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Your ref: 14/00002/SCOP



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Dear Andrew

**Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping consultation (Regulation 15 (3) (i) of the EIA Regulations 2011):** Proposed development comprising up to 4,000 residential dwellings, district centre and business centre, primary and secondary schools, renewable energy park, heritage and visitor facilities, linear park, community open space, sports and recreation, landscaping and associated utilities and infrastructure

**Location:** Heyford Park Camp Road Upper Heyford Bicester OX25 5HA

Thank you for seeking our advice on the scope of the Environmental Statement (ES) in your consultation dated 27 February 2014 which we received on the same day.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Case law<sup>1</sup> and guidance<sup>2</sup> has stressed the need for a full set of environmental information to be available for consideration prior to a decision being taken on whether or not to grant planning permission. Annex A to this letter provides Natural England's advice on the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for this development.

Should the proposal be amended in a way which significantly affects its impact on the natural environment then, in accordance with Section 4 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Natural England should be consulted again.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us. For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Sophie Temple on 0300 060 1487. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison, J in *R. v. Cornwall County Council ex parte Hardy* (2001)

<sup>2</sup> *Note on Environmental Impact Assessment Directive for Local Planning Authorities* Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (April 2004) available from

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/sustainability/environmental/environmentalimpactassessment/noteenvironmental/>



Yours sincerely

Sophie Temple  
Thames Valley Team  
Sustainable development and regulation

## **Annex A – Advice related to EIA Scoping Requirements**

### **1. General Principles**

Schedule 4 of the Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011, sets out the necessary information to assess impacts on the natural environment to be included in an ES, specifically:

- A description of the development – including physical characteristics and the full land use requirements of the site during construction and operational phases.
- Expected residues and emissions (water, air and soil pollution, noise, vibration, light, heat, radiation, etc.) resulting from the operation of the proposed development.
- An assessment of alternatives and clear reasoning as to why the preferred option has been chosen.
- A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development, including, in particular, population, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, including the architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors.
- A description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment – this should cover direct effects but also any indirect, secondary, cumulative, short, medium and long term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects. Effects should relate to the existence of the development, the use of natural resources and the emissions from pollutants. This should also include a description of the forecasting methods to predict the likely effects on the environment.
- A description of the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and where possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment.
- A non-technical summary of the information.
- An indication of any difficulties (technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered by the applicant in compiling the required information.

It will be important for any assessment to consider the potential cumulative effects of this proposal, including all supporting infrastructure, with other similar proposals and a thorough assessment of the 'in combination' effects of the proposed development with any existing developments and current applications. A full consideration of the implications of the whole scheme should be included in the ES. All supporting infrastructure should be included within the assessment.

### **2. Biodiversity and Geology**

#### **2.1 Ecological Aspects of an Environmental Statement**

Natural England advises that the potential impact of the proposal upon features of nature conservation interest and opportunities for habitat creation/enhancement should be included within this assessment in accordance with appropriate guidance on such matters. Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) have been developed by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and are available on their website.

EclA is the process of identifying, quantifying and evaluating the potential impacts of defined actions on ecosystems or their components. EclA may be carried out as part of the EIA process or to support other forms of environmental assessment or appraisal.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out guidance in S.118 on how to take account of biodiversity interests in planning decisions and the framework that local authorities should provide to assist developers.

## 2.2 Internationally and Nationally Designated Sites

The ES should thoroughly assess the potential for the proposal to affect designated sites. European sites (eg designated Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) fall within the scope of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. In addition paragraph 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation, listed or proposed Ramsar sites, and any site identified as being necessary to compensate for adverse impacts on classified, potential or possible SPAs, SACs and Ramsar sites be treated in the same way as classified sites.

Under Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 an appropriate assessment needs to be undertaken in respect of any plan or project which is (a) likely to have a significant effect on a European site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) and (b) not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site.

Should a Likely Significant Effect on a European/Internationally designated site be identified or be uncertain, the competent authority (in this case the Local Planning Authority) may need to prepare an Appropriate Assessment, in addition to consideration of impacts through the EIA process.

### **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and sites of European or international importance (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites)**

The development site is adjacent to (within 150m) the following designated nature conservation site:

- Ardley Cutting and Quarry SSSI
- Further information on the SSSI and its special interest features can be found at [www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk). The ES should include a full assessment of the direct and indirect effects of the development on the features of special interest within Ardley Cutting and Quarry, and should identify such mitigation measures as may be required in order to avoid, minimise or reduce any adverse significant effects.
- Natura 2000 network site conservation objectives are available on our internet site [here](#).

## 2.3 Regionally and Locally Important Sites

The EIA will need to consider any impacts upon local wildlife and geological sites. Local Sites are identified by the local wildlife trust, geoconservation group or a local forum established for the purposes of identifying and selecting local sites. They are of county importance for wildlife or geodiversity. The Environmental Statement should therefore include an assessment of the likely impacts on the wildlife and geodiversity interests of such sites. The assessment should include proposals for mitigation of any impacts and if appropriate, compensation measures. Contact the local wildlife trust, geoconservation group or local sites body in this area for further information.

## 2.4 Protected Species - Species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010

The ES should assess the impact of all phases of the proposal on protected species (including, for example, great crested newts, reptiles, birds, water voles, badgers and bats). Natural England does not hold comprehensive information regarding the locations of species protected by law, but advises on the procedures and legislation relevant to such species. Records of protected species should be sought from appropriate local biological record centres, nature conservation organisations, groups and individuals; and consideration should be given to the wider context of the site for example in terms of habitat linkages and protected species populations in the wider area, to assist in the impact assessment.

The conservation of species protected by law is explained in Part IV and Annex A of Government Circular 06/2005 *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System*. The area likely to be affected by the proposal should be thoroughly

surveyed by competent ecologists at appropriate times of year for relevant species and the survey results, impact assessments and appropriate accompanying mitigation strategies included as part of the ES.

In order to provide this information there may be a requirement for a survey at a particular time of year. Surveys should always be carried out in optimal survey time periods and to current guidance by suitably qualified and where necessary, licensed, consultants. Natural England has adopted [standing advice](#) for protected species which includes links to guidance on survey and mitigation.

## 2.5 Habitats and Species of Principal Importance

The ES should thoroughly assess the impact of the proposals on habitats and/or species listed as 'Habitats and Species of Principal Importance' within the England Biodiversity List, published under the requirements of S41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 places a general duty on all public authorities, including local planning authorities, to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Further information on this duty is available in the Defra publication '[Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty](#)'.

Government Circular 06/2005 states that Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and habitats, 'are capable of being a material consideration...in the making of planning decisions'. Natural England therefore advises that survey, impact assessment and mitigation proposals for Habitats and Species of Principal Importance should be included in the ES. Consideration should also be given to those species and habitats included in the relevant Local BAP.

Natural England advises that a habitat survey (equivalent to Phase 2) is carried out on the site, in order to identify any important habitats present. In addition, ornithological, botanical and invertebrate surveys should be carried out at appropriate times in the year, to establish whether any scarce or priority species are present. The Environmental Statement should include details of:

- Any historical data for the site affected by the proposal (eg from previous surveys);
- Additional surveys carried out as part of this proposal;
- The habitats and species present;
- The status of these habitats and species (eg whether priority species or habitat);
- The direct and indirect effects of the development upon those habitats and species;
- Full details of any mitigation or compensation that might be required.

The development should seek if possible to avoid adverse impact on sensitive areas for wildlife within the site, and if possible provide opportunities for overall wildlife gain.

The record centre for the relevant Local Authorities should be able to provide the relevant information on the location and type of priority habitat for the area under consideration.

## 2.6 Contacts for Local Records

Natural England does not hold local information on local sites, local landscape character and local or national biodiversity priority habitats and species. We recommend that you seek further information from the appropriate bodies (which may include the local records centre, the local wildlife trust, local geoconservation group or other recording society and a local landscape characterisation document).

## 3. Green Infrastructure

Given the size of the proposed development (500 ha), a planned network of high quality green infrastructure should be incorporated as an important part of the design from their outset, and outlined within the ES. The inclusion of multi-functional green infrastructure (GI) can provide a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits, for example, increased biodiversity, improved health and well-being and flood storage.

Suitable GI provides the opportunity to create an enhanced landscape setting and relate the development to its local landscape character, place and context. We advise, therefore, that the ES for this application outlines the incorporation of usable, natural, welcoming green spaces that both create a sense of place across the development and link into the wider the local green character of the area. Provision for footpath and cycle routes into the wider locality should be investigated. Opportunities should be taken for the extension of local Priority Habitats, which are listed in section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 covered in the UK Biodiversity Action Plans. Additionally, Cherwell Biodiversity Action Plan 2013-2014, outlines the importance of GI provisions and priority habitats. We advise considering potential areas of the proposed development site for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) as part of the GI assessment in the ES. Sustainable Drainage Systems help to reduce the level of storm water run-off produced at the site by developing permeable areas, this can be achieved through creating permeable spaces within driveways, the incorporation of garden water butts, green roofs, and permeable wetland drainage routes such as swales and ponds, for example.

GI can be designed to maximise the benefits needed for this development. We strongly encourage you to share this advice with the applicant to maximise opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure during the development of the detailed proposal.

A [Green Infrastructure for Oxfordshire](#) is underway which should provide more detailed local priorities. Additional evidence and case studies on green infrastructure, including the economic benefits of GI can be found on the Natural England [Green Infrastructure web pages](#).

#### 4. Air Quality

Air quality in the UK has improved over recent decades but air pollution remains a significant issue; for example over 97% of sensitive habitat area in England is predicted to exceed the critical loads for ecosystem protection from atmospheric nitrogen deposition ([England Biodiversity Strategy](#), Defra 2011). A priority action in the England Biodiversity Strategy is to reduce air pollution impacts on biodiversity. The planning system plays a key role in determining the location of developments which may give rise to pollution, either directly or from traffic generation, and hence planning decisions can have a significant impact on the quality of air, water and land. The assessment should take account of the risks of air pollution and how these can be managed or reduced. Further information on air pollution impacts and the sensitivity of different habitats/designated sites can be found on the Air Pollution Information System ([www.apis.ac.uk](http://www.apis.ac.uk)). Further information on air pollution modelling and assessment can be found on the Environment Agency website.

For this particular development, there are strong implications on the effect of the local environment from air quality concerns, especially with relation to the closely situated Ardley Cutting and Quarry SSSI, designated for lowland calcareous grassland (priority habitat). Natural England would expect to see a thorough air quality assessment as part of this proposals ES, in line with best practice guidelines as described:

To address this concern and to advise whether it is likely to have a likely significant effect (LSE) on a designated site the ES should provide the appropriate information.

A 'significance screening' assessment should be provided for the roads already situated at the site and any proposed new roads, where the proposal is considered against the following significance scenarios, as stated in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) manual 2008:

- I. road alignment will change by 5 m or more
- II. daily traffic flows will increase by more than 1000 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) or more
- III. heavy duty vehicle flows (HDV) will change by 200 AADT or more
- IV. daily average speed will change by 10km/hr or more
- V. peak hour speed will change by 20 km/hr or more



Following this step, if the proposal is screened 'in' in terms of likely effect, then a 'detailed assessment' should be undertaken, and the following information should be provided:

- Projected emission levels from the proposal should be modelled and assessed against the critical load and critical levels for the designated site for any emissions that are likely to significantly affect the integrity of Burnham Beeches.
- Critical loads and levels for the designated site can be obtained online from the Air Pollution Information Systems (<http://www.apis.ac.uk/>). Background levels can also be obtained here.
- The projected percentage of Process Contributions (PC) for the proposal toward the SSSI should be provided. The model that is used for this should also be stated (for instance the SCAIL screening tool).
- The background level should then be added to the PC to equal the PEC (Predicted Environmental Concentration). If this is less than what the critical level for the interest feature is, or the increase is less than 1% of the critical level, then it can be concluded the proposal is unlikely to damage the interest features of the SSSI (n.b. for critical load the threshold is 1% also). Conversely, if these figures are higher than 1%, then this will need to be revisited and looked at in more detail.
- For additional information we refer you to the Highway Agency's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/ha/standards/dmrbl/>)

The following links may prove helpful:

- Environment Agency: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/permitting/32320.aspx>
- Simple Calculation of Atmospheric Impact Limits: <http://www.scaill.ceh.ac.uk/>
- Air Pollution Information System ([www.apis.ac.uk](http://www.apis.ac.uk/))

If the proposed development will also require an environmental permit, we strongly recommend that the Environment Agency is consulted for permitting pre-application advice as soon as possible to ensure that there are no permitting concerns that are relevant to the design of the proposal or the determination of the planning decision.

On receipt of this additional information Natural England must be consulted on how your authority should proceed. Pending this, any approval of planning permission would be contrary to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations.

## 2) Appropriate Assessment Required

Natural England's advice on the requirements of Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 is as follows:

We consider that the proposed development, which is not directly connected with or necessary to site management for nature conservation, is likely to have a significant effect on the internationally important interest features of the site, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. We therefore advise the Local Planning Authority (LPA), as decision-taker and competent authority, must undertake an appropriate assessment to fully assess these implications against the site's conservation objectives. Natural England should be re-consulted on this process and be given a reasonable period within which to respond.

The site's conservation objectives can be found at:

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/UK0012586-Windsor-Forest-and-Great-Park-SAC\\_tcm6-31834.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/UK0012586-Windsor-Forest-and-Great-Park-SAC_tcm6-31834.pdf).

The scope of the appropriate assessment should include the following matters:

- Potential for emissions from the proposal to impact the designated sites through impact on air quality;
- Assessing the significance of these emissions from the proposal on the designated site.

## 5. Landscape Character

### Landscape and visual impacts

Natural England would wish to see details of local landscape character areas mapped at a scale appropriate to the development site as well as any relevant management plans or strategies pertaining to the area. The EIA should include assessments of visual effects on the surrounding area and landscape together with any physical effects of the development, such as changes in topography. The European Landscape Convention places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to consider the impacts of landscape when exercising their functions.

The EIA should include a full assessment of the potential impacts of the development on local landscape character using landscape assessment methodologies. We encourage the use of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), based on the good practice guidelines produced jointly by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment in 2013. LCA provides a sound basis for guiding, informing and understanding the ability of any location to accommodate change and to make positive proposals for conserving, enhancing or regenerating character, as detailed proposals are developed.

This development is extremely large, and given the surrounding countryside setting, has the potential to impact significantly on local landscape character, which the development of largely populated areas and the proposed solar farm. Natural England therefore advise that a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is conducted for the development, and included within the ES, to highlight any potential impacts and subsequent mitigation strategies. Natural England supports the publication *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment and Management in 2013 (3rd edition). The methodology set out is almost universally used for LVIA and must be followed for any assessments conducted, to produce a robust and effective LVIA.

In order to foster high quality development that respects, maintains, or enhances, local landscape character and distinctiveness, Natural England encourages all new development to consider the character and distinctiveness of the area, with the siting and design of the proposed development reflecting local design characteristics and, wherever possible, using local materials. The EIA process should detail the measures to be taken to ensure the building design will be of a high standard, as well as detail of layout alternatives together with justification of the selected option in terms of landscape impact and benefit.

The assessment should also include the cumulative effect of the development with other relevant existing or proposed developments in the area. In this context Natural England advises that the cumulative impact assessment should include other proposals currently at Scoping stage. Due to the overlapping timescale of their progress through the planning system, cumulative impact of the proposed development with those proposals currently at Scoping stage would be likely to be a material consideration at the time of determination of the planning application.

The assessment should refer to the relevant [National Character Areas](#) which can be found on our website. Links for Landscape Character Assessment at a local level are also available on the same page.

### Heritage Landscapes

You should consider whether there is land in the area affected by the development which qualifies for conditional exemption from capital taxes on the grounds of outstanding scenic, scientific or historic interest. An up-to-date list may be obtained at [www.hmrc.gov.uk/heritage/lbsearch.htm](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/heritage/lbsearch.htm) and further information can be found on Natural England's landscape pages [here](#).

## 6. Access and Recreation

Natural England encourages any proposal to incorporate measures to help encourage people to

access the countryside for quiet enjoyment. Measures such as reinstating existing footpaths together with the creation of new footpaths and bridleways are to be encouraged. Links to other green networks and, where appropriate, urban fringe areas should also be explored to help promote the creation of wider green infrastructure. Relevant aspects of local authority green infrastructure strategies should be incorporated where appropriate. We would advise, however, that any restored access routes are guided away from the Ardley Cutting and Quarry SSSI, to reduce any impact from increased visitor pressure on the site, generated by the development, such routes should be outlined within the ES.

### **Rights of Way, Access land, Coastal access and National Trails**

The EIA should consider potential impacts on access land, public open land, rights of way and coastal access routes in the vicinity of the development. Appropriate mitigation measures should be incorporated for any adverse impacts. We also recommend reference to the relevant Right of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP) to identify public rights of way within or adjacent to the proposed site that should be maintained or enhanced.

### **7. Soil and Agricultural Land Quality**

Impacts from the development should be considered in light of the Government's policy for the protection of the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land as set out in paragraph 112 of the NPPF. We also recommend that soils should be considered under a more general heading of sustainable use of land and the ecosystem services they provide as a natural resource in line with paragraph 109 of the NPPF.

[http://neintranettechnical/content/technical/docs/docs\\_12/Non-Minerals\\_EIA\\_Scoping\\_-\\_Land\\_Quality\\_and\\_Soil\\_Resource\\_Protection\\_v1.2.docx](http://neintranettechnical/content/technical/docs/docs_12/Non-Minerals_EIA_Scoping_-_Land_Quality_and_Soil_Resource_Protection_v1.2.docx)

As identified in the NPPF new sites or extensions to new sites for peat extraction should not be granted permission by Local Planning Authorities or proposed in development plans.

### **8. Climate Change Adaptation**

The [England Biodiversity Strategy](#) published by Defra establishes principles for the consideration of biodiversity and the effects of climate change. The ES should reflect these principles and identify how the development's effects on the natural environment will be influenced by climate change, and how ecological networks will be maintained. The NPPF requires that the planning system should contribute to the enhancement of the natural environment 'by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures' ([NPPF](#) Para 109), which should be demonstrated through the ES.

### **9. Cumulative and in-combination effects**

A full consideration of the implications of the whole scheme should be included in the ES. All supporting infrastructure should be included within the assessment.

The ES should include an impact assessment to identify, describe and evaluate the effects that are likely to result from the project in combination with other projects and activities that are being, have been or will be carried out. The following types of projects should be included in such an assessment, (subject to available information):

- a. existing completed projects;
- b. approved but uncompleted projects;
- c. ongoing activities;
- d. plans or projects for which an application has been made and which are under consideration by the consenting authorities; and
- e. plans and projects which are reasonably foreseeable, ie projects for which an application has not yet been submitted, but which are likely to progress before completion of the



development and for which sufficient information is available to assess the likelihood of cumulative and in-combination effects.

### **Solar farms**

We note the inclusion of a solar farm has been proposed as part of the development, the ES should explain where and how this would fit into the overall design of the development, including all visual screening and security measures. Natural England also advise that a scheme for the use of the land beneath the solar panels is outlined, and that this land could be utilised for the development of priority habitats, which should be considered. For additional information relating to Solar Parks please refer to the Technical Information Note at the link below, which provides a summary of advice about their siting, their potential impacts and mitigation requirements for the safeguarding of the natural environment.

[Solar parks: maximising environmental benefits \(TIN101\)](#)

### **Ancient Woodland – addition to the S41 NERC Act paragraph**

The S41 list includes six priority woodland habitats, which will often be ancient woodland, with all ancient semi-natural woodland in the South East falling into one or more of the six types. The semi natural ancient woodland Kennel Copse is located within the boundary of the proposed development, and Natural England would expect to see evidence within the ES that safe guards this resource.

Information about ancient woodland can be found in Natural England's standing advice [http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/standing-advice-ancient-woodland\\_tcm6-32633.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/standing-advice-ancient-woodland_tcm6-32633.pdf).

Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable resource of great importance for its wildlife, its history and the contribution it makes to our diverse landscapes. Local authorities have a vital role in ensuring its conservation, in particular through the planning system. The ES should have regard to the requirements under the NPPF (Para. 118)<sup>2</sup> which states:

'Planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss.'