



Department for
Energy Security
& Net Zero

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Our ref: 2412u
Your ref: JO/CHRI E3L5 Sopley River Avon SSSI

2 April 2026

Dear Mr O'Reilly,

**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: JO/CHRI E3L5 SOPLEY RIVER AVON SSSI

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:

- Replace three wooden poles as part of an 11kV, 526 metre line



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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 (“the Applicant”) in relation to the impacts on the environment of the proposed development and the views of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Pool 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 the River Avon System Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Avon Valley (Bickton to Christchurch) SSSI, River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Avon Valley Special Protected Area (SPA), and Avon Valley Ramsar.
4. The Applicant produced a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in February 2025 which provided details on the working method, risks to protected sites, and proposed mitigation measures.
5. Natural England (NE) was consulted regarding the designated sensitive areas and granted unconditional assent to the development for the period between 1 September 2025 and 31 December 2025 (reference: 2402251255JC). Although the assent period has expired and works are now scheduled to take place between 1 September 2026 and 31 December 2026, further consultation with Natural England is not required. The proposed development is considered unlikely to disturb or adversely affect the notified features of the SAC, SPA, and Ramsar site.
6. An ecology survey was conducted at the site of the proposed development on 15 October 2025, and the subsequent “Preliminary Ecological Appraisal” was issued by Wessex Ecology. The survey identified that wetland and wet lowland grassland provided suitable habitats for nesting birds. Pole 18 contained woodpecker holes with limited potential for use as bat roosts, and a mill stream east of pole 14 had potential to support water voles and their burrows. Pole 14 will be accessed via a bailey bridge, as it is located on an island between the main river and a side channel. To mitigate ecological impacts, works



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should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season. On the day of the pole removal, the woodpecker holes should be checked for bats by the pole replacement operative using a torch or, if necessary, an endoscope. An ecologist should also check the banks of the mill stream near the crossing point for water vole burrows prior to works.

7. The Applicant consulted with the LPA which had no objection to the development on 29 January 2026 (planning reference: P/26/00304/SCRN).
8. Having considered the HRA, 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 potential disturbance to lowland grassland habitats and overwintering bird species, as a result of excavations and vehicle movements. The Secretary of State has considered whether there could be an Adverse Effect on Integrity of the protected site. The works are expected to take up to 2 days to complete during a period of dry weather. As such any open excavations will be closed during the same day. Vehicles will access the site via the proposed access route, avoiding significant stands of vegetation. Where vegetation cannot be avoided, the attending ecologist will undertake visual checks to confirm the absence of breeding birds. Only vehicles required for the completion of the pole replacements will be permitted on designated habitats. No refuelling will take place on site, and all vehicles will carry spill kits at all times.
9. In light of the proposed mitigations, 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.

Yours sincerely,

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