

Large battery storage & solar farm planning application near Minety sub-station: information update

As many local residents may by now be aware, a planning application was made to Wiltshire County Council (WCC) in April 2020 for the installation and operation of a large solar farm and battery storage near the Minety sub-station (WCC planning reference 20/03528/FUL). Following a time extension, the public consultation process ran until 28 July 2020.

The developer, JBM Solar, seeks to convert 271 acres of undulating, greenfield land into a commercial solar farm (generating up to 50MW) and a battery storage facility to warehouse excess supply.

The proposed site would be situated in an area of land between Bullock's Horn and Dog Trap Lane (running west to east) and between the B4040 from Charlton to Minety and the Cloatley/Upper Minety minor road (running south to north).

A public meeting for local communities could not take place in March 2020, as originally planned, due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. To date, no clear alternative public consultation forum has been proposed.

Consultation responses

The parish councils of Hankerton, Minety and Oaksey submitted written responses to WCC objecting to the proposal. Charlton parish council's response stated no objection, subject to certain conditions. Over 60 other written responses have been made to WCC by members of the public, and by CPRE Wiltshire, the countryside charity, objecting to the proposal. About 10 representations in support of the proposal have been provided. All of these responses can be viewed at WCC's planning portal.

Who is JBM Solar?

The proposal is made on behalf of JBM Solar Project 14 Ltd which is ultimately owned by PP Asset Management Limited, an English company (source: Companies House filings). PP Asset Management Limited is an independent investment and asset management company based in London, founded in 2009. According to its website (<https://www.ppassetmanagement.com/>), it serves as the exclusive investment vehicle for its owner, Philip Pels.

What is Wiltshire's contribution to large solar/battery storage developments?

The Government's Renewable Energy Planning Database (June 2020), published by Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ("BEIS")¹ contains details of all renewables projects in the UK on a county by county basis. Analysis of this data indicates that, as at June 2020:

- Wiltshire has the highest number (19) of existing and proposed² large (i.e. with installed capacity of 25 megawatts (MW) or more)³ battery storage site and solar farm developments on a combined basis, relative to all other counties in the UK.
- Wiltshire has the highest number (11) of such battery storage developments, nationally, and the second highest number of such solar farm developments (8), after Cambridgeshire (9).

¹ Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewable-energy-planning-database-monthly-extract>

² Development Status includes: 'Appeal Granted, Operational, Planning Application Submitted, Planning Permission Granted and Under Construction'

³ For solar farms, approximately 25 acres of land is required for every 5 MW of installation, according to the Solar Farm Association <https://www.solar-trade.org.uk/solar-farms/>

- Wiltshire has the second highest amount of existing and proposed installed capacity in the UK from such large battery storage and solar farm developments, both on an individual basis (battery storage: 529 MW, solar: 381 MW) and a combined basis (910 MW), compared with all other counties in the UK.
- at 910 MW, Wiltshire's existing and proposed installed capacity from such developments is second only to that of Kent (1,027 MW, inclusive of Kent's recently approved 700 MW solar and battery and storage combined development at Cleve Hill Solar Park) and more than double that of Cambridgeshire (434 MW), the next highest county on a combined basis.

This data has been presented in the form of tables, heat maps and graphs (see separate attachments).

Does Wiltshire have a policy relating to large solar farms?

No. WCC has confirmed, pursuant to a Freedom of Information request made by the Minety Solar Farm Action Group (MSFAG), that it does not have a specific policy for large solar farms.

Minety Solar Farm Action Group

A group of residents recently formed MSFAG:

- Hankerton/Cloatley - Jacqui Erskine Crum and Piers Johansen;
- Minety - Russell Gardner and Ewan Morrison; and
- Oaksey - Jonathan Hall and Patrick Crawford.

Its purpose is to help raise awareness of the proposal in the local community, identify further key information relevant to a proper assessment and help others in the local community articulate a response.

MSFAG have suggested to WCC that a policy should be formulated for large solar farms given that national data indicates Wiltshire is the highest overall contributor of large solar/battery storage developments in the UK. A copy of the MSFAG letter dated 28 July 2020 to WCC on this topic is available at WCC's planning portal.

Local petition

MSFAG has been conducting a petition of local residents to seek their backing of the majority view of the parish councils to oppose the solar farm proposal. So far, more than 130 residents across Hankerton/Cloatley, Minety and Oaksey have added their support to the petition opposing the proposal.

Should you wish to register your support for the petition to oppose the proposal, please contact one of the members, or email MSFAG at: msfag2020@gmail.com.

What next?

WCC has indicated on its planning portal that its 'target decision date' is 1 September 2020. It is possible that this date is further extended if the matter is referred to the WCC Planning Committee.

WCC has informally indicated that it will consider representations from the public through its planning portal prior to the decision date, notwithstanding the consultation period has ended.