



Department for  
Energy Security  
& Net Zero

Madeleine Pain  
Southern Electric Power Distribution PLC  
PO Box 36  
Lyndhurst  
SO43 7PH

**Energy Infrastructure Planning**  
3-8 Whitehall Place  
London  
SW1A 2JP

**Email:**  
S37consents@energysecurity.gov.uk  
**Website:** [www.gov.uk/desn](http://www.gov.uk/desn)

Our ref: 2324u  
Your ref: BM Line Undergrounding - BM17

14<sup>th</sup> January 2026

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: Undergrounding at BM17**

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:

- Remove three spans of an existing 33kV overhead line, including four electricity poles with associated steelwork and stays, and replace them with approximately 485 meters of new underground cable to reduce the



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risk of circuit damage during conductor replacement. Install five new Terminal H poles with 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 Dorset 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 is located within Dorset Heathlands SPA, Dorset Heath SAC and Ferndown Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
4. The Applicant consulted the LPA, who advised that the proposed development does not require an Environmental Impact Assessment and confirmed they have no objections on 22 September 2025. However, the LPA determined that the development is not likely to have significant environmental effects, provided that:
  - Natural England’s comments are fully considered.
  - Agreed mitigation measures are implemented (e.g., ecological protection, archaeological monitoring, reinstatement of heathland).
5. Following the LPA’s screening opinion and completion of Form B, the LPA requested the following modifications/ conditions:
  - Prior to commencement of development, including any excavation, a written scheme detailing a programme of investigative archaeological fieldwork, post- excavation analysis, publication results shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing by the LPA. The development must proceed in accordance with the approved scheme.  
Reason: To safeguard and/or record the archaeological interest on and around the site.
  - Where works occur within the bird breeding season (1 March to 31 July), a breeding bird survey by a suitably qualified Ecologist is required. If active nests, eggs, chicks, or nearby breeding Schedule



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1/Annex 1 birds are identified, all works that are likely to affect the nest or cause disturbance must cease and buffer zones shall be established in consultation with Natural England.

Reason: In the interests of nature conservation.

- The development must be carried out in accordance with the mitigation measures set out in the 'Notice of proposal to carry out an operation affecting a SSSI' dated 16th July 2025, with all measures completed prior to first use and permanently maintained unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.

Reason: In the interests of nature conservation.

- Informative: the applicant should notify Natural England and the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) site manager when site access is required. As the development cannot avoid the bird nesting season, and without mitigation is likely to have a significant effect on the SPA and SAC (Dorset Heathlands), a Habitat Regulations Assessment application is likely to be required; confirmation should be sought from Natural England.
6. The Applicant consulted Natural England, who confirmed via email on 29 July 2025 (reference: 1607251440NG) that they had no objections. Natural England subsequently granted assent for the proposed development covering the period from 1 September 2025 to 25 October 2026.
  7. A Preliminary Environmental Assessment Report prepared by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks on 13 December 2024 identified that the site lies within Ferndown Common SSSI, which is also part of the Dorset Heaths SAC and Dorset Heathlands SPA. The area supports lowland heath, a priority habitat, comprising dwarf-shrub heath, acid grassland, and scrub, with marginal woodland containing Scots pine, pedunculate oak, and birch. These habitats provide suitable conditions for protected species, including rare reptiles such as sand lizard and smooth snake, as well as ground-nesting and Annex I bird species such as Dartford warbler, woodlark, and nightjar. A woodlark was recorded singing during the site visit.
  8. A main badger sett was identified near one of the poles, and although ponds were present within 250 m, consultation with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust confirmed the absence of great crested newts. The report also highlighted archaeological sensitivity due to nearby barrows. Seasonal restrictions will apply to avoid the SPA bird breeding season and reptile breeding/hibernation periods.
  9. The proposed development is likely to adversely impact the Ecology of the site in the absence of mitigations. It is therefore recommended that



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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 13 August 2025, the document provided details on work methods, risks to the protected sites and proposed mitigation measures.
11. Having considered the HRA the Secretary of State concludes that the proposed works may have likely significant effects on a National Site Network site under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. This is due to vegetation clearance and works during the breeding season, which could temporarily reduce suitable nesting habitat in and around the site. The Secretary of State has considered whether there could be an Adverse Effect on Integrity of the protected site.
12. The Applicant has outlined appropriate mitigation measures in the HRA, including scheduling vegetation clearance outside the SPA bird breeding season, ensuring that any works during the breeding season occur only in pre-cleared areas to avoid disturbance. Pre-works nesting bird checks will be carried out, and if active nests are found, protective buffers will be applied. Track matting will be used on access routes to protect soils, and heathland will be allowed to regenerate naturally post-works. All habitat clearance will be supervised by an ecologist, with staged removal to avoid harm to reptiles.
13. 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.
14. 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.

Yours sincerely,

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