



Department for
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& Net Zero

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Our ref: 1882u
Your ref: EZD346-Fibua Copehill Down

11th July 2025

Dear Mr Farrell Copp,

**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: EZD346- Fibua Copehill Down

Decision:

The Secretary of State concludes that the proposed works are not EIA development under the 2017 Regulations and do not require a statutory EIA as they are unlikely to have significant effects on the environment due to their nature, location and size. A copy of this letter has been sent to the LPA for information.

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

- Upgrading approximately 6,020m of an existing 11kV overhead line by installing 96 poles to support the heavier construction of the line along with additional stays.

Secretary of State considerations:

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”) by Southern Electric Power Distribution PLC (“the Applicant”) in relation to the impacts on the environment of the proposed development and the views of Wiltshire Council (“the LPA”). In reaching his decision, the Secretary of State notes the following factors:

1. The proposed development does not fall within Schedule 1 (mandatory EIA);
2. The proposed 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 proposed development falls within Salisbury Plain SPA, Salisbury Plain SAC, River Avon SAC, River Till SSSI, Salisbury Plain SSSI and an Impact Risk Zone.
4. The Applicant consulted the LPA. The LPA concluded their checks and had no objections to make on the proposed development on 10 June 2025.
5. The Applicant consulted Natural England. Natural England responded via email on 4 June 2025 granting assent covering the period from 1 August 2025 to 31 October 2025 (reference: 1305251539CG).
6. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was carried out by RSK ADAS Ltd on 14 August 2024. The report determined the site consisted of Lowland Calcareous Grassland, Other Neutral Grassland, Modified Grassland, Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Native Hedgerow, Pollen and Nectar Arable Field Margins and Other Cereal Crops. Two shallow pools and a drainage ditch were located within 250 m of the proposed water main route. The pole route was partially situated within the Salisbury Plain Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
7. The site provided suitable foraging, commuting and some roosting habitat for a wide variety of bat species, with hedgerows, woodland, grasslands, and a watercourse on site providing suitable habitat for Hazel Dormouse, Great Crested Newt, Otter, Water Vole, White-clawed Crayfish, Badger, Marsh Fritillary, widespread reptile species and nesting birds.

8. The arable fields on site also provided suitable habitat for ground-nesting birds, including Schedule 1 species such as Stone Curlew. The tank tracks within the lowland calcareous grassland also provided suitable habitat for Fairy Shrimp. Fourteen poles on site were noted to have potential features suitable for roosting bats, with pole 14 rated as PRF-M (suitable for multiple bats), and the remaining 13 poles rated as PRF-I (suitable for individual or small numbers of bats).
9. The proposed development is likely to adversely impact the Ecology of the site in the absence of mitigations. It is therefore recommended that the Applicant follows the recommendations outlined in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal to minimise the risk of impacts on Wildlife and protected species.
10. The Applicant provided a Habitats Regulation Assessment ("the HRA") which was carried out 6 May 2025, the document provided details on work methods, risks to the protected sites and proposed mitigation measures.
11. Having considered the HRA and the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, the Secretary of State considers there may be likely significant effects on a National Site Network site under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. This is due to excavation and vehicle movement causing disturbance to the Heathland habitats located in/around the proposed site. The Secretary of State has considered whether there could be an Adverse Effect on Integrity of the protected site.
12. The Applicant has provided appropriate mitigations on the HRA advising track matting will be installed along access routes to ensure habitats are not impacted by vehicles, all areas required for excavation around the poles will have the topsoil removed and stored separately, soil side up, before being reinstated the same day and checked by the site manager.
13. A pre-works nesting bird check should be carried out at least 48 hours prior to the works starting to ensure no nesting birds (including Hobby) are present. If an active Hobby nest is found a buffer of at least 200 m – 450 m should be implemented until the young have fledged.
14. Considering the proposed mitigation, the Secretary of State is satisfied that there will be no Adverse Effect on Integrity of the protected site, and this is beyond all reasonable scientific doubt.
15. The proposed development is a minor modification to an existing piece of infrastructure and not likely to have a significant effect on the Natural Landscape site manager

Yours sincerely,

John McKenna
Head of Network Planning team
Energy Infrastructure Planning Delivery Team