

Delegated Report

North Hertfordshire District Council

Screening Opinion in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended)

**Site: Land between Stevenage Road and the A602 Wymondley Bypass, Stevenage
Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire**

**Proposal: Proposed development of a battery energy storage system, access,
landscaping and associated infrastructure**

This screening opinion relates to the above proposed development and is based on the information request dated 30 January 2025.

This report confirms the view of the Local Planning Authority that the proposed development described above does not fall within Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations and does not therefore require a mandatory Environmental Statement.

The proposed development described above falls within Schedule 2, Section 3(a) of the Regulations which relates to 'Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water'. The proposed development site exceeds the threshold/site criteria under Section 3(a) as the development site exceeds 0.5 hectares. As such, the Local Planning Authority adopts the following screening opinion to assess whether the proposed development is Environmental Impact Assessment development.

This report appraises the characteristics of the site and the proposed development against the criteria in Schedule 3 of the Regulations and against the current Planning Practice Guidance and concludes that the proposed development is not likely to give rise to significant environmental impacts and so would not require a formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and an Environmental Statement (ES).

1. Summary of the proposed development

- 1.1 The proposed development is for a battery energy storage system, access, landscaping and associated infrastructure. The indicative layout shows the proposal would include a compound consisting of the following infrastructure:

- 32 No. battery units
- 16 No. power conversion systems
- 8 No. ring main unit/transformer modules
- A substation containing a main transformer, auxiliary transformer and associated disconnectors/circuit breaker and kiosk
- A switchroom housing 6 No. rooms and ancillary cabinets
- A control building housing control, operational infrastructure and office welfare facilities
- CCTV and lighting
- Access road

- Security fence and access gates

- 1.2 The proposed development would be located on the south side of Stevenage Road around 400m to the west of Little Wymondley. The field would utilise an existing access off Stevenage Road. Stevenage Road provides a connection to a priority junction with the A602 circa 300m to the west. The A602 links to Junction 8 of the A1M to the east and continues towards Hitchin to the west.
- 1.3 The site itself is an agricultural field bounded to the north and east by substantial wooded area. To the west, the site is bounded by isolated trees which form a broken-field boundary. To the south, the site is bounded by a mixture of trees and vegetation of varying heights with the A602 Wymondley bypass adjacent to this boundary. A pylon carrying high voltage transmission cables sails over the field.

2. Assessment against Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 of the Regulations

- 2.1 The proposed development does not fall within any of the categories of development set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations.
- 2.2 The proposed development falls within column 1 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations being categorised as being within Section 3(a) which relates to 'Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water' forming part of category 3 ('Energy industry').
- 2.3 The site is not within a 'sensitive area' as defined under Regulation 2 of the EIA regulations.
- 2.4 The development site boundary exceeds the relevant area threshold of 0.5 hectares.
- 2.5 Based on the above, the proposed development represents Schedule 2 development, however this does not automatically mean that the proposal is EIA development. In accordance with the Regulations, a screening exercise must be carried out in order to determine whether an EIA is required, considering the proposals against the selection criteria identified in Schedule 3 of the Regulations.
- 2.6 Regulation 5(4) of the EIA Regulations 2017 outlines that the Local Planning authority must take account the selection criteria set out under Schedule 3 of the regulations when determining whether a Schedule 2 development is an EIA development.

3. Selection Criteria for Screening Schedule 2 Development

Site location and context

- 3.1 The land the subject of this Screening Opinion covers an area of approximately 0.75 hectares and forms part of a wider agricultural field which has an overall size of around 2.5 hectares. The site is currently accessed via an existing access point off Stevenage Road.
- 3.2 The site is located within the Green Belt to the east of Little Wymondley and to the east of Hitchin.
- 3.3 The agricultural field is located within Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3 of the Flood Map as identified by the Environment Agency. However, it is clear from the submitted plans that the

development proposal would be confined to the westernmost portion of the site which is within Flood Zone 1 only.

Assessment against Schedule 3 of the Regulations

Characteristics of the development

Schedule 3 states that the characteristics of the development must be considered with particular regard to the following:

3.4 a) *The size of the development.*

In this case, the main operational part of the site to be occupied by the BESS compound would be around 0.75 hectares. The remainder of the agricultural field which measures at around 1.75 hectares can be utilised for any proposed landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

3.5 b) *Cumulation with other development.*

The potential for cumulative impact with other development is not considered significant as the proposal is not of a significant scale. There are no nearby sensitive receptors with the nearest residential properties being over 135 metres away to the west of the site.

3.6 c) *Use of natural resources*

The proposed development would support the move to low-carbon electricity generation through addressing the intermittency and voltage issues associated with renewable energy technologies. The proposed development would not result in the loss of any sensitive land, soil, water or biodiversity assets. The proposed development would seek to deliver biodiversity net gains through landscape planting.

3.7 d) *The production of waste*

The development would be unlikely to produce waste both within the construction phase and operational phase. Batteries will be recycled. The development will be unlikely to result in significant environmental effects in terms of waste production. Construction waste is an inevitability with any development project.

3.8 e) *Pollution and Nuisances*

A certain level of noise generation would be expected from the proposed equipment and associated infrastructure. However, it is considered this would be negligible and only applicable to receptors to the south-east of the site. Furthermore, the proposed development would be bounded by screening along the field boundaries of the site, which would assist in mitigating impacts to potential receptors and beyond.

3.9 f) *The risk of major accidents*

Natural disaster events are not considered relevant to the proposed development. The main risk of accidents is likely to be through vehicular traffic entering and leaving the site. However, measures and requirements can be put in place to ensure that the access points

are in accordance with HCC Highways policy to ensure safe and sufficient access (with suitable visibility etc).

In terms of the proposed BESS facility, the BESS units would be constantly monitored to ensure appropriate performance, temperature and overall safety. It is anticipated that a Battery Fire Safety Management Plan would be developed for the proposal once detailed designs are finalised. This matter could be secured by way of an appropriately worded planning condition.

3.10 *g) the risks to human health*

The development would not give rise to any impacts on water or result in any air pollution during its operation. The development itself would reduce the reliance on fossil fuel power stations and aid in facilitating the continued expansion of renewable energy development in the UK.

Location of development (having regard to environmental sensitivity of the area to be affected)

Schedule 3 states that the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by development must be considered having regard in particular to:

3.11 *a) the existing land use*

The existing site is agricultural land. There are existing trees and vegetation along the boundaries of the site. The existing land use is not considered sensitive to the proposed use, as it is not of any significant environmental value.

3.12 *b) abundance/quality/regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area*

The development would not likely have a significant impact on immediate/onsite/nearby natural resources. There is no water or significant ecology on the site. The development would not require a significant disturbance to the existing site as it would involve in the main the placing of containers and equipment on the site.

3.13 *c) absorption capacity of the natural environment*

The site of the proposed development:

- i. Is not wetland, riparian area of river mouth;
- ii. Is not within a natural coastal or maritime habitat;
- iii. Is not within a mountain or forest area;
- iv. Is not within a nature reserve;
- v. Is not within a European nature conservation designation and is remote from all other nature conservation designation, with no impact pathways;
- vi. Is not within an area known to exceed existing environmental standard; and
- vii. Is not within a designated landscape of historic, cultural or architectural significance.

Characteristics of the potential impact

- 3.14 The likely significant effects of the development on the environment must be considered in relation to criteria set out in paragraphs 1 and 2 above, with regard to the impact of the development on the factors specified in regulation 4(2), taking into account—

3.15 *The extent and nature of the impact*

The impact of the proposed development would be largely limited to the site and not the surrounding area.

3.16 *The transboundary nature of the impact*

The proposal does not span any borders or result in any air borne or water borne emissions. As such, there would be no potential for transboundary effects.

3.17 *The intensity and complexity of the impact*

There are no particular complexities in either construction or operation of the development.

3.18 *The probability of the impact*

Any adverse impacts can be mitigated by design (e.g. noise limited at evenings and a landscape scheme to reduce visual impact).

3.19 *The expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact*

The development is likely to have a permanent impact, although not of a substantial local significance.

3.20 *The cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development*

There are no developments which the proposed development is considered likely to combine with to cause significant cumulative environmental effects.

3.21 *The possibility of effectively reducing the impact*

Planning conditions can be imposed to reduce the impact of noise and visual impact.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The Local Planning Authority recognises that the EIA Planning Practice Guidance states that only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an assessment. The Planning Practice Guidance states that the exclusive thresholds offer only a broad indication of the scale of development, which is likely to be a candidate for EIA, but that the requirements need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. In this case, the proposed development would not be of a scale or a nature to justify the need for an EIA or ES.

- 4.2 The NPPG states: 'Environmental Impact Assessment should not be a barrier to growth and will only apply to a small proportion of projects considered within the town and country

planning regime. Local planning authorities have a well-established general responsibility to consider the environmental implications of developments which are subject to planning control. The 2017 Regulations integrate Environmental Impact Assessment procedures into this framework and should only apply to those projects which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. Local planning authorities and developers should carefully consider if a project should be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment. If required, they should limit the scope of assessment to those aspects of the environment that are likely to be significantly affected'.

- 4.3 In terms of Energy Industry projects, the guidance states that EIA assessment is unlikely unless the new development is on a significantly greater scale than the previous use or the types of impact are of a markedly different nature. In this case, the proposed development would not be of a scale or a nature to justify the need for an EIA.
- 4.4 In view of the above analysis, and in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations and guidance in the Planning Practice Guidance, it is considered that any environmental effects that are likely as a result of the proposed development can be adequately addressed by specific studies and reports that accompany or can accompany an application for planning permission and an Environmental Impact assessment is not required in this instance. Accordingly, the Local Planning Authority issues a 'Negative Opinion'.