

Kingsway Solar

Our approach to the environment

The Kingsway Solar development will require a Development Consent Order (DCO).

The Scheme is of a type and scale that has the potential for likely significant effects, and therefore we will be undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The Scheme's EIA is a key part of the DCO process.

What is an Environmental Impact Assessment?

An EIA is a process whereby baseline information on the existing environment is collected and potential impacts of the Scheme on the existing environment and communities are assessed. Mitigation measures to avoid, prevent, reduce or offset where possible any significant impacts, are developed with input from a team of technical specialists who will have consulted with a range of stakeholders.

We recognise that the Scheme has the potential to impact local communities and the surrounding environment. It is anticipated that construction activities have the potential to cause temporary increases in traffic, noise levels and potentially construction dust. The avoidance of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land where practical, and a sympathetic layout within the existing landscape to minimise landscape and visual impacts during operation will be key as the design of the Scheme is progressed.

The process is reported in an Environmental Statement, allowing the impacts to be understood by the public and authority considering the application before a decision is made.

Surveys and baseline data collection

We have started to gather existing baseline data from local record centres (e.g. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Record Centre (CPERC)) and you may have seen survey teams completing walkovers and surveys in the area. Our teams have commenced with terrestrial ecology surveys, Agricultural Land Classification to test the quality of the soil and geophysical surveys to support heritage assessments. Further survey work will continue in 2025, enabling us to build a detailed picture of the environmental features of the area and help to inform and develop the Scheme design.

EIA Scoping

We are currently developing an EIA Scoping Report which will set out our approach to the environmental assessment to establish what information may be needed to identify any likely significant effects from the Scheme.

The EIA Scoping Report will also set out the methods to be followed, using established industry guidelines and is being completed by experienced and qualified professionals in a wide range of environmental fields.

We are meeting with local planning officers and other stakeholders to share details and get their feedback on the Scheme and our proposed approach to the EIA.

The EIA Scoping Report is then submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) who invite consultation bodies including local planning authorities and other statutory stakeholders (such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England) to provide comment.

The Scoping Opinion received from PINS will be used to form the basis of the assessments required for the EIA.

Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)

Once we've agreed the scope of the EIA, the preliminary findings of the EIA process will be set out within the Preliminary Environmental Information Report.

The report represents a point in the EIA process where the design of the Scheme is still in development, and the likely significant effects are continuing to be understood. The PEIR will consider the current environment within the study area for the Scheme. The potential beneficial and adverse effects of the construction, operation and decommissioning phases will be considered. To identify the potential likely significant effects from the Scheme, the sensitivity of the environmental features and likely magnitude of impacts upon them will be considered. The PEIR will also consider potential mitigation and environmental enhancements.

The report will be published and shared for the statutory public consultation on the Scheme which is planned for early 2025. This is your opportunity to comment and provide your views on the early assessment outcomes.

Environmental Statement

The final results of our environmental assessment work will be published in an Environmental Statement. This will be included as part of our application for development consent that we'll submit to PINS.

PINS will examine the application on behalf of the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, before the Secretary of State makes the final decision whether or not to grant consent for the Scheme.



Land proposed for the Kingsway Solar site

What topics are to be included in the Environmental Statement?



Ecology and Biodiversity

Potential impacts on habitats and protected or notable species (such as birds, great crested newts, bats, badgers, etc.) relevant to the Scheme will be assessed. Surveys have already commenced for breeding and wintering birds, bats, habitats and notable plant communities. We will also outline our approach to enhancement and Biodiversity Net Gain.



Landscape and visual amenity

Initial site visits have been undertaken to understand the landscape and visual baseline and to identify receptors. The assessment will consider the potential impacts to the landscape character and visual amenity from the introduction of new infrastructure, including glint and glare issues, on a number of receptors (including residences and users of Public Rights of Way (PRoW)). We will consider ways that we can reduce potential impacts through the design of the scheme and other measures, including planting and screening.

No part of the Scheme lies within a statutorily designated landscape.



Historic environment

There are Scheduled Monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas and registered parks and gardens in or within proximity of the Scheme components. Geophysical surveys have commenced to map buried archaeological features. The assessment will consider the importance and likely scale of impacts on heritage assets, including buried features, and involve discussions with key stakeholders including the Historic England and the Cambridge Historic Environment Team (CHET).



Noise and vibration

In consultation with the local planning authorities, noise monitoring surveys would be agreed and undertaken as part of the EIA process to establish the baseline noise environment. The assessment will consider both construction and operation noise sources, including the solar modules, grid connection and on-site substations.



Traffic and transport

The traffic and transport assessment will look at issues such as road safety, congestion, road capacity, severance, effects on drivers and other road users. The assessment will focus on the increased traffic flows on the surrounding roads being used by HGVs and workers during construction. During operation, access will be required from time to time for routine maintenance.



Population

A range of potential effects on people and the community would be assessed including effects on employment, community access and recreation. The assessment will consider potential negative impacts as well as positive impacts such as opportunities for upskilling and educational opportunities for the local population, along with maintaining or enhancing recreation opportunities (e.g. PRoW).



Land, soils and groundwater

Survey work completed to date has focused on determining the extent of BMV agricultural land. This will be used to inform the design of the Scheme. The assessment will also consider potential impacts on source protection zones, sites of geological importance and land contamination from the proposed construction works.



Air quality

During construction, air quality issues could arise from dust caused by excavation and movement of spoil and emissions from machinery and vehicle movements. The assessment will consider impacts to both human and ecological receptors.



Climate

This assessment will look at the Scheme's greenhouse gas emissions and impact on climate both now and in the future. It will identify the Scheme's main sources of greenhouse gas emissions during construction, operation and decommissioning to find the most effective ways of reducing them.



Cumulative effects

There are two types of cumulative effects which will be considered: Intra-development effects and Inter-development effects.

Intra-development effects are those that occur because of multiple factors happening within the same development or project (e.g. noise and visual impacts affecting the same dwelling). Inter-development impacts are those that occur from multiple developments in the same area (e.g. infrastructure developments and residential developments in East and South Cambridgeshire).

Other environmental topics will be considered within the Scheme design, technical documents and management plans as part of the DCO application but won't necessarily have their own chapter within the Environmental Statement. These topics could include; water, glint and glare, waste and electric and magnetic fields.

Mitigation

Environmental mitigation refers to the measures proposed to avoid, prevent, reduce or offset the adverse environmental impacts of a project. Mitigation measures may include adopting technologies that minimise pollution or emissions, implementing best management practices, altering Scheme design to reduce potential impacts, and establishing environmental monitoring and management systems.

A suite of management plans will be produced alongside the Environmental Statement, which are likely to include; an Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan, Outline Soil Management Plan and Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan. We will be engaging with stakeholders on the content of these management plans as the project progresses.

Other documentation submitted with the DCO application

A number of other regulatory regimes require separate documents which will be produced to support the DCO application. These include the Planning Statement, Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). In addition a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) will be produced and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment completed. Although BNG is not currently a requirement for DCO applicants, measures will be incorporated through the design process to achieve a minimum of 10% BNG.



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What happens next

Our next step in the planning process is to submit an EIA Scoping Report and request an EIA Scoping Opinion from Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. The EIA Scoping Report will be submitted in December 2024.

We are at a very early stage in design for the Scheme. Therefore, following completion of the non-statutory consultation, consideration of the feedback and further technical and environmental surveys and studies, the design of the Scheme will be developed.

Once the scope of the EIA is defined and an initial design of the Scheme agreed, preliminary assessments of the impacts during construction, operation and decommissioning of the Scheme, including temporary and permanent impacts, will commence.

Further consultation will be undertaken on the outcomes of these preliminary assessments, through the publication of the PEIR for statutory consultation in early 2025. Feedback from this process will be used to refine the design of the Scheme, and mitigation measures, ahead of the DCO application in late 2025.

