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Application	V/23/95757
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By Email only

9 October 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

Screening Opinion under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, Part 2, Regulation 6

Application No:	V/23/95757
Description:	EIA Screening Request for Development of a Solar Photovoltaic Farm and battery storage c27MWp DC on unused agricultural land off Allington Lane for a period of 30 – 35 years.
Site:	Land West and East of Allington Lane

Applicant: Locogen Ltd
Date Submitted: 26 July 2023

Site Description

The proposed site, located in the countryside between the settlements of Fair Oak and West End and either side of Allington Lane, is currently unused agricultural land surrounded by hedges and mature tree belts. The aspect and topography of the land is south-facing and gently sloping towards watercourses.

Proposed Development

The proposed development would involve the installation of a solar farm with a generating capacity of around c.27MWp AC and a site area of approximately 22 ha split over several fields. It is also proposed to include containerised battery storage as part of the proposed development. Panels would be a maximum 3.5m in height.

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Three existing field vehicular accesses would be utilised. There would be a private wire connection to the nearby One Horton Heath development. The general approach is to avoid environmental impacts in the first instance and then minimise where necessary.

Is an Environmental Impact Assessment Required?

The Local Planning Authority are of the opinion that an Environmental Impact Assessment is **not required** for this development

Screening Assessment

The EIA Regulations (the Regulations), in conjunction with the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) set out the legal framework in relation to EIA. The EIA Regulations contain two development schedules (Schedule 1 development and Schedule 2 development). Schedule 1 contains a list of development where EIA is mandatory. Schedule 2 contains a list of development types and development thresholds where the requirement for EIA should be considered.

The Local Planning Authority must screen planning applications for development of a description contained within Column 1 of Schedule 2 which is within a sensitive area or meets or exceeds the relevant thresholds contained in Column 2, to determine whether it is likely to have significant effects on the environment when having regard to the selection criteria which are contained within Schedule 3 of the Regulations.

Not all of the criteria will be relevant in every case. Each case should be considered on its own merits in a balanced way. A Screening Matrix has been utilised to assist the process and is attached.

Schedule 1 Development

An Environmental Statement is mandatory for projects listed in Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations. Schedule 1 developments are large scale projects for which significant effects would be expected and comprise developments such as power stations, airports etc.

The development is not of a type listed in Schedule 1 of the Regulations.

Schedule 2 Development

Schedule 2 development means development, other than exempt development, of a description mentioned in column 1 of the table in Schedule 2 where:

- (a) any part of that development is to be carried out in a sensitive area; or
- (b) the applicable threshold or criterion in the corresponding part of column 2 of that table is respectively exceeded or met in relation to that development.

Is the development Schedule 2 development?

The development proposed is of a type listed in column 2 category 3 (a) Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water (unless included in Schedule 1).

Sensitive areas

As set out in Paragraph 032 of the PPG, the more environmentally sensitive the location, the more likely it is that the effects on the environment will be significant and will require an EIA. Certain designated sites are defined in regulation 2(1) as sensitive areas and the thresholds and criteria in the second column of the table in Schedule 2 are not applied. All development in, or partly in, such areas should be screened. These are:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European Sites;
- National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and
- World Heritage Sites and scheduled monuments.

In certain cases, local designations which are not included in the definition of “sensitive areas”, but which are nonetheless environmentally sensitive, may also be relevant in determining whether an assessment is required. In considering the sensitivity of a particular location, regard should also be had to whether any nationally or internationally agreed environmental standards are already being approached or exceeded.

Thresholds

The proposed development site is not located in a sensitive area and therefore the thresholds set out in column 1 of the table in Schedule 2 for category 3 (a) industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water apply for which there is a general site area threshold of 0.5ha.. The site extends to approximately 22 ha, exceeding the Column 2 0.5ha threshold set under 2017 EIA Regulations. This

means the proposal could constitute Schedule 2 development subject to the selection criteria as identified in Schedule 3 of the Regulations.

The Indicative Criteria and Threshold in Column 3 of a thermal output of more than 50MW is not exceeded (proposed 27MWp AC). Key issues to consider are indicated as emissions to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel and any visual impact.

Schedule 3: Selection Criteria for Screening Schedule 2 Developments

Schedule 3 includes three broad categories for consideration which comprise of: the characteristics of the development; the environmental sensitivity of the location; and, the types and characteristics of the potential impacts, which includes such matters as: the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact; the nature of the impact; the probability and complexity of the impact; the onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact; and, the possibility of effectively reducing the impact. The relevant matters to the particular development proposed are considered below and in the attached Screening Matrix.

1 Characteristics of development

- a) *Size and design of the development* – a solar farm of the size proposed is not likely to result in significant environmental impacts post mitigation. The total area of fields is approximately 22ha within existing field boundaries and the maximum height of panels 3.5m.
- b) *Cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development* –. There is an operational 6.3MW Solar Farm development and Private Wire Substation to the north east which will be enclosed by the One Horton Heath development for up to 2500 dwellings, school, commercial uses, open space and associated infrastructure (planning reference O/20/89498). Planning permission F/21/91185 was granted in September 2022 for the link road through the site and in December 2022 full planning permission was granted for the first 381 dwellings at the southern end of the OHH site. The scale and impacts of the existing solar farm and permitted development at One Horton Heath would not cumulatively be likely to result in further significant effects post mitigation.
- c) *Use of natural resources* - The development would medium-term temporarily (30-35 years) change the use of the land from agricultural farmland to solar farm, in the form of a solar arrays using renewable sunlight and associated infrastructure. This uses resources which can be recycled for construction but very limited use of resources during the operational or decommissioning phases. Works to topography would be very minor and there would be no loss

of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land Grades (1,2 or 3a), the site being classified as Grade 3b or lower. Some limited minor impact on soil from the installation of the plant the ongoing operation of the plant but no long terms significant effects are characteristic of this type of development. Assessments of the ecology, landscape, agricultural land and hydrology will be undertaken and mitigation works secured by condition or S106.

The site is located in a minerals safeguarding area. However, as the use is temporary these resources are not sterilised and the development is not likely to have the potential for significant effects on the environment.

- d) *Production of waste* - the production of waste which would result from the construction phase would be typical for a solar project of the nature proposed with potential recycling of materials and waste levels not being considered to be significant. The use would not generate significant levels of waste during its operational period. At the end of its lifetime plant will be removed from site and components may be reused or recycled. The provisions for the storage, collection, and disposal of rubbish from the development during the construction phase can be managed through a Construction Environment Management Plan.
- e) *Pollution and nuisance* - the site is located near the River Itchen which flows into the Solent, however, with appropriate controls the risk of pollution is not significant. Similarly, on any site nuisances can be controlled with appropriate buffers and drainage, thus this type of development is such that it is not considered that polluting environmental effects will be significant. Based on a noise assessment, conditions can ensure that noise generated by the invertors used on the site will not exceed required levels at the nearest noise sensitive properties.
- f) *Risk of major accidents and/or disasters*- the anticipated risk of accidents occurring is considered to be low if appropriately managed. The construction and operational phases of the development do not involve the use of high risk substances or technologies. There is also not considered to be a significant risk of accidents occurring as a result of the proposed end use, including those related to transport. The construction phase would be managed by the developer in accordance with a CEMP, the relevant Health and Safety Regulations and other associated statutory provisions. A glint and glare assessment for road, air and rail users will be considered.

Flood Risk: There are streams and a ponds on site which is also in close proximity to the River Itchen. Areas of surface water flooding identified next to Allington Lane. The Environment Agency's Flood Zone Mapping shows that

the site lies largely within Flood Zone 1 which comprises of land assessed as having a less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of fluvial or tidal flooding in any given year. Pockets are in Flood Zones 2 and 3 which are at risk of surface water flooding and could be excluded from development if required. Given the nature of the development, it is not considered that there is likely to be significant effects in relation to flood risk. Flood risk and surface water drainage would need to be fully addressed and in accordance with Eastleigh Borough Local Plan 2022 policy and may require the use of sustainable drainage to retain greenfield flow rates.

g) Risk to human health – Contamination or air pollution- the site has a low risk of land contamination associated with its former uses. There is some risk that contamination could be mobilised during construction which could have adverse effects, including the potential risk to human health. It is not, however, considered that this circumstance is exceptional or of such significance as to require an EIA and this matter can be appropriately managed through site investigation, risk assessment and management, remediation, verification, and subsequent monitoring.

Noise- the development is anticipated to result in an increase in noise levels during the construction and potentially operational phases. The construction impacts are not anticipated to be unusual for a development of this type and the temporary noise emissions arising from site preparation and construction activities can be controlled through the use of a Construction Environment Management Plan, incorporating a range of measures including the appropriate locating of plant and on-site facilities, lorry routing and the controlling of construction and delivery hours to minimise the impact upon sensitive receptors, which include the adjoining primary school, day nursery and residential accommodation for the elderly. During the operational phase, the development may result in an increase in noise levels relative to the existing situation on site with this arising from additional traffic movements and plant. The location of plant will be considered in this respect following the submission of a noise assessment, to ensure it is not close to existing residential properties. Such impacts are not currently anticipated to result in significant effects on the environment.

Air Quality - the air quality impacts from the development are not anticipated to result in significant effects on the environment.

It is concluded that the Characteristics of the proposed development would not give rise to a level of environmental impact or impacts which would require an EIA to be undertaken.

2 The Location of the Development

The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by development must be considered, with particular regard, to—

(a) the existing and approved land use; currently agricultural land: Potential for some grazing alongside proposed use.

(b) the relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground: Phase 1 and Phase 2 ecology work is being undertaken and will be submitted with a full application which will be sufficient to determine the likely the impacts and inform ecological enhancement work such that longer term the project will deliver an increase in biodiversity from the former agricultural baseline. The applicant has undertaken the removal of specific areas of solar panels to account for possible Great Crested Newts habitats and have included areas of set back from any notable trees and woodland. Biodiversity Net Gain and other mitigation to be provided through condition/S106. Improvements to biodiversity are likely to add to the existing high levels. This also a temporary use.

(c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas—

(i) wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths; The River Itchen SSSI is located to the south and west of the proposed development, separated both by the existing railway and road network. An assessment of hydrological impacts will support the planning application together with any necessary prevention and mitigation works

(ii) coastal zones and the marine environment: The Solent SPA and SAC is fed by the River Itchen and impacts on water quality are a consideration, albeit that pollution from the development is not expected

(iii) mountain and forest areas: There are no mountain or significant forest areas affected by this site and as such this has been scoped out of further consideration. Proposals for the protection and enhancement of trees and hedgerows will be provided

(iv) nature reserves and parks: Despite the proximity to Itchen Valley Country Park, it is not considered that there will be a direct impact on the park from the

Development by means of embedded mitigation and consideration within design.

(v) European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation: The site adjoins a small stretch of the Internationally designated River Itchen SAC/SSSI leading to Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site and the Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (collectively known as the Solent Complex) and is within their zones of impact; Nationally designated Ancient Woodland is located at Hearts Copse adjoining the site, and also west of the southern field. Hearts Copse is also locally designated SINC. Within the site the Allington Lane Pond and adjoining field has SINC designation and west of the site is located the Hogwood and Gravel Pits SINC. Priority Habitat is designated at Itchen Valley Priority Biodiversity Area (also River Itchen SSSI and SAC). The development site is sensitive in these respects. Itchen Valley Country Park is also nearby to the south-west. Whilst there is the potential for impacts on ecological receptors these are not considered to rise to the level of significant effects on the environment. A Shadow HRA and SSSI Impact Report for the River Itchen SSSI (September 2023) have been considered by Natural England with the advice given that, with appropriate mitigation, the proposals would avoid adverse effects on the integrity of the River Itchen SAC, or harm the special interests of the River Itchen Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Development itself avoids designated areas and provides buffers and habitats for protected species.

Whilst there are European and other nationally designated areas located close to the development, it is anticipated, as highlighted above, that there is sufficient separation between the proposed development and these designations that neither will be directly nor significantly affected by this site. This will be confirmed through the assessments supporting the planning application and mitigation secured as necessary through conditions or S106

(vi) areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure: There are no environmentally degraded areas affected by this site and as such this can be scoped out of further consideration

(vii) densely populated areas: the site is within countryside and not within or close to existing or proposed densely populated areas.

(viii) landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance: An assessment of landscape and cultural heritage will be undertaken and mitigation considered as necessary. Nearby Allington Manor is on the non-statutory Hampshire Gardens Trust Historic Parks and Gardens list, albeit that the original heritage interest is now significantly eroded. While close to the

development site, this is to be separated from the development site by hedges and trees and it is unlikely that there would be any negative impact of the existing asset, subject to further appraisal with the application. There are no Listed Buildings or other known landscapes or sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance likely to be directly affected by this site. The land also does not fall within a Conservation Area.

The South Downs National Park is within 5km of the site and is a Protected Landscape. The visual impact of the solar development will be subject to further Landscape and Visual Impact (LVIA) assessment, but the low topography of the fields and their high level of existing tree and hedge screening would be likely to only result in close, localised visual impact, particularly from the existing public footpath on land to east of Allington Lane and from the rear of residential properties. Some glimpses through field gates etc for passing traffic in Allington Lane also likely. The height and location of panels will be subject to detailed consideration during the application and mitigation through additional screening will be required through S106 or condition. A glint and glare assessment will be submitted to confirm impacts. Effects are also temporary and reversible. The cumulative visual impact of the development combined with the existing solar farm at Chalcroft Farm and approved and planned development at One Horton Heath form part of the consideration.

It is concluded that the location of the proposed development would not give rise to a level of environmental impact or impacts which would require an EIA to be undertaken.

3. Types and characteristics of the potential impact

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), (i.e. population and human health; biodiversity, with particular attention to species and habitats protected under Directive 92/43/EEC(1) and Directive 2009/147/EC(2); land, soil, water, air and climate; material assets, cultural heritage and the landscape; the interaction between these factors) taking into account:

- (a) Magnitude and spatial extent of the impact* - as detailed above, the potential types and spatial extent of the likely impacts are not significant in EIA terms. The area of the development is c22ha and does not affect a wide population.
- (b) Nature of the impact* – as detailed in 1 above, any impacts are localised.

- (c) *Transboundary nature of the impact* – none likely. The impacts are not complex in EIA terms as detailed in 1 above.
- (d) *The intensity and complexity of the impact* - largely visual impacts at a low height and close range, including those from public rights of way. They are also temporary and reversible.
- (e) *Probability of the impact* – the impacts detailed in 1 above are likely to occur.
- (f) *Expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact* – the impacts detailed in 1 above are likely to be either temporary during the construction period or permanent during the implementation phase. The operational period is 35-40 years and impacts are reversible.
- (g) *Cumulation of the impact of other existing and/or approved development* – as considered in 1 above. There are other major development permitted in the locality which have been considered in combination with the development proposed and are not likely to give rise to cumulative significant effects.
- (h) *Possibility of effectively reducing the impact* – as indicated above mitigation and biodiversity gains can significantly reduce likely impacts and can be secured by conditions/S106.

It is concluded that the type and characteristics of the potential impacts arising from the proposed development would not give rise to a level of environmental impact or impacts which would require an EIA to be undertaken.

Conclusion

The development has been screened against the relevant provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 and the Planning Practice Guidance. This screening assessment has considered whether the proposed development is likely to give rise to significant effects on the Environment.

The development is not Schedule 1 development as defined in the EIA Regulations, but is Schedule 2 development under 3 (a) industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water. The site extends to approximately 22 ha, exceeding the 0.5ha threshold set by the Regulations. This means the proposal could constitute Schedule 2 development subject to the selection criteria as identified in Schedule 3 of the Regulations. Screening has been undertaken using Schedule 3 criteria.

The proposals Subject to mitigation, the development would not be likely to give rise to significant effects on the application site or its immediate surroundings, nor do the characteristics and location of development indicate that the development is likely to give rise to significant environment effects. The site is not located within a sensitive area as defined by the EIA Regulations and it is considered that the potential for significant effects on the environment is low subject to prevention and mitigation measures. These prevention and mitigation measures, which are typical for a development of this type and nature in close proximity to sensitive uses, would be necessary and these are able to be appropriately provided and controlled through the planning application process, including though the use of planning conditions and obligations. It is noted that the use is both temporary and reversible.

Accordingly, the screening assessment has identified that significant effects on the environment are not considered likely either alone or in combination with other development and, therefore, it is the opinion of Eastleigh Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority that the proposed development does not constitute EIA development as defined by the Regulations.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A Grandfield", written in a cursive style.

Andy Grandfield
Service Director for Planning and Environment