



Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

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Our ref: 2327u
Your ref: Balh-That

Friday 12th December 2025

Dear Miss Madeleine Pain,

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: Balh-That

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:

- The replacement of four electricity poles supporting an existing 33kV overhead line approximately 0.1 meters.



Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

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 West Berkshire Council ("the LPA"). In particular, 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 is located within a Registered Common Land, Impact Risk Zone and Greenham & Crookham Common SSSI.
4. The Applicant consulted the LPA, which reviewed the proposed development and confirmed that the development is not considered EIA development. The LPA advised that the works are unlikely to have a significant adverse effect on the environment due to their limited scale, temporary nature, and the ability to restrict the spatial extent of activities. Mitigation measures, including ecological consultation and like-for-like pole replacements, were noted as effective in reducing potential impacts. Consequently, the LPA raised no objections and issued this advice on 24 September 2025.
5. Following the LPA's screening opinion, the LPA completed Form B and confirmed they were satisfied with the additional information provided by the Applicant. However, they requested the following modifications/conditions:
 - Works will be carried out in accordance with all ecological measures and adhere to the plans and methods outlined in the CEMP, Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and the Non-Licensed Method Statement. Within one month of completing works, the Applicant will submit a schedule of condition posts to the LPA for review.
 - Reason: To ensure the adequate safeguarding of protected species in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.
6. The Applicant consulted Natural England, which granted unconditional assent on 28 July 2025. The assent is valid for three periods: 1 September to 30 November in 2025, 2026, and 2027.
7. The Applicant consulted the County Archaeologist, who responded on 25 July 2025. The archaeologist noted that the area has historical



Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

significance, with evidence of multiple periods of human occupation. Although no features are recorded on the Historic Environment Record at the proposed pole locations, the surrounding land contains small 20th-century military structures (e.g., brick chambers, drains, concrete slabs) and remnants of quarries and pits from common use. Banks and ditches around the common likely served as boundaries from medieval to post-medieval times. The archaeologist raised no objection to the development but advised caution when using heavy machinery.

8. A Preliminary Ecology Appraisal was issued on 19 December 2024 by Joanna Graham Ecology Limited. The survey identified that all four poles are located Greenham and Crookham Commons SSSI, which includes priority habitats (deciduous woodland, wood pasture, Bracken, scrub) and supports protected species such as Great Crested Newt, bats, Hazel Dormouse, reptiles, and ground-nesting birds. Additionally, ponds near P73 and P74 (notably pond 21) have excellent Habitat Suitability Index scores and indeterminate eDNA results, with historic records of Great Crested Newts, so their presence cannot be ruled out. Without mitigation the works pose a moderate risk of disturbing Hazel Dormice and an amber-level risk for Great Crested Newts.
9. Poles 73 and 80 are in Bracken-dominated areas with scattered scrub (gorse, hawthorn, rose, foxglove) and occasional trees (willow, silver birch, sycamore, oak). Pole 74 is in mixed scrub with Bramble, gorse, Bracken, and silver birch saplings, while Pole 76 is in similar scrub habitat. These areas provide nesting opportunities for ground-nesting and woodland birds; woodpecker holes were noted on P74 and P76.
10. The route offers commuting and foraging habitat for bats along hedgerows, woodland edges, and riparian corridors. Mature trees and deadwood provide potential roost sites, and woodpecker holes and cracks on P74 and P76 may also be suitable. Badger habitat is present, though no setts or tracks were recorded within 30m of the poles; dense Bracken and scrub may conceal evidence.
11. 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
12. The proposed development is a minor modification to an existing infrastructure and is not likely to have a significant effect on the National Landscape in which it is located.



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Yours sincerely,

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