



THE PLANNING ACT 2008

THE INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING (EXAMINATION PROCEDURE) RULES  
2010

Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind Farm

**Appendix I4 to the Natural England Deadline 6 Submission**  
**Natural England's advice on Onshore Ecology relating to Onshore Ornithology**

For:

The construction and operation of Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind Farm located approximately 54 km from the Lincolnshire Coast in the Southern North Sea.

Planning Inspectorate Reference EN010130

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4<sup>th</sup> April 2025

## **Appendix I4 - Natural England's Advice on Onshore Ecology and Ornithology at Deadline 6**

### **Introduction**

This appendix sets out Natural England's advice which has been provided directly to ODOW via email correspondence, as requested by the Applicant following a meeting held on 24 March 2025, to address outstanding issues within Appendix J6 Natural England's Risks and Issues Log.

Due to timings, Natural England will not be able to review the Applicant's Deadline 6 response within the ODOW OWF examination. Therefore, within this Appendix we have submitted our advice to also allow consideration by your yourselves, to aid determination.

In addition, ahead of Deadline 6, Natural England received from the Applicant proposed wording and additions to documentation for review and comment. Our advice, provided under our discretionary advice service, to the Applicant for consideration is detailed below.

Further, following the meeting with ODOW on 24 March 2025, ODOW contacted Natural England via email requesting further guidance on Noise. Advice was provided via email dated 02 March 2025 and can be found in Annex 1 below.

### **Detailed Advice**

#### **1) Advice Provided following review of the Applicant's proposed updates to the Outline Soil Management Plan [REP5-116] and the Outline Code of Construction Practice [REP5-114].**

ODOW proposed amendments received by email on 25 March 2025 (in black). Natural England provided comment in response directly to the Applicant via e-mail on 31 March 2025 (in blue):

#### *Outline Soil Management Plan*

1. *Reference to the SNCB being consulted has been incorporated into Section 1.4 of the outline SMP (excerpt attached below):*
9. The CoCP and SMP will be submitted to the relevant LPA in consultation with LCC and the relevant statutory nature conservation body for approval prior to commencement of construction.

NE's Response: Natural England acknowledges the proposal to include consultation with the relevant SNCB as referenced above. Providing this is included, Natural England would consider this matter resolved. As such, text within the Risks and Issues log will be worded to reflect our position on this.

*2. The following has been added into Section 1.19 in respect of adverse weather:*

- Mowing and stripping should be avoided during wet conditions.

NE Response: This addition is welcomed and progresses this matter. However, please note that as per our previous advice, we are seeking a clear written commitment to avoid mowing and stripping during wet conditions. If this commitment to avoid can be included within this document, instead of 'should be avoided' then Natural England would consider this matter (RR H91 only, not H12) resolved. Should this commitment be included, this issue will be marked as progressed at Deadline 6.

#### *Outline Code of Construction Practice*

*3. The following additional wording has been added into Section 5.11 of the outline CoCP in respect of Pollution Prevention and Emergency Responses.*

- 95. The final Pollution Prevention and Emergency Incident Response Plan will identify and include sensitive ecological receptors, such as the Sea bank Clay Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest and its features.

NE Response: We welcome this additional wording which will progress this issue within the Risks and Issues Log. Providing the inclusion of Sea Bank Clay Pits as a sensitive ecological receptor as referenced above is within this document, Natural England would consider RR H44 as resolved. However, NE would still expect sight of a specific bentonite frack out management plan (RR H6), as such this issue will not be marked as resolved but progressed at Deadline 6.

## **2) Advice Provided following review of the Applicant's proposed updates to Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Strategy V7 [REP5-120] and the Air Quality Management Plan [REP4a-078]**

ODOW proposed amendments received by email 28 March 2025 (in black). Natural England provided comment in response on 03 April 2025 (in blue).

*Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Strategy - Ornithology:*

4. *We are proposing to add the following text into the OLEMS:*

*In section 3.7.5.4 Minimising Disturbance to Non Breeding Waterbirds and Breeding Schedule 1 birds within Anderby Marsh LWT reserve:*

- Conducting ongoing ecological monitoring of the area in preparation for the main works scheduled for August/September. An Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will advise on potential impacts to and mitigation measures for aggregations of birds arising from the soft start works, as defined in Section 3.3.

NE Response: Natural England recognises the intention to mitigate impacts. However, in order to give weight to the proposal can the types of mitigation measures that could be used be set out in the OLEMs, to be finalised prior to construction? In addition, we note that there is not a commitment to undertake the mitigation measures that ECoW considers warranted.

5. *In Section 3.7.5.5. Minimising Disturbance to Non Breeding Waterbirds using (potentially) Functionally Linked Land:*

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~~161.~~ 162. Data from the additional visit in April 2024 indicates that dark-bellied brent geese are still present at the River Haven at a notable abundance in this month and therefore works within 400m of the Haven, as illustrated in Figure 52 of the Winter Bird Survey 2023/24 Addendum (document reference AS1-108), during April will be limited to soft start works. Soft start works in April will entail site preparations and establishment of the haul road and work areas. No drilling will take place in April. Visual screening will be installed in the seasonally restricted area around The Haven in April in order to minimise potential visual disturbance arising from soft start works. Consideration will be given to the necessity for screening in each location and the material to be used, in order to minimise the potential for disturbance caused by the screening itself being moved by wind.

NE Response: Natural England welcomes the inclusion of the proposed text. But we query what happens if screening is not possible for whatever reason e.g. bad weather etc. What is the contingency? Or will works cease anyway due to the bad weather etc.? If works are to continue will there be a commitment to undertake contingency measures which will be agreed as part of the finalised OLEM?

~~169. An Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will advise on potential impacts to and mitigation measures for aggregations of lapwing, golden plover and curlew arising from the localised winter works, as defined in Section 3.3. The ECoW will oversee monitoring of bird disturbance responses and will advise on measures to avoid repeated disturbance. The initial localised winter works will be planned to commence in advance of the core winter period (defined as November to February as described in paragraph 165) where practicable, in order to establish a baseline level of activity prior to birds selecting preferred habitat/locations during that period. Prior to construction works commencing in new locations during the core winter period, the ECoW will review and advise on potential impacts and associated avoidance or mitigation requirements. The Applicant will comply with the recommendations of the ECoW.~~

NE Response: Natural England recognises the intention to mitigate impacts. However, in order to give weight to the proposal can the types of mitigation measures that could be used be set out in the OLEMs, to be finalised prior to construction? In addition, we note that during the shoulder months of October and March there is still a risk of energetic stresses i.e. freezing conditions. Consideration should also be given to the implementation of cold weather working condition during the full overwintering period.

#### *Air Quality Management Plan*

6. We are proposing to add the following text into the Air Quality Management Plan:

Monitoring	<p>Undertake daily on-site and off-site inspections where receptors (including roads) are nearby, to monitor dust, record inspection results, and make the log available to the local authority when asked. This should include regular dust soiling checks of surfaces such as street furniture, cars and windowsills within 100m of Order Limits, with cleaning to be provided if necessary. This monitoring should also take account of wind-swept particles from adjacent operations and land, e.g. pollen, to appropriately inform observations and investigations.</p> <p>Carry out regular site inspections to monitor compliance with the AQMP measures, record inspection results, and <u>make an inspection log</u> available to the local authority when asked.</p> <p>Increase the frequency of site inspections by the person accountable for air quality and dust issues on site when activities with a high potential to produce dust are being carried out and during prolonged dry or windy conditions.</p> <p>Agree dust deposition, dust flux, or real-time particulate matter with a diameter of less than 10 micrometres (PM<sub>10</sub>) continuous monitoring locations with the Local Authority. Where possible commence baseline monitoring at least three months before work commences on site or, if it is a large site, before work on a phase commences. Further guidance is provided by IAQM on monitoring during demolition, earthworks and construction.</p> <p><u>Conduct dust deposition monitoring at sensitive ecological designations, where relevant. The locations will be agreed in consultation with Natural England.</u></p>
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NE Response: Natural England welcomes the inclusion of the monitoring but queries the feedback loop and actions that will be taken if unacceptable levels are noted. We advise that real time reporting and actions are required.

**Annex 1 – Advice provided to ODOW on 02 April 2025, through Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service.**

Date: 02 April 2025

Re: Noise Guidance

Please could we have confirmation on whether you will be committing to the monitoring as set out in our Deadline 5 submission for onshore ecology [REP5-168] and included below?

*'We advise monitoring ecological noise sensitive receptors against the baseline, including designated features of designated sites and any functionally linked land they use, should be outlined in the Noise and Vibration Management Plan (NVMP) and the full NVMP secured as a requirement within the DCO. This should align with and reference avoidance and mitigation as outlined in Chapters 26 and 22 of the ES.'*

In response to your query regarding the reference of 3dB we have sought further clarification from our specialists, and they have provided the following:

**Background**

As noise and disturbance to birds is an under-studied area, a lot of information on it is taken from specific studies at the Humber Estuary, which is a busy port with a high noise baseline; i.e. the Cutts et al (2009) study is often referenced as well as some commissioned by the International Estuarine and Coastal Specialists (IECS), also based around the Humber. As this is area specific, there are some caveats in applying the findings of these studies to all circumstances, e.g. habituation to noise, different types and duration of noise, time of year etc. Because of this, applying blanket noise thresholds is not appropriate as the thresholds used may not have the same impact significance to birds in other areas at different times of year. Projects like ODOW like a defined threshold as it gives them a standard to measure against. But this is not always appropriate.

**3dB change**

Because of the blanket thresholds not being the best way to monitor and so mitigate impacts from noise to birds, NE suggest a change in dB from the baseline to account for any potential habituation effects and type of noise (e.g. sporadic, loud, sharp bangs). Again, because the area is under-studied it is difficult to give a defined figure. The 3dB is based on human perception to changes in noise and so gives a precautionary, assumed impact to birds.

**The below is an excerpt from our internal guidance:**

*'Generic noise threshold levels are unlikely to offer a suitable approach for assessing the potential effects of noise on birds. A potentially more suitable approach might be the application of a threshold increase in noise levels, either continuous noise or sporadic noise. In the case of sporadic noise, a greater than 3 dBA increase in peak noise might be a useful and sufficiently precautionary rule-of-thumb when considering the likelihood of a significant effect (a difference of 3 dBA in similar types of noise is just distinguishable to people). Thus, as a general rule, if the noise source is no more than 3dB higher than existing noise levels it is unlikely to be significant but noting that a 3dB increase in the average noise level could mask a significant increase in impulsive noise. Similarly, if considering the potential effect of chronic noise on breeding birds, the absence of a 3dB increase in the maximum level should not be used to exclude an impact linked to an increase in average baseline levels. This would require the proponents of any increase in noise levels likely to affect birds to compare the predicted new noise level to existing noise levels, thus necessitating the accurate measurement of existing noise levels in the vicinity of environmental receptors as a baseline.'*

## **Monitoring**

Through the monitoring, the Project may be able to add some more data to this subject to help inform future scenarios and support the assessment of impacts to birds from noise in a different scenario and at different times of year.