

# **Westhide Solar Power Proposal: Consultation Update June 2021**

## **1. Site walkover – May 2021**

Thank you to all the residents and parish councillors that attended the site walkover on 19<sup>th</sup> May. We hope it gave everyone a clearer sense of what is being proposed and where.

We found it very useful and took note of the questions, comments and suggestions raised on the day. Below you will find a summary of the points raised and our responses.

## **2. Consultation responses**

### *Substation compound*

- The substation compound generally consists of an open-air enclosure containing upright stand-alone pieces of electrical infrastructure such as the transformer, for example. The indicative area outlined for the substation compound on the site boundary map (the small square field in the south-west of the site) is much larger than the likely footprint required. The reason for this is to allow us the room to position the substation optimally in relation to ecological, technical and visual impact constraints, leaving sufficient space for any screening planting if required. The exact size of the substation and its micro-siting within that area will be detailed in the draft site design.
- We believe that the distances between the substation and the nearest properties are sufficient to ensure that the noise generated by the transformer will dissipate and not affect existing ambient noise levels. However, based on consultation feedback from residents who have flagged up noise as a concern, we are carrying out a full noise assessment, which includes the monitoring and recording of existing ambient/background noise levels at the nearest residential properties. Work undertaken in this assessment will allow us to design the scheme in such a way as to ensure noise won't affect residential amenity.
- The largest piece of equipment to be transported to site will be the transformer for the substation. A transport consultancy is currently undertaking a review of the transport and access options and will be drafting a proposed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP). As part of that work they will calculate the logistics of

delivering the transformer – the size of vehicle required and the most appropriate route.

### *Cable route*

- We will be connecting the scheme to the substation in Dormington. All cabling will be underground. We are reviewing the option of laying the cable along the public highways network – this is our default option. However, we are also commencing discussions with landowners along the cable route to investigate options of going across agricultural land and shortening the route. This would minimise the need to lay cable along roads.
- If we were to only use the public road network for the underground connection from Westhide to the substation at Dormington the entire route wouldn't be affected at the same time – the cable would be laid in rolling blocks of 250m along the route. This process is usually managed with lane closures and associated traffic control measures, similar to any utilities process.

### *Access & transport*

- We have taken note of residents' concerns in relation to the proposed use of the road between Withington and Westhide for construction traffic and are reviewing ways of minimising usage of and impact on this road, especially by larger vehicles.
- A transport consultancy is currently undertaking a review of the transport and access options and will be drafting a proposed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP). The CTMP will look to identify ways of minimising impacts from construction traffic and will specify recommended hours for construction traffic where vehicles will cause the least amount of disruption.
- Once we have a draft CTMP ready we will consult on the details of the transport proposals with the local community and seek ways to improve our proposals further to enable residential/recreational use of the roads to continue with the least amount of impact.

### *Public access*

- Our initial impression from discussions with residents is that increasing public access for walking would provide a material benefit and is something many people feel passionately about.

- The estate has expressed an interest in using the solar scheme as an opportunity for increasing public access to local residents.
- All hedgerows and the existing field pattern are being retained within the site. A buffer distance of 5 metres from all field boundaries will be maintained and a permissive path could be introduced along the external perimeter of the site to be used as a circular path.
- Any proposed permissive path will be included in the landscape masterplan that will form one of the documents for the planning application and as such would be enforceable by planning.

#### *Landscape, visual impact & screening planting*

- For screening planting, our landscape and ecology consultants will be able to recommend a number of native species that will not only aid screening of the site but also improve the hedgerow habitat and support a variety of fruit and seed-bearing species.

We will request that they factor in the use of species that will maximise the screening of the site as quickly as possible. We will also review the potential for introducing some more mature planting where possible/if appropriate.

- Our screening planting plan will detail the minimum height required for hedgerows to provide effective screening and will form part of the planning application.

Therefore, if planning permission is obtained, this height will need to be adhered to throughout the lifetime of the scheme.

- Hedgerow maintenance will also form part of the ecology maintenance plan that will form part of the planning application. Adherence to the ecology maintenance plan is often included as a planning condition.
- With respect to planting a new hedgerow along the south-eastern boundary of the site, our landscape consultants will suggest the best location for the new hedgerow based on site topography and design.

#### *Ecology*

- The estate is very keen to add as much biodiversity across the site as possible and we will look at the possibility of including bird and bat boxes in suitable locations, if deemed appropriate by the ecologist.

- The maintenance of the wildflower meadow will be detailed in the ecology maintenance plan which will form part of the planning application. Adherence to the ecology maintenance plan is often included as a planning condition for the duration of the scheme.

### *Energy*

- If 40 megawatts of solar panels were installed at Westhide, this would be expected to generate circa 42,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of energy every year. This figure is derived by multiplying the installed capacity by the total number of hours in a year (8760) and then multiplying that figure by a capacity factor of 0.12 (or 12%). The capacity factor is a calculation that takes into account the fact that energy won't be generated from solar 24 hours a day and that there are seasonal variations in radiation. As a principle, we tend to err on the side of caution and use conservative figures when providing calculations of this nature. Generally-speaking the capacity factor comes in the 0.10-0.25 (10-25%) range around the world, depending on location, with UK calculations typically using the 0.10-0.15 range (10-15%). Based on an electricity usage of 2900 kWh per year for a medium-sized household, this comes to the equivalent amount of energy as used by circa 14,000 households.
- We are connecting on the 66kV network. This is the spare capacity offered to us by Western Power Distribution.

### *Use of agricultural land*

- We are currently living through a climate crisis and renewable energy is a key component in the strategy towards creating a cleaner energy supply and mitigating against further increases in greenhouse gases. Herefordshire Council declared a Climate Emergency in March 2019 and is aiming to develop a countywide carbon dioxide reduction strategy aspiring for carbon neutrality by 2030. A solar scheme of 40 megawatts could displace around 9,700 tonnes of carbon dioxide every year.

Herefordshire is a rural county with an abundance of high-quality agricultural land and few large-scale brownfield sites that could accommodate a scheme of a similar size. In playing its part in generating renewable energy, it is therefore highly likely that in Herefordshire agricultural land will need to be used for this purpose.

- The area around Westhide is predominantly high-grade agricultural land. Having reviewed the entire Westhide Estate, we believe we found a rare location of grade 3 land that also benefits from minimal landscape and visual impact. As current agricultural grade mapping is based on historic data and is quite broad-brush, we are undertaking an Agricultural Land Classification survey that looks to specify the grading of each field contained within the entire development area.
- Sheep grazing can be explored as an option for grass maintenance within the site.

### 3. Further consultation

Site assessments and various studies are ongoing. The data from these will provide us with constraints for the design of the site, which we are working on.

As we mentioned on the site walkover, as soon as draft versions are ready, we would like to host a consultation event to discuss the following:

1. Provisional site design plan
2. Proposed construction traffic management measures and timings
3. Provisional screening planting plan

We will be in touch once these are ready with details of the event.

### 4. Site boundary confirmation

We also wanted to clarify that the site boundary map that was distributed at the site walkover and that is available on the project website (please see below) is the latest version of the site boundary and shows the **maximum area that could be developed**.

As we mentioned at the walkover a larger area was initially reviewed (and was included in the earlier ecological and landscape assessment work) but based on a topographical assessment of the site and input from landscape consultants in the early stages of assessments, some of the boundaries were reduced and pulled further north.

