



Land Between Northacre Industrial Estate, Westbury and  
Rodden Road, Frome

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Planning Application (including D&A  
Statement) for Installation of an  
Underground Grid Connection

8<sup>th</sup> March 2019



## Notice

This report was produced by Land & Mineral Management for Northacre Renewable Energy Limited for the specific purpose of accompanying a planning application at for a grid connection to serve Northacre Renewable Energy Facility.

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## Contact Details:

Lesley Loane  
tel: 01373 465739 07970103196  
email: [ll@landandmineral.co.uk](mailto:ll@landandmineral.co.uk)  
Web: [www.landandmineral.co.uk](http://www.landandmineral.co.uk)

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Northacre Renewable Energy Ltd is applying for planning permission to install an underground cable that will connect the renewable energy facility at Northacre Industrial Estate with the local distribution network at a substation on the edge of Frome.
- 1.2 The route of the cable is 10.61km, this includes sections where the cable will be laid in the public highway and over a railway as well as crossing farmland. The installation work is primarily by digging a trench approximately 0.52m wide and approximately 1.45m deep, installing ducting, reinstating the trench and then pulling the cable through the ducting.
- 1.3 The route of the cable crosses from Wiltshire Council into Mendip District Council and therefore two planning applications have been submitted, one to each local authority, but including the same information over arching to the whole installation for completeness.
- 1.4 The sections of the cable installed on the roads are permitted development, but have, after discussion with the LPA's, been included in these applications for transparency and completeness. Works in the highway will be subject to other authorisations obtained from the appropriate highway authority. Similarly, Network Rail agreements will be in place as needed.
- 1.5 The installation of this underground cable, if being undertaken by a statutory electricity provider (i.e. a company such as SSE) would not require planning consent, as it falls within Permitted Development (GDPO 2015 Part 15 Power related development, Class B; electricity undertakings). However, this grid connection cable is being installed by an Independent Connections Provider (ICP) to the local distribution network owner's codes and standards. After the connection is energised, it will be adopted by the network owner.
- 1.6 Therefore, although the works to be undertaken are the same as if under the remit of a statutory undertaker, a planning application is required. The installation of the ducting and the cable within it will be carried out by DNO Consulting (DNOC), an ICP who are accredited to carry out such works on behalf of statutory undertakers and the private sector on a significant number of similar projects. Their recent installed work list is included with the application for reference.

## 2 Purpose of the grid connection

- 2.1 The cable is required to connect the facility at Northacre to the grid so that the renewable electricity generated can be delivered to the local distribution network (ultimately National Grid). Planning permission 14 /12003/WCM was granted in 2015 for an advanced thermal treatment facility and that consent remains extant. Subsequently permission has been sought to revise the layout and design of the approved facility and Wiltshire Council resolved to grant concern to the revised layout and design on 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2019. That decision has been subject of a request for the application to be called in for determination by the Secretary of State. At the time of writing the Secretary of State has not yet decided if the application is to be called in. Development of the site is being progressed and this proposal for the grid connection forms part of that work.
- 2.2 The Northacre Renewable Energy facility (as revised) will generate 25.5 MW electricity / year of which approximately 4 MW will be used on the site itself and 2 MW used by the adjacent Northacre Resource Recovery Centre. Additionally, private wire connections to local industry are under discussion, but the majority of the electricity will use the proposed connection to the national grid contributing to the government's aims of increasing renewable energy sources.
- 2.3 The grid connection to the local distribution network substation off Rodden Road, Frome has been agreed with the local distribution network owner, Southern Electric Power Distribution (SEPD)which ultimately connects to National Grid's network. Obviously if suitable infrastructure was available in closer proximity to Northacre Industrial Estate that would have been considered.
- 2.4 The route that the cable takes has been subject to an extended period of negotiation, not only with SEPD, but also all of the landowners involved to secure the necessary access and wayleave arrangements. This has now been completed and therefore the route of the cable is now fixed and these planning applications can be made.
- 2.5 When completed, the cable connection between Northacre and Frome substation will be adopted by SEPD, providing reinforcement to the local distribution network serving the Westbury area and improving grid resilience locally.

### 3 Route and Installation of the Grid Connection

- 3.1 This application is accompanied by a set of plans which shows the route of the wayleave within which cable to be installed for the grid connection, firstly as an overview across its full length from Northacre Industrial Estate to the substation at Rodden Road, Frome and secondly, broken down into larger scale for each detailed section of the route. The Northacre Renewable Energy Facility lies to the east on the overview plan, and is shaded blue for reference. The substation at Rodden Road Frome to the south west is shaded mustard yellow.
- 3.2 The boundary between Wiltshire and Mendip is shown on the OS base map used for the applications as a purple line. Within Wiltshire is 3,475m of cable in private land and 505m in highways land. Within Mendip there is 5,410m in private land and 1,220m in highways land.
- 3.3 The application area is shown, where it crosses private land as a red line of 25m width which reflects the agreements with those landowners and the cable installation has the flexibility to route within that 25m width to avoid any very specific locational constraints (see ecological summary below). In several places where the route crosses established tracks, the wayleave is less. On the public highway sections the red line is simply reflecting the width of the trench that will be dug and it is a more established but constrained area for installation of cables.
- 3.4 In establishing the route, agreement was sought from the landowners to minimise the length as far as possible but also to route the cable to the edges of fields minimising any disruption to farming during the installation process. Occasional manhole covers will be installed to provide maintenance and repair access and these will be sited away from areas that could be disturbed by farming activities. Similarly, the route has the flexibility within the wayleave to avoid the removal of any substantial trees or bend around any specifically identified features.
- 3.5 Where a stream or field ditch is to be crossed, rather than impact the flow, even for the very short period needed to install the ducting, the cable will be drilled under the stream. This has the advantage of not causing any water related issues or disturbing any habitats and species it may support.
- 3.6 Although the area which is enclosed by these planning applications technically exceeds 1ha, a formal flood risk assessment has not been deemed necessary due to the very temporary nature of the works and the fact they will be fully reinstated after the ducting and cable is put in place. Therefore, although there are areas potentially identified on the EA's flood risk map within the

red line of the application, installing the grid connection and re-instating the ground immediately afterwards causes no increase in flood risk.

- 3.7 To install the cable, an excavator uses a bucket to dig a trench approximately 0.52m wide and 1.45m deep. Soils are carefully separated into subsoil and topsoil when removed. Ducting is laid in the trench on a suitable bed material. The ducting is covered back in and the soils re-instated in the correct sequence. The cable is pulled though the ducting in sections and jointed. Once this has been completed the line of the trench in each section is re-seeded.
- 3.8 Where the connection crosses a hedge, a section 1m wide will be removed, unless greater required for access. The ecological work described in detail in the ecological assessment will form part of these operations. Once installation is complete the hedge will be replanted in agreement with the farmer if they require. As noted above the cable will be installed under water courses by drilling beneath them. The methodology for installation in the public highway will be agreed with the appropriate authority as part of securing the appropriate consents.
- 3.9 The degree of disturbance associated with the cable duct trenching and installation along the cable route across the farmland is very small and similar to a farmer installing land drains, where trenches are dug, filled with gravel and pipes and then re-covered. Temporary compounds established as permitted development, moving along the route, will be used to manage the equipment digging and installing the grid connection with such compounds being secured overnight and at weekends.
- 3.10 It is intended that installation will be normal working hours Monday to Friday, but additional working may be required particularly in the highway to meet other requirements. The Construction Environmental Management Plan, prepared by the grid connection installer DNOC from their extensive experience of these type of works addresses this in more detail, see section 4.8 below.

## 4 Constraints considered

- 4.1 Previous grid connection proposals and pre-application discussions with both planning authorities have identified that archaeology and ecology are the two potential constraints which need to be considered in progressing an underground cable installation for a grid connection such as the one proposed for the Northacre project.

### *Archaeology*

- 4.2 A desk based assessment (DBA) has been carried out looking at the full route and setting of the installation across both local authorities. A desk based assessment is informed by extensive data searches of material from previous investigations and developments as well as statutory information. The area looked at extends beyond the simple development footprint as a precautionary approach.
- 4.3 This assessment has established that within the section of the route that passes through Brook Farm and eastwards towards the Northacre Industrial Estate, there are likely to be surviving buried archaeological remains associated with the adjacent Scheduled Monument of a deserted medieval settlement, manorial site, and mill. Consultation with Rachel Foster, Archaeological Advisor to Wiltshire Council, has indicated that a controlled strip map and sample archaeological excavation be carried out in specific places within the route through Brook Farm; and that an archaeological watching brief can accompany the construction groundworks for the remainder of the section between Northacre Industrial Park to Fairwood House.
- 4.4 This assessment has established that for the remainder of the route, there is relatively limited potential for surviving buried archaeological remains of such significance that could preclude development. It is suggested in the report that an archaeological watching brief during excavation of the cable trench may be an appropriate mitigation measure if one is considered necessary.

### *Ecology*

- 4.5 Ecological assessment has also been carried out. The Ecological Appraisal comprised a Phase 1 Habitat survey and a protected species survey, beginning with a walk over of the full route (except the sub-station itself in Frome for health and safety reasons) by two qualified ecologists. Additional research into the range of ecological records available for the wider area has then also informed an assessment and the measures that will be incorporated into the installation proposals.

4.6 The key conclusions of the assessment are:

No protected or notable species were recorded within the application area, although there were some within 1km.

There are no statutory sites of nature conservation importance within 1km of the application area. Although there are five non statutory sites adjacent to the development corridor.

With appropriate measures in place the cable installation can be completed without harm to protected species.

- 4.7 The ecological assessment proposes that a detailed constraints map is produced on the precise route, in spring immediately prior to the work commencing, with an ecologist walking the route with one of the team installing the cable. This will lead to a pinpointing of a number of measures for specific points along the route requiring some pre-installation inspection and clearing by an ecologist suitably licenced, or direct supervision during the trench being dug and re-instated at particular locations. An Ecological Clerk of Works will be appointed to the development.
- 4.8 The nature of the works leads to having a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). The purpose of a construction environmental management plan is to outline how a construction project will avoid, minimise or mitigate effects on the environment and surrounding area. In this instance, rather than condition the CEMP as part of a planning consent, a CEMP has been produced to accompany the application.

## 5 Policy and Legislation

- 5.1 The installation of a grid connection in association with a consented renewable energy facility has been considered against the Policies of the Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015. As set out above protection of the historic environment (archaeology) and the protection of biodiversity (ecology) are the primary points and are addressed by Core Policies 58 and 50 respectively.

*Core Policy 58 Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment (extract)*

- 5.2 *Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment. Designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance, including: i. Nationally significant archaeological remains.*

*Core Policy 50 Biodiversity and Geodiversity (extract)*

- 5.3 *Development proposals must demonstrate how they protect, and where possible enhance, features of nature conservation and geological value as part of the design rational..... All development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species and habitats throughout the lifetime of the development. All development should seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity..... Sustainable development will avoid direct and indirect impacts upon local sites through sensitive site location and layout, and by maintaining sufficient buffers and ecological connectivity with the wider environment.*

- 5.4 The reason for both policies and the protection it seeks to give to these assets are fully addressed through the assessment work that accompanies this application and by the measures proposed for overseeing and mitigation during the appropriate stages of the cable installation.

- 5.5 The installation of the underground cable has also been considered against the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017. The development is not of a type described in Schedule 1 nor Schedule 2. Neither has there been any likelihood of significant impact identified as a result of the cable installation. The proposal therefore does not fall within the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and is not EIA development.

## **6 Conclusion**

- 6.1 The proposal is to dig a simple 0.52m x 1.45m trench and install ducting through which a cable will be pulled to form a connection between the renewable energy source at Northacre Industrial Estate, Westbury and the electricity substation at Rodden Road, Frome. The line of the cable installation will be re-instated and re-planted as necessary.
- 6.2 The development sought is one which, if being carried out by another body (a statutory undertaker), would be considered to be Permitted Development, ie something which was not required to obtain planning consent, because it is judged to have no potential for impacts that need to be considered through the planning system. This application is necessary only because the ICP Contractor installing the cable which will ultimately be adopted by the local distribution network owner (statutory undertaker) is not a statutory undertaker.
- 6.3 The installation work will be carried out by a specialist and experienced contractor. It will be subject to the mitigation and monitoring requirements set out in the accompanying Ecological and Archaeological assessments as well as a Construction Environmental Management Plan.
- 6.4 Other consents, such as those for works in the public highway as noted in the CEMP as well as guidance notes and operational procedures will be obtained and followed. The nature of the work is temporary and when complete, very little, if any trace will be visible.
- 6.5 Wiltshire Core Strategy policies in terms of protection of the environment and other resources have been considered and the proposal is part of a consented development, dealing with residual waste and creating renewable energy which has been supported by Wiltshire Council previously.
- 6.6 Planning permission should be granted.