

13 December 2023

Our Ref: P60-SCR

Planning and Buildings
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Moorlands House
Stockwell Street
Leek
Staffordshire
ST13 6HQ

By email: planning@staffmoorlands.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR A SCREENING OPINION UNDER REGULATION 6 TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017 (AS AMENDED).

PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF A BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM, 400KV SUBSTATION, ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE AND WORKS ON LAND AT GREENFIELDS FARM, THORNEY EDGE ROAD, BAGNALL, STOKE-ON-TRENT, ST9 9LA.

Enso Energy requests an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion from Staffordshire Moorlands District Council ('SMDC') with regards to the development of a Battery Energy Storage System ('BESS'), 400kV substation and associated infrastructure and works located on land Greenfields Farm, Thorney Edge Road, Bagnall, Stoke-on-Trent, ST9 9LA. This request is made under Regulations 6(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) Regulations 2017 ("the EIA Regulations").

EIA Requirement

Battery storage projects are not specifically referenced in Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations, however it is considered such projects are a subset of energy generation. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Environmental Impact Assessment¹ states: *"In determining whether a particular proposal for development is included within one of the categories of development... local planning authorities and developers should have regard to... a "wide scope and broad purpose"*". Given this, it is therefore considered that the Proposed Development is a subset of, and constitutes Schedule 2 development under Section 3(a) *'Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water'* as the area of development exceeds 0.5 hectares and accordingly it is appropriate to seek a Screening Opinion from SMDC as the relevant Local Planning Authority.

In accordance with Regulation 6(2), this request is accompanied by the following information to assist SMDC in adopting an EIA Screening Opinion:

- A plan sufficient to identify the land;

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/environmental-impact-assessment>. Paragraph 031 (Reference ID: 4-031-20170728).

- A description of the development; including in particular a description of the physical characteristics of the development and a description of the location of the development, with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected;
- A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development;
- A description of any likely significant effects of the Proposed Development on the environment resulting from expected residues and emissions and use of natural resources, in particular soil, land, water and biodiversity; and
- Such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make.

This screening request considers the need for an Environmental Statement (ES) to accompany a planning application, with consideration of the relevant selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 development presented in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides guidance on EIA screening and how to assess whether a development is likely to give rise to significant environmental effects, such as to require an EIA. Paragraph 018 (Ref ID: 4-018-20170728) of the PPG states: *‘only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an Environmental Impact Assessment’*.

As set out in Paragraph 023 (Ref ID: 4-023-20170728) of the PPG: *‘Developers are encouraged to identify any features of their proposed development and any measures envisaged to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been significant adverse effects on the environment and to include these with the information required to inform the screening decision’*. This approach is in accordance with Regulation 6 of the EIA Regulations.

Site Location and Description

The Site is located approximately 700 metres to the north of Werrington and approximately 2.7 kilometres to the east of Stoke-on-Trent. The land immediately surrounding the Site comprises arable and grazing land, set within well-established hedgerow and tree planting. The National Grid Cellarhead Substation is located approximately 450 metres to the northeast of the BESS Site; Wetley Moor Common is located approximately 470 metres to the west of the BESS Site.

The Site (excluding the underground cable to the Point of Connection (PoC)) comprises land totalling approximately 8.9 hectares (see Location Plan at Appendix 1)

The Site is mainly rural in character with some localised intrusion of man-made features, such as nearby agricultural buildings, overhead electricity transmission lines and the National Grid Cellarhead Substation. The Site is accessed using existing access tracks from Thorney Edge Road to the northwest of the Site.

The field network within the Site is characterised by hedgerows with tree planting. A Public Right of Way (PRoW) ‘Bagnall 35’ shares the proposed access track into the Site, before splitting into two separate footpaths to the northeast of the Site. The PRoW ‘Cheddleton 49’ runs along the southern boundary of the Site.

The Site is located within the Green Belt.

Planning and Environmental Designations

The Site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations or assets that relate to biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage.

The Site is located within the Wetley Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) impact zone. The SSSI is located approximately 450m to the west of the Site and the Proposed Development is considered unlikely to cause any direct impacts on this designation.

The Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning indicates that the site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1 – land at the lowest risk of flooding.

There are no designated or non-designated heritage assets within the Site. The closest Listed Building is the Grade II Listed 'Stone Post at SJ 9342 4781' approximately 950 metres to the southeast of the Site.

The Site is in a 'Disadvantaged' Less Favoured Area ('LFA'). The LFAs consist of 'Disadvantaged' and 'Severely Disadvantaged'; these are areas where the natural characteristics (geology, altitude, climate, etc.) make it difficult for farmers to compete. According to the Natural England Provisional Agricultural Land Classification maps, the Site is located on Grade 4 land and is therefore not considered to be 'Best or Most Versatile' land.

Planning History

In August 2021 an EIA Screening request was submitted to SMDC for a *"Solar farm (approx. 2268 panels) of approximately 1.5MW with Battery Storage facility (approx. 60 containers) up to 57MW on 4.25 hectares of land at Greenfields Farm, Thorney Edge Road, Bagnall, Staffordshire, ST9 9LA"*.

The Council considered the main impacts related to landscape/visual, noise and traffic during construction, but that these impacts were unlikely to give rise to significant effects and could be assessed through the planning application.

The Council's Screening Opinion confirmed that the development is not EIA Development in terms of the EIA Regulations.

Proposed Development

The proposal is for the construction, operation and maintenance of a Battery Energy Storage System and 400kV Substation with a connection to the National Grid. Planning permission for the BESS element is sought for a time-limited period of 40 years.

The main components of the proposal comprise:

- Battery compound (including battery modules housed in shipping containers or similar; inverter/transformer units in shipping containers or similar; auxiliary transformer; switchgear and associated buildings comprising control rooms and switchgear rooms);
- 400kV substation;
- Perimeter fencing and CCTV/infra-red cameras mounted on posts along the internal perimeter of the Site;
- Underground cabling;
- Proposed access improvements from Thorney Edge Road;
- Compacted internal crushed stone compound and tracks to allow vehicular access;
- Landscaping to include bunded planting, biodiversity enhancements and surface water attenuation measures (to be designed as part of the evolving design).

The construction of the proposed development would take place over 12 months, with construction and delivery vehicles entering the site via an existing access along Thorney Edge Road. This access is currently used by farm traffic and HGVs and is considered suitable for construction deliveries.

A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) will be prepared and submitted with the planning application and be implemented during the construction phase. The aim of the CTMP is to reduce the effect of the construction phase on the highway network. It will contain all the required information for the construction phase, as well as package of agreed mitigation measures.

Operation and Decommissioning

Once operational there would be limited vehicle visits each month comprising a transit style van for maintenance purposes, accessing the Site via the existing access from Thorney Edge Road.

A Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) would be prepared and submitted with the planning application. The LEMP will provide a detailed planting design to demonstrate how the land would be managed throughout the operational phase of the development. It is anticipated that it would be managed in such a way as to deliver significant biodiversity net gains.

After a 40-year period the BESS would be decommissioned with all equipment and built structures associated with the BESS would be removed from the Site and the land restored to agricultural use.

Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

The Screening process should consider the development proposals against the criteria and thresholds which are included within the EIA Regulations and accompanying Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) in determining the requirement for an ES to accompany an application for planning permission.

Schedule 3 of the Regulations sets out the criteria for screening Schedule 2 developments. The characteristics and location of the Proposed Development along with the characteristics of the likely significant effects are determinants as to whether the Proposed Development constitutes EIA development.

The characteristics of the Proposed Development together with its location and potential temporary effects have been assessed against the following considerations:

- Landscape and visual;
- Biodiversity;
- Amenity (noise);
- The use of agricultural land;
- Traffic and access; and
- Cumulative effects.

An appraisal of Schedule 3 is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Assessment of Proposed Development as EIA Development

Characteristics of Development	Assessment	EIA
Size and design of development	The Site area is approximately 8.9 hectares, exceeding 0.5 hectare threshold. The maximum height of the battery containers and associated buildings would be approximately 3 m. The 400kV substation would have a maximum height of approximately 13 m, however the substation will be partly underground and therefore the visual impacts will be reduced.	No

Characteristics of Development	Assessment	EIA
	There are opportunities to mitigate views through design with hard landscaping, soft landscaping and additional planting for visual screening and ecological benefit. The overall extent of ground disturbance on Site would be minimised with the area excavated limited to cabling, bases for the battery storage containers, the inverter/transformer stations and the substation. The height and extent of hard landscaping required to enclose the BESS will be established as part of the ongoing project design. The connecting cable to the Cellarhead National Grid Substation will be laid underground.	
Cumulation with other development	As part of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment a cumulative assessment will be undertaken considering existing and/or other committed development within the surrounding area.	No
Use of natural resources	The Proposed Development comprises batteries and other ancillary electrical equipment, all of which use natural resources. However, it would also make efficient use of these resources and provide a reliable, flexible store of low carbon energy over time, reducing the overall requirement for high-polluting fossil fuel generation for the lifetime of the development. The Site would then revert to arable land and grazing on decommissioning.	No
Production of waste	No waste would be produced other than a limited amount during construction through earthworks, excavation of cable trenches and foundations for the substation, batteries, and other associated buildings. Much of the excavated material would be reused on site (i.e. for backfilling cable trenches and landscaping bunds). The battery containers are delivered in modular form.	No
Pollution and nuisances	Noise impacts are anticipated to be limited from the battery cooling equipment and on-site substation. These are not likely to be perceptible to nearby sensitive receptors above background noise levels when mitigation measures are factored into the assessment. Mitigation will be “designed in” to the BESS layout to ensure noise generated is not perceptible above background noise levels. There will be no harmful pollutants or odours. Disturbance arising from construction and related traffic will be limited and short term in nature.	No
Risks to human health	There would be a low risk of accidents during the temporary construction period. Access into the BESS and substation compound during construction will be restricted by security fencing, site operatives	No

Characteristics of Development	Assessment	EIA
	and security cameras. The site will be constantly monitored remotely during operation.	
Location of Development	Assessment	EIA
Existing land use	The existing use is agricultural land. The Site contains no statutory designations relating to landscape, heritage and ecology. The site is in close proximity to the Point of Connection and a suitable distance from existing settlements. The Site is not located in a sensitive area. The topography and intervening vegetation means the proposal is unlikely to significantly affect the distant Wetley Moor Common SSSI and heritage assets.	No
Relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area	The agricultural land use will change from grazing to energy storage. This will be temporary and fully reversible. The Proposed Development will be designed to incorporate areas dedicated to the achievement of biodiversity net gain.	No
Absorption capacity of the natural environment	Due to the existing vegetative boundaries, the Proposed Development can be absorbed well into the landscape, with the incorporation of landscaping and additional planting where required. The layout of the Proposed Development will maintain and protect existing internal hedgerows, mature hedgerow trees, field margins and drainage ditches where possible. The site is within Flood Zone 1 and a Flood Risk Assessment will be prepared to ensure that the Proposed Development is safe and it will not increase flood risk elsewhere. With existing and proposed screening it is considered unlikely that any significant effects on landscape or the amenity of nearby sensitive receptors would be significantly impacted. In terms of proximity to residential receptors the Proposed Development will sit passively in the landscape. Noise during construction will be limited to specific hours, and during operation noise levels will be typically below background noise levels.	No
Types and Characteristics of Potential Impact	Assessment	EIA
Magnitude, extent and nature of impacts	The impact of the Proposed Development will relate to landscape, amenity and cumulative impacts. Impacts beyond the site boundary will be limited due to topography and intervening vegetation; impacts can be mitigated further through good design and delivering overall biodiversity net gain. The Proposed Development is temporary and fully reversible and impacts from construction are short in duration.	No

Types and Characteristics of Potential Impact	Assessment	EIA
	Impacts on users of the Public Rights of Way can be mitigated through good design and effective screening.	
Transboundary nature of impact	The Proposed Development will make an important contribution to increasing the flexibility of the electricity grid. The proposals will also support the delivery of renewable energy schemes to achieve legally binding national targets on net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and local climate targets by 2030.	No
Intensity and complexity of impact	The magnitude of effect will be low and non-complex.	No
Probability of impact	It is considered that the Proposed Development will not have a significant impact, and this will be fully evidenced by the assessments accompanying the planning application.	No
Duration, frequency and reversibility of impact	The effects of construction will be temporary. The effects of operation will be time limited (to 40 years) but nonetheless temporary and fully reversible. The effects of decommissioning will be temporary and short term. The impacts are fully reversible.	No
Cumulation of impact	A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment will consider the cumulative impact of the Proposed Development with developments currently being determined in the planning system and/or granted planning permission.	No
Possibility of reducing impact	Impacts will be reduced through initial early consultation with statutory consultees, the design of effective additional boundary screening, biodiversity enhancements and through in-built mitigation. The design will pass through an iterative review process, which will be informed by environmental assessment work and community engagement.	No

Given the nature of the development proposals, it is considered that whilst there may be some effects upon the environment because of the proposed development, none of these are considered to constitute significant effects upon the environment.

The PPG, under the EIA section (Paragraph 057), provides further indicative criteria and thresholds, as well as key issues to consider, in the determination of likely significance of effects. For 3(a) Energy Industry, the criteria and advice given are:

- Indicative Criteria and Threshold – *‘Thermal output more than 50 MW. Small stations using novel forms of generation should be considered carefully’.*
- Key Issues to Consider – *‘Level of emissions to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel and any visual impact’.*

The development is unlikely to give rise to significant impacts relating to air, transport or visual or any further wide-ranging effects.

Accordingly, it is considered that the proposals do not constitute EIA development and would not require an ES to be submitted with a planning application for a BESS with associated infrastructure in this location.

We look forward to receiving the Screening Opinion within three weeks of receipt of this request as specified in the Regulation and confirmation that the Screening Opinion will be placed on the Public Register.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Moore
Principal Planner

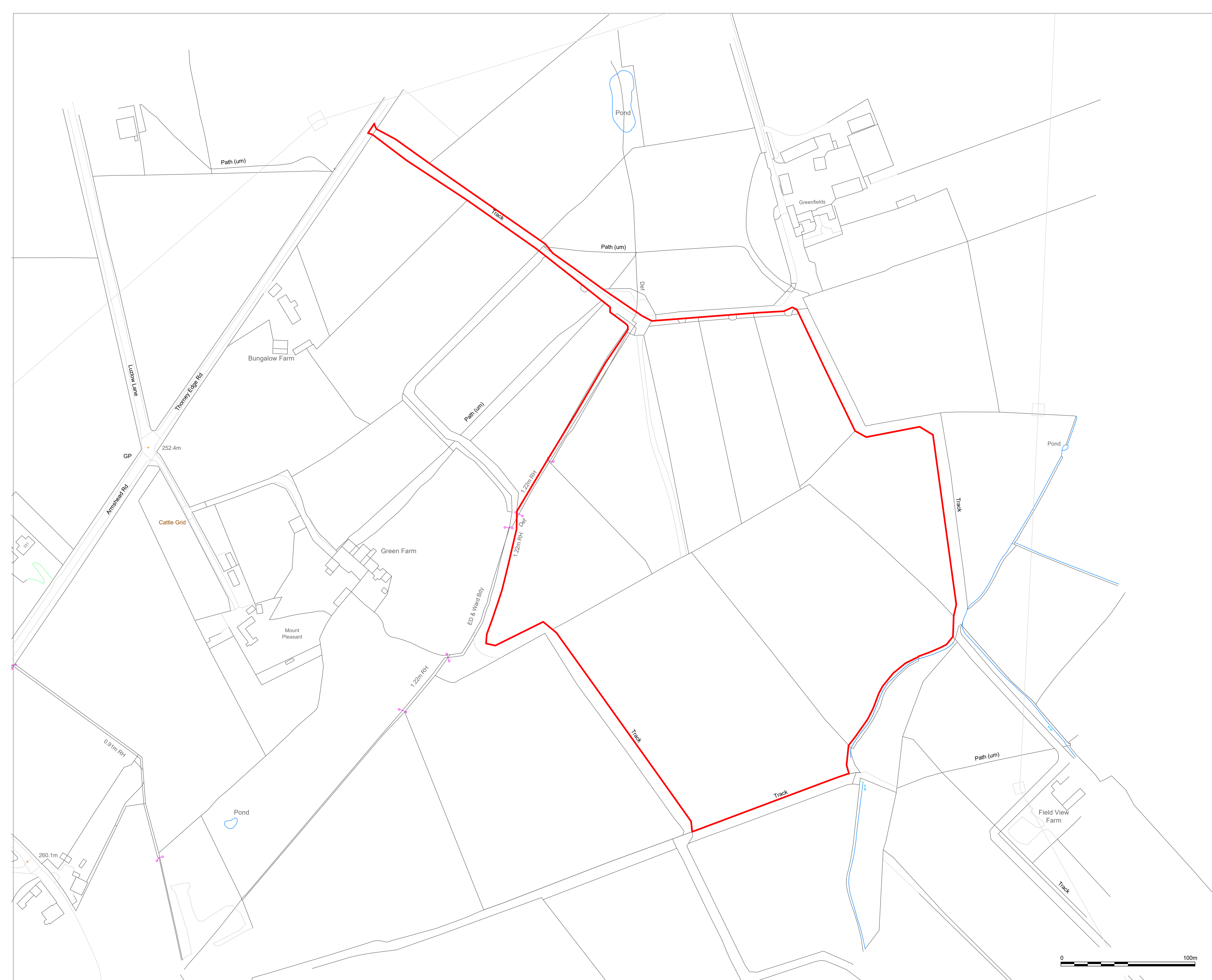


Enso Energy Limited

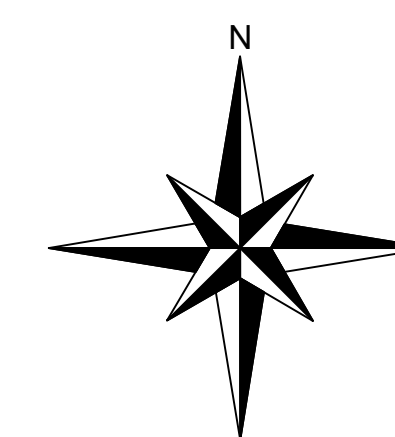
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Encs. Appendix 1 – Location Plan



KEY

 Site Boundary

Revisions:
First Issue- 11/12/2023 AH

ALL DIMENSIONS TO BE CHECKED ON SITE WORK
TO FIGURED DIMENSIONS ONLY REPORT
DISCREPANCIES TO THE GFP AT ONCE BEFORE
PROCEEDING COPYRIGHT ACT APPLIES.

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Project Title:

Greenfields BESS

Drawing Title:

Site Location Plan

DRWG No: CD-01-P01	Rev: -	Sht no: -
Drawn by : AH	Checked by: RM	
Scale: 1:1250 @ A1	Date: 11/12/2023	