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Our reference: NewRidesSolar_EIA_Screening_Request_1
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Dear Sirs

Request under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 for a Screening Opinion in respect of a proposed 10MW solar farm at New Rides Wind Farm, Eastchurch

On behalf of Energiekontor UK Ltd I hereby request a Screening Opinion from the Council under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ("the EIA Regulations") in relation to a proposed 10MW solar farm development at New Rides Wind Farm, Eastchurch. This request is accompanied by the following:

- Figure 1 – Site Location
- Figure 2 – Site Layout
- Figures 3 and 4 – Environmental Designations

As required under Regulation 6 of the EIA Regulations, a brief description of the Proposed Development, the Site and its surrounding area are provided along with a summary of the possible effects on the environment.

The Site

The Site consists of agricultural land situated within and adjacent to the operational New Rides Wind Farm development on the Isle of Sheppey, shown on Figure 1. It is located approximately 1km south of the village of Eastchurch and the B2231 and to the west and south of New Rides Farm. The wind farm consists of four 125m high turbines and has been operational since 2019.

To the west of the Site lies the Sheppey Prison Cluster, made up of HMP Swaleside, HMP Elmley and HMP Standford Hill. To the south lies marshland associated with the river Swale and the Eastchurch Marshes, whilst to the east of the Site there is an existing solar farm associated with Old Rides Farm. For reference purposes the Old Rides Solar Farm is an 8MW development that was not subject to EIA (application reference SW/12/1448). There is a further operational solar farm at South Lees, 3.5km to the west of the Site. This provides 10.5MW of capacity and was similarly not subject to EIA (application reference SW/13/1202).

The Site is low lying and on a gently sloping south-facing land, rising from 2m above ordnance datum (AOD) in the south of the Site to 28m in the north of the Site.

The Proposed Development

The Proposed Development would consist of the installation and 35 year operation of a solar farm with a capacity of up to 10MW. An indicative layout of the proposed solar farm is provided on Figure 2. The installation would involve erection of solar panels on approximately 23ha (58 acres) of agricultural land. Access to the site would be via the existing access for New Rides Farm and New Rides Wind Farm off the B2231.

The solar panels would be positioned in rows and orientated due south, inclined to ensure optimum irradiance. The rows would be positioned to avoid any significant shadowing effects from the wind turbines, which would otherwise reduce the efficiency of the panels. The panels would be constructed of toughened glass and be mounted on a steel framework supporting structure which would be driven directly into the ground, with no need for any concrete foundations.

In addition to the solar panels the Proposed Development would require inverters to convert the direct current (DC) electricity generated by the panels into alternating current (AC) for the grid. Transformers would also be required to connect the solar farm to the high voltage electricity distribution network. The transformers and inverters would typically sit alongside each other within a cabinet approximately 6m long, 2.5 wide and 3m high, which would typically be located on a concrete plinth. The Proposed Development would be likely to require up to ten of these inverter/transformer cabinets.

Once operational there would be no on-site office or permanent staffing of the Site. Visits to the Site would typically be made once or twice a month for maintenance of the panels (e.g. washing the panels, or land management activities (e.g. grass cutting). Vehicles used for these visits would typically be 4x4 vehicles.

The development would be temporary with a proposed operational life of 35 years, after which the Site would be decommissioned and the equipment removed. A programme of restoration would be expected to be agreed with the Council by condition.

The EIA Regulations

The EIA Regulations set out thresholds for Schedule 1 developments for which Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is mandatory and Schedule 2 development for which an EIA may be required. The Proposed Development does not fall within any of the developments listed in Schedule 1, but falls within Section 3(a) of Schedule 2, i.e. industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water where the area of development exceeds 0.5ha.

Schedule 2 development proposals require an EIA if they are considered likely to have significant effects on the environment, by virtue of factors such as nature, size or location. Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations provides selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 developments, namely: the characteristics of the development; the environmental sensitivity of the location; and the types and characteristics of the potential impacts (e.g. its magnitude and duration). These selection criteria are considered individually for the Proposed Development below.

Regulation 4(2) sets out that where an EIA is required it must identify, describe and assess in an appropriate manner, in light of each individual case, the direct and indirect significant effects of the proposed development on the following factors:

(a) population and human health;
(b) biodiversity, with particular attention to species and habitats protected under Directive 92/43/EEC and Directive 2009/147/EC;
(c) land, soil, water, air and climate;
(d) material assets, cultural heritage and the landscape; and
(e) the interaction between the factors referred to in paragraphs (a) to (d).

Schedule 3 Selection Criteria for Screening Schedule 2 Development

Characteristics of Development

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations provides the characteristics of development that must be considered, with particular regard to the following:

The size and design of the whole development	The Proposed Development would consist of a solar farm with an installed capacity of approximately 10MW within an area of approximately 23ha. The solar panels would be mounted in frames set at an angle and would face south. The panels would likely be no higher than 3 metres above the ground at their highest point. Other infrastructure on site would include inverters to convert the current for export to the electricity distribution network and a substation. The small scale of the development means that the construction period would be relatively short, expecting to last approximately 8-12 weeks. Component parts would be delivered on HGV lorries with no abnormal loads. The average daily number of delivery vehicles throughout the construction period would be expected to be low, likely in the region of 5-6 per day. Hedgerows around the site would be maintained at a height of between 2.5-3m to screen the development from external views, and also provide biodiversity benefit.
Cumulation with other existing development and/or approved development	There are two operational solar farms within 5km of the Site: Old Rides Solar Farm (8MW), located immediately to the east of the Site, and South Lees Solar Farm (10.5MW), located 3.5km to the west of the Site. Neither of these solar farm projects were subject to EIA, as they were not predicted to have significant environmental effects.
The use of natural resources	The construction process would require the use of limited natural resources. Manufacture of the component parts (e.g. panels, frames and other equipment) would also require the use of some natural resources. However, there would be no excessive or

	unusual use of natural resources. During the operational phase, the Proposed Development would generate electricity from a renewable source, thereby helping to reduce reliance on hydrocarbons. Very minimal natural resources would be required for maintenance during the operational phase, primarily fuel for visiting the site and water for washing the panels.
The production of waste	During the construction phase, typical construction waste would be generated, but the level of this would be low given the scale and nature of the works and would be handled in accordance with appropriate licenses and procedures. No waste materials would be generated during the operational period. On decommissioning, the majority of materials removed from the Site could be re-used or recycled.
Pollution and nuisances	The construction phase would require the temporary storage of fuels and vehicle maintenance materials. These would be stored and used in accordance with construction best practice methodology to minimise the risks to the soil and also to surrounding watercourses, waterbodies and groundwater. No hazardous or toxic materials would be stored on site during the operational phase of the development. Similarly, the Proposed Development would not generate any polluting emissions. Solar farms are passive and do not include moving parts that generate noise. Concerns can sometimes be raised regarding noise from the cooling fans of the inverters required on-site, however these are housed within cabinets which deaden the noise to a very low level. The cabinets are located centrally within the development so any noise due to the equipment would not have a detrimental effect on residential amenity. Any noise that may be generated during the construction phase can be controlled by the Council by the use of conditions, e.g. restricting working hours.

	Lights may be required on-site during the construction phase of the development, however as with noise the hours of operation can be controlled by the Council by condition. No on-site lighting would be required during the operational phase of the development.
The risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge	There would be potential for accidents during the construction phase of the development, however this relates to the normal risks associated with construction and would be managed in an appropriate way by the lead engineering contractor and designer commissioned to install the site under the Construction, Design and Management Regulations. During the operational phase of the development the solar farm would be unmanned. Visits to the Site would be infrequent and for the purposes of grass cutting and equipment maintenance. There is the potential for accidents to occur during these processes, however they would be managed by use of good agricultural, commercial and health and safety practices. No unusual substances and technologies particular to the Proposed Development would be likely to bring about accidents. In order to prevent unauthorised access to the solar panel equipment, which may lead to vandalism or accidents, an on-site security system would be installed. This would consist of a 2-2.5m high deer fence style fence surrounding the panel areas, locked gates and a CCTV/thermal imaging detection system. Cameras would face into the Site and would be triggered by motion sensors. No detrimental effects on the privacy or amenity of local residents would occur as a result of the security measures proposed. Using the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning[1], the northern half of the Site lies within the

[1] Environment Agency, Flood Map for Planning (https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/confirm-location?easting=596793&northing=170644&placeOrPostcode=isle%20of%20sheppey Last Accessed 04/08/2020)

	Flood Zone 1 (the lowest risk classification for flood risk which indicates there is less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of flooding). However, the southern part of the Site lies within Flood Zone 3 indicating a high risk of fluvial or tidal flooding. The area is either at risk of flooding from the sea by a flood that has a 1 in 200 or greater chance of happening each year, or from a river by a flood that has a 1 in 100 or greater chance of happening each year. The area is subject to tidal flooding in response to extreme tidal levels in the Swale and is also at risk from fluvial flooding due to the backing up of water in the Eastchurch Marshes drainage network due to the tide-locking at drainage outfalls. Existing coastal flood defences provide protection to the site for a 1 in 200-year flood. The Site is not considered to be at risk from groundwater flooding[2]. The Applicant would commission a detailed site flood risk assessment and incorporate mitigation measures if needed. When considering the flood defences in place, risks of major accident and/or disaster, including those caused by climate change are considered to be low.
The risks to human health (for example, due to water contamination or air pollution)	During the construction phase there is potential for fuels and chemicals to spill, however this risk would be suitably managed in an appropriate way by the lead engineering contractor and designer under the Construction, Design and Management Regulations. Similarly, appropriate management methods would be used during the decommissioning phase also. During the operational phase, the Proposed Development would pose very low risk to human health.

[2] The Swale Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2020, Appendix F (https://services.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/SFRA%202020/2019s0345%20-%20Appendix%20F%20-%20Groundwater%20-%20District%20(v3).pdf Last Accessed 03/08/2020)

Location of Development

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations provides that the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by the development must be considered, with particular regard to the following:

The existing and approved land use	The Site consists of agricultural land situated within and adjacent to the operational New Rides Wind Farm development. The Proposed Development would involve the erection of solar panels on approximately 23ha of agricultural land. The Site is not zoned for any particular development under the Swale Borough Local Plan[3]
The relative abundance, availability quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground	The Proposed Development would take 23 ha of agricultural land of low ecological value out of production for the 35 years that would constitute the lifetime of the development. However, it should be noted that as the Proposed Development would be for a temporary period the agricultural land would not be sterilised such as it would if a residential, transportation or commercial development were to be built, and as such it should not be considered in the same way. The Site is surrounded by tall hedgerows. No loss of hedgerow is expected. Mitigations measures such as filling existing gaps in the hedgerows would be considered, if required, to improve screening and increase biodiversity.
The absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas: • wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths; • coastal zones and the marine environment; • mountain and forest areas;	**Wetlands, riparian areas, river mouths, Coastal zones and the marine environment** The Isle of Sheppey, in which the Site is located, is surrounded by the Thames Estuary to the North and the Swale Estuary to the south (approximately 2.3km south of the Site). The Swale Estuary is a key marine feature of the area and is designated as a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). The shallower waters of the Swale Estuary

[3] Bearing Fruits 2031, The Swale Borough Local Plan, Adopted July 2017 (http://services.swale.gov.uk/media/files/localplan/adoptedlocalplanfinalwebversion.pdf Last Accessed 03/08/2020)

• nature reserves and parks; • European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation; • 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; • densely populated areas; • landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or archaeological significance.	are also protected protected under different legislation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Wetlands here are also protected under the international Ramsar convention (see Figure 3). Included as part of Policy DM 23 of the Swale Borough Council Local Plan, an area of Coastal Change Management has been identified in the south of the Site[4]. **Mountain and forest areas** The nearest major forested area to the Site is Kent Downs, approximately 9km to the South. At this distance and given the nature of the development this area would not be significantly affected by the Proposed Development. The area of England in which the Site is located (southeast) has relatively flat topography, thus there are no notable mountain ranges close enough that could be affected by the Proposed Development. **European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation and National reserves and parks** There are no European, National or Local landscape, cultural heritage or ecological designations within the Site boundary. The nearest national landscape designation is the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) located approximately 9km to the south of the Site, at this distance the Proposed Development would not significantly affect this AONB.

[4] The Swale Borough Council, Online Map, (http://services.swale.gov.uk/maps/iShare5.6.WebSwaleLive/atMyCouncil.aspx?ms=Swale/Swale_Flood_Risk_Strategic_Assessment&layers=&starteasting=593500&startnorthing=167500&startzoom=62900 Last Accessed 03/08/2020)

	There is an overlapping SSSI, SPA and Ramsar designation approximately 750m southeast of the Site, named The Swale. These are the nearest European designated sites. At this distance and given the nature of the Proposed Development these designated sites would not be significantly affected. The nearest National Nature Reserve (NNR) is Elmley approximately 1.8km southwest of the Site. The nearest Local Nature Reserve is Oare Marshes approximately 4.2km to the southeast of the Site (See Figure 3). At this distance and given the nature of the Proposed Development these sites would not be significantly affected. A RSPB Reserve is located approximately 100m southwest of the Site. Due to the small scale and low impact nature of the Proposed Development no impacts are expected to this RSPB Reserve. **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** There are no areas relevant to the Proposed Development where there has already been a failure to meet the environmental quality standards laid down in EU legislation. **Densely populated areas** The Site is located within a lowly populated area and would generally be screened from the majority of views due to the surrounding tall hedgerows. The distance from the Site to residential properties coupled with the existing screening mean that no significant adverse effects on local amenity are predicted. **Landscapes and sites of Historical, cultural or archaeological significance** There is one Grade I, seven Grade II, two Grade II* Listed Buildings and one Scheduled monument

	(Shurland House) within 1km of the Site. There are a further three Grade II Listed Buildings within 2km of the Site (see Figure 4). Included as part of Policy DM 24 of the Swale Borough Council Local Plan, a locally designated Area of High Landscape Value (Kent Level) has been identified directly adjacent to the south of the Site[5]. Given the distance between the Site and the cultural heritage assets and the existing screening, no likely significant adverse effects are expected on the setting of the cultural heritage assets or the locally designated landscape area as a result of the Proposed Development.

[5] The Swale Borough Council, Online Map, (http://services.swale.gov.uk/maps/iShare5.6.WebSwaleLive/atMyCouncil.aspx?ms=Swale/Swale_Flood_Risk_Strategic_Assessment&layers=&starteasting=593500&startnorthing=167500&startzoom=62900 Last Accessed 03/08/2020)

Types and Characteristics of the Potential Impact

This section of the report provides further assessment of the potential for the Proposed Development to give rise to likely significant effects on the factors specified in regulation 4(2) of the EIA Regulations. This potential has been evaluated giving due consideration to the criteria set out in Schedule 3, Paragraph 3 of the EIA Regulations as appropriate, namely: the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected); the nature of the impact; the transboundary nature of the impact; the intensity and complexity of the impact; the probability of the impact; the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact; the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development; and the possibility of effectively reducing the impact. The table below sets out the potential for significant environmental effects identified in a preliminary appraisal of the likelihood of potential impacts on sensitive receptors arising from the Proposed Development.

Environmental Factor	Baseline Findings	Potential for Significant Environmental Effects
Population and Human Health	The requirement for consideration of health was introduced into the EIA regulations in 2017 and is interpreted as the need to consider impacts on human health in the population and on healthcare resources. The first of these is largely through the consideration of humans as receptors to the impacts on air quality, noise, visual amenity, ground contamination etc. The second is whether the Proposed development would impact on the availability of services.	**Noise** Any noise that may be generated during the construction phase would be mitigated through construction management practices and can also be further controlled by the Council by the use of conditions, e.g. restricting working hours. Since solar farms are passive and do not include moving parts that generate noise, little noise is expected during the operational phase. Concerns can sometimes be raised regarding noise from the cooling fans of the inverters required onsite, however these are housed within cabinets which reduce the noise, as well as being located at the centre of the Site, thus noise levels are expected to be very low. Any noise that may be generated during the construction phase would be managed through appropriate construction management practices. As such, **no significant effects are predicted**. **Visual Amenity** Lights may be required on-site during the construction phase of the

Environmental Factor	Baseline Findings	Potential for Significant Environmental Effects
		development, however as with noise the hours of operation can be controlled by the Council by condition. No on-site lighting would be required during the operational phase. The Proposed Development is also surrounded by hedgerows which would be maintained at a height of between 2.5-3m to screen the Proposed Development from external views. As such, **no significant effects are predicted**. **Ground Contamination** During the construction phase there would be temporary storage of fuels and vehicle maintenance materials and the potential for fuels and chemicals to spill, however this risk would be suitably managed in an appropriate way by the lead engineering contractor and designer under the Construction, Design and Management Regulations. Similarly, appropriate management methods would be used during the decommissioning phase. No hazardous or toxic materials would be stored on site during the operational phase of the development.

Environmental Factor	Baseline Findings	Potential for Significant Environmental Effects
		As such, **no significant effects are predicted**. **Air Quality** Similarly to the above, air quality during the construction phase would be managed through appropriate construction management practices. The Proposed Development would generate only a very small amount of polluting emissions during the operational phase (mainly through maintenance vehicles visiting the Site). As such, **no significant effects are predicted.**
Biodiversity	There are no European, National or Local landscape, ecological designations within the Site. There is an overlapping SSSI, SPA and Ramsar designation approximately 750m southeast of the Site. These are the nearest European designated sites. The nearest National Nature Reserve (NNR) is Elmley approximately 1.8km southwest of the Site. The nearest Local Nature Reserve is Oare Marshes approximately 4.2km to the southeast of the Site.	The Proposed Development is not located within any national or international designations, thus such designations are not expected to be directly impacted by the Proposed Development. The designations identified within 1-2km of the Site are not expected to be impacted by the small scale and low impact nature of the Proposed Development. As such, **no significant effects are predicted.** An ecology report shall be prepared as part of a future planning

Environmental Factor	Baseline Findings	Potential for Significant Environmental Effects
	A RSPB Reserve is located approximately 100m southwest of the Site. The Swale Estuary (located 2.3km south of the Site) is a key marine feature of the area and is designated as a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).	application to consider any residual effects of the Proposed Development on the surrounding designations and habitat management in the area. The ecology report shall include details of mitigation and enhancement measures if needed.
Land, soil, water, air and climate	The land use of the Site is predominately agricultural, with the Operation New Rides wind farm also located on the Site. The Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning[6] indicates that the northern half of the site lies within the Flood Zone 1 (the lowest risk classification for flood risk which indicates there is less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of flooding). However, the southern part of the site lies within Flood Zone 3 indicating a high risk of fluvial or tidal flooding. The area is either at risk of	The agricultural land on the Site is considered to be of low ecological value. However, the Applicant would commission an agricultural land classification survey as part of a future planning application. When considering the existing hydrological mitigation measures in place (i.e. the costal defences), the risk of flooding (including accidents and/or disasters influenced by climate change) is considered low. The construction methods will ensure that rainfall will be able to infiltrate into the soil thus no adverse effects on on-site or downstream flooding would occur. The Applicant would also commission a detailed

[6] Environment Agency, Flood Map for Planning (https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/confirm-location?easting=596793&northing=170644&placeOrPostcode=isle%20of%20sheppey Last Accessed 04/08/2020)

Environmental Factor	Baseline Findings	Potential for Significant Environmental Effects
	flooding from the sea by a flood that has a 1 in 200 or greater chance of happening each year, or from a river by a flood that has a 1 in 100 or greater chance of happening each year. The area is subject to tidal flooding in response to extreme tidal levels in the Swale and is also at risk from fluvial flooding due to the backing up of water in the Eastchurch Marshes drainage network due to the tide-locking at drainage outfalls. Existing coastal flood defences provide protection to the site for a 1 in 200-year flood. The Site is not considered to be at risk from groundwater flooding[7]. Included as part of Policy DM 23 of the Swale Borough Council Local Plan, an area of Coastal Change Management has been identified adjacent to the south of the Site.	site flood risk assessment as part of a future planning application and incorporate mitigation measures if needed. As such, **no significant effects are predicted**.
Material assets, cultural heritage and	There is one Grade I, seven Grade II, two Grade II* Listed Buildings and one Scheduled Monument	No direct impacts are predicted in relation to the cultural heritage assets identified. In terms of indirect effects, given the nature of the

[7] The Swale Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2020, Appendix F (https://services.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/SFRA%202020/2019s0345%20-%20Appendix%20F%20-%20Groundwater%20-%20District%20(v3).pdf Last Accessed 03/08/2020)

Environmental Factor	Baseline Findings	Potential for Significant Environmental Effects
the landscape	(Shurland House) within 1km of the Site. There are a further three Grade II Listed Buildings within 2km of the Site. The nearest national landscape designation is the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) located approximately 9km to the south of the Site. Included as part of Policy DM 24 of the Swale Borough Council Local Plan, a locally designated Area of High Landscape Value (Kent Level) has been identified adjacent to the south of the Site[8].	Proposed Development (i.e. low lying and screened by hedgerows) and the distances involved to the heritage assets, no significant effects are predicted on the settings of any assets. Given the distance to the Kent Downs AONB and the size and scale of the Proposed Development and the surrounding hedgerow screening, effects to the AONB are predicted to be negligible. Given the size and scale of the Proposed Development and when also considering the existing hedgerows, any effects on views from the High Landscape Value area adjacent to the south of the Site are predicted to be limited. As such, **no significant effects are considered predicted**. The Applicant would also commission a landscape and visual impact assessment as part of a future planning application and incorporate mitigation measures if needed.

[8] The Swale Borough Council, Online Map, (http://services.swale.gov.uk/maps/iShare5.6.WebSwaleLive/atMyCouncil.aspx?ms=Swale/Swale_Flood_Risk_Strategic_Assessment&layers=&starteasting=593500&startnorthing=167500&startzoom=62900 Last Accessed 03/08/2020)

Summary

The above tables consider that the Proposed Development does not have the potential to result in significant effects. For the aforementioned reasons we propose that an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required for the Proposed Development.

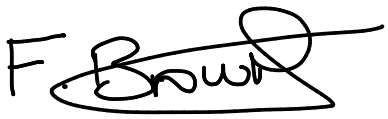
However, it is recognised that in the case of some environmental topics there is a need for technical assessments to be provided. Therefore, we propose to submit the following information with a future planning application:

- Ecology Report;
- Agricultural Land Classification Survey;
- Flood Risk Assessment; and
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

Next Steps

I trust this is satisfactory and look forward to receiving the Council's Screening Opinion in due course. If you would like any additional information or wish to discuss things further then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,



Fred Brown
Energiekontor UK