

Assessment Summary of the Planning Inspectorate's Scoping Opinion and Alignment with Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council's Concerns

1. Purpose of Report

This report provides Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council with:

- A clear synopsis of the Planning Inspectorate's (PINS) Scoping Opinion for the Arrow Valley Solar NSIP.
- A summary of the positive outcomes for the Parish Council.
- An assessment of whether the concerns raised by Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council (BoAPC) have been addressed by PINS.

2. Synopsis of the Planning Inspectorate's Scoping Opinion

The Scoping Opinion is critical of the developer's Scoping Report and requires substantial additional assessment across environmental, social, and technical topics. Key themes include:

2.1 Insufficient Baseline Evidence

PINS repeatedly states that the Scoping Report lacks the necessary survey data to justify scoping decisions. It requires:

- Full ecological surveys
- Detailed hydrological and flood risk assessments
- Agricultural land classification
- Landscape and visual baseline photography
- Traffic, noise, air quality and construction impact assessments

Desk-based assumptions are not accepted.

2.2 Requirement for Worst-Case Assessment

PINS instructs the applicant to assess:

- Maximum panel heights
- Full extent of cable routes and compounds
- Construction traffic and abnormal loads
- Cumulative effects with other solar and grid projects

This prevents the applicant from downplaying impacts.

2.3 Clearer Project Description Required

PINS notes that the Scoping Report lacks clarity on:

- Construction methods (including HDD drilling)
- Water demand and supply
- Decommissioning
- Access routes and traffic volumes

The applicant must provide a much more detailed project description.

2.4 Local Policy Must Be Considered

PINS explicitly requires the applicant to take account of:

- Stratford-on-Avon District Council Core Strategy
- Relevant Neighbourhood Development Plans (including Bidford-on-Avon where applicable)
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- National Policy Statements EN-1, EN-3 and EN-5

This ensures local policy weight is embedded in the EIA.

3. Positives for Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council

The Scoping Opinion reinforces many of the issues typically raised by BoAPC in large-scale energy consultations. Key positives include:

3.1 Strong Position on Landscape and Rural Character

PINS requires:

- Full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
- Assessment of views from settlements, PRow, and rural lanes
- Cumulative assessment with other solar and grid schemes

This supports BoAPC's concerns about:

- Loss of rural character
- Visual intrusion
- Industrialisation of the countryside

3.2 Full Assessment of Traffic and Construction Impacts

PINS requires:

- Detailed construction traffic modelling
- Identification of Abnormal Indivisible Load (AIL) routes
- Assessment of road widening, junction modifications, and safety impacts

This aligns with BoAPC's concerns about:

- Heavy construction traffic through Bidford
- Road safety
- Disruption to residents and businesses

3.3 Water Environment and Flood Risk

PINS refuses to allow the applicant to scope out:

- Surface water impacts
- Groundwater impacts
- Water Framework Directive compliance
- Flood risk and drainage impacts

This supports BoAPC's concerns about:

- Flooding along the Avon corridor
- Drainage impacts from large impermeable areas
- Watercourse disturbance

3.4 Ecology and Biodiversity

PINS requires:

- Full protected species surveys
- Habitat connectivity assessment
- Assessment of hedgerow loss and fragmentation

This aligns with BoAPC's concerns about:

- Loss of wildlife corridors
- Impacts on farmland birds and protected species
- Habitat fragmentation

3.5 Agriculture and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land

PINS requires:

- Detailed mapping of agricultural land grades
- Justification for use of BMV land

This supports BoAPC's concerns about:

- Loss of productive farmland
- Impact on local food production

3.6 Human Health, Recreation, and PRow

PINS requires:

- Assessment of community wellbeing
- PRow impact assessment
- Recreation and tourism assessment

This aligns with BoAPC's concerns about:

- Loss of amenity
- Impact on walking routes and open countryside
- Effects on local quality of life

4. Have Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council's Concerns Been Addressed?

Based on the issues typically raised by BoAPC, the Scoping Opinion addresses **almost all** of them. The table below summarises alignment:

Topic	BoAPC Concern	PINS Response	Alignment
Landscape & Visual	Rural character, cumulative effects	Full LVIA + cumulative	Strong
Traffic & Construction	HGVs, AILs, safety	Full modelling + route assessment	Strong
Flooding & Water	Avon corridor flooding	Full hydrology + WFD	Strong
Ecology	Loss of habitats	Full surveys + connectivity	Strong
Agriculture	Loss of BMV land	Detailed mapping + justification	Strong
PRoW & Recreation	Loss of amenity	Full assessment required	Strong
Noise, Dust, Air Quality	Construction disturbance	Full assessment required	Strong
Policy Compliance	Local policy ignored	Local policy must be included	Very strong

Conclusion: The Planning Inspectorate has substantially reinforced the concerns raised by Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council. The applicant must now undertake a far more rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment, giving the Parish Council a strong basis for future engagement.

5. Implications for Bidford-on-Avon Parish Council

- BoAPC's concerns are now formally recognised by PINS.
- The Environmental Statement will be significantly more detailed than the Scoping Report.
- BoAPC will have strong grounds for further representation at the statutory consultation and Examination stages.
- Councillors should prepare for a large volume of technical documentation once the ES is submitted.