



18 March 2024

Case Officer – White Cross Onshore Development Proposal (North Devon Council)

Your Ref: Application No. 77576
Our Ref: WHX001-FLO-CON-ENV-LET-0005

Dear Neale,

Thank you for your letter dated 4th March 2024, regarding the planning application for White Cross Offshore Windfarm (the Project). White Cross Offshore Windfarm Limited (WCOWL) note your request for further information under Regulation 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

I am writing to formally acknowledge receipt of your request and to confirm that WCOWL will be providing a package of further information in response to your letter. The request for further information and clarifications will be addressed through the submission of an Environmental Statement Addendum (ESA).

We will also take this opportunity to formally confirm that WCOWL are committed to the extended deadline of submitting the ESA and supporting documents not later than the 1 July 2024. This allows for the completion of the spring bat activity surveys in April and May, and for the inclusion of the results of these surveys within the ESA.

A list of the further information and clarifications that WCOWL intend to submit in response to your request is included as **Appendix A** to this letter. We have purposely set out what we propose to submit against each request. For items that remain unclear to us, we kindly seek your further guidance. We invite your comments on all items.

Our absolute intent is to ensure alignment between WCOWL and NDC, so we can pursue further work scopes with confidence. We must reach a pragmatic way forward on all outstanding items within the prescribed timeframe.

We very much look forward to meeting you in person on the 27th March. This will provide an opportunity to work through the appended list in detail and meet the new case officer.

Yours sincerely,

Alastair Rayner

Alastair Rayner
The White Cross Offshore Windfarm Ltd team

WHX001-FLO-CON-ENV-LET-0005

Appendix A – Project Response to Request for Further Information

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Bats	<p>Further bat activity surveys to be undertaken along the Saunton Road hedgerow in April and May 2024, in support of construction access requirements. These will supplement surveys already completed in June, July and August 2023.</p> <p>This will provide additional data for the spring and early summer survey period for bat activity surveys, which has been requested. The need for additional data beyond this period is not anticipated, and this issue is already considered in detail in the Supplementary Bat Activity Survey report, to which we would like to draw your attention.</p> <p>The following documents prepared by the Project ecological consultants (BSG Ecology) will be submitted as part of the ESA to address the request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updated Supplementary Bat Activity Survey Report (Saunton Road), covering all the above surveys• Approach to Bat Mitigation (to be supplied as an Annex to the survey report) <p>Please note the need to accommodate additional spring/summer bat activity surveys is driving our timelines; these are contingent on no further surveys beyond April and May being required pre-consent.</p>

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Further surveys and assessment for wintering birds	<p>A season of wintering bird survey has been completed (October 2023 to March 2024) covering the north bank of the Taw Estuary, and the identified high-tide roosts on Braunton Marsh. Additional survey work has also been carried out on the south side of the estuary between December and March, in response to discussion with Natural England.</p> <p>This work consists of two visits per month, 2 hours each side of high tide (4 hours in total for each visit).</p> <p>The following documents prepared by BSG Ecology will be submitted as part of the ESA to address the request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wintering Bird Survey Report (Braunton Marsh and River Taw)• Approach to Lapwing Mitigation (to be supplied as an Annex to the survey report) <p>It should be noted that this information is additional to the substantial bank of historical data that is already available, which has been already been used to inform the assessment.</p>

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Great Crested Newts (GCN)	<p>Please note, for clarification, surveys conducted to date include: a) A Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) survey of all ponds within at least 250m of the Onshore Development Area; followed by b) environmental DNA (eDNA) surveys of all suitable ponds (identified during the HSI survey), to determine the presence or likely absence of great crested newts; and then c) population size class assessments of all eDNA-positive ponds in 2022.</p> <p>The survey techniques that have been used are therefore considered to already be consistent with current best practice, and provide an adequate baseline with which to inform the EIA.</p> <p>Given the work carried out to date, and outcome of the assessment (the risk of impacts is low), further survey work is not considered necessary in advance of determination of the planning application. It is however anticipated that it would be reasonable, as a precaution, to update some of this work in advance of the construction phase to ensure that any legal compliance issues and licencing requirements can be re-confirmed, and the mitigation approach refined accordingly (as set out in the ES).</p> <p>If NDC has any concerns about eDNA survey, it is worth noting that underpins Natural England District Level Licencing Scheme for great crested newts, and that eDNA survey for GCN is demonstrated to be a highly effective technique with detection rates much higher than those for other ‘traditional’ methods.</p>
Petalwort	<p>Further work including surveys and assessment have now been undertaken by a qualified experienced bryologist with expertise in petalwort, who has previously carried out petalwort surveys at Braunton Burrows for Natural England.</p> <p>A technical note will be provided as part of the ESA to address the request. This will include the following annexes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk-based Review and Assessment of Petalwort at Braunton Burrows SAC • Petalwort Survey Report • Figures showing locations of notable plant species (including Petalwort)

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Badgers	<p>The full extent of the cable corridor was surveyed for badgers with the results set out within the Environmental Statement and appendices. Five badger setts were recorded, none of which are closer than 60m from the cable corridor and no setts are expected to be affected by the Project.</p> <p>As per standard industry practice, and given the high mobility of badger and therefore the possibility of new setts being created, precautionary pre-construction badger surveys will also be conducted. The aim of this work would be to confirm the assessment remains up to date; should any new setts be located, the data will be used to determine whether any mitigation is required including the need for a Natural England licence, which if needed would be secured and factored into the programme.</p> <p>It is suggested that NDC agree to this precautionary pre-construction survey as a planning condition.</p>
Requirement for second year of survey work	<p>We kindly request clarification on this point; i.e. which surveys do you consider require a second year of data; how has this conclusion been reached, and what guidance does this recommendation originate from?</p> <p>This indicative timeline raises significant concern. We'll discuss this point on the 27th March. It would be helpful to receive your feedback on this specific item prior to our meeting.</p>
Habitats Regulation Assessment and the Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment	<p>Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) and Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment will be updated to reflect any new and/or updated information from the above items.</p>
Updates to Offshore Application	<p>The ESA will be updated to reflect any new and/or updated information from the above items.</p> <p>The HRA and Environmental Impact Assessment will also be amended accordingly.</p>

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Cable route construction	<p>Our general view is that sufficient information has already been provided on many aspects of the cable route construction. To supplement this, we will also provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighting Impact Assessment (including assessment of the impacts from the construction phase) • Flood Risk Assessment (to be updated) • Geotechnical Investigation Interpretative Report • Bentonite Management Plan • Hydrogeological Risk Assessment <p>Pre-construction we will prepare a full UXO Risk Mitigation strategy, specific to the final detailed route. We would be fully supportive of following the same standard process as deployed by Dynamic Dunescape.</p> <p>We kindly request NDC to confirm if the proposed information meets expectations. If not, then we need to be advised, so we can look to provide more detail as necessary.</p>
Explanation/assessment of maintenance activities	<p>In our view, the information provided would normally be sufficient to determine the likely significant effects. Specific O&M activities will be a function of detailed design, which has not yet been completed.</p> <p>We can perhaps look to provide some limited further detail of the standard approach to routine works, and some more description.</p> <p>We kindly request your guidance on what else we should provide at this early project stage.</p>

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Landfall Construction	<p>We are working hard with our design installation contractor to mature the landfall construction methodology and have commissioned further studies.</p> <p>We are now confident that landfall construction can be completed within 1 calendar month , with some additional set-up and demobilisation time required.</p> <p>A written description including the following information will be submitted within the ESA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phasing of works for each scope element • Drawings showing the working areas required for each phase • Programme of works for each phase • Methodology for each phase <p>The methodology will cater for public safety, car park and traffic considerations.</p>
Waste Audit Statement	<p>An updated Waste Audit Statement will be submitted as part of the ESA, in accordance with Policy W4 of the Devon County Council Waste Management & Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document.</p>
Agricultural Land Classification and soil surveys	<p>A site-specific soil survey is underway. This is additional to the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) and assessment previously submitted.</p> <p>The following documents will be submitted as part of the ESA to address the request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil Survey Report (including soil descriptions) • Agricultural Land Classification (drawing on the results from the soil survey and the Natural England national ALC mapping) <p>This will inform an appraisal to demonstrate compliance with Policy ST14: Enhancing Environmental Assets of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan and specifically policy:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(d) conserving northern Devon’s geodiversity and its best and most versatile agricultural land</p>

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Horizontal Directional Drill (HDD) activities	<p>More detail on the proposed HDD activities will be included in the ESA. The following documents will also be provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geotechnical Investigation Interpretative Report • Bentonite Management Plan • Hydrogeological Risk Assessment <p>The level of detail being requested is beyond standard practice, therefore, we would appreciate NDC confirmation that this satisfies the request.</p>
Flood risk and drainage assessments	<p>The Project has extensively engaged with the Environment Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority (Devon County Council) to ensure we satisfy their interests.</p> <p>To provide more detail, the following updated documents will be included in the ESA :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood Risk Assessment (additional climate change scenarios) • Outline Drainage Strategy (outfall, attenuation, maintenance)
Decommissioning impacts	<p>Further detail on decommissioning activities to be included, considering the likely impacts/outcomes from decommissioning.</p> <p>The opportunity to retain landscaping and attenuation measures associated with the onshore substation, and the likely beneficial environmental gains from this, will also be further evaluated.</p> <p>The project is open to agreeing a suitable and appropriate mechanism for securing the decommissioning, for example a planning condition or planning obligation (Section 106 agreement). We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further at our meeting on the 27th March.</p>

Request for Further Information	Project Response
Review of alternative cable routes	<p>In direct response to concerns raised by the local community, we have had two separate independent reviews of Chapter 4: Site Selection and Assessment of Alternatives completed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A 'cold eyes' external third-party technical review. This was conducted by an independent industry expert without any prior project knowledge. 2. Independent legal review by in-house counsel from our retained project lawyers' <p>The findings of both reviews were consistent. They confirmed the project followed a rigorous selection process and reached appropriate conclusions.</p> <p>The in-house council formally advised that the '<i>site selection process and treatment of alternative sites has been dealt with systematically and clearly</i>'.</p>
Environmental Statement signposting and clarifications	Improved clarity and signposting will be incorporated to aid navigation of the previously submitted information.