

Riverside Energy Park

Update on Environment Bank Site Selection Progress

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Update on Environment Bank Site Selection Progress

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Applicant has commissioned the Environment Bank (EB) to secure biodiversity offsetting suitable to compensate for the residual biodiversity impact associated with the Proposed Development and provide a 10% net gain. This is secured in Requirement 5 of the dDCO submitted at Deadline 5. Details on the biodiversity offsetting process are set out in the **Biodiversity Accounting Report (8.02.09, REP2-060)** and the **Biodiversity Offset Delivery Framework (8.02.25, REP3-031)**.
- 1.1.2 At the Issue Specific Hearing on 5 June 2019, Ms Martland on behalf of the EB explained the Applicant's commitment to delivering an off-site compensation package (biodiversity offset) and stated that *"It is intended that work to identify and prepare the offset will be progressed allowing details of sites being considered to be provided in future submissions."*¹
- 1.1.3 The purpose of this paper is to provide an update to the ExA on the progress made by the EB in relation to identifying potential sites for biodiversity offsetting in the local area.

1.2 Process for Site Selection

- 1.2.1 The site selection process is outlined in Section 3 of the **Biodiversity Offset Delivery Framework (8.02.25, REP3-031)** and initially involves a site search within a selected target area, exploring existing registered sites that may potentially be available for offsetting. The Applicant has selected the London Borough of Bexley (LBB) as the initial target area to ensure the offsetting requirement is delivered within the closest vicinity to the Proposed Development. If there are limited sites identified within LBB, the target area will be extended to also include neighbouring boroughs, although preference will still be applied to sites within LBB and land that contributes to local green infrastructure and biodiversity connectivity.
- 1.2.2 The preliminary phase of the site search involves the identification of suitable landowners in the LBB who would be interested in receiving funds for carrying out nature conservation projects that deliver net gain for biodiversity. Once the EB is aware of sites which are available, an ecological assessment will be undertaken to determine the sites most suitable for offsetting. The site selection will prioritise sites that can provide a 'like for like' replacement of habitat, with specific regard to opportunities for Open Mosaic Habitat (OMH).

¹ Applicant's Oral summary from the Issue Specific Hearing on Environmental Matter (8.02.19, REP3-027)

- 1.2.3 The preliminary site search has been informed by a desk-based search of existing nature reserves and open spaces within LBB, together with a review of EB's site registry, aerial maps, local nature conservation strategies and existing nature conservation projects, as well as discussions with other organisations that may provide further links to relevant landowners. The preliminary site search has also been informed by several Deadline 4 submissions to the ExA which suggested sites considered to have potential for biodiversity offsetting. The Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve, Ralph Todd and Thames Water Utilities Limited suggested several sites including the Thamesview Golf Centre, Crossness Nature Reserve and land in Peabody ownership referred to as 'Norman Road Field and Veridian Park'.
- 1.2.4 Using the findings of the desk-based search, EB have identified and contacted key landowners and organisations within LBB that have land holdings with potential for biodiversity offsetting. In addition, organisations with potential nature conservation links to relevant projects and landowners in the area have also been contacted. The landowners/organisations contacted to date are as follows:
- LBB – LBB are a principal landowner in the borough who own and/or manage a range of semi-natural and amenity green spaces. The Council were identified as a lead contact for several nature conservation projects identified in the All London Green Grid² - Area Framework 5 - River Cray and Southern Marshes.
 - Peabody – Peabody were identified as a significant landowner in the Thamesmead area with landholdings in proximity to REP and Crossness Local Nature Reserve, including the Thamesview Golf Centre and Peabody land including 'Norman Road Field and Veridian Park' identified in the ExA submissions by Ralph Todd and Thames Water Utilities Limited.
 - Thames Water – Identified as a landowner of several assets in the borough including Crossness Local Nature Reserve and adjacent land.
 - London Wildlife Trust – A key nature conservation organisation in London with landholdings and project links in LBB.
 - Thames21 – An independent charity working to improve the environmental conditions of local waterways across London. A lead partner in projects in Thamesmead Canals and River Cray Project.
- 1.2.5 Additional landowners within the borough, as well adjacent local authority councils, have also been identified and are being contacted as the preliminary search continues.

² All London Green Grid – Area Framework 5: River Cray and Southern Marshes. Located at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/af05_river_cray_and_southern_marshes.pdf

1.2.6 The Applicant intends to provide an overview of the initial site options identified within the Environment Bank Site Selection for Biodiversity Offsetting Report which is being prepared by the EB and will be submitted at Deadline 7. The sites identified within the Environment Bank Site Selection for Biodiversity Offsetting Report, will consider the sites suggested in submissions to the ExA at D4 and will take into account preferred site locations that can either individually or cumulatively, deliver the offset requirement. Priority will be given to sites in LBB and that contribute towards achieving local nature conservation targets and objectives. The proposed offset design will be used to agree a final site(s) package for biodiversity compensation delivery in the detailed design phase of the Proposed Development.

1.3 Site Selection Discussions

1.3.1 The Applicant and EB representatives met with LBB (Parks and Open Space Team/Land Team) on 17 July 2019 to discuss the site selection process. The discussion provided an overview of the offsetting process, the offset requirements for the Proposed Development, delivery mechanisms and funding support and the timeframes for moving forward. Following the meeting, on 24 July 2019, EB provided LBB with a summary of the meeting discussion and a timeframe for registering as a potential offset provider and reviewing suitable offsetting opportunities. EB has subsequently undertaken a review of the LBB asset register and on 31 July 2019 provided LBB with a list of thirteen sites with potential for biodiversity offsetting as a basis for further discussion.

1.3.2 On 09 August 2019 EB spoke with LBB (Parks and Open Space Team/Land Team) and have confirmed LBB intent to offer land for consideration as an offset receptor. Specific sites were discussed and a further meeting is being arranged for mid-August to short list sites and discuss next steps. Any sites or projects agreed will be included within the Environment Bank Site Selection for Biodiversity Offsetting Report and will be used to inform the development of the final offset package.

1.3.3 The Applicant and EB representative met with Peabody on 2 August 2019. The meeting addressed the biodiversity offsetting process and considerations for Peabody as a potential offset provider. Further discussions are in progress to explore the suitability of the Thamesview Golf Centre and other sites of Peabody ownership within LBB and neighbouring boroughs.

1.3.4 EB contacted Thames Water Utilities Ltd on 31 July 2019 to discuss the suitability of all Thames Water owned assets within the borough and the principle of Thames Water being an offset provider. The ecologist at Thames Water, who could provide an overview on all suitable assets, is currently on secondment until mid-August, and EB will follow up to arrange to discuss opportunities when they become available.

1.3.5 On 2 August 2019 EB met with a representative from London Wildlife Trust (LWT). The discussion explored the potential use of LWT sites within LBB for biodiversity offsetting. EB and LWT also discussed other conservation

projects, nature conservation priorities or landowners in LBB and neighbouring boroughs which may be interested in providing biodiversity compensation on their property. LWT made commitment for a follow-up discussion week commencing 12 August to discuss site specific projects.

1.3.6 EB contacted relevant project officers at Thames21 on 29 and 31 July to identify if biodiversity offsetting could contribute towards, or complement, any of their existing project work within LBB, either on their own or partner owned land. EB are currently awaiting a response.

1.3.7 Additionally, the Applicant and EB are in contact with Dartford Borough Council in order to arrange a meeting to discuss biodiversity offsetting opportunities within the borough and are similarly making contact with Greenwich, Barking and Dagenham and Bromley Councils.

1.4 Conclusion and Next Steps

1.4.1 The Environment Bank continues to seek contact with organisations and land holders with potential interest in biodiversity offsetting within LBB and adjacent boroughs. A number of potential parcels in LBB have already been identified and are being considered for inclusion in the Environment Bank Site Selection for Biodiversity Offsetting Report which will be submitted at Deadline 7.

1.4.2 Follow up meetings with LBB (Parks and Open Space Team/Land Team), Peabody and Thames Water are being sought for mid-August with a view to confirm site availability and the types and likely unit value of projects available. Similarly, a meeting with Dartford Borough Council is being progressed as is contact with other adjacent local authorities.