

EIA SCREENING OPINION - Planning Authority Summary

Application Reference Number	15NP0055EIA
Description / Site Address	Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Opinion in respect of proposed Forward Operating Base (FOB) at Otterburn Training Area, Otterburn, Northumberland
Last date for decision	16 July 2015 (Extension agreed until 23 July 2015)

Introduction

Following a request made by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) for a formal EIA screening opinion, the Local Planning Authority has considered this proposed permanent development of a Forward Operating Base (FOB) in the Otterburn Military Training Area, against the EIA Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (as amended). This document should be considered to be the formal Screening Opinion of the Local Planning Authority.

The site has a temporary permission for an operating base (ref: 10NP0018), with additional infrastructure approved under reference 11NP0002. Both of these permissions are due to expire on 18th August 2015. A detailed description of the proposed development, setting out each aspect of the proposal, has been provided within DIO's Screening document.

Based on the information submitted, The LPA's assessment of the likely significance of potential environmental impacts concludes that **an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required**. A statement of reasons follows.

EIA Screening Checklist

(Stage 1) - Is the proposal indicated by the broad descriptions given in Schedule 2 Column 1 of the Regulations?

Yes - 10. Infrastructure projects, (b) urban development projects.

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

No – The project is for non-residential development and does not exceed five hectares in area.

(Stage 3) – Does the proposal exceed any of the indicative thresholds set out in National Planning Practice Guidance?

No – The indicative thresholds relevant to this proposal suggest that EIA is unlikely to be required on for the redevelopment of land unless the new development is on a significantly greater scale than the previous use. While the proposal would be permanent, rather than the existing temporary consent, and would therefore have a greater degree of permanence, the

types of impact would not be of a markedly different nature, nor is there known to be a high level of contamination.

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

Yes – The development is within a sensitive area as defined by EIA Regulation 2(1).

EU/National Designations

Northumberland National Park – Potential high sensitivity in terms of considerations including biodiversity, landscape, tranquillity and heritage/archaeological considerations.

As the proposal falls within a sensitive area, the scale of the development falling below the thresholds and more lenient criteria set out in Stage 2 and 3 of this process do not rule out the potential for the proposal to be EIA development.

(Stage 5) – Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations sets out the following selection and assessment criteria that should be taken into account in determining whether a proposal is likely to have significant environment effects.

Any of the characteristics of the development, locational factors or characteristics of the potential impact that are likely to cause concerns regarding potential impacts are highlighted in bold. Those which do not are struck through.

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

~~(a) The existing land use~~

~~(b) Abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources~~

~~(c) 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 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 fauna and flora(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 or archaeological significance.

3. Characteristics of the Potential Impact

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

~~(a) The extent of the impact (geographical area/population size affected)~~

~~(b) The transfrontier nature of the impact~~

(c) The magnitude and complexity of the impact

(d) The probability of the impact

(e) The duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact

Statement of Reasons

In considering the nature and location of the development proposal, the potential environmental impacts are discussed below. The Screening Report provided by DIO sets out the likely environmental effects of the proposed permanent FOB, during the construction, operation and decommissioning, across a range of areas, which are assessed below.

Effects on Landscape

The potential landscape effects of the proposal have been assessed, which has included an assessment of the proposal by the Park's Landscape and Forestry Officer.

The development is located within an area characterised as Rolling Uplands within the Landscape Character Assessment of the area (2007) and the NNPA Landscape SPD (2011). A characteristic of the landscape in a significant part of this area is the presence of military training and the proposal is sited within one of the more intensively used areas.

The location of the Forward Operating Base at Wilkwood on the Otterburn Ranges is such that there are very few publicly accessible receptor sites from which this development can be viewed from. For some of those including the surrounding Access Land in which it is located, public access is restricted by the Otterburn Ranges Bye Laws and provisions within the CROW Act 2000 due to the hazardous nature of the military training that is undertaken by the MOD on the Otterburn Ranges.

The development may however be visible in good weather, from a short section of the Coquet Valley road that lies approximately 3.5 km to the north of the Wilkwood site. The temporary development is visible within the landscape due to its height, size and colour. However, the location and design help to mitigate the effect that the FOB will have on the landscape character and views in this part of the National Park.

The effects of this development on the landscape character and views of the National Park will differ slightly between the construction phase that will be temporary in nature and that of the military use of the FOB thereafter. The applicant has recognised this in the Scoping Report and identified various mitigation measures to minimise the impact of the development.

It is noted that the minor modifications to the existing structure are identified for inclusion in the forthcoming application for the permanent FOB.

It is concluded that, whilst the development will have an effect upon the surrounding landscape character and views of this part of the National Park, these effects are not considered to be significant in the context of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2011 (as amended).

Effects on Biodiversity

The potential ecological effects of the proposal have been assessed, which has included an assessment of the proposal by the Park's Ecologist. The Screening Report put forward by DIO suggests that small scale disturbance to fauna and loss of species poor grassland over a longer term are the main potential effects.

The Wilkwood FOB is not within a designated site, it is however 1 km from Harbottle Moors SAC. The qualifying feature of interest for this site is European dry heath. Harbottle Moors is also a SSSI where more features are identified in the citation including dry heath, wet heath, blanket bog, ancient semi-natural woodland, upland bird assemblages and natural water bodies. The FOB is also within 1.5km Ramsey's Burn Wood and Yardhope Flow (part of the Otterburn Mires SSSI).

Since the facility already exists and is operational at the moment, the National Park's Ecologist cannot determine any reason that a significant effect on the ecology and environment will occur in continuing the same use, including the nearby designated sites. There is no evidence or information provided that indicates intensification or change of use from the existing. No extension of the site beyond the existing area of hard standing is proposed and therefore it is unlikely that there will be any further loss of habitat.

Issues that could occur and potentially affect the surrounding habitats and protected sites are water pollution, effect of lighting, accidental fire and disturbance of wildlife through operation. These are matters that one would anticipate could be dealt with under operating procedures and conditions relating to a planning consent and are unlikely to have a significant effect on the ecology or environment to require an EIA on those grounds.

Effects on Archaeology & Cultural Heritage

The potential effects of the proposal on cultural heritage have been assessed, which has included an assessment of the proposal by the Park's Historic Environment Officer, who is in agreement with its conclusions. The report has considered all known heritage assets whose settings may be impacted by the Forward Operating Base and has concluded that any effects will be minor or negligible. As a result there are no grounds for changing the original advice given prior to the construction of the FOB which concluded that there would be no significant impacts on heritage assets as a result of this structure, which is a military structure in a militarised landscape.

Other Potential Environmental Effects

Travel & Transport - The site already has an established use for military training and the proposed development is in keeping with this use. The Screening Report sets out the expectation of low traffic movements connected with the construction and operational phases would fall well short of any significant traffic impact, which is accepted. It is also considered that vehicle movements would not have a significant effect on the tranquillity of the National Park.

Noise, Vibration & Tranquillity – The development is unlikely to give rise to a significant environment impact through noise or vibration. The Screening Report sets out the intention to ensure that firing will continue in line with established patterns. Noise & vibration impacts are not considered to create a significant environmental impact that would significantly affect local amenity or the tranquillity of the National Park. There is not considered to be any other likely significant impact on tranquillity arising as a result of this proposal.

Water – The proposed water effects of the development are not considered to have any potential significant impacts on hydrology or the water environment.

Energy & Climate Change – There would be no significant energy impacts arising from the proposal.

Air Quality – Minor levels of dust or emissions could arise from modification works, but these are likely to fall well short of any significant impacts.

Waste – Existing waste management procedures would remain in place during operation and any additional waste generated in construction and decommissioning phases could be adequately dealt with through contractors without any likelihood of significant effects on the environment.

Geology & Soils – Impacts are considered to be limited and easily manageable through mitigation measures, without any likelihood of significant environmental impacts.

Health, Safety & Wellbeing – The Screening Report sets out measures that will be in place to safeguard health, safety and wellbeing. It is considered that there would not be significant threats to safety as a result of this proposal.

Social & Community – The level of training activity would be unchanged and there would be unlikely to be a significant effect on local environmental quality and enjoyment within the local community.

Infrastructure & Economy – There are not considered to be any likely significant effects on local infrastructure or the economy as a result of this proposal.

Conclusion

The Local Planning Authority has considered this proposed development based on the information provided as a formal EIA screening opinion request under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (as amended).

Based on the information submitted, the LPA's assessment of the likely significance of potential environmental impacts concludes that an **Environmental Impact Assessment is not required**. A statement of reasons is set out above.

	Signature	Date
Planning Officer	CS	22/7/15
Head of Development Management	SB	22/7/15