Cleve Hill Solar Park FAQs

March 2018

What is Cleve Hill Solar Park?

The proposed Cleve Hill Solar Park is a solar photovoltaic park on the north Kent coast which will have a generating capacity which could exceed 350 megawatts (MW). If built, it will generate clean, renewable energy for approximately 110,000 homes a year, which is approximately the number of households in the Swale and Canterbury Districts combined.

The proposed site is located 2km northeast of Faversham, 5km west of Whitstable to the northwest of the village of Graveney. Our ambition is to deliver a scheme that helps to address national and local electricity needs by generating an affordable and renewable source of clean energy.

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The development consenting regime for NSIP projects comes under the Planning Act 2008 and the application process is known as the Development Consent Order or 'DCO'. DCO applications must be made to the Planning Inspectorate who in the case of energy related development acts on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Any final consent award is granted by the Secretary of State for BEIS, which is currently Greg Clark.

DCO applications cannot be determined by the local authority, although the local authorities are involved throughout the planning process and do maintain an important role during the DCO application process. The local authority is the responsible planning authority post-consent of the project.

Why do we need Cleve Hill Solar Park?

A quarter of the UK's generating capacity is due to close by 2018 so a new mix of electricity generation is needed to keep the lights on. Also, with the UK's climate change ambitions being amongst the highest in Europe, we will need to significantly increase our renewable energy growth without jeopardising electricity supply, or increasing costs for consumers.

The proposed Cleve Hill Solar Park is a pioneering scheme, which aims to apply private sector innovation without requiring government subsidies. Cleve Hill Solar Park Ltd is proposing to use battery storage technologies, which would store any excess solar power and distribute it to the grid when it's needed the most.

How will the local area benefit?

The Cleve Hill Solar Park could bring £27.25 million investment to Swale and Kent over a minimum period of 25 years. As a significant local business, Cleve Hill Solar Park Ltd will be contributing substantial business rates on an annual basis to the local councils. Based on current estimates of the potential generation capacity of Cleve Hill Solar Park, the revenue generated for Kent and Swale councils will be in excess of £1 million.

What will be included in Cleve Hill Solar Park?

Proposals for the Solar Park include a solar array, which will provide electricity to the national grid to power UK homes. The solar panels will have an East West layout in order to maximise the output of the solar farm throughout the day. There will be electrical connection infrastructure to connect the solar park to the Cleve Hill Substation. This is situated adjacent to the proposed solar park.

It is proposed to include an energy storage solution, so that Cleve Hill Solar Park can store the Sun's power and distribute it to the grid when it is needed the most.

Land will be provided for ecological mitigation and enhancement, with particular consideration to bird species.

Why more solar power?

Our goal is to make Cleve Hill Solar Park the lowest cost generator of energy in the UK. At over 350MW, Cleve Hill Solar Park could provide enough affordable and clean electricity to power over 110,000 homes.

This is also at a time when a quarter of the UK's generating capacity is due to close, and more renewable energy generation is needed to achieve the UK's goals of reducing our carbon emissions by 80%.

We also plan to use battery storage to help ensure that energy is fed into the grid at the time when it is most needed. To find out more visit the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy website and download the Government's Industrial Strategy here.

To learn more about the Government's clean growth ambitions, download the Government's Clean Growth Strategy here.

The final design and scale of our project will have regard to several environmental and technical variables alongside feedback received from consultation and the findings of our environmental impact assessment.

How will the park be secured?

Security fencing will not be used. Around the boundary of the site a deer fence will be used. A deer fence comprises of timber poles approximately two metres high with a light wire mesh. It is designed to allow for the movement of small mammals. Where possible, this fencing will be erected behind screening planting.

Wooden gates will be used where they already exist or are required.

How close will the panels be to homes?
We have been in ongoing dialogue with the nearest neighbours to the site. Following their comments and feedback we have re-designed areas of the site to either remove, set-back or screen developable areas for solar panels to reduce the potential visual impact from homes.

In the areas where solar panels will be set-back we propose to manage the land to improve biodiversity by enabling native species-rich meadows to develop.

Our screening planting plans will include a mixture of native deciduous and evergreen species that complement the existing vegetation in the landscape.

During construction will there be additional areas needed for compounds?
No. All compound areas for construction will be inside the site boundary.

Will there be security on site during construction?
24/7 security will be on site during the construction phase. This may comprise of around three to four security staff.

How will you manage the land?
We are currently working with industry leading experts in land management and ecosystem services on solar parks from Lancaster University and University of Birmingham to plan land management practices.

We have formed a Habitat Management Steering Group with Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT), RSPB and Natural England. This forum is used to discuss all aspects of ecology and ornithology on the site and agree mitigation proposals and habitat improvements for the site. The group met in February 2018 and will continue meeting throughout the development of the proposals.

One of the most exciting elements of potential biodiversity enhancement is the opportunity to support and improve conditions for bees. As part of this we are in discussions with the Bumblebee Trust and the 'Making a Buzz for the Coast' project to find ways in which we can support the population of bees on the site.

We are also proposing to graze sheep on the site which will allow the land to retain an agricultural use.

How will the flood defences be managed?
We have undertaken flood modelling for 1 in 200-year and 1 in 1000-year events based on flood predictions using predicted sea levels in 2070. This includes conservative flood modelling, predicting events which would have catastrophic impacts on the entire Thames Estuary and beyond. We have provided this modelling to the Environment Agency (EA).

We have also been in ongoing dialogue with the EA about their plans for the area over the next 100 years, such as the managed realignment of the existing flood defences. We responded to their Medway Estuary and Swale Strategy consultation along with other stakeholders in the area.

The site will be designed to be protected against flood events by raising the lowest electrical connection on the solar panels above predicted flood levels. As the topography of the site varies slightly, some areas are more susceptible to deeper flooding, this has produced a range of heights above ground level for the bottom edge of the panels. This ranges from 1.2m above the ground to 1.8m above the ground.

Who has responsibility for management?

The land within the site boundary will be managed by Cleve Hill Solar Park Ltd. We are in discussions with KWT, RSPB and Natural England about land management on the site through the Habitat Management Steering Group. We will produce a robust landscape and biodiversity management plan as part of the application, which will inform how the land will be managed.

What has happened after the first round of community consultation?

In December 2017, we undertook our Phase One public consultation which provided the project team with a large amount of valuable feedback regarding the initial development proposals. You can read a brief summary of this feedback in the Phase One Community Consultation Update, available to download from our website.

As well as this, we published our Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report and received feedback on this from a number of statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, and a Scoping Opinion from the Planning Inspectorate.

Our environmental and technical team have been undertaking a number of environmental impact assessments, gathering baseline data from which they can test the potential impact of Cleve Hill Solar Park and mitigate against any adverse impacts.

All of this information is being used to inform our project design. From this we will produce a more detailed design which we will consult on during our Phase Two public consultation period.

What about Public Rights of Way?

We will not be altering any of the existing Public Rights of Way (PROW). These will remain open during the operational lifetime of the project. PROWs may need to be temporarily closed or diverted for short periods of time during the construction of the solar park, but we will aim to minimise disturbance as much as possible.

We are working with Kent County Council on plans to enhance PROWs and potentially to extend the existing footpaths network. We look forward to updating plans for the next round of community consultation.

For all sources please visit our website.

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