

NNPA Ref: 13NP0048EIA. Erection of 2 No. Wind Turbines each 74 m to tip, including construction of 2 no. 30 metres x 30 metres construction areas at High Thorneyburn Farm, Falstone, Hexham, Northumberland, NE48 1AP.

SCREENING OPINION – Planning Authority Summary

We have considered this proposed development in terms of EIA Screening and have completed our assessment of the significance of potential environmental impacts. We conclude that **an Environmental Impact Assessment is required**. An Environmental Statement should be submitted for this proposal as part of any planning application that is forthcoming. A statement of reasons is attached.

Screening Checklist

(Stage 1) – Is the proposed indicated by the broad descriptions given in Schedule 2 Column 1 of the regulations?

Yes – 3 Energy Projects (i) installations for the harnessing of wind turbines for energy production (windfarms)

(Stage 2) – Does the proposal exceed threshold criteria in Schedule 2 Column 2 of the Regulations?

Yes. The hub height of each of the two proposed turbines exceeds 15 metres.

(Stage 3)- Does the proposal exceed any of the more lenient criteria in Annex A of Circular 02/99?

No – A15 Requires an EIA for 5 plus turbines of 5 MW generating capacity.

(Stage 4)- Assessment of Sensitivity. All constraints & designations or affecting or affected by the proposal, both on the site itself and its surrounding areas should be considered. EIA Regulation 2(1) defines sensitivity. The thresholds in Schedule 2 Column 2 and criteria in Circular 02/99 do not apply.

EU/National Designations

Northumberland National Park – Within the proposed development site and surrounding area, potentially sensitive in terms of biodiversity, landscape, tranquillity and archaeological considerations.

Other indicators/reasons why the site may be sensitive

None

(Stage 5) Schedule 3 selection and assessment criteria. Tick all applicable and likely to raise concerns.

1. Characteristics of the Development

- ✓ (a) The size of the development
- (b) The cumulation with other development
- (c) The use of Natural Resources
- (d) The production of waste
- (e) Pollution and nuisances
- (f) The risk of accidents

2. Location of Developments

The existing land use

Abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources

- ✓ The absorption capacity of the natural environment, particularly;
 - (i) Wetlands
 - (ii) Coastal zones
 - (iii) Mountain and forest areas
 - (iv) Nature reserves and parks
 - (v) Areas designated by Member States pursuant to the Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds (1) and Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna(2)
 - (vi) Areas in which the environmental quality standards laid down in EU legislation have already been exceeded;
 - (vii) Densely populated areas
 - ✓ (viii) Landscapes of historical, cultural and archaeological significance.

3. Characteristics of the Potential Impact

The potential significant effects of the developments must be considered in relation to criteria set out under paragraphs 1 and 2, and having particular regard to-

- (a) The extent of the impact (geographical area/ population size affected)
- ✓ (b) The transfrontier nature of the impact
- ✓ (c) The probability of the impact
- ✓ (d) The duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact.

Statement of Reasons:

Proposed Development

Installation of 2 no wind turbines each 74 metres to tip, including the construction of 2 no construction compounds 30 metres x 30 metres at High Thorneyburn Farm, Falstone, Northumberland.

Background

Northumberland National Park Authority has been requested by the applicant to produce a screening opinion as to whether the above development is EIA development, requiring the submission of an Environmental Statement.

The proposed development, due to its scale and output is not classed as Schedule 1 development.

The development is Schedule 2 development under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. The proposal is development consisting of the construction of 2 no turbines to 74 metres in height and 2 no construction compounds of 30 metres x 30 metres. The proposal falls within the 'wind farms' category, which is classed as an energy industry project in 3 (i) of column 1 of schedule 2. Due to the height of the proposed turbines, the proposal exceeds one of the relevant thresholds in column 2. In addition, the proposed development would be wholly within a 'sensitive' area.

The main impacts of the development are likely to be landscape and visual impacts, heritage and ecology impacts are also possible.

Landscape Impacts

The site lies within the Border Moors and Forests NCA, and on the edge of two Local Character Types, namely, Moorland Forestry Mosaic CT and Rolling Uplands Valleys CT and the respective character areas of Kielder Forest and Upper North Tyne Valley. Wind farm developments (either in Scotland or England) should avoid adverse impact on the expansive upland landscape and the setting of the National Park.

High Thorneyburn Farm lies on the northern slopes of the North Tyne valley four kilometres east of the village of Falstone in west Northumberland. The landscape character of this area has been identified and documented by Natural England as part of the National Character Area process and also more locally by Northumberland National Park and the former Tynedale Council in 2007.

The proposed application site sits at the centre of The Border Moors and Forests National Character Area (NCA). An area consisting of an extensive, sparsely populated upland plateau, with long distant views and a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity.

The Border Moors and Forests NAC together with the neighbouring Cheviots NCA, is the most tranquil area in England, tranquillity in this sense meaning freedom from noise and visual disturbance. The broad upland plateau, forested hillsides, reservoirs and enclosed valleys have a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity which can have a calming and restorative effect on people's health and wellbeing. Additionally 39% of the NCA has been recognised for its landscape value by being designated a National Park.

The NCA identifies that man-made vertical structures which detract from the valley landform, create visual clutter or adversely affect the unfettered skylines which form the distinctive setting to these valleys should be avoided and any such existing structures removed where possible. It specifically recommends that wind farm development proposals should avoid adverse impact on the special qualities of the National Park and/or its setting.

The proposed structures would be much greater in scale than the micro and small scale wind turbines which have been permitted elsewhere in Northumberland National Park. Turbines previously permitted have been up to 15m in height (measured to the hub – compared to the 50m to hub height of the structures now proposed). In each of the previously approved cases, the Authority has been content that the turbines would support National Park residents and businesses (typically upland farms) in a proportionate way, without having a significant impact on the surrounding environment.

Due to the scale of the turbines, they would not be seen purely be in the context of the existing farm complex, particularly when seen in long view. Turbines of this height would not just be an incremental piece of domestic or agricultural paraphernalia. They would be significant and dominant landscape elements in their own right. The structures would be out of character with the rolling, open, uncluttered and unaltered landscape in this area. Currently there are no man-made vertical structures of a similar scale to these turbines in the surrounding area. Nor are there any dominant landscape features. This absence of existing visual elements, either landscape or man-made, means that turbines of this scale could not readily be assimilated into the landscape, and that there would be an absence of competing focal points which could lessen their visual impact. The proposed developed would have a transformative impact on the character of the landscape in this area and would visually intrude on views within, into and from the National Park from sites over a wide area.

On the basis of the above considerations, the proposed development is expected to have a significant adverse landscape and visual impact on this part of the Northumberland National Park.

Impacts on Heritage Assets

The site is not known to be a site of archaeological importance and therefore an Environmental Statement is not being requested due to the potential impact on the historic environment. However, whilst it is not thought that the proposal would have a significant impact on the historic environment, it would be expected that sufficient measures are undertaken to ensure that nothing of archaeological importance is disturbed. This may include, but is not limited to; a desk based assessment and an agreement to undertake an archaeological watching brief.

Ecological Impacts

The site is not considered to be of specific ecological importance with a specified ecology designation. However, care needs to be taken in all new developments that no issues of harm or detriment are presented to the ecology of the site. In the context of an application for a wind turbine, it is entirely appropriate that the applicant is asked to provide evidence within an Environmental Statement as to how any effects on flora and fauna will be mitigated against, and provide a comprehensive assessment on how this will be achieved.

Summary

Due to the reasons outlined in this report, Northumberland National Park Authority would require any planning application to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

You have the right to formally request a scoping opinion from Northumberland National Park Authority, to tell you what the required Environmental Statement needs to cover.

	Signature	Date
Planning Officer		
Head of Planning and Communities		