



Offshore Wind Farms

EAST ANGLIA ONE NORTH

PINS Ref: EN010077

and

EAST ANGLIA TWO

PINS Ref: EN020078

Deadline 8

ISH 14

HABITATS and BIODIVERSITY

The quality of biodiversity surveys

by

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EA1N – EN010077 / SEAS ID no 2002 4494

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Summary

- 1 The lack of rigour in the Ecological surveys
- 2 The Sandlings SPA
- 3 The River Hundred and Riparian Woodland surveys
- 4 The Arable surveys
- 5 The unsafe surveys undermine the Applicant's project and make it unsafe for the ExA to find in favour
- 6 Conclusion



1 The relationship of Royal Haskoning with SPR is a close one, as RH's director and SPR's EAN1 and EA2 project manager are, of course, the same person. Can surveys by Royal Haskoning be considered independent?

1.1 The following examples will serve to illustrate where the existing surveys and their results are not safe, and where independent surveys might be preferable.

2 Sandlings SPA

2.1 The cable route crosses the SPA at a narrow point and with a reduced corridor which demonstrates some mitigation. However, there are several issues with this.

2.2 The SPA crossing (using either trenching or HDD method) will result in potential impacts and thus required an App Assessment as part of the HRA process. In that stage of the HRA it is necessary to demonstrate that there are 'no alternatives'. However, the cable route could in theory loop up to the north and back down again (avoiding direct habitat loss or temporary disturbance). Why not? The whole cable route is not straight or straightforward in any case.

2.3 The HRA relied on there being no records of nightjar or woodlark in this part of the SPA, but the habitat is still present. Their late inclusion at ISH 14 was designed to address this but fell short of achieving the advice of NE.

2.4 It is clear that evidence must be obtained in relation to the habitats present for HRA, prior to a decision being made. However, this evidence has comprised a very basic and flawed Phase 1 survey and a late Phase 2 survey which should have identified the vegetation communities affected to NVC level (National Vegetation Classification) and did not. NVC identification is vital to ensure that mitigation and restoration is based on sound baseline information. For instance, an accurate survey might show that turves should be preserved and reinstated after the trenching, instead of preserving only the topsoil.

2.5 However, the Applicant suggested at the last hearing that NE's objections to its plans need not prevent ExA making its own decision. It is therefore necessary to draw attention to flaws in the surveys to assist ExA.

2.6 The SSSI habitats are described by the Applicant as: 'species-poor semi-improved grassland and dense scrub'. Aerial photos show a much more diverse habitat in mosaic than this description. In any case, the habitats are still designating features of the Leiston - Aldeburgh SSSI. The SSSI unit (Unit1) states that *"The Unit comprises a mosaic of acid grassland, heathland, sand sedge, bracken, coarse grasses and scrub and is being managed to expand and restore the areas of acid grassland and heath. During visit, evidence was found of a recent fire resulting in a considerable loss of gorse and mature heather (4.2 Ha) in the south-west of the unit. The unit is usually grazed by Exmoor and Dartmoor ponies."* Reptiles



are not specifically mentioned in the SSSI citation but dragonflies and invertebrates are.

2.7 NE has requested mitigation in the form of prolonged management of restored and restoring habitat which the Applicant has agreed to do in order to aspire to biodiversity net gain, in this instance, after the extreme ecological shock of trenching. However, the 'absence' of reptiles is an issue, for although NE has accepted that surveys will take place before construction, it is likely that reptiles will be there. The population levels present may require mitigation that might conflict with the time constraints imposed by the bird breeding season and thus it requires careful timing.

2.8 These issues could be much better mitigated by tunnelling under the SSSI. SEAS does not accept the argument that HDD would take 1 year compared to 1 month for the trenched approach - this seems far too long for a relatively short section of HDD. In any case, microtunnelling has not been seriously considered and we urge that it should be, since it can avoid any problems associated with bentonite and enables both wild creatures and human population to live in relative peace while it is happening. SEAS has submitted a document on microtunnelling at this deadline 8.

3 The River Hundred

3.1 The river has not been considered in detail and has almost been discounted as receptor. The Extended Phase 1 report actually stated no further otter and water vole surveys were necessary, and although these did take place in the end, this places serious questions as to the quality of the P1 report. This baseline information is necessary to identify the method for cable crossing the river. It has not yet been provided by an independent ecologist. The means of crossing the river is still the 'go-to' trench method commonly proposed for a ditch. It is ecologically devastating for a vital river on which an SSSI depends.

3.2 The NE comments pick up on the fact that the Hundred River is directly connected to the Sandlings SPA (and SSSI) and that potential impacts could arise from actions (even temporary ones) during the construction phase. These issues should have been assessed in the HRA and still have not been. SEAS has submitted a verbal representation of these consequences at ISH14 Biodiversity and HRA, and submitted our written account at deadline 8.

3.3 Several errors at an early stage set the scene for compounding omissions as recently as February 2021.

3.3.1 APP-503, APP-504 records state that this initial visit was undertaken in April 2018. However, in the photos, the river was in spate and the trees were bare with very little coming through the earth (e.g. TN 162a). The lack of spring growth and blossom is remarkable for April and cannot produce an accurate botanical assessment of a woodland. A sample of the Applicant's photos of bare broadleaved trees and dead bracken is given on p4 (there is no grid reference, so we surmise this area is to the west of the B1122). There are no Target Notes within the work 19 order limits in the riparian woodland, which, in the most recent survey (February 2021) attracted 22 TNs.

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3.3.2 The first woodland survey did not survey the east side of the B1122 (there is no horse chestnut or gorse in the riparian woodland, though it is mentioned, and no target notes were made of the monolith trees and veteran trees as potential bat habitat or roosts).

3.3.3 The survey east of the river covered areas north of the order limits, such as near the B1122 bridge over the river. This was from a position in the pony field destined to become haul track, where the river was shown in spate. The survey wandered south of the order limits, too. They did not make target notes inside the order limits in the protected meadow, despite characteristic features visible even in winter, like the champion oak (TM 44781 60497).

3.4 The woodland at the A1122 pinchpoint has effectively been sacrificed on both sides of the road - but the real ecological impacts cannot be ascertained from the surveys undertaken. The Phase 1 map actually omits a section of this area (the riparian woodland to the east of the B1122) — even from a desktop survey the decaying monolith trees of bat roosting potential are identifiable. The detail in the P1 report is insufficient to adequately assess potential impacts - again, for direct or indirect impacts on woodland, the P1 report should have recommended Phase 2 surveys of the woodland habitat to ensure that potential impacts on a Priority Habitat can be accurately predicted and subsequently mitigated for or offset. This was not done.

3.5 The riparian woodland is characterised by Alder, Poplar, and Nettle with seasonal flooding events and a high water table. For this reason SEAS is concerned that the consideration should be given that the woodland is likely to be one of the wet woodlands, probably within the W6 (JNCC, NVC) category.

3.6 The survey carried out in February 2021 repeated some of the errors of the first one.

3.7.1 It was again carried out in winter. This means that an assessment of the riparian woodland could not be carried out to NVC specifications.

3.7.2 No gorse and no horse chestnut are present in the riparian woodland.

3.7.3 No assessment of the extent of riparian seepage into the woodland was attempted.

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3.7.5 No assessment of the woodland as a whole was carried out. This is essential to ascertain if we have a wet woodland here as disturbances from trenching to a part of the woodland (trenching will remove more than 40%) will cause adverse effects to the whole.

3.8 In view of Royal Haskoning's commitment to SPR's project at all levels, we request that at least an independent survey should be carried out of the woodland, to JNCC standard and measured against NVC, in May preferably.

3.9 SEAS is grateful to local plant and tree experts who have begun to log growth on a volunteer basis in this woodland and will present their findings to the County Recorder.

4 Arable receptors have been dismissed as 'species poor' yet the essential roles of hedgerow and field margins in connectivity and diversity have not been assessed and any mitigation proposed is inadequate (reduced to filling in gaps in hedgerows). Arable species have not been considered and the buffer zones suggested for nesting birds are inadequate. Several aquatic habitats have been missed. Habitats for rare and protected species have been missed or dismissed (e.g., the nightingales in Fitches Lane/wood; the hares and watercourse on the Friston Substation site). Bat surveys have been let down by recording equipment and have been carried out too late in the day for ExA.

5 SEAS has provided photos of species in situ and at risk from the development.¹ We trust this begins to compensate, through evidence, for the patchy surveys which have been presented to ExA by the Applicant. Without accurate Phase 2 surveys, the ExA cannot be assured that appropriate mitigation is a) deliverable and b) has been committed to in any serious mitigation strategy.

5.1 SEAS challenges the safety of the Applicant's surveys and believes that a safe decision, consequently, cannot be made in favour of the Applicant.

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¹ <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/EN010077/EN010077-004131-6.SEAS%20ISH7%20-%20Post%20submission%20on%20Terrestrial%20Ecology%20-%20DEADLINE%206.pdf>
<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/EN010077/EN010077-004130-5.SEAS%20ISH7%20-%20Post%20hearing%20River%20One%20Hundred%20Woodland%20-%20DEADLINE%206.pdf>
<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/EN010077/EN010077-003791-DL5%20-%20SEAS%20-%20Habitats%20and%20Biodiversity.pdf>

6 The Applicants' Site Selection decision (June 2018) depended on the Aldeburgh Road 'pinch point'. Indeed, we have been told repeatedly that there is no alternative to this crossing.

6.1 The selection was made without adequate ecological surveys of Works Area 19. The Aldringham River Hundred Valley Special Landscape Area (SLA) was ignored. In consequence, the river will suffer an ecological shock and a chunk of its woodland will be lost for good, impacting the SPA in several places, and the wetlands of the SSSI which exist because of the river.

6.2 The Applicant's failure to assess this area properly calls into question the reliability of this and the rest of their surveys. A safe decision for planning consent cannot be made without addressing these failings.

6.3 Refusal is essential.

