



**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT) REGULATIONS 2017:
REGULATION 6: SCREENING REQUEST**

Site: Land North of Kettleburgh Road (Easton) and Land South of The Street (Letheringham) (including grid connection route traversing The Street (Letheringham), Pit Road, Sanctuary Bridge Road, Framlingham Road, The Street (Easton), Hacheston Road, Easton Lane and The Street (Hacheston).

Screening Opinion reference: DC/26/2623/EIA

Contact: Emma Bird, Pegasus Group (Emma.Bird@pegasusgroup.co.uk) on behalf of Quintas Cleantech

Date: 2 September 2026

Case Officer: Ross Brereton – Principal Planner MRTPI

Authorising Officer: Joe Blackmore - Planning Manager MRTPI

Summary

This Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion has been undertaken by East Suffolk Council (ESC) as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for submitted Screening Opinion Request DC/26/2623/EIA concerning the construction and operation of a 49.9MW solar farm and 50MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), including all associated works, equipment, enclosures, access and cable routes.

The Screening Request follows a Legal Opinion written by Josef Cannon KC, and submitted alongside a formal objection to the parallel planning application DC/25/2733/FUL, by the Stop Deben Solar Action Group.

The Legal Opinion states, *“the Council’s current Screening Opinion [DC/25/0693/EIA] is likely to be unlawful in public terms because it impermissibly fails to consider the works associated with grid connection as part of the overall project for EIA purposes. This would render any decision to grant*

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planning permission on the present basis vulnerable to challenge by judicial review. The failure to assess the grid connection as part of the relevant project would seem to us to be unlawful (and irrational). The Council is entitled to, and should, undertake a re-screening of the proposed development, explicitly including the cabling and all associated works integral to the function of the solar farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) within the “project” for the purposes of EIA.”

The applicant’s second EIA Screening Request includes the same two parcels of land previously screened (land to the north of Kettleburgh Road (Easton) and land to the west of The Street (Letheringham)); albeit the total site area has reduced in size from 116.4ha to 90.6ha to align with the current proposals under the parallel planning application. There are no changes to the proposed output since the issue of the first Screening Opinion and would still facilitate a 49.9MW solar farm and 50MW BESS. This Screening Request does, however, include the proposed cable route interconnecting the two parcels (the 33kV line), and the grid connection route (the 132kV line) to the Wickham Market Substation accessed off The Street, Hacheston to address the potential unlawfulness of the first Screening Opinion issued by ESC. For simplicity, these are referred to as the ‘cable route’. The new Screening Opinion also considers the proposed development in light of all material submitted by the applicant to date, and follows two rounds of consultation with technical consultees and the local community in relation to the parallel planning application.

The proposed development would have an operational lifespan of 40 years, which would be followed by a period of decommission and the land being restored to its original use.

In undertaking this assessment, the Local Planning Authority has had regard to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ("EIA Regulations") and the Government's National Planning Practice Guidance ("PPG").

This Screening Opinion concludes that the impacts of the proposed development would constitute EIA development and therefore an Environmental Statement is required.

Site Description

The site is split into three parts; the northern parcel (Parcel 1), the southern parcel (Parcel 2) and the cable route (which includes the high voltage interconnecting cabling between Parcels 1 and Parcel 2 and the grid connection to Wickham Market substation).

Given that the proposed development in its entirety spans over a large area, this section describes each element of the site.

Parcel 1

Parcel 1 is in the Parish of Easton and spans approximately 17.6ha. The eastern boundary is partly bound by Framlingham Road but wraps around the curtilage of Easton Hall and Easton Hall Lodge. The southern boundary is bound by Kettleburgh Road. There are no mature landscape features dividing the road from the parcel. The northern boundary is bound by mature trees including Skouldings Wood to the north-west and two parcels of undeveloped land to the north and north-east. The western boundary is bound by a mature belt of hedgerow dividing the site from an adjacent parcel of land.

The topography of the site gently slopes from the north to the south. Given there is no mature boundary with Kettleburgh Road, the parcel is especially open. The topography of the land continues to fall away towards the south of the parcel beyond Kettleburgh Road. The parcel is located in the B7 Deben Valley Landscape Character Area.

The parcel contains Public Rights of Way (Footpaths 1 and 2) which run around the perimeter of the parcel along its northern, western and part of its southern boundary before crossing Kettleburgh Road into an adjacent field parcel. A disused pit is identified as contaminated land within the curtilage of Easton Hall. Parcel 1 would partly border this area in its south-eastern extent.

There are no statutory or non-statutory heritage designations within the site but Easton Park, which is designated in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (SCLP) as a historic parkland with Non-Designated Heritage Asset status, is located on the opposite side of Framlingham Road. This is bound by the Serpentine Walling, which is 590m long and designated as a Grade II listed building. The Round Cottage, also a Grade II listed building, is located approximately 100m south of the most south-easterly extent of the parcel.

The parallel planning application identifies that Parcel 1 predominantly comprises 3.54ha of Grade 2 and 12.45ha of Grade 3a Best and Most Versatile Land. The parcel is entirely within Flood Zone 1. The parcel is not covered by any environmental or ecological designations, including statutory designated sites, but there are three statutory designated sites within 5km (SSSIs). The parcel is located within the Impact Risk Zone for these identified SSSIs. A large swathe of ancient woodland is located within Easton Park and runs close to the boundary with Framlingham Road, as well as a group Tree Preservation Order (TPO) opposite the south-east boundary of the parcel.

The parcel is entirely within the Easton Neighbourhood Plan area. Whilst there are no specific neighbourhood plan designations covering the site, Important Viewpoint 16 is located at the north-

east extent of the parcel from Footpath 1 which pans across the parcel. There are also three other Important Viewpoints at the south-eastern corner of the parcel panning outwards to the north-west, south-west and south-east.

Parcel 2

Parcel 2 is in the Parish of Letheringham and spans an area approximately 73ha. The eastern boundary is partly defined by The Street and Park Road, wrapping around several physical features including Hill House, Park Farm and April Cottage (including their access) and Old Park Woodland. The southern boundary is defined by a tree belt and hedgerow that separates the site from Old Park Farm. The western boundary is partly defined by Sandy Lane but also wraps around the buildings associated with Seven Spar Hall and Seven Spar Farm. The latter land holding also includes a caravan and motorhome club. The northern boundary is largely bound by an access track with field parcels beyond. Cutters Grove Wood bounds the site to the north-west.

The parcel is prominent in the landscape enabling long views across it from Sandy Lane and Park Road. This is exacerbated further by the surrounding area being largely free of development and surrounding vegetation. There are also two Public Rights of Way footpaths that cross the site; Footpath 2 runs east-west through the centre of the parcel, and Footpath 11 runs along the southern perimeter. Approximately two thirds of the parcel is located in the B7 Deben Valley Landscape Character Area similar, with the western one third located in the L4 Otley Hall and Debach Estate Claylands Landscape Character Area.

The majority of the parcel is recorded as having archaeological potential. There are no statutory or locally listed buildings on the parcel, but several are located within the immediate vicinity that may be impacted by the proposed development [this list is not definitive]. These include:

- Sundial Cottage, Moat End Adjacent Cottage and Pike Cottage – Grade II (north-east boundary)
- April Cottage – Grade II (site wraps around building to the east)
- Assets at Letheringham Lodge (approximately 500m south-east)
 - o Letheringham Lodge – Grade I
 - o Moated Site at Letheringham Lodge – Scheduled Monument
 - o Barn at Letheringham Lodge – Grade II
- Assets at Godwin's Place (approximately 600m north-west)
 - o Godwins [sic] Place – Grade II

- Godwin's Place Moated Site and Ponds – Scheduled Monument
- Assets at or near to Abbey Farm
 - Church of St Mary – Grade I
 - Letheringham Priory and Remains of 17th Century Walled Garden – Scheduled Monument
 - Prior Gateway and Walls of Enclosure – Grade II
 - Farmbuilding at Abbey Farm – Grade II

There is no conservation area on or within the vicinity of the parcel.

The parallel planning application identifies that the parcel comprises 19.48ha of Grade 2 and 51.89ha of Grade 3a Best and Most Versatile Land. The remaining 2.17ha comprises Grade 3b and non-agricultural land. There are no ecological or environmental designations covering the parcel but Cutters Wood and Old Park Wood are designated as ancient woodland and County Wildlife Sites. These natural features adjoin the boundary to the north-west and south-east of the parcel. There is also a disused pit identified as contaminated land in the north-east of the parcel.

Cabling Route

The entire cable route, including the 33kV parcel connection and 132kV grid connection would traverse approximately 7.8km of mostly public highway within the parishes of Letheringham, Easton and Hacheston.

The 33kV route would traverse (Parcel 1 to Parcel 2) Framlingham Road, The Street (Easton), Sanctuary Bridge Road, Pit Road and The Street (Letheringham).

The 132kV route would traverse (Parcel 2 to Wickham Market substation) The Street (Letheringham), Pit Road, Sanctuary Bridge Road, The Street (Easton), Hacheston Road, Easton Lane and The Street (Hacheston).

Of note is that the cable route is proposed to run underneath the River Deben when traversing Sanctuary Bridge Road. The surrounding area of the river is within Flood Zone 2 and 3. There are no other environmental designations covering the proposed route, but it is noted that the cabling would run closely to ancient woodland associated with Easton Park and a group TPO, both of which adjoin Framlingham Road. There is also a long, thin section of woodland known as Howards Belt protruding from Brockley's Wood that reaches as far south as Easton Lane. The route would also run closely to a significant number of verges, trees and hedgerows that bound the highway.

The proposed route would also pass through the Easton Conservation Area, and close to a high proportion of listed buildings that front both Framlingham Road and The Street (Easton). It would also pass several other individual listed buildings along The Street (Letheringham), Hacheston Road and Easton Lane. Another cluster of listed buildings are located at the junction with Easton Lane and The Street (Hacheston). There are also several areas of archaeological potential on the route, including a large proportion beneath the Easton Conservation Area, and two small areas beneath the River Deben and The Street (Hacheston).

Proposed Development

The proposed development assessed as part of this EIA Screening Opinion is as follows:

- Solar array of a maximum of 49.9MW located across Parcels 1 and 2;
- Photovoltaic (PV) panels mounted on a table frame to form an array approximately 3m above ground level and pile driven into the ground;
- BESS stations within containerised units (maximum height of 3m) with a maximum capacity of 50MW and storage for contaminated water within Parcel 2;
- *A 33kV cable route connecting Parcels 1 and 2 (approximately 1.9km);
- *A 132kv cable route connecting the solar and BESS development to the Wickham Market substation to the west of The Street (Hacheston) (approximately 5.9km);
- Inverters/transformers (maximum height of 3m) housed in prefabricated containers and associated cabling;
- Distribution Network Operation (DNO) substation, DNO meter point, customer substation and system (maximum height of 3m);
- Perimeter fencing (maximum height of 2.5m) comprising mesh wire and fence posts, including mammal gates/gaps;
- A CCTV system (motion-sensor, infra-red) located at points around the parcel perimeters;
- Associated internal access tracks using semi permeable materials;
- Site access from the highway for construction and operational activities;
- Temporary construction and set down area;
- Communication and weather monitoring equipment within a monitoring building; and
- Associated electricity and communication cables and earthing.

The features of the proposed development marked with an asterisk do not form part of the parallel planning application under DC/25/2733/FUL.

Consideration of EIA Regulations

The requirement for EIA is either mandatory or conditional depending upon the classification of the development proposed. If the project is listed in Schedule 1 of the Regulations, an assessment is required in every case. However, if it is listed in Schedule 2 then the Local Planning Authority (LPA) should consider whether it is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

In accordance with the Regulations, if a proposed project is listed in the first column in Schedule 2 and exceeds the relevant thresholds of the relevant criteria set out in the second column (sometimes referred to as 'exclusion threshold and criteria'), the proposal needs to be screened by the LPA to determine whether significant effects are likely and hence whether an EIA is required. Projects listed in Schedule 2 that are in, or partly in, a sensitive area also need to be screened, even if they are below the thresholds or do not meet the criteria. Sensitive areas are defined as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European sites; National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, World Heritage Sites and scheduled monuments.

If development meets Schedule 2 criteria, the LPA must consider whether the proposed development is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This Screening Opinion considers those effects having regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 EIA Regulations.

The Regulations are clear in emphasising that developments which qualify to be within the list in Schedule 2 require an EIA only where they are likely to have significant environmental effects taking into account any information provided by the applicant and the criteria in Schedule 3 including the characteristics of the development, its location and the type and characteristics of the potential impact.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) notes that only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an EIA. While it is not possible to formulate criteria or thresholds which will provide a universal test of whether or not an assessment is required, it is possible to offer a broad indication of the type or scale of development which is likely to require an assessment. It is also possible to provide an indication of the sort of development for which an assessment is unlikely to be necessary. To aid LPAs determine whether a project is likely to have significant environmental effects, a set of indicative thresholds and criteria have been proposed. The table also presents an indication of the types of impact that are most likely to be significant for particular types of development.

It adds that it should not be presumed that development above the indicative thresholds should always be subject to assessment, or those falling below these thresholds could never give rise to significant effects, especially where the development is in an environmentally sensitive location. Each development will need to be considered on its own merits.

Screening Assessment

Schedule 1 Consideration

The Screening Request correctly identifies that the proposed development would not fall under Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations.

Schedule 2 Consideration

The Screening Request correctly identifies that the proposed development would fall under Schedule 2, (3a) – *industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water* of the EIA Regulations. The scheme exceeds the 0.5ha area of development threshold stated in Schedule 2 and therefore requires screening accordingly.

The LPA has referred to the Indicative Screening Threshold table which provides expansive criteria for development under Schedule 3 (3a). It notes that the indicative criteria and threshold for such developments is for thermal output of more than 50MW and that the key issues to consider are levels of emissions to air; arrangements for the transport of fuel; and any visual impact. Whilst the thermal output from the solar arrays would be just under the indicative threshold, the proposed development would be situated in a rural location where significant effects may still occur, particularly in relation to visual impact. The 50MW BESS is not classified as a thermal output device, but is coupled with the solar arrays, and as such, its effect on the environment is also considered as part of this Screening Opinion.

Schedule 3 Consideration

1. Characteristics of the Development

a) The size and design of the whole development

The proposed development would be of a significant scale located in the countryside. Both parcels are undeveloped and particularly prominent in the landscape. Each would be transformed by the covering of solar arrays at a height of 3m above ground level. There would also be other forms of development on the site including BESS, ancillary buildings, and extensive perimeter fencing. The

isolated nature of the parcels would require them to be connected via a 1.9km 33kV cable that would run within the public highway. The development as a whole would connect to the Wickham Market substation via a 5.9km cable route that would also run within the public highway.

b) Cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development

Planning permission has recently been granted for a solar photovoltaic installation of 20MW output with all associated supporting infrastructure, including cable routing, inverters and transformers, fencing, CCTV, and landscaping for a temporary period of 42 years (ref: DC/25/2997/FUL).

The approved development is to be located on land to the south of Hacheston Road/Easton Lane where the cable route would be laid. There is potential for a cumulative impact if the construction of the cable route were to coincide with the construction of the Glevering Estate solar development. The LPA does not consider there would be a cumulative impact with the Silverlace Green solar development (DC/21/1001/FUL) given its distance from the proposed development.

c) The use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity

The proposed development (excluding the cable route) would be installed on agricultural land, most of which is classified as Best and Most Versatile Land (BMV). An Agricultural Land Classification report accompanying the parallel planning application identifies that the red line boundary of Parcel 1 would comprises 92.9% BMV land whilst Parcel 2 would comprise 97% BMV land. Whilst the use of the land would be generational, it is proposed to be temporary and restored to its original condition following a period of decommission. This long period, in turn, would also present an opportunity to allow the soil to rest following intensive agricultural activity. The applicant does state, however, that the land would still be available for alternative agricultural use alongside the proposed development.

The two parcels are entirely located within Flood Zone 1 and therefore at low risk of flooding with a 1 in 1000 annual probability of fluvial flooding. The majority of the parcels are also at low risk of surface water flooding, with the exception of an area running parallel to a drain in Parcel 1 and some small pockets across both parcels. Matters pertaining to drainage continue to be addressed within the scope of the parallel planning application.

Of particular concern, however, is the cable route that would run along Sanctuary Bridge Road beneath the River Deben. Whilst the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) consider the cabling to result in a low risk to flooding, they do note that this would be dependent on whether it disrupts

groundwater. The LLFA confirm that this matter, plus the impact on the River Deben would be a matter for consideration by the Environment Agency (EA). The EA did not respond to this consultation.

Further to the LLFA's commentary, the Council's Ecology team also recognise the potential impact the cable route may have on habitat associated with the River Deben. They note that the cable route would involve horizontal directional drilling (HDD) beneath it, which may impact on statutory and non-statutory designated nature conservation sites downstream of the proposed crossing point.

The Ecology Officer recognises that such designations could be adversely impacted by incidents arising from the use of HDD such as 'frac out' events resulting in the release of drilling fluid, which may result in an adverse impact on aquatic habitats through smothering. The Officer adds that whilst the submitted information refers to the potential to implement measures to control or mitigate such impacts, it does not appear to confirm whether such measures are actually implementable in this location, nor does it confirm that HDD as a construction technique is feasible in this location from the launch and exit locations identified. The Officer understands that HDD requires certain ground conditions to be present and it is unclear whether this is the case in this location.

The Ecology Officer also recognises that the launch and exit pit locations would be within areas mapped as Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh, as identified on MAGIC Map. The mapping data is considered to derive from historic information, but nevertheless this is recognised as UK Priority habitat and should be avoided if present. The Officer concludes that in the absence of a detailed ecological assessment, they are unable to provide more detailed commentary on this matter.

The absence of ecological assessment for the entire route also means that it is not possible to consider whether other sections of the cable route would have the potential to cause ecological harm which would require avoidance or mitigation measures. For example, it is not clear whether it would always be within the carriageway or whether verges or other neighbouring areas may also need to be used, which is particularly important where the route runs adjacent to identified nature conservation sites (such as Maid's/Brockley Woods CWS).

The Ecology Officer considers that their commentary in respect of the parcels (as addressed in their response to the previous EIA Screening Opinion) still stands but welcome the removal of Cutter's Wood and Old Park Wood ancient woodland/County Wildlife Sites from the red line boundary of Parcel 2.

There are no statutory designated nature conservation sites on or adjacent to the parcels, with the closest being three Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) meadows within 5km. The closest internationally designated site is a component of the Deben Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) and Deben Estuary Ramsar Site approximately 7km to the south-east. There are also records of protected or UK Priority species within the immediate surrounding area and hedgerows likely to meet the criteria to be considered UK Priority habitat. All ecological matters relating to the two parcels are currently being addressed within the scope of the parallel planning application.

Natural England comment that on the basis of the material supplied, the proposed development has potential likely significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes and further consideration is required. This is in respect of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now known as the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape). However, given that this designation is approximately 8km east of the site, it is not expected that the proposed development would have any significant effect.

d) The production of waste

The proposed development, once operational, would not yield any production of waste that would have a significant impact on the environment. The amount produced during construction of the solar arrays is likely to be minimal and could be appropriately controlled through waste management practices and the adoption of a Construction Environmental Management Plan. However, there are uncertainties surrounding the amount of waste that may be produced from installing the cable route across an expansive area of the road network.

e) Pollution and nuisances

The construction of the development is likely to cause significant disruption in and around the rural villages of Easton, Letheringham and Hacheston. This disruption is likely to be associated with noise, air quality, road closures/temporary traffic regulation orders (TTRO) and construction vehicle activity on a constrained network of roads in and within the vicinity of the site. Consideration is also given to the cumulative impacts associated with the construction of the Glevering Estate solar farm.

Once operational, the most likely form of pollution and nuisance is likely to arise from noise. This matter, however, is currently being addressed through the parallel planning application, and planning conditions, if planning permission were to be granted.

f) The risk of accidents, having regard to substances or technologies used

The introduction of a 50MW BESS on Parcel 2, and the associated fire risks, are of significant concern to the local community. In the event of a fire, there is high potential for the release of lithium-based fluids mixed with water and/or foam, as well as the release of a fast-moving downwind plume carrying hazardous gasses that may pose respiratory and environmental risks. The BESS would also be sited close to Cutter's Wood; a parcel of ancient woodland.

As part of the parallel planning application, the applicant has submitted an Outline Battery Safety Management Plan (OBSMP) and Emergency Response Plan, which is considered by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to meet National Fire Chiefs Council requirements. However, SFRS note that in light of current drought conditions, they do not consider that the proposed water provision should be a rainwater storage area as there is no guarantee that 180,000 litres of water would be available all year round. Given the risks associated with BESS, and the continued uncertainty surrounding risk management, there is a potential risk for uncontained accidents occurring which may pose a significant risk to the environment and the local community.

Consultation with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reveals that there is a high-pressure gas pipeline running north-south across the western extent of Parcel 2. The proposed plans illustrate that there would be no solar arrays placed within the immediate vicinity of the pipeline. Cadent Gas continue to express no objection in principle subject to the developer adhering to easements, building proximity distance, and pipeline safety regulation requirements, including studies into the potential impact the development would have on their cathodic protection.

g) The risks to human health

The main risks to human health are likely to be caused by air pollution and noise impact to receptors caused by large-scale construction activity. Operational noise matters are being addressed in the parallel planning application and would be controlled by condition to ensure the development is below background noise levels (e.g. assessment of equipment specification and acoustic mitigation such as screening).

There is also a risk to human health arising from a BESS fire through groundwater pollution and/or the release of toxic gases that are likely to travel downwind in a plume.

2. Location of the Development

a) The existing and approved land use

The two parcels are in agricultural use, whilst the majority of the cable route would run the length of the public highway. The use of the land would be temporary, albeit generational for a period of 40 years, and reverted to its original use following decommission.

b) The relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area and its underground.

The parcels are in agricultural use and would result in the temporary, but generational use, of Grade 2 and Grade 3a BMV land. The applicant notes that the stoppage of such agricultural practices would help to improve the quality of the soil over time but there would remain an opportunity for the land to remain in agricultural use alongside the proposed development (i.e. agrivoltaics). The impact on natural resources is likely to be minimal.

c) The absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas – (i) wetlands; (ii) coastal zones; (iii) mountain and forest areas; (iv) nature reserves and parks; (v) European sites and other areas clarified or protected under national legislation; (vi) areas in which there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards, laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered that there is such a failure; (vii) densely populated areas; (viii) landscape and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance.

From the outset, the proposed development would not have an impact on coastal zones, mountain and forest areas, nature reserves and parks, European sites, on sites that have already failed to meet environmental quality standards or densely populated areas.

As set out under Part 1 (c), there is potential for the cable route to impact on Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh where it would run beneath the River Deben along Sanctuary Bridge Road. Further information is set out within the specific section above.

In respect of landscape matters, it is evident from the parallel planning application, including the applicant's LVIA and all representations received to date, that the proposed development would have a significant impact on landscape character. The size and scale of the site (as a whole), its position and topography, would extend across the parishes of Letheringham and Easton, diminishing the local landscape's sense of remoteness and ruralness, its openness and visual amenity. Consequently, the proposed development has the potential to cause long-term harm on the character of the landscape which should be rigorously evaluated through an Environmental Statement.

The LPA also notes that the cable route would be laid near to a high concentration of listed buildings within the vicinity of Easton, including the Easton Conservation Area. There are also other listed buildings close to the cable route, including a cluster on The Street (Hacheston). The excavation of the route has the potential to impact the structural integrity of these assets but no information to the contrary has been submitted with the EIA Screening Request.

Similarly, there are pockets of archaeological potential along the route including within the vicinity of the River Deben, through the centre of Easton, and at the junction with Easton Lane/The Street (Hacheston). The Archaeology Officer advises that should the LPA conclude that EIA is required, then archaeology should be scoped in. However, they also note archaeology considerations can be dealt with by condition, as has been for the parallel planning application. Given that the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service have reached a point where they are content with the information submitted with the planning application, and have recommended conditions, it is considered that such matters in relation to the cable route could also be dealt with in this manner. The LPA is of the view that encountering such finds is unlikely in the public highway but could be adequately controlled by condition if they were.

3. Characteristics of the potential impact

(a) The magnitude and spatial extent of the impact

The magnitude and spatial extent of the impact is expected to be considerable. It would span across two large parcels of land isolated from one another and be connected by a 1.9km cable route. There would also be a 5.9km grid connection route to the Wickham Market substation. When considering the proposed development in the context of the existing scenario, the impact of the construction would have a significant impact on local communities, the public highway and possibly heritage assets. Once operational, the proposed development is expected to have a significant impact on the character of the landscape and visual amenity. However, the cable route is unlikely to result in any further impacts once operational.

(b) The nature of the impact

The installation of the solar arrays, BESS and associated infrastructure (excluding the cable route) would result in long-term impacts on the character of the landscape and the rural setting of Letheringham and Easton. The development would fundamentally alter the baseline character of the land parcels for a generation.

There is potential for effects on heritage assets and the River Deven (and associated aquatic biodiversity including downstream nature designations) arising from the construction of the cable route.

Construction activity for the entire development is expected to affect the local community through use of local roads in and around rural villages over an extensive area. This effect is most likely to be felt in relation to the construction of the cable route but there is also potential for cumulative effects arising from concurrent or sequential construction of the parcels and the cable route. Consideration is also given to the Glevering Estate solar farm.

(c) The transboundary nature of the impact

The proposed development would span across 90ha of undeveloped land across the parishes of Easton and Letheringham. The total cable route would span 7.8km across the parishes of Easton and Letheringham, as well as the parish of Hacheston.

(d) The intensity and complexity of the impact

The intensity and complexity of the proposed development is most likely to be experienced during its construction. However, this is expected to extend into the operational phase in respect of landscape impact.

(e) The probability of the impact

The probability of the impact is likely to be high as discussed in previous sections of this Screening Opinion.

(f) The expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact

The construction phase of the parcels is expected to take place over a 12-month period, which is considered intensive for a development of this scale. There is no information on the timeframes for the construction of the cable route but is likely to take a considerable amount of time to lay in the absence of any information to confirm otherwise.

The proposed development would be operational for 40 years, followed by a period of decommissioning. A condition would be imposed requiring the land to be reinstated to its original state.

(g) The cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development

There is expected to be a cumulative impact between the construction of the solar and BESS installation across the two parcels along with the delivery of an extensive cable route and the construction of the Glevering Estate solar farm (DC/25/2997/FUL).

(h) The possibility of effectively reducing the impact

Based on the information submitted with this EIA Screening Request, and the parallel planning application, it is not possible to determine the possibility of effectively reducing the impact of the matters discussed above at this stage. Therefore, a precautionary approach must be taken.

Conclusions

The development exceeds the threshold in Schedule 2 3(a) of the EIA Regulations. Having regard to the criteria listed under Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations, for the reasons outlined above, it has been determined that it is likely that the development would have a significant effect on the environment. This is a result of likely impacts on landscape character, heritage assets, the public highway, the River Deben (both impact on its catchment and aquatic biodiversity), other ecological considerations along the cable route, nuisance and pollution, health and safety risks associated with BESS, and cumulative impacts, either associated with the construction and/or operation of the proposed development.

It is highlighted that this list is not exhaustive. The Scoping Opinion, which follows a Screening Opinion, will define the specific environmental topics, methods and level of detail required for the EIA.

Environmental Impact Assessment IS required.

Public Consultation

The views and concerns raised in public consultation responses have been acknowledged. However, it is important to clarify that the determination of this EIA Screening Opinion has been made strictly in accordance with the relevant regulations and the criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended). This Screening Opinion does not in any way predetermine the outcome of the parallel planning application, which is subject to separate assessment and full consideration, including the opportunity for public consultation.