applicant differently. This section summarises who falls into these groups and how the Applicant will engage with them.
- 4.4 Table 2 below outlines a series of completed and proposed engagements with stakeholders, which has been designed to ensure that all such parties are adequately informed and can provide input at the appropriate stages of the application process.
- 4.5 Additionally, the Applicant has started engagement with Norfolk County Council regarding a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). This agreement should help to provide the necessary resource and support, enabling engagement with the Applicant regarding the Proposed Development.
- 4.6 The Applicant will undertake Statutory Consultation and publish a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), as required under Section 47 of the Planning Act 2008. Before publishing the SoCC, the Applicant will consult with Breckland Council, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Council and Norwich County Council on the draft version for a period of 28 days.

Table 4.1: Approach to stakeholder engagement

Audience	Methods of Engagement
Planning Inspectorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct engagement</li> <li>• Written briefings</li> </ul>

Prescribed Consultees (Technical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct engagement through relevant technical lead(s)</li> <li>• Written briefings</li> <li>• Invitation to in-person consultation events</li> <li>• Preparation of Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) (where required)</li> <li>• The Droves website and virtual exhibition</li> </ul>
Prescribed Consultees (Community and Non-governmental Organisations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct engagement through relevant technical lead(s)</li> <li>• Written briefings</li> <li>• Invitation to in-person consultation events</li> <li>• The Droves website and virtual exhibition</li> </ul>
Host Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct engagement and ongoing liaison with relevant technical leads.</li> <li>• Written briefings</li> <li>• Invitation to in-person consultation events</li> <li>• The Droves website and virtual exhibition</li> <li>• Preparation of SoCG</li> </ul>
Neighbouring Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written briefings</li> <li>• Invitation to in-person consultation events</li> <li>• The Droves website and virtual exhibition</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct engagement (including meetings with residents and community organisations/elected representatives on request)</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> <li>• The Droves website and virtual exhibition</li> <li>• Invitation to in-person consultation events</li> </ul>
Landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation to in-person consultation events</li> <li>• The Droves website and virtual exhibition</li> <li>• Long-term direct engagement</li> <li>• Close communication in person and via land agents</li> <li>• Opportunities for meetings with engineers on specific concerns.</li> </ul>



## 5.0 Risk Management

- 5.1 The Applicant will produce an Issues Tracker during the pre-application period that will be informed by consultation with stakeholders and assessment by the Applicant. The identified risks will carry a Red, Amber, Green status that reflects the degree of risk with each issue, as well as the Applicant's intended approach to resolve the issues. The Issues Tracker will culminate in a list of Potential Main Issues for the Examination, which will be submitted into examination if the DCO application is accepted.