



EAST PARK ENERGY

East Park Energy

EN010141

Statement of Common Ground (Draft)

Natural England

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Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and
Procedure) Regulations 2009: Regulation 5(2)(q)

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Planning Act 2008

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Statement of Common Ground (Draft)

between the Applicant

and

Natural England

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CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction	2
1.1	Purpose of this Document	2
1.2	The Scheme	2
1.3	The Site	2
1.4	Status of the SoCG	4
1.5	Structure of the SoCG	4
2.0	Role of Natural England in DCO Process and Summary of Consultation	6
2.1	Role of Natural England	6
2.2	Summary of Consultation Undertaken.....	6
3.0	Matters OF AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT	8
3.1	Introduction.....	8
Appendix A		15

TABLES

Table 1:	Consultation between the Applicant and Natural England
Table 2:	Position between the Applicant and the Natural England on matters of discussion / consultation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this Document

1.1.1 This is a Statement of Common Ground (“SoCG”) made between the following parties:

BSSL Cambsbed 1 Ltd (hereafter referred to as the ‘Applicant’)

and

Natural England (NE)

1.1.2 The purpose and scope of this SoCG is to identify areas of agreement and, as appropriate, disagreement, between the parties in respect of the assessment of the Applicant’s proposals.

1.2 The Scheme

1.2.1 The Scheme comprises a new ground-mounted solar photovoltaic energy generating station and an associated on-site battery energy storage system (BESS) on land to the north-west of St Neots. The Scheme also includes the associated infrastructure for connection to the national grid at the Eaton Socon National Grid Substation.

1.2.2 Subject to the Scheme securing Development Consent in Winter 2026/27 it is anticipated that works would start on site in early 2028 and be completed by mid-to late 2030 (although initial energisation of the Scheme is likely to commence prior to 2030). The Scheme comprises a temporary development with an operational phase of 40 years; decommissioning activities would therefore likely commence in 2070, 40 years after commissioning.

1.3 The Site

1.3.1 The ‘Site’ is located to the north-west of the town of St Neots, and is across two administrative areas; Bedford Borough Council (BBC) (a unitary authority)

and Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) (a two-tier authority with Cambridgeshire County Council). The Site location is shown on **ES Vol 3 Figure 1-1: Site Location [APP-120]**. The Site area extends to approximately 773 hectares (ha).

1.3.2 With reference to **ES Vol 3 Figure 1-2: Site References [APP-120]**, for ease of reference the Site have been sub-divided into East Park Sites A to D, in which all of the above ground infrastructure proposed as part of the operational Scheme would be located (excluding works to National Grid's Eaton Socon Substation). The Site also cover land outside of East Park Sites A to D which will be required for access, cabling, and the grid connection to the Eaton Socon Substation. East Park Sites A to D can be described as follows:

- **East Park Site A** – covering land west of the B660 between Pertenhall and Swineshead at the western end of the Site. East Park Site A comprises arable fields located to the north, west and east side of a small hill that lies between Pertenhall and Riseley. East Park Site A lies either side of the Pertenhall Brook, with access proposed from the B660 to the east.
- **East Park Site B** – covering land between Pertenhall, Keysoe, and Little Staughton. East Park Site B comprises arable fields located north of an elevated ridgeline which runs between Keysoe and Little Staughton. East Park Site B is crossed by a number of small watercourses, with access proposed from the B660, Great Staughton Road, Little Staughton Road, and an unnamed road between Little Staughton and Great Staughton Road.
- **East Park Site C** – covering land south of Great Staughton. East Park Site C comprises arable fields located south of the River Kym, with access proposed from Moor Road to its south-eastern boundary, and from Little Staughton Road to the north-west.

- **East Park Site D** – covering land around Pastures Farm between Great Staughton and Hail Weston. East Park Site D comprises arable fields with access proposed via a new access from the B645.

1.3.3 With reference to **ES Vol 3 Figure 1-2: Site References [APP-120]**, there are three linear corridors proposed for underground cabling that connect the different parts of the Site and provide a grid connection to the Eaton Socon Substation. These are identified as:

- **Cable Corridor** – Site B to Site C – which connects Site B to Site C across an unnamed road and arable fields.
- **Cable Corridor** – Site C to Site D – which connects Site C to Site D across Moor Road and an arable field.
- **Grid Connection** – Site D to Eaton Socon Substation – which connects Site D to the Eaton Socon Substation and crosses open arable fields, the Duloe Brook, and Duloe Road and Bushmead Road.

1.4 Status of the SoCG

1.4.1 This SoCG is a ‘live’ document that will be updated and amended as the Examination phase progresses. It identifies the matters relating to the Scheme that have been agreed between the parties, the matters under discussion, together with other matters not agreed. It is intended that it will be finalised and signed by the Applicant and Natural England as requested by the Examining Authority during the Examination of the submitted application.

1.5 Structure of the SoCG

1.5.1 This SoCG is structured as follows:

- Section 2.0 – provides a summary of consultation undertaken with Natural England; and
- Section 3.0 – sets out whether matters are ‘agreed’, ‘under discussion’, or ‘not agreed’.

1.5.2 A signing sheet between the Applicant and Natural England is provided at Appendix A.

2.0 ROLE OF NATURAL ENGLAND IN DCO PROCESS AND SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

2.1 Role of Natural England

2.1.1 Natural England (NE) is the government’s adviser for the natural environment in England. NE is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.

2.1.2 NE's general purpose, as set out in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

2.1.3 NE has regulatory and licensing responsibilities for biodiversity, designated sites (including SACs, SPAs, Ramsar sites, SSSIs), protected species, and the delivery of nature-recovery.

2.2 Summary of Consultation Undertaken

2.2.1 The Applicant has been in consultation and engagement with NE during the pre-application period, and has a cost-recovery agreement in place for the benefit of NE. Table 1 summarises the principal meetings and correspondence that have taken place between the Applicant and NE in relation to the Scheme. This does not seek to include every correspondence between the parties.

Table 1: Consultation between the Applicant and Natural England

Date	Method of Consultation	Points of Discussion
08/02/2024	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction to the Scheme Clarifications from EIA scoping opinion Approach to surveys and assessment
11/02/2024	Written Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written advice from Natural England with regard to:

Date	Method of Consultation	Points of Discussion
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Statutory designated sites ○ Other designated sites ○ Protected species surveys ○ Biodiversity net gain ○ Statutory landscape designations ○ Land use and soils
10/05/2024	Written Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Written advice requested from Natural England with regard to the approach to surveying agricultural land.
21/05/2024	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meeting to discuss the Applicant's proposed approach to surveying agricultural land.
12/05/2025	Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Applicant set out revised approach to surveying agricultural land across the Site.
19/05/2025	Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natural England comment "No issues or further comments to make at this stage" with regard to the Applicant's revised approach to surveying agricultural land across the Site.

3.0 MATTERS OF AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The matters covered by the SoCG on which agreement between the parties has been sought include (but are not necessarily limited to) the following matters as requested in Annex F of the Examining Authority's **Rule 6 Letter [PD-005]**:

- Biodiversity, habitats and nature conservation including issues relating to:
 - The effects on protected species and habitats (*Ref. 003 and 004 in Table 2, below*);
 - Mitigation measures, including the likely effectiveness of mitigation monitoring procedures and their being secured (*Ref. 006 in Table 2, below*);
- Water environment, water protection, drainage and impact on habitats and species (*Ref. 003 and 004 in Table 2, below*);
- Landscape and Visual, appropriateness of mitigation, ZTC and impact on Kent Downs National Landscape¹ (*Ref. 008, 009, and 010 in Table 2, below*);
- Various Environmental Management Plans, both during construction and operation (*Ref. 006, 010, and 011 in Table 2, below*);
- 'Shadow' licence applications (*Ref. 007 in Table 2, below*);
- Biodiversity Net Gain (*Ref. 005 in Table 2, below*); and
- The dDCO (*Ref. 012 in Table 2, below*).

3.1.2 The matters that have been agreed, are under discussion, or are not agreed between the Applicant and Natural England are set out in Table 2.

¹ Note, the Applicant understands reference to the Kent Downs National Landscape to be included within the Rule 6 Letter in error.

Table 2: Position between the Applicant and Natural England on matters of discussion / consultation

Ref.	Summary of Matter	Natural England Position	Applicant Position	Status
Topic: Ecology and Biodiversity				
001	The Applicant's approach to assessing European Sites, and Habitats Regulations Assessment.	Natural England advise agree with the conclusions of the Applicant's Information to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment [APP-035] . Subject to delivery of the Scheme in accordance with the draft DCO and framework of environmental management plans, the Scheme will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of an internationally designated site.	The Applicant welcomes Natural England's agreement on this matter.	Matter Agreed
002	The Applicant's approach to assessing statutory designated sites for nature conservation.	Natural England agree with the conclusions of ES Vol 1 Chapter 7 Ecology and Nature Conservation [APP-043] . Subject to delivery of the Scheme in accordance with the draft DCO and framework of environmental management plans, the Scheme will not result in significant effects to statutory designated sites for nature conservation.	The Applicant welcomes Natural England's agreement on this matter.	Matter Agreed
003	The Applicant's approach to assessing protected species.	Natural England agree with the conclusions of ES Vol 1 Chapter 7 Ecology and Nature Conservation [APP-043] .	The Applicant welcomes Natural England's agreement on this matter.	Matter Agreed

Ref.	Summary of Matter	Natural England Position	Applicant Position	Status
004	The Applicant's approach to assessing other valuable and sensitive habitats and species, landscapes and access routes.	Natural England agree with the conclusions of ES Vol 1 Chapter 7 Ecology and Nature Conservation [APP-043] .	The Applicant welcomes Natural England's agreement on this matter.	Matter Agreed
005	The Applicant's approach to Biodiversity Net Gain	<p>Natural England welcome the ambitious commitments to delivering BNG on this project. Natural England recognise that the shortfall in BNG for watercourses may be due to the metric and assessment, but have no further advice to make on this matter.</p> <p>Natural England recommend the target increase in BNG of 10% across all biodiversity unit types is secured by a suitably worded requirement in the DCO.</p>	<p>The Applicant welcomes Natural England's acknowledgement of the Scheme's ambitious proposals for biodiversity net gain.</p> <p>BNG for this Scheme is not mandatory. The Applicant has amended the outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (oLEMP) [APP-159] to provide the commitment to achieving biodiversity net gains. Requirement 4 of the draft DCO [AS-008] secures that a final Landscape and Ecological Management Plan in substantial accordance with the oLEMP is agreed with the LPA prior to commencement of any phase of the authorised development. The Applicant is committed to providing biodiversity net gains, and considers this approach adequately secures the Applicant's proposed BNG, and that a separate additional Requirement in the draft DCO is not necessary.</p>	Matter Agreed
006	The Applicant's approach to mitigation for ecological receptors, secured through the framework of	Natural England has no comment on the approach to mitigation for ecological receptors, and is therefore satisfied with the	The Applicant notes this comment and will continue engaging with the Local Planning Authorities to refine the mitigation	Matter Agreed

Ref.	Summary of Matter	Natural England Position	Applicant Position	Status
	environmental management plans required by the DCO.	mitigation set out in the framework of environmental management plans, deferring to the Local Planning Authorities for any detailed comments.	measures set out in the framework of environmental management plans.	
Topic: Other Consents and Licences				
007	The Applicant's approach to other consents and licences.	Natural England is satisfied with the framework in place for managing other consents and licences.	The Applicant has received a LONI from Natural England in relation to a protected species licence for Great Crested Newts, and has submitted this into the Examination at Deadline 2.	Matter Agreed
Topic: Landscape and Visual				
008	The Applicant's approach to assessing impacts on nationally designated landscapes.	Natural England note the Scheme is not within or within the setting of any nationally designated landscapes. The Scheme will not impact on any nationally designated landscape.	The Applicant welcomes Natural England's agreement on this matter.	Matter Agreed
009	The Applicant's approach to the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.	Natural England has no comment on the approach to landscape and visual impact assessment, and is therefore satisfied with the approach taken, deferring to the Local Planning Authorities for any detailed comments.	The Applicant notes this comment and will continue to engage with the Local Planning Authorities.	Matter Agreed

Ref.	Summary of Matter	Natural England Position	Applicant Position	Status
010	The Applicant's approach to mitigation for landscape and visual effects.	Natural England has no comment on the approach to mitigation for landscape and visual effects, and is therefore satisfied with the approach taken, deferring to the Local Planning Authorities for any detailed comments.	The Applicant notes this comment and will continue to engage with the Local Planning Authorities.	Matter Agreed
Topic: Land Use and Soils				
011	The Applicant's approach to the agricultural land classification survey.	<p>Natural England welcomes that a more detailed ALC survey has been undertaken across the Site following the statutory consultation, but note the survey effort is still below guidance in Defra's Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites.</p> <p>Natural England advise that where a detailed ALC survey is not undertaken across the full site, it is expected that the consultant provides clear and well-evidenced justification demonstrating that the proposed survey coverage is adequate to support reliable land quality classification and subgrade determination.</p> <p>Deferring a small area of Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey to a planning condition is generally not recommended, particularly where the outcome could influence the planning balance or the identification of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land. The NPPF underscores the</p>	<p>The Applicant has taken a proportionate approach to surveying agricultural land across the Site. The Applicant has responded to Natural England's comments with reference to NE-RR-07 in the Applicant's Response to Relevant Representations.</p> <p>In summary, ES Chapter 13 explains at paragraph 13.4.6 [APP-049] that sampling was undertaken at a density of one survey point per two hectares across most of the Site and at one survey point per hectare in areas of potentially greater impact, including the BESS, on-site substation, construction compounds and cable corridors.</p> <p>The Applicant considers that whilst the approach taken to classifying soils is robust, appropriate and proportionate for planning and EIA purposes, further survey data would be required post-consent to inform a final detailed soil management and</p>	Matter Agreed

Ref.	Summary of Matter	Natural England Position	Applicant Position	Status
		<p>importance of protecting BMV land (Grades 1, 2, and 3a) and encourages the use of land of poorer quality where significant development of agricultural land is necessary. The NPPF also recognises soils as a natural capital asset, reinforcing the need for robust, up-front evidence on soil quality and land capability to inform sustainable development decisions.</p> <p>The Defra Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites further reinforces the importance of early soil resource surveys, appropriate soil handling, and minimising degradation principles that rely on accurate baseline data such as that provided by ALC surveys. Deferring surveys risks undermining these principles and may compromise the ability to implement effective soil protection measures during construction.</p> <p>In addition, the Overarching National Policy Statements (NPS) for energy infrastructure EN-1 (Energy), EN-3 (Renewable Energy Infrastructure), and EN-5 (Electricity Networks Infrastructure) highlight the need to consider the permanent loss of agricultural land, particularly BMV land, as part of the planning and consenting process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). EN-1 specifically states that applicants should minimise impacts on BMV land and provide clear justification</p>	<p>handling strategy. The Applicant has therefore updated the oSMP [as updated alongside this submission] to state under paragraph 8.1.4 that: <i>“Further agricultural land classification and soil resource surveys will be undertaken post-consent and prior to commencement of construction to inform the detailed Soil Management Plan. This will include surveying any land currently identified as ‘Ungraded’ due to access limitations, and undertaking additional survey work across the remainder of the Order limits to achieve an observation density of approximately one survey point per hectare. The results of these surveys will be used to validate ALC grading and to refine the detailed SMP measures for stripping, segregation, storage and reinstatement of soils.”</i></p>	

Ref.	Summary of Matter	Natural England Position	Applicant Position	Status
		where such land is affected. These policy statements reinforce the need for a complete and defensible ALC evidence base to support decision-making and demonstrate compliance with national policy objectives.		
Topic: Draft Development Consent Order				
012	The Applicant's approach to the draft DCO.	<p>Natural England request to be consulted on the soil management plan prior to commencement of the authorised development.</p> <p>Natural England is otherwise satisfied with the content of the draft DCO [AS-008] insofar as it relates to Natural England's remit.</p>	The Applicant has amended Requirement 7(1) of the draft DCO [AS-008] to confirm that Natural England must be consulted on the final Soil Management Plan prior to approval by the relevant LPA.	Matter Agreed

APPENDIX A

BSSL Cambsbed 1 Ltd

Name:

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Signature:

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Position:

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On behalf of:

BSSL Cambsbed 1 Ltd

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Date:

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Natural England

Name:

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Signature:

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Position:

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On behalf of:

Natural England

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Date:

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