

Mr Jake Stentiford  
Surface Planning  
155 Main Street  
Grenoside  
Sheffield  
S35 8PN

6<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Dear Mr Stentiford

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017  
Screening Opinion with regard to planning application SMD/2024/0055 for the  
development of a Flexible Energy Facility, associated works, landscaping and  
habitat creation at Land South of Cellarhead Substation and West of Rownall  
Road, Wetley Rocks, Staffordshire

I refer to your application dated 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024, validated on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024, in connection with the above proposal. The application has been screened under Regulation 8 of the above regulations as to whether the proposal is EIA development requiring the submission of an Environmental Statement. This is the formal screening opinion of the Local Planning Authority.

The proposal is for the construction of a Flexible Energy Facility with associated works, landscaping and habitat creation. The proposed development 248 no. battery containers, 62 no. transformer units, 124 no. inverter units, 4 no. switchrooms, a switchgear container and a self-contained substation within a secure acoustic fence enclosure, access roads, landscaping and habitat creation on a site totalling circa 22.4ha.

Such development falls within the description of development in Column 1, Section 3 (a) of Schedule 2 to the 2017 Regulations namely Energy industry; industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water. Column 2 confirms the threshold for such development to be 0.5 hectares. The proposal exceeds this threshold. The proposal is therefore 'Schedule 2 development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations and needs to be screened by the LPA to determine whether significant effects on the environment are likely and hence whether Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

In preparing this screening opinion the LPA has had regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations. The LPA has also had regard to the Indicative thresholds and criteria set out in the Planning Practice Guidance. This advises that key issues to consider for this description of development are levels of emission to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel and any visual impact. It is confirmed that the site is not in a sensitive area. The LPA has used the recommended Screening Matrix to prepare this opinion and this letter should be read in conjunction with that.

### Characteristics of the Development

The size of this proposal is significantly larger than the threshold area and would result in the delivery of energy development within a rural landscape. The nature of the proposals would be uncharacteristic to its surroundings introducing an urbanising effect to the area. Further, the scheme includes changes to the local topography and measures, such as bunding, to screen the development. The unnatural land form proposed would change the character of the landscape.

In isolation, the scale of the development is such that it is unlikely to trigger EIA development, and a similar approach has been taken to other similar developments in the area.

However, within the immediate area are consented applications for similar development (SMD/2022/0444 and SMD/2022/0548). In addition, a further undetermined BESS scheme at Newfields Farm (SMD/2024/0019); and an undetermined solar array on land to the north of the Cellarhead Substation (SMD/2023/0523), are proposed within close proximity to the site. These developments would total an area of approximately 97.7ha of rural landscape lost to energy development. These would surround the large Cellarhead Substation, which in itself is an urban form of development in an otherwise rural environment.

Cumulatively with other approved developments, and those other energy developments in the area which are under consideration, the development could result in a significant change and urbanising effect in the landscape. Which may suggest an EIA could be needed.

The main impacts would be landscape, visual and ecological matters. However, there would be no significant emissions or pollutants arising from the development during its operational phase.

In terms of landscape/visual impact, a development of this nature has the potential to have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of this rural area, introducing an urban form of development.

The proposal would be at the expense of the agricultural productivity of the land. Again, in isolation the development is not of such a scale to give rise to significant environmental

effects in this regard. However, cumulatively, given the high land usage the loss of any BMV ought to be considered.

In terms of ecology and biodiversity effects, the proposal has the potential to have impacts upon species, and habitats. The development does not directly affect designated sites and no significant effects on international, national or local sites are expected. A number of SSSI's have been identified within close proximity to the site. Individually, the development is unlikely to have any significant effect on this SSSI, although the cumulative effects remain unclear. There are ecological considerations that will need to be addressed through the planning application regardless.

The development would not directly impact designated or non-designated heritage assets, although the site does lie within the wider setting of a number of designated heritage assets. The cumulative change to the rural landscape has the potential to affect the wider setting of heritage assets. Evidence suggests that the site has low archaeological potential, nonetheless the effects could be considered through appropriate investigative works secured via condition.

Cumulatively, the developments would result in large areas of hardstanding in the rural area. While the sites are not directly adjacent the proposals would result in changes to permeability. The knock on effects of any interconnectivity between the sites on flood risk and the hydrology are unclear.

Matters of waste, noise, air pollutants, contamination, traffic, risk of accidents or risks to the population are not considered to be significant issues in isolation.

During construction phase, the development would result in the movement of construction traffic. Access to the site from the local highway network would be from rural roads and would require the movement of construction vehicles through nearby settlements and, therefore, sensitive uses. In isolation, given the scale of the proposals, the effect of construction traffic could be adequately addressed through a CMTP and/or CEMP. However, there are other similar developments in the immediate area which have planning permission, while there are other energy developments which are yet to be determined. Cumulatively, should all developments be constructed at a similar time, the effect of construction on the highway network, dust, emissions, vibration and disturbance to residential amenity could be significant.

#### Location of the development

The site is not within a Sensitive area in terms of the Regulations. The existing use of land is agricultural and the extent of which is relatively abundant in the wider area. The site is within the Green Belt which is not, in itself, a landscape designation, although the essential characteristic of the Green Belt is its openness and permanence. The site is within a rural area which is generally characterised by a pastoral landscape which includes isolated farm

buildings and dwellings. The local landscape is, however, crossed by significant energy infrastructure, including overhead power lines. These provide a degree of urbanisation to this rural landscape character.

Nonetheless, the character of the landscape will completely change for the lifetime of the development. As identified above, there are cumulative effects which would need to be considered in great detail.

No designated heritage assets would be affected although the site lies within their wider setting. No designated ecological sites would be directly affected, although the site lies within close proximity to a number of SSSI's and the cumulatively effects of all the approved and proposed developments on these designations would require greater consideration.

#### Characteristics of the potential impact

This development would be an uncharacteristic feature within the local landscape, although it is noted that similar developments have been approved within the local landscape. In isolation, the type and characteristics of the potential impacts are likely to be relatively localised.

However, this development is one of a number of energy developments in the area, both approved or currently under consideration. Cumulatively, the spatial extent of all of these developments is of a significant magnitude. This is in addition to the existing Cellarhead Substation. The sheer scale of all of the proposed developments, cumulatively, is likely to have a significant effect on the landscape, and result in an urbanising visual change in the rural area. The developments would result in the loss of the use of agricultural land for the lifetime of the developments, which could have an affect on BMV land and productivity.

If approved, there is a high probability that the developments could be constructed at the same time. Given the cumulative scale of the developments this could lead to a significant scale and intensity of movements on the local highway network, with the site accessed via rural roads. Construction vehicles are likely to be required to move through local settlements to reach the site. The scale of the developments, and the intensity of vehicular movements necessary, could have significant impacts on the overall effectiveness of the highway network. Furthermore, there is a probability of issues relating to dust, emissions, noise and vibration which would affect the living conditions of the local population. These matters therefore need to be considered together to ensure the effects can be adequately minimised.

Overall, the LPA is of the opinion that, cumulatively, the potential impacts would be of a magnitude to suggest that an environmental statement is required.

### Conclusions

For the reasons noted above, and expanded upon in the attached matrix, it is considered that the development would likely have significant effects on the environment by virtue of cumulative factors such as its nature, size or location.

Under regulation 6(9) it is hereby confirmed that, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, the above development is EIA development in terms of the Regulations.

Therefore, you are hereby notified that the Local Planning Authority is of the opinion that, in accordance with Regulation 11(1), an Environmental Statement is required.

Should you disagree with this screening opinion then, under 6(10) and 7 of the Regulations, you can request a screening direction from the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely,

X *B.S. Haywood*

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Signed by: Ben Haywood

**Head of Development Services**