

REFERENCE: 26/0556

PROPOSAL: LARGE SOLAR FARM (DNS)

SITE: Land between M4 Motorway and South Wales Main Line Railway near Llanwern Underwood and Bishton

APPLICATION TYPE: EIA screening

CASE OFFICER: Geraint Roberts

RECOMMENDATION: LVIA will be required

Comments:

This is a screening application however the submitted scoping report by Axis 'Craig Y Perthi Solar Farm' is already assuming an EIA including LVIA will be required. Given the location and scale of the proposals potentially significant landscape character and visual amenity impacts are likely.

If comments on scoping [as set out in section 6.0 of the scoping report] are relevant for this application, my comments relate to how the potential landscape character and visual amenity impacts will be assessed and presented.

The LVIA scoping is to industry standards. At least 24 viewpoints will be assessed and photomontages for year 1 and 10 will be provided where applicable.

Plans produced show that cumulative impacts will be assessed which is welcome and there is an indicative landscape masterplan.

Proposals to improve 5 km of footpaths/green lanes and create new permissive path walkways are welcome as is making use of existing farm entrances and tracks where possible, new native species hedgerow / tree planting and gapping up of existing hedgerows, new areas of native species woodland planting and creation of a community orchard.

Additional comments are:

1. I cannot find mention of a tree survey to BS5837 – this should set the site constraints and layout of solar panels, with panel set-back lines to incorporate tree shadow lines and buildings/connection runs for services to consider root protection areas.
2. The site will extend to approximately 111 ha of fencing / solar panels across two LANDMAP Visual and Sensory aspect areas: Llanwern Park and Wilcrick Moor. I recommend these areas are shown on a plan along with the Zone of Theoretical Influence and the proposals.

3. Topography is undulating – the illustrative landscape masterplan should be shown with OS contour lines and with any clear ‘break of slope lines’ shown. Showing the same information over an aerial photo base will also be helpful as this will pick up existing hedgerows and tree cover in more detail.
4. Para 6.2.1 states photos were taken in August 2021. Photos are already 5 years old, some views will not have changed but others may have. Will up to date photos be taken?
5. Careful siting and screening of the onsite 132 kv substation and two switchgear buildings will be important.
6. The main visual amenity impacts will be on the community of Bishton. The 24 viewpoints appear logical, although I would advise there may be the need for additional viewpoints. One example is the start/end of footpath close to the church/The Old Rectory – the Google Street View image below shows the undulating nature of the landscape and how visible the panels will be at this point extending above any new hedgelines. Panels should be seen against rising land not breaking the skyline, hence the need for ‘break of slope’ mapping. Deer fencing and CCTV poles will compound the impact of the panels and should be incorporated into the LVIA.



7. Impacts on private residential property are more difficult to assess. I would advise panoramic photos from the high points of the solar panel layout back towards Bishton would help identify any obvious impacts and potential for mitigation.
8. Given the panels are not clustered, it should be made clear in the LVIA how the overall proposals will be experienced by user groups, it may be as one, or two, or even three sites.