



Department for  
Business, Energy  
& Industrial Strategy

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Our ref: 1481U  
Your ref: NORT-24805

8 December 2022

Dear Mr Anderson,

**SCREENING DECISION BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE UNDER THE ELECTRICITY WORKS (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2017 (“THE 2017 REGULATIONS”)**

**NAME OF SCHEME: BIRKSIDE FELL 20KV OVERHEAD LINE REBUILD, BLANCHLAND, HEXHAM, NORTHUMBERLAND**

**LOCATION: BIRKSIDE FELL TO LOW HOPE, BLANCHLAND, CONSETT, NORTHUMBERLAND, DH8 9SZ**

Screening decision for a proposed development (the “Development”) to:

- Rebuild a 20 kilovolt (KV) overhead electricity line of approximately 2,500 metres in length. The proposal will involve the replacement of existing 26 wood poles and overhead conductors and the installation of new poles and conductors of similar structure and size;
- The relocation of pole 167 from its current position and diverting the overhead cables by approximately 10 metres to the north between the new angle stay poles number 166 and 168.

The development requires Section 37 consent under the Electricity Act 1989 and are subject to the 2017 Regulations.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (“the Secretary of State”) has considered the factors set out in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations, together with the information within the supplied documentation (“the Application”) Northern Power Grid (“the



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Applicant”) in relation to the impacts on the environment of the Development and the views of the Northumberland Council (“the LPA”). In particular, in reaching his decision the Secretary of State notes the following factors:

1. The Development does not fall within Schedule 1 (mandatory EIA).
2. The Development falls under Schedule 2 of the 2017 Regulations as the electricity line is to be installed above ground in a sensitive area.
3. The LPA was consulted and raised no objection to the Development (Form B dated 24 September 2021, ref. 21/03085/OHL). Further the LPA’s delegated report dated 15 October 2021 states that *“Having assessed the application against the relevant national and local planning policies, it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework”*.
4. The Development is located within the Hexhamshire Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Muggleswick, Stanhope and Edmundbyers Common and Blanchland Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the North Pennine Moors Special Protection Area (SPA), the North Pennine Moors Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the North Pennines Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
5. The above sites are notified for a variety of habitats including upland heathland, juniper scrub, major areas of blanket bog of which a significant proportion remains active with accumulating peat, acidic rock outcrops and scree supporting a range of lichens and bryophytes. The sites also support assemblage of upland breeding bird species and protected birds such as Merlin, Golden Plover and Short-eared Owl. The sites also support small populations of nationally scarce plants and there is a rich heathland invertebrate community.
6. The Application includes a Habitats Regulations Assessment report, a RAMS method statement and a SSSI assent notice prepared by the Applicant which detail avoidance and mitigation measures and good practice measures. Such measures also include:
  - a. An Ecologist will be appointed and present on site to monitor that the development proceeds in accordance with relevant environmental requirements and in adherence with the required good practice and mitigation measures,
  - b. Sensitive, minimal removal and replacement of surface peat and vegetation,
  - c. Minimal use of wide tracked low ground pressure vehicles, and to be stored on designated sites with compact ground,
  - d. Works to take place outside the upland bird breeding season,
  - e. Lighting control measures,
  - f. Construction methods and timings to ensure minimal disturbance to the site and to reduce the risk of entrapment,
  - g. Careful and appropriate soil stripping methods and reinstatement measures,
  - h. Biosecurity measures to control the spread of non-native species, and
  - i. Best practice pollution control measures.



7. Natural England was consulted and issued assent under Section 28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), (assent dated 17 October 2022, ref. 10065737). Further, the views of the LPA state that *“Given that there are already overhead line works within the area and the application is for replacement works, there would not be a materially greater visual impact on the landscape or amenity than the existing. The proposed works are required in order to maintain security of electricity supplies in the local area as part of a program of network maintenance and improvement work. The proposal is found to be acceptable and furthermore would be in accordance with Policy and NE21 of the Tynedale District Local Plan.”*
8. In view of the above factors the Secretary of State considers that any potential likely significant effects to protected species or the habitats of the above sites will be mitigated subject to the implementation of the measures detailed in the Habitats Regulations Assessment report, the RAMS method statement and as agreed with Natural England.
9. In relation to the AONB, the Development is to replace infrastructure of similar shape and size along a route in close proximity to the path of the current overhead electricity line and in approximately the same position within the landscape. Therefore, due to the temporary and minor nature of the construction works, the Development is not expected to result in any notable landscape visual effects on the special qualities of the AONB.
10. With regards to production of waste associated with the Development, the Application states that any redundant parts and equipment generated from the Development will be removed from the site and disposed of appropriately. Therefore, provided these measures are implemented and due to the minor nature of the works it is expected to be unlikely that there would be any significant effects arising from the production of waste. Further the LPA’s views do not raise any concerns on this matter.
11. The Application does not include information with regards to designated heritage assets, however it is noted that the closest scheduled monument, the “Burntshieldhaugh Fell prehistoric settlement and field system, 570m east of Ivy Pool”, is at approximately 220 metres from the Development. However, based on the information available it is concluded that the Development will not have an effect on any designated or non-designated heritage assets. Further the LPA’s views do not raise any concerns in relation to this matter.
12. The Application does not include information with regards to listed buildings in the vicinity of the Development, however it is noted that there are four Boundary Stones Grade II listed buildings within approximately 250 metres from the Development. However, based on the information available and as the Development is to replace existing infrastructure it is considered unlikely that there would be any significant effects to the setting of the Grade II buildings. Further, the LPA’s views do not raise any concerns on this matter.
13. The Application does not include information with regards to potential impacts to archaeological remains, however as stated previously, the Development is to replace existing infrastructure and limited ground works are expected to occur. Therefore, on the basis of the information available it appears reasonable to



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conclude that there would be no potential for buried archaeology and heritage assets to be present and impacted by the Development. In addition, the LPA's views do not raise any concerns on this matter.

14. The Application does not include information with regards to potential impacts to residential receptors. However due to the temporary and limited nature of the construction works, it is considered unlikely that there would be any potential significant effects to the surrounding residential receptors. Also, it is noted that the LPA's views do not raise any concerns on this matter.
15. Finally, the Application does not suggest that there are other known developments in the area. Therefore, given the temporary and localised nature of the Development, the Secretary of State considers that it is unlikely that there would be any localised likely significant effects from the Development in combination with other existing or approved projects.

Taking account of the abovementioned factors and information received, the Secretary of State concludes that the Development is **not an EIA** development under the 2017 Regulations and does not require a statutory EIA as it is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment due to its nature, location and size. A copy of this letter has been sent to the LPA for information.

Yours sincerely,

*Francesco Marolda*  
Overhead Lines Manager  
Energy Infrastructure Planning