Cottam Solar Project

Environmental Statement

ES Addendum 9.1: Ecology and Biodiversity

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December 2023

PINS reference: EN010133

Document reference: EX4/C8.4.9.1

APFP Regulation 5(2)(a)

Cottam
SOLAR PROJECT

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Examination Deadline 4

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Date: December 2023

Revision: [01]

9 Ecology and Biodiversity

9.1 Introduction

9.1.1 This document is an addendum to the ecology and biodiversity assessment included within the submitted Environmental Statement Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity (Application Document Reference: **[APP-044]**).

9.1.2 This Addendum report should be read in conjunction with Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity **[APP-044].** This Addendum updates certain elements of ES Chapter 9.

9.1.3 In response to minor changes to the Scheme, comments made in the relevant representations, and in response to question 2.4.3 in the Examining Authority's second written questions and requests for information **[PD-015]**, this addendum has been prepared to provide additional information relating to:

- The approach to construction and maintenance access gaps at hedgerows.
- The assessment of potential effects on the Humber Estuary Ramsar site.
- The assessment of significance within the cumulative assessment.

9.2 Updates to ES Chapter 9: The Approach to Construction and Maintenance Access Gaps at Hedgerows

9.2.1 There have been some minor updates to the number of gaps that will be required in hedgerows within the Order Limits temporarily during construction and during the operational life of the Scheme. All changes are set out in Revision D of the Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (OLEMP) **[EX4/C7.3_E]**, specifically Section 1.2 and Appendix C.

9.2.2 Chapter 9 **[APP-044]** set out in the third and fourth bullet points of section 9.6.9, the number of locations where minor works (pruning or removal) of short lengths of hedgerows required to facilitate access for construction or maintenance activities. Since the preparation of the chapter, these numbers have required minor revision due to the clarification of how and where accesses will be required, and a further examination of the likelihood that minor hedgerow works (pruning and removal) will be necessary.

9.2.3 Temporary gaps are proposed where hedgerows intersect the Cable Route Corridor only, and these will be replanted/reinstated (as set out in the Outline Ecological Protection and Mitigation Strategy **[APP-356]** and the OLEMP **[EX4/C7.3_E]** secured by requirements 7 and 8 of the draft DCO **[EX4/C3.1_F]** once construction and cable laying is complete. Gaps are also required where hedgerows intersect a maintenance track (regardless of whether they also intersect the cable route at the same location) and are required to facilitate ongoing maintenance access and will remain as such for the operational lifetime of the Scheme. In addition, there are a number of locations of possible hedgerow works (pruning or removal) which may be required to accommodate Abnormal Indivisible Loads (AIL) during the construction phase or for where it is not known at this stage whether hedgerows will require minor works.

9.2.4 The length of the temporary hedgerow gaps will range between 3 and 7.1m in order to accommodate a maximum arrangement of the cable trench, a haul route and a passing bay, as stated in paragraph 9.6.9 of Chapter 9 **[APP-044]**. As indicated on the Hedgerow Removal Plans of Appendix C to the OLEMP **[EX3/C7.3_D]**, there will be a total of 21 temporary hedgerow gap locations, with a further 32 possible temporary hedgerow works locations. This equates to between a possible 63m and 376.3m of hedgerow loss. In the original ES Chapter **[APP-044]**, at paragraph 9.7.58, it was stated that approximately 60 locations would be affected, therefore this clarification represents a reduction by at least 7 locations, assuming all possible locations transpire to be impacted.

9.2.5 The length of the hedgerow gaps required during the operational period of the Scheme will range between 3 and 6.5m, , as stated in paragraph 9.6.9 of Chapter 9 **[APP-044]**, in keeping with typical gap sizes in an agricultural setting. However, as indicated on the Hedgerow Removal Plans in Appendix C to the OLEMP **[EX3/C7.3_D]**, there will be a total of 19 hedgerow gap locations during the operational life of the Scheme. This equates to between a possible 57m and 123.5m of hedgerow loss. In the original ES Chapter **[APP-044]**, at paragraph 9.7.57, it was stated that 12 hedgerow locations would be affected, therefore this clarification represents an increase by 7 locations, measuring up to an additional length of 45.5m.

9.2.6 In the context of the hedgerow network within the Order Limits and that of the surrounding area, these changes are not considered to lead to any change in the assessment of effects of the Scheme on hedgerows from that set out in paragraphs 9.7.57 to 9.7.71 of the original ES Chapter **[APP-044]**.

9.3 Updates to ES Chapter 9: The Assessment of Potential Effects on the Humber Estuary Ramsar Site

9.3.1 In Chapter 9 **[APP-044]**, the Humber Estuary Ramsar site was omitted from the assessment of effects, although an assessment was made for the Humber Estuary SPA designation which concluded that there would be no likely effect (see paragraphs 9.7.2 - 9.7.5).

9.3.2 The separate document, Information to Support a Habitats Regulations Assessment (iHRA) **[APP-357]**, also omitted the Ramsar site and focussed on the SPA and SAC designations. The omission of the Humber Estuary Ramsar site was noted in the Examining Authority's First Written Questions and Requests for Information (EXQ1) dated 31st October 2023 **[PD-011]**. The iHRA document has now been revised to take into account the Ramsar site and was submitted into the Examination at Deadline 3 **[REP3-024]**.

Humber Estuary Ramsar Site Description and Evaluation

9.3.3 Ramsar Sites are designated under the criteria of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in order to protect the important wetland habitats and species within them. Typically, these sites are recognised for their unique or rare habitats or plant communities and their role in the maintenance of populations of migratory birds or

mammals of conservation concern. Additionally, some Ramsar Sites are designated for notable general bird assemblages or a population of particularly threatened non-avian species.

9.3.4 The Ramsar and SAC designations in the Humber Estuary physically overlap for the vast majority of their extents, save for small sections where the Ramsar designation extends marginally beyond that of the SAC, for example encompassing wetlands north of Barton on Humber, all of which occur beyond the 30km desk study search zone from the Scheme. Consequently, the Ramsar designation is also located 14.1km north west from the Order Limits at the closest point (Cottam 3a).

9.3.5 In keeping with the reasons for designation of the SAC, the Ramsar Site is notified for the complex estuary habitats, comprising dune systems and slacks, estuarine waters, intertidal mud and sand flats, saltmarshes and coastal brackish/saline lagoons. In terms of birdlife, the site is also notified due to its internationally important assemblage of overwintering waterfowl, in particular shelduck, golden plover, knot, dunlin, black-tailed godwit, bar-tailed godwit and redshank, species for which there is considerable overlap with the SPA designation. Additionally, the Ramsar Site is notified for the breeding colony of grey seals at Donna Nook and the breeding site of the natterjack toad at Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe dune slacks, both of which occur on the east coast. The natterjack toad is the only reason for notification not also covered either under the SAC or SPA designation. Finally, the presence of river and sea lamprey which migrate through the estuary to/from spawning areas is the remaining reason for the site's notification.

9.3.6 The Humber Estuary Ramsar site is considered to be of International importance.

Assessment of Effects on Humber Estuary Ramsar Site

9.3.7 Due to the overlap in physical extent and in reasons for designation between the SAC, SPA and Ramsar, the assessments for the Humber Estuary SAC and SPA are considered to apply also to the Ramsar site. As such, habitat loss, change or fragmentation of the Ramsar site or habitat degradation through water or airborne pollution events, are not considered likely owing to the physical separation of the Order Limits from the designated site as well as the restricted nature and sensitive design of the construction activities involved.

9.3.8 The additional presence of natterjack toad on the Ramsar Site citation is not considered to affect this assessment. The colony of this species is located within the Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe dune slacks (covered also by their own separate SAC designation) some 58km to the east of the Order Limits. Consequently, no possible impact pathway on this species is considered present.

9.3.9 Similarly, in Natural England's response to EXQ1 dated 21st November 2023 **[REP2-088]**, it is expressed that, despite earlier omission, significant effects upon the Humber Estuary Ramsar Site are considered unlikely:

"The overlap between the SAC/SPA designations and Ramsar designation is noted, both geographically and with regard to the designated features. However this should not warrant the omission of consideration of the Ramsar designation in its own right. All but

one of the Ramsar features are also features of the SAC/SPA. Natterjack Toad are a feature of the Ramsar site only. Due to the physical separation of the site from the proposed development, and the limited range of the Natterjack Toad, Natural England do consider that impacts on this feature are unlikely, however, this should be noted within the ES/iHRA for completeness. In discussions regarding the Statement of Common Ground between Natural England and the Applicant, the applicant has noted the need for specific consideration of the Ramsar designation; this is forthcoming."

9.3.10 Residual effects of the Scheme on the Ramsar designation are therefore considered to be neutral.

Assessment of Cumulative Effects on Humber Estuary Ramsar Site

9.3.11 The presence of the other identified local schemes (West Burton Solar Project, Gate Burton Energy Park and Tillbridge Solar) is not considered to bring about novel or increased risks of impact or impact pathways in combination with the Scheme. As with the assessment for the Humber Estuary SAC and SPA, this is due primarily to the physical separation, and the low risk construction methods anticipated to be employed during the construction of all projects.

9.3.12 The large distances and presence of intervening land, infrastructure and settlements, together with the inherently low capacity for, and likelihood of, pollution events within the solar energy generation and storage schemes means that significant effects upon the Ramsar Site, even in the absence of specific mitigation measures, are considered unlikely. This conclusion is in line with Natural England consultation advice.

9.4 Updates to ES Chapter 9: Cumulative Assessment

9.4.1 In the Examining Authority's First Written Questions (EXQ1) **[PD-011]**, Q1.6.12 concerned the cumulative effects section of ES Chapter 9:

"The reported cumulative effects reported within ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity [APP-044] do not include a definition of those which are considered significant. In addition, the justification for some of the conclusions remain vague e.g. paragraph 9.9.19 states there is potential for increased effects on species but does not explain what these are. Can the Applicant:

- *(i) explain the methods used to define significant cumulative effects on ecological receptors;*
- *(ii) clarify the significance of the cumulative biodiversity effects reported; and*
- *(iii) provide an update to ES Chapter 9."*

9.4.2 Responses to points (i) and (ii) were provided in the Applicant's Responses to EXQ1 **[REP-034]**. The response makes reference to the updated cumulative assessment provided in the Joint Report on the Interrelationship with Other National Infrastructure Projects **[EX4/C8.1.8_C]**. Consequently, in relation to point (iii), the following text brings the ES Chapter 9 in line with this document.

9.4.3 A **moderate cumulative beneficial effect** on reptiles and amphibians is predicted when considering all four projects together, which would be **significant** at the District level.

9.4.4 The **moderate cumulative adverse effect** during construction and operation on skylark, yellow wagtail, grey partridge and quail arising from all four projects considered together is likely to be **significant** at the District level.

9.4.5 A **minor cumulative adverse effect** during operation at **significant** Local scale is likely for overwintering birds when considering all four schemes together and the degree to which these species may be displaced from open arable and pasture land.

9.4.6 A **temporary cumulative adverse effect** during construction **significant** at the Site scale is likely for hedgerows, trees, ditches and watercourses within the Shared Cable Route Corridor owing to the need for temporary accesses via field boundaries containing hedgerows, trees and ditches to permit cable installation.