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Dear Sir/Madam

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017**

**EIA Screening Opinion Request**

**Site: 100.56 Hectares of Land at Hayton House, Great North Road, Aberford, North Yorkshire**

**Proposal: Proposed ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) development of 49.9MW and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS of 49.9MW with associated infrastructure.**

I refer to your request for a Screening Opinion under Regulation 6 of the EIA Regulations which was received on 9th December 2021.

The proposal is the ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) development of 49.9MW and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS of 49.9MW with associated infrastructure on 100.56 Hectares of land at Hayton House approximately 1.2 km northeast of the centre of Aberford, and 5.5 km south west of Tadcaster.

It is agreed that the development proposals, as detailed in the submitted documentation, fall within Column 1, 3(a) of Schedule 2 industrial installations for the production of energy. It is also the case

that the proposals exceed the applicable threshold for this type of development as set out in Column 2 being in excess of 0.5 hectares of land.

The Local Planning Authority has taken account of the selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 Development set out in Schedule 3 of the regulations and has considered the indicative screening thresholds in National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) and applied the screening checklist also contained in the NPPG. It has considered the section criteria for screening schedule 2 development set out in Schedule 3 (Regulation 5(4)).

The proposed development could lead to significant effects on several aspects of the environment. Due to the nature of solar farm and battery storage developments, some individual effects may not be significant. Other individual impacts are not possible to fully assess without a more detailed scheme to consider. However, in light of the information available in the Screening Report and following consultation with relevant consultees, it is considered that significant effects and cumulative effects overall are likely due to the following;

1. Sensitive Area- The development would be near to several 'sensitive areas' as defined by Regulation 2 of the EIA Regulations namely, Scheduled Monuments within the meaning of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.
2. Natural resources- Grade 2 Agricultural Land- The development could result in the loss some of the best and most versatile Grade 2 agricultural land. It is noted that a site-specific Agricultural land classification confirmed that not all the land is Grade 2. However, the proposal would still result in the loss of more than 50 Hectares of Grade 2 land for a considerably long period of time. Moreover, clarification on a more detailed level is needed on whether the construction, access and hard standings will cause irreversible damage the soil quality long term. The operational time is stated to be 40 years; therefore, the land will not be available for this considerable time and the development should be considered long term. The site is above the recognised threshold of 20ha of significance for statutory consultation with Natural England. Additionally, there are large areas of Ancient Woodland adjoining the sites and the indirect impacts on these are unknown.
3. Pollution and Nuisances- There could be adverse nuisance impacts in terms of glare, operational noise and internal security lighting. This would need to be fully assessed through the application process but significant effects on the adjacent Ancient Woodland, SINC's and Heritage Assets could be likely.
4. Biodiversity (Species and Habitats)- It is not expected that the proposed scheme would have any significant effect on any statutorily designated nature conservation site (e.g. SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar site or Local Nature Reserve). The closest Nationally Designated sites are the SSSI Renshaw Woods within 2km. There are three areas of woodlands included on the Ancient Woodland Inventory immediately adjacent to and abutting the sites. Ancient woodland is considered irreplaceable habitat in policy terms. These ancient woodlands are also locally designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). It is assumed from the documents provided, that there would be no direct loss of woodland habitat. There is the potential for significant impacts on these woods due to connectivity and connectivity between them and with other woodlands, such as between Hazel Wood and Hayton Wood or the wooded corridor along Cock Beck.

Due to extensive footprint of this proposal there is the potential to significantly impact on farmland species. It is noted the proposal would undertake a breeding bird survey, but

consideration should also be given to non-breeding birds and to species such as Brown Hare (which is relatively common on parts of the magnesian limestone ridge). Farms a short distance to the east have good populations of Grey Partridge and Skylark. It is not known if there would be significant impact on farmland species. Potential impacts on priority habitats and protected species will partly depend on whether the proposed development impinges on the Cock Beck valley, where effects on permanent grassland, riparian habitats and riverine species would need to be assessed. As a large part of the site adjoins the Cock Beck, there is concern over potential significant impacts.

5. Landscape and Visual. Although not in any national landscape designated area, the site is within the Locally Important Landscape Area. (LILA). It is also within the Green Belt but this designation does not have impacts for landscape or scenic quality. The site adjoins ancient woodland and local conservation areas (SIncs). In the 2019 'Selby Landscape Character Assessment' the landscape falls within the West Selby Limestone Ridge characterised by rolling arable farmland, woodlands and local influence of parkland landscapes with sparse settlement pattern. The landscape has an 'Enriched Historic Environment'. For these reasons it is considered to have lower sensitivity to change. The Selby District Local Landscape Designation Review December 2019 re-evaluates the district and re-confirms the LILA designations and confirms that this is the most attractive landscapes in the district associated with the belt of limestone ridge country in the west of the area. The area is considered to have a coherent and intact landscape character with strong sense of tranquillity or remoteness. Within this context, there is the potential for significant adverse landscape and visual effects due to the scale, extent and spread of the development. A landscape and visual impact assessment to current guidelines (GLVIA3) should be provided. Prior to this we would expect further consultation on the appropriate method, scope and content of the assessment and to agree potential viewpoints prior to submission of an application, typically at the scoping stage if EIA development.

The development would be visible from and would impact on the public's enjoyment along several Public Rights of Way (PROW's). A PROW runs along the northern edge of Hayton Wood bounding the northern parcel of land. This leads past Hazelwood Castle and links into a bridleway to the north. A PROW runs along the north side of Cock Beck within the site. There is a bridleway close to the east running north to south. In addition, there are numerous minor roads and access tracks in and around the sites. The sites would be visible from nearby roads. Other vantage points exist within the grounds of Hazelwood Castle Hotel and Spa, nearby properties and from tracks into and out of the woodlands

6. Cultural Heritage/Archaeology. There could be a significant wider impact on the setting of a number of Heritage Assets in the nearby vicinity. It is not the intention of this letter to list all of these but the most important with the closest proximity include Hazelwood Castle (Grade I LB), St Marys Chapel (Grade II\* LB), Roman Chapel of St Leonard (Grade I LB). The development could have significant impacts on the agricultural pastoral setting to these affecting views towards and from these Heritage Assets. There are Scheduled Monuments abutting the site. Given the proximity to these, the impact could be significant. In terms of archaeology, within the site there are numerous cropmarks both within and adjacent to the red-line area, indicative of previous field systems, trackways and settlements. These are most likely prehistoric or Romano- British date. The southwest part of the area is also adjacent to a medieval moated manor house.

7. Transport and Access- PROWs- footpaths and bridleways which are part of the historic rural environment around Hazelwood Castle. Although the development would not directly affect access to these routes, the visual public enjoyment is likely to be significantly affected due to the extensive scale and spread of this development.

The Local Planning Authority have concluded that the proposal would be likely to have significant impacts cumulatively due to the significant scale of the proposal, the location within, and proximity to, landscapes of historical, cultural and archaeological significance, the loss of high quality agricultural land, the potential impact on ancient woodland, SINC's and their connectivity with other woodlands and wooded corridors, the Cock Beck valley (where effects on grassland and riparian habitats and riverine species would need to be assessed), the likely significant visual impact on the landscape which is LILA, and the likely significant impacts on Heritage Assets.

As such the proposed development is considered to be EIA development, and an Environmental Statement is required to accompany any future planning application.

This letter should be treated as the Councils formal decision on this Screening Opinion Request. A detailed reasoning for this conclusion is set out in the attached Screening Matrix based upon the Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Checklist from the Government website.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the above officer.

Yours faithfully,



Mr M P Grainger  
Head of Planning