

Heckington Fen Solar Park

EN010123

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Applicant: Ecotricity (Heck Fen Solar) Limited

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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Table of Contents:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

Table of Contents: 2

List of Tables: 2

1 Introduction 3

 1.1 Introduction 3

 1.2 The Applicant 3

 1.3 Site Location 3

 1.4 Overview of the Proposed Development 4

 1.5 Consenting Regime and Requirement For Environmental Assessment 5

 1.6 Consultation and The Preliminary Environmental Information Report 8

 1.7 Purpose of The Environmental Statement..... 8

 1.8 Structure of the Environmental Statement 9

 1.9 The EIA Consultant Team..... 11

 1.10 Environmental Statement Availability and Comments 12

List of Tables:

Table 1.1: Consultant Team..... 11

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 The Environmental Statement (ES) (document reference 6.1) has been prepared on behalf of Ecotricity (Heck Fen Solar) Ltd (hereafter referred to as the "Applicant"), and forms part of a suite of documents supporting an application under Section 37 of the Planning Act 2008 to the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) for a Development Consent Order (DCO) for Heckington Fen Solar Park.

1.1.2 The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) presents the findings of the development proposal in relation to a DCO application for the construction, operation (including maintenance), and decommissioning of a ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generation and energy storage facility (hereafter referred to as "the Energy Park"), cable route to, and above and below ground works at, the National Grid Bicker Fen Substation (hereafter referred to as "the Proposed Development" (inclusive of Energy Park)) on land at Six Hundreds Farm, Six Hundreds Drove, East Heckington, Sleaford, Lincolnshire.

1.1.3 Heckington Fen Solar Park, as the project title for the draft Development Consent Order document, is interchangeably referenced as Heckington Fen Energy Park within the ES documentation as the Energy Park main site includes an energy storage element.

1.1.4 The ES will assess the Energy Park, Cable Route Corridor for the grid connection and the above and below ground works needed for connection to the National Grid Bicker Fen Substation.

1.1.5 By virtue of its potential generating capacity, which stands at over 50MW, this project constitutes a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). Therefore, instead of applying to the local authority for Planning Permission, the application must be made to the Secretary of State (SoS) for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) for a DCO pursuant to the Planning Act 2008¹. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be required to be undertaken for the Proposed Development and as such The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017² (hereafter referred to as "the EIA Regulations") apply.

1.1.6 This chapter outlines the purpose and structure of the ES, and provides an overview of the Applicant and the Proposed Development.

1.2 THE APPLICANT

1.2.1 Ecotricity was founded in 1995 as the world's first green energy company and now supplies customers across the UK from a growing portfolio of wind and sun parks, with all its electricity supply coming from 100% renewable energy. Ecotricity is a high technology business, developing cutting edge green technology and energy for a low carbon future.

1.2.2 Ecotricity (Heck Fen Solar) Limited, an Ecotricity company, has been formed to create and develop the Heckington Fen Energy Park.

1.3 SITE LOCATION

¹ HMSO (2008) The Planning Act 2008.

² HMSO (2017) The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

1.3.1 The Energy Park is located within the county of Lincolnshire on an area of agricultural land approximately 3.7km east of the village of Heckington and 8.9km west of the town of Boston. The connecting cable route extends approximately 8.5km in length from the Energy Park onsite substation to the connection point at the National Grid Bicker Fen Substation.

1.3.2 The Energy Park lies wholly within the administrative area of North Kesteven District Council (NKDC) and immediately adjacent to the boundary of Boston Borough Council (BBC) along the eastern edge.

1.3.3 The Cable Route Corridor area between the Onsite Substation and the National Grid Bicker Fen Substation straddles across the NKDC boundary and BBC boundary. The Off-site Cable Route Corridor, a subsection area of the Cable Route Corridor between the Energy Park boundary and the new point of connection at National Grid Bicker Fen Substation, lies wholly within BBC boundary.

1.3.4 The above and below ground works at the National Grid Bicker Fen Substation lie wholly within the BBC boundary.

1.3.5 The site location of the Proposed Development is shown on **Figure 1.1- DCO Order Limits** (document reference 6.2.1), with administrative boundaries illustrated on **Figure 1.2- Administrative Boundaries** (document reference 6.2.1).

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

1.4.1 The Proposed Development comprises the construction, operation (including maintenance) and decommissioning of ground mounted solar PV panel arrays, an energy storage system (ESS) facility and supporting infrastructure. Subject to obtaining the necessary consents, construction is anticipated to commence at the earliest in Spring 2025, and to be completed ready for operation no earlier than Autumn 2027, with decommissioning no later than 40 years after the commencement of operation (c.2067).

1.4.2 It is anticipated the Energy Park could create renewable energy to power 100,000 homes and would prevent 75,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year from entering the atmosphere. Further details of the benefits of the Proposed Development are provided in **Chapter 4- Proposed Development** (document reference 6.1.4).

1.4.3 The Proposed Development includes the following key components:

- Solar PV panels;
- PV module mounting structures;
- Inverters;
- Transformers;
- Switchgear;
- Cabling (including extra high, high, and low voltage power, earthing, communication, and control) – below ground for the grid connection to Bicker Fen, and in trenches and/or behind the panels on the Energy Park;
- Energy Storage Systems (ESS) (technology not determined at this time);
- Onsite Substation comprising a substation and control buildings;
- Fencing, gatehouses, and security measures;
- Internal access tracks;
- Community orchard;
- Permissive path;

- Construction of new access point onto highway (previously consented as part of the previous wind park application);
- Landscaping including creation of new habitat areas;
- Construction areas, worker facilities, temporary compounds, and infrastructure;
- Digging of cable trench and laying cables for connection to the National Grid Bicker Fen Substation;
- Installing access points along the Cable Route Corridor for the grid connection; and
- Extension of National Grid Bicker Fen Substation and installation of above ground equipment.

1.4.4 The land within the Order limits that forms the subject of this ES extends to approximately 644.79ha, encompassing the entire Proposed Development, see **Figure 1.1-DCO Order Limits** (document reference 6.2.1).

1.4.5 The Energy Park extends to approximately 524ha as one site. The Energy Park site boundary is shown on **Figure 1.3- Energy Park Boundary** (document reference 6.2.1). A breakdown of the Energy Park's historical field system is shown on **Figure 1.4- Field Plan** (document reference 6.2.1), to help identify particular fields in relation to EIA assessment work.

1.4.6 Further details of the site description are provided in **Chapter 3- Site Description, Site Selection, and Iterative Design Process** (document reference 6.1.3), of this ES, while a description of the Proposed Development infrastructure and design is provided in **Chapter 4- Proposed Development** (document reference 6.1.4).

1.5 CONSENTING REGIME AND REQUIREMENT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

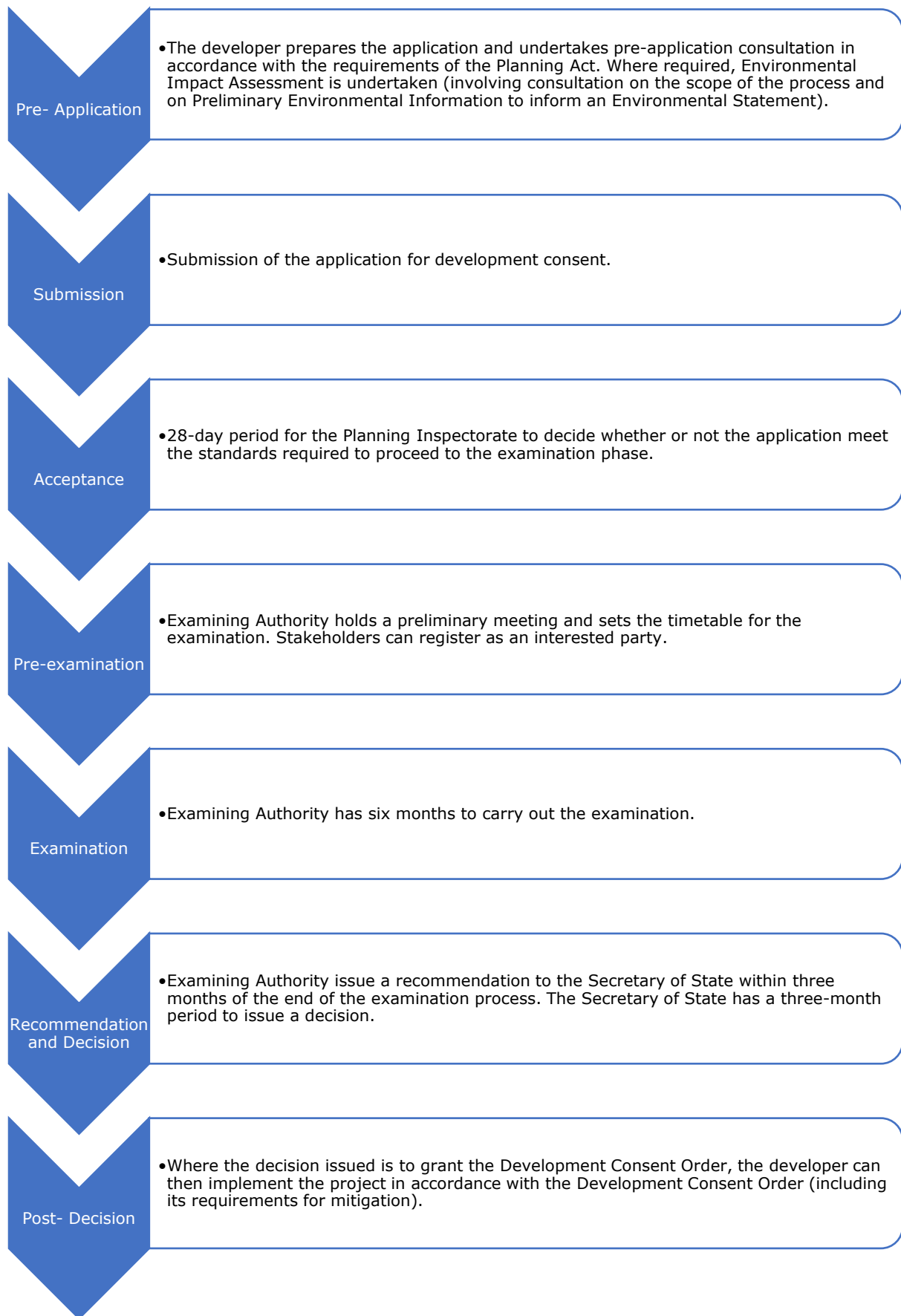
Consenting Regime

1.5.1 Heckington Fen Solar Park represents a significant planning project and is defined as a National Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) in accordance with the Planning Act 2008. The Proposed Development falls within the definition of an onshore generating station in England exceeding 50 megawatts (MW) and therefore represents an NSIP under section 14 and 15 of the Planning Act 2008.

1.5.2 The Planning Act 2008 dictates that the Secretary of State is responsible for determining the application for a Development Consent Order (DCO), with the power to appoint the Planning Inspectorate to manage and examine the application. In this role, the Planning Inspectorate will examine the application through an appointed Examining Authority for the Proposed Development and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State who will then decide whether to grant a DCO which authorises and permits the development.

1.5.3 The Planning Act 2008 defines the key stages in the application process for NSIPs. These are summarised in **Diagram 1.1.** on the following page.

Diagram 1.1: Overview of Application Process



Need for EIA

1.5.4 EIA is the process of identifying and assessing the significant effects (beneficial or adverse) likely to arise from a project. This requires consideration of the likely changes to the environment, where these arise as a consequence of a project, through comparison with the existing and projected future baseline conditions during/following the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of a development should it proceed.

1.5.5 For NSIPs in England, the legislative requirements for EIA are set by The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, as amended (referred to as the "EIA Regulations").

1.5.6 EIA is not required for all developments. Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations identifies development types that always require EIA. Schedule 2 identifies development types that require EIA if they are likely to lead to significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as their nature, size, or location. The criteria on which this judgement must be made are set out in Schedule 3.

1.5.7 The Proposed Development would fall under Schedule 2, under Paragraph 3(a) of Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations as it constitutes '**industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water**'. Considering the nature and scale of the development proposed, EIA is being undertaken for the Proposed Development.

1.5.8 The Applicant has confirmed to the Planning Inspectorate under Regulation 8(1)(b) of the EIA Regulations that an ES will be provided with the DCO application for the Proposed Development (as required by Regulation 5(2)(a) of the Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009³ ('APFP Regulations'), as it is considered there is the potential for the Proposed Development to meet the criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations.

Scoping

1.5.9 The Applicant has notified the Secretary of State in a letter to the Planning Inspectorate dated 7th January 2022 under Regulation 8(1)(b) of the EIA Regulations that an ES will be provided with the DCO application for the Proposed Development. Therefore, in accordance with Regulation 6(2)(a) of the EIA Regulations, the Proposed Development is EIA development.

1.5.10 On the 7th January 2022, the Applicant submitted an EIA Scoping Request to the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the SoS. The issues that the Applicant considers the EIA will need to address were identified in the Heckington Fen Solar Park Scoping Report (see **Appendix 1.1 - Heckington Fen Solar Park Scoping Report** (document reference 6.3.1.1)).

1.5.11 The Planning Inspectorate reviewed and consulted on the Scoping Report and published a Scoping Opinion on the 17th February 2022 which included the formal responses received by the Planning Inspectorate and other consultees (see: **Appendix 1.2 - Scoping Opinion** (document reference 6.3.1.2) and **Appendix 1.3- Natural England Scoping Response** (document reference 6.3.1.3). All issues raised in the Scoping Opinion have been considered during the EIA process and are discussed in further detail in the technical chapters.

³ HMSO (2009) Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009

1.6 CONSULTATION AND THE PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REPORT

1.6.1 Prior to the completion of this Environmental Statement, a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) was prepared to support statutory consultation under Section 42 of the Planning Act 2008. The PEIR was published for both Section 42, 47 and 48 stakeholder consultation in June 2022 to inform the public and stakeholders of the Applicant's preliminary assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the development proposal up to that point.

1.6.2 Further (targeted) consultation was undertaken in November 2022. The reasons behind this targeted consultation are described in the **Consultation Report** (document reference 5.1), submitted as part of the DCO Application.

1.6.3 The Applicant sought the views of consultees on the information contained within the PEIR, and there was an opportunity within the process up to submission of the DCO application for both the EIA and the project design to have regard to comments received. All issues raised during consultation on the PEIR has been considered during the EIA process and used to inform the final impact assessment for the ES. Section 42 consultation responses specific to individual chapter topics have been included and addressed within the relevant topic chapter, **(Chapters 6-18)** of this ES (document reference 6.1.6-6.1.18).

1.6.4 The pre-application consultation undertaken by the Applicant is also documented within the **Consultation Report** (document reference 5.1), submitted with the DCO Application.

1.6.5 Further detail on the consultation undertaken is provided in **Chapter 2: EIA Methodology and Public Consultation** of the ES (document reference 6.1.2).

1.6.6 The Application was accepted for Examination on the 13th March 2023. Since the Application was submitted, as a result of ongoing discussions with National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET), it has become clear that a change application request for additional works is needed at Bicker Fen Substation to connect the project. The Applicant has undertaken a targeted consultation in July-August 2023 for those relevant "EIA Consultation Bodies" and relevant local stakeholders, including Bicker Parish Council. Further details of this targeted consultation are described in the **Change Consultation Report** (Pre-ExA.ChangeApp.CCR.V1).

1.7 PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

1.7.1 An Environmental Statement (ES) is a document that sets out the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). An EIA is a process for identifying the likely significance of environmental effects (beneficial or adverse) arising from a Proposed Development, by comparing the existing environmental conditions prior to development (the baseline) with the environmental conditions during/following the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of a development should it proceed. The baseline for the assessment has been derived from surveys and studies within and around the Order limits. The ES has also considered measures to avoid, reduce, or mitigate any significant adverse effects on the environment and, where possible, enhance the environment. It has then identified residual effects, which are defined as the effects that remain on receptors following the implementation of mitigation measures. The EIA is carried out prior to the submission of a planning application. The methodology and approach of the EIA process is explained in detail at **Chapter 2- EIA Methodology and Public Consultation** (document reference 6.1.2).

1.7.2 The statutory requirements for carrying out an EIA, the contents of the ES and the procedures for determining DCO applications for 'EIA Development' are set out within The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 and Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the "EIA Regulations").

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

1.8.1 This ES comprises technical studies on each of the aspects of the environment identified as likely to be significantly affected by the Proposed Development (the 'technical chapters'), which are supported with figures and technical appendices where appropriate. The exception to this structure is **Chapter 18: Miscellaneous Issues** (document reference 6.1.18) which presents assessments relating to topics where no individual chapter was warranted, either due to the brevity of the assessment or the small impact associated with the Proposed Development.

1.8.2 Each chapter also presents the potential cumulative effects resulting from other present, or reasonably foreseeable projects together (i.e. cumulatively) with the Proposed Development.

1.8.3 The aim of Environmental Impact Assessment is to protect the environment by ensuring that the SoS, when deciding whether to grant planning permission for a project, does so in the full knowledge of the likely significant effects and takes this into account in the decision-making process.

1.8.4 This Environmental Statement is structured as follows:

- **Environmental Statement: Volume 1 Main Text** (document reference 6.1) - comprises the main volume of the ES, including 'general chapters' that describe the EIA context, provide a description of the Proposed Development, and sets out the scope of the ES, followed by the technical chapters containing topic-by-topic environmental information and concluding with a summary.
- **Environmental Statement: Volume 2 Figures and Drawings** (document reference 6.2) - a set of figures is provided to accompany Volume 1 to aid the reader's understanding.
- **Environmental Statement: Volume 3 Technical Appendices** (document reference 6.3) - comprises the technical appendices supporting the main report, including specialist reports providing relevant background and technical information.
- **Environmental Statement: Non-Technical Summary (NTS)** (document reference 6.4) - this provides a concise summary of the ES identifying the likely significant environmental effects and the measures proposed to mitigate or to avoid adverse effects of the Proposed Development.

1.8.5 This ES has been structured to allow relevant environmental information to be easily accessible. The content of the Environmental Statement: Volume 1 Main Text comprises:

1. Volume 1: Main Text

- Chapter 0 Contents and Statement of Competence
- Chapter 1 Introduction
- Chapter 2 EIA Assessment Methodology and Consultation
- Chapter 3 Site Description, Site Selection, and Iterative Design
- Chapter 4 Proposed Development
- Chapter 5 Planning Policy

- Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual
- Chapter 7 Residential Visual Amenity
- Chapter 8 Ecology and Ornithology
- Chapter 9 Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Flood Risk and Drainage
- Chapter 10 Cultural Heritage
- Chapter 11 Socio-Economic
- Chapter 12 Noise and Vibration
- Chapter 13 Climate Change
- Chapter 14 Transport and Access
- Chapter 15 Air Quality
- Chapter 16 Land Use and Agriculture
- Chapter 17 Glint and Glare
- Chapter 18 Miscellaneous Issues
- Chapter 19 Summary
- Chapter 20 Glossary

1.8.6 **Chapter 0- Contents and Statement of Competence** (document reference 6.1.0) outlines in full the chapter titles, relevant appendices, and figure list.

1.8.7 For continuity, the figures and appendices are arranged and presented using the same reference numbers as the chapters as a means of providing supportive background and technical information.

1.8.8 The Change Application has resulted in updates made to the contents of the Environmental Statement. Full details of the proposed changes to the National Bicker Fen Substation Extension Works are set out in **Chapter 4: Proposed Development** (document reference 6.1.4 (Revision 2)). The following ES chapters have been deemed to need updates to reflect the changes and confirm if conclusions remain valid or need updating:

Volume 1: Main Text

- Chapter 0 Contents and Statement of Competence (document reference 6.1.0 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 1 Introduction (document reference 6.1.1(Revision 2))
- Chapter 2 EIA Assessment Methodology and Consultation (document reference 6.1.2 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 3 Site Description, Site Selection, and Iterative Design (document reference 6.1.3 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 4 Proposed Development (document reference 6.1.4 (Revision 3))
- Chapter 5 Planning Policy (document reference 6.1.5 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual (document reference 6.1.6 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 7 Residential Visual Amenity (document reference 6.1.7 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 8 Ecology and Ornithology (document reference 6.1.8 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 9 Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Flood Risk and Drainage (document reference 6.1.9 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 11 Socio-Economic (document reference 6.1.11 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 12 Noise and Vibration (document reference 6.1.12 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 13 Climate Change (document reference 6.1.13 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 14 Transport and Access (document reference 6.1.14 (Revision 2))

- Chapter 15 Air Quality (document reference 6.1.15 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 18 Miscellaneous Issues (document reference 6.1.18 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 19 Summary (document reference 6.1.19 (Revision 2))
- Chapter 20 Glossary (document reference 6.1.20 (Revision 2))

1.8.9 Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage (document reference 6.1.10/ APP-063), Chapter 16: Land Use and Agriculture (document reference 6.1.10/ APP-069) and Chapter 17: Glint and Glare (document reference 6.1.10/ APP-070) have not been deemed to need updating, and the assessment and conclusions drawn remain valid.

1.9 THE EIA CONSULTANT TEAM

1.9.1 The team responsible for the production of the ES has been co-ordinated and managed by Pegasus Group. Pegasus Group is accredited under the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) 'Quality Mark' scheme which is a mark of excellence in EIA co-ordination and management. Pegasus Group have extensive experience of undertaking EIA work across a range of projects and development types.

1.9.2 In line with Regulation 14(4) of the EIA Regulations, the ES and all technical assessments have been undertaken by suitably qualified 'competent experts'. The consultants who have contributed to the preparation of this ES are set out in **Table 1.1** below.

Table 1.1: Consultant Team

Topic	Consultant
EIA coordination and planning	Pegasus Group
Project Design and Buildability	Ecotricity
Landscape and Visual	Pegasus Group
Residential Visual Amenity	Pegasus Group
Ecology and Ornithology	Ecotricity Kevin Shepherd- Consultant Ornithologist Neil Bostock- Consultant Ecologist Biocensus KJ Ecology
Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Flood Risk and Drainage	JBA Consulting
Cultural Heritage and Archaeology	Pegasus Group
Socio-Economic	Pegasus Group
Noise	Hoare Lea
Climate Change	Land Use Consultants (LUC)
Transport and Access	Pegasus Group
Air Quality	Hoare Lea
Land Use and Agriculture	Kernon Countryside Consultants Ltd Savills
Glint and Glare	Wardell Armstrong LLP
Miscellaneous Issues	Pegasus Group

Topic	Consultant
Cumulative effects and inter-relationships	Assessment team

1.9.3 A Statement of Competence setting out the relevant expertise and/ or qualifications of the experts who have prepared each of the ES topics is located in **Chapter 0- Contents and Statement of Competence** (document reference 6.1.0).

1.10 ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT AVAILABILITY AND COMMENTS

1.10.1 Copies of the ES may be obtained from Pegasus Group, the costs for which are set out below:

- Main Text and Technical Appendices- £0.35p per sheet to cover printing costs
- Non-Technical Summary (NTS) - Free of charge
- Digital copies of the above documents on a CD or USB stick - £15

1.10.2 Postage is payable on all orders. For copies of any of the above please contact Pegasus Group (quoting reference P20-2370) at the following address:

Pegasus Group
 33 Sheep Street
 Cirencester
 GL71RQ
 Telephone: 01285 641717
 Email: cirencester@pegasusgroup.co.uk

1.10.3 The Environmental Statement and other DCO application documentation will also be available to view on the National Infrastructure Planning website <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/>. The site is managed by the Planning Inspectorate, the government agency responsible for examining applications for NSIPs.