

Dealt with by: Mrs J Curley

Our Ref: SMD/2021/0352

Direct Dial: 01538 395400 ext. 4124

Your Ref:

Date: 5th August 2021

Jake Stentiford
155 Main Street
Grenoside
S35 8PN

Dear Mr. Stentiford,

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017
Adoption of an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Opinion
Land East of Cellarhead Battery Site Rownall Road Wetley Rocks Staffordshire
LPA reference SMD/2021/0352

I refer to your request under 6 (1) of the above Regulations for an opinion as to whether the proposal is EIA development requiring the submission of an Environmental Statement.

The proposal is for a battery storage facility. The site extends to over 2.65 hectares and the proposal would comprise of 140 battery containers having approximate dimensions of 3.5 metres in height, 12.19 metres in length and 2.44 metres in width. Each container is accompanied by an inverter and a transformer unit. In addition to the battery storage units, 6 switch rooms are located throughout the site. All of the equipment is contained within a secure 4m high acoustic fence enclosure. It is said that the proposal will generate an electrical capacity of approximately 300MW

Having regard to the above Regulations, the proposal is Schedule 2 development. It falls within Column 1 under 3a) *Energy Industry: Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (unless included in Schedule 1)*

For such development Column 2 refers to the applicable threshold and criteria being the development area exceeding 0.5 hectares. As this is exceeded in this case, a Screening opinion is required.

In preparing this screening opinion the LPA has had regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the Regulations. To assist in determining whether the project is likely to have significant environmental effects the LPA has also had regard to the Indicative thresholds in the Planning Practice Guidance. This advises that key issues to consider include emission to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel and any visual impact.

The LPA also has used the recommended Screening Matrix.

Characteristics of the development

The size of this proposal is larger than the threshold area which may suggest an EIA could be needed. These refer variously to sites of more than 0.5 hectares and outputs of more than 50MW.

The main impacts are expected to be landscape/visual, noise (including from traffic during construction). However the view reached is that these impacts are unlikely to give rise to significant effects in terms of the Regulations but they and other material issues will require close scrutiny at the planning application stage.

In terms of landscape/visual impact, the placing of 140 battery containers on concrete plinths within a 4m acoustic fenced enclosure has the potential to have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of this rural area, introducing as it would a very urban form of development. This harm is not anticipated to be at a level leading to significant environmental effects owing to the scale of the proposal. Nevertheless a comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact assessment and detailed Landscaping scheme will be required to demonstrate that landscape/visual impact can be mitigated to an acceptable level. It is noted that there is reference to bunding being proposed to screen the site of up to 4m in height. A note of caution that bunding of such a height can appear as an incongruous, unnatural feature in the countryside. It can also adversely affect adjacent existing hedgerows and trees and is difficult to disguise effectively with planting. It often creates even more challenging ground conditions in which to attempt to successfully establish new planting.

There are a number of houses nearby whose amenity could be impacted by the proposal as a result of noise emissions from the battery containers and construction traffic. The Noise Impact Assessment provided with the Screening request does appear to demonstrate that any impacts identified can be mitigated so as not to add to ambient noise levels or result in undue disturbance to the occupiers of nearby residential properties. The NIA supports the judgement that significant effects are unlikely as a result of noise emissions. Full details should be included with the planning application.

In terms of traffic generation, once operational it is understood that the facility will be largely unmanned and thus traffic generation would be minimal. During commissioning there would be construction traffic. This is considered unlikely however to be at a scale that could give rise to significant environmental effects. Full details of this are unknown and would need to be provided in a Transport Statement and Construction Management Plan. The Local Highway Authority have asked that the following should be addressed; daily number of vehicles, types and sizes of delivery vehicles; approach routes for deliveries; consideration of the effect of large delivery vehicles on relatively narrow lanes and proposals to safeguard or repair damage to carriageway, edge and verge and proposals for access (widening, hard surfacing, visibility splay) and consideration of whether alternative access points are available i.e. via the existing substation. Details of visits required for ongoing operations and maintenance will also be required.

The ecology of the site is not known. However advised by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, it is considered unlikely that the proposal would lead to significant ecological impacts provided net gain is provided, appropriate surveys are carried out and reasonable avoidance measures for nesting birds, mammals etc are included. Your attention is drawn to the full comments of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, ecological advisors to the Council dated 4th August 2021 which

sets out the documents expected to be provided with the planning application and includes suggested ecological enhancements for the site.

On the positive environmental benefit, the proposal will generate an electrical capacity of approximately 300MW. The export of the energy stored would be transmitted via new underground cabling to the existing substation which is approx. 190m to the east.

Overall the characteristics of the development are considered unlikely to give rise to significant effects for the purposes of the Regulations.

Location of the development

The site is not within a Sensitive area in terms of the Regulations. The site is within the Wetley Moor SSI impact risk zone but the proposal is considered unlikely to cause any direct impacts. The main risk would likely be from a major fire outbreak but this is considered unlikely given the legal requirement to carry out a Fire Risk Assessment and incorporate mitigation measures as set out in your e-mail of the 4th August. The site is within the Green Belt and is open countryside in a rural area characterised by isolated farmhouses and dwellings. The character of the landscape will completely change for the lifetime of the development. Although it is reversible, the submission indicates a life of 40 years. The matter of landscape character will be a key consideration in the planning application. It will need to be addressed as part of the comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment referred to above. For the purposes of the Regulations however significant effects are considered to be unlikely.

Characteristics of the potential impact

The impacts in this proposal are specific and judged relatively limited in the EIA assessment context so as not to be considered complex. Although the life of the project is given to be 40 years, which would represent a significant proportion of people's lives, the impacts are likely in the main to be readily reversible should the development be brought to an end and removed. Overall, the LPA is of the opinion that any potential impacts would not be of a magnitude to suggest that an environmental statement is required. There would be no trans frontier impact.

The development would not be of more than local importance and would not involve unusually complex and potentially hazardous environmental effects. There would be no significant cumulative effect. Although the proposal will be seen in association with the existing substation, the scale is such that it would not be significant in terms of the Regulations. The Council is currently considering two other Screening opinions for battery storage related to the Cellarhead sub station on nearby sites and if these were to come forward there would be the matter of cumulative impact to consider. However it is not known at this stage if planning applications will follow. The information provided in your e-mail of the 14th July suggests that cumulative impact is unlikely to be an issue at present due to the available capacity for new connections at the substation. The National Grid document, National Grid, GSP Availability, supplied (but also publicly available) shows 276 MW of available demand headroom/ import capacity at the Cellarhead substation. It is understood from your e-mail that further capacity would require the substation to be expanded and that this could take several years if it were to happen. Other considerations include the fact that one of the other sites has limited if any visual connection with the subject site. In addition, a negative Screening opinion was issued in October 2019 for a large solar farm under SMD/2019/0568. It also included the subject site but it has never come forward as a formal proposal. Cumulative impact will need to be addressed in the planning application but on the information available to the Council at present it is considered unlikely to lead to significant environmental effects in terms of the Regulations.

Given the nature, scale and location of the proposal it is not anticipated to have any significant environmental effects in terms of use of natural resources, waste, heritage, pollution, flooding, population and human health, water resources, biodiversity, landscape and visual, transport/access, land use, land stability and climate change, nor will it result in a risk of major accidents/disasters.

For the reasons above it is considered that the development would not be likely to have EIA significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location. This judgement is based on the information provided with the Screening request and currently available to the Local Planning Authority.

Under regulation 6(9) it is hereby confirmed that in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the above development is not EIA development in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

I trust that the above is of assistance

Yours sincerely

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

Head of Development Services