Date: 26 June 2026
Our ref: 550031
Your ref: ExQ1

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BY EMAIL ONLY

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[redacted]

Dear Examining Authority

Lime Down Solar Park – ExQ1
NSIP Reference Name / Code: Lime Down Solar Park / EN010168
User Code: [redacted]

Thank you for consulting Natural England on the Examining Authority's first written questions and apologies for the delay in our response.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose 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.

Please see below Natural England's response to the questions posed to Natural England.

AQ1.5 - BESS Impacts on Wildlife, Livestock and Pets

In the case of a thermal runaway event at the BESS, what effect is this likely to have on animals, including wildlife, livestock and pets? The applicant is specifically asked to include an assessment on horses in its response to take account of the potential effects on equine businesses.

This question does not fall within Natural England's remit and we therefore will not be providing further comment on this matter.

EB1.1 Natural England Environmental Impact (Agricultural) Regulations

Would the land within the solar PV panel areas (Lime Down A – E inclusive), be subject to the EIA (Agricultural) (England) (No. 2) Regulations 2006 post decommissioning given it would be out of agricultural use for a period of at least 60 years? Should this be the case, you are asked to provide a commentary as to the requirements of the above Regulations and the process the landowners would need to go through to return the land to agricultural use. Furthermore, if the land under the panels is to be grazed by sheep during the operation phase, what might that mean under the terms of the above Regulations should the intention be to return the land to arable farming instead of grazing.

Provided that the regulations not change between now and decommissioning of the development, the land would require an EIA Agriculture screening application before being agriculturally improved again. This is because the land would be considered uncultivated after 15 years, a screening decision would therefore need to be taken to return the land to arable use. Grazing with sheep would not change this requirement as ploughing for arable use would be considered as an increase

in productivity.

EB1.2 - Mitigation Hierarchy – CRC

ES Chapter 9 [REP1-015] sets out the approach to survey work undertaken in the CRC. The role of the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) is set out in the outline Ecological Protection and Mitigation Strategy (oEPMS) [REP1-106] in terms of construction of both solar PV sites and the CRC. Given the lack of survey work it is not clear what options would be available to the ECoW to re-route the cable route to avoid protected habitats and species.

The applicant: You are asked to set out how, without specific species and habitat surveys, the construction of the cable route would follow the mitigation hierarchy at set out in NPS EN-1. Specifically, you are asked to demonstrate how the cable route would avoid sensitive habitats and species, as opposed to just mitigate any harms.

Natural England and the Environment Agency: Do either of you have any comment to make on the applicant's approach.

Natural England has reviewed the applicant's response to this question provided in The Applicant's Response to the Examining Authority's First Written Questions (Lime Down Solar Park Limited, June 2026, Document Reference: EXAM/9.29).

We note that the CRC has been subject to baseline habitat surveys which have been used to identify the habitats in the the CRC of greatest ecological value. Further we note that avoidance measures involving the use of HDD to avoid direct impacts to these habitats is proposed. The applicant has previously discussed the reduced construction working width of the CRC when crossing field boundaries with Natural England, this is welcomed.

It is noted that further ecological surveys will be carried out to identify features with greatest value to species, the applicant states that the results of these surveys will be used to microsite cable trenches to avoid impacts to these features. The use of micro siting to avoid impacts to these features is welcomed.

EB1.5 Bat Surveys

In considering the contents of [REP1-218] can each party confirm, or otherwise, that you are content with the applicant's approach to bat surveys. If you are not satisfied, please provide details. If parties are satisfied, please provide comment on how it meets the requirements of the mitigation hierarchy.

Survey scope was agreed between the applicant and Natural England at an early stage. The agreed survey effort focused on use of a higher number of static detectors than would be expected by best practice guidance given the suitability of habitats present on site for bats. Further, a majority of suitable habitat for bats within the site will be retained. The high number of static detectors used provides a robust image of bat habitat across the site due to the extent of the areas of the site which was covered by static detectors. Static detectors are more reliable at recording the calls of rarer species such as horseshoe bats which due to the highly directional nature of their calls are often significantly under recorded during transect surveys.

Winter surveys are not routinely required for developments. Best practice guidance recommends bat activity surveys are undertaken at a site between April to October. Surveys undertaken of the application site cover this period.

Within the Solar PV area, trees and buildings with roost potential and associated access points and commuting habitat will be retained by development. A highlighted in Natural England's Relevant Representations, the level of survey detail for Ground Level Tree Assessments is not consistent

with best practice guidelines. While currently no impacts are proposed on these features, if additional impacts are identified surveys should be conducted in line with best practice guidelines, i.e. Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition).

Given the temporary nature of impacts of habitats within the Cable Route Corridor, and the full reinstatement of habitats following construction, full activity surveys of the CRC would not be considered proportionate to the level of impact. Bats have been assumed present within the CRC with mitigation and avoidance measures are proposed accordingly, including those referenced within the Habitats Regulations Assessment.

EB1.7 Great Crested Newts

ES Chapter 9 [REP1-015] states that the District Level Licencing scheme would be entered into to mitigate effects on Great Crested Newts. Both parties are asked to provide an update on this process and submit a copy of the granted license into the examination. Furthermore, both parties are asked to respond to specific concerns raised by Wiltshire Council in their D2 response paragraph 14.5 [REP2-048].

The Natural England DLL team can confirm that a DLL certificate has been countersigned for in relation to Lime Down Solar Park. This is the final DLL stage a scheme can get to before their planning (or in this case DCO) is approved.

Natural England are in agreement with Wiltshire Council that the presence of GCN in any ponds should be properly acknowledged and any associated impacts fully discussed. Natural England are in agreement that the inconsistency between this and the ES should be addressed for clarity, although it is also acknowledged that a DLL licence has been applied for and impacts are appropriately addressed through this.

EB1.11 White-Clawed Crayfish

Wiltshire Council raise specific concerns over the applicant's approach to white-clawed crayfish in their D2 submission [REP2-048]. In ES Chapter 9 Appendix 9-1 [REP1-083] the applicant has identified suitable habitat for this species at Gauze Brook and Gabriel's Well as well as a number of wet ditches directly connected to these watercourses, thus have assumed their presence.

The Applicant: You are asked to set out how your approach is consistent with Natural England's standing advice relating to white-clawed crayfish.

Natural England: Please comment on the applicant's approach, citing the mitigation hierarchy and having consideration for the three new circa 6m wide permanent accesses for culverts proposed across 'wet' ditches at Lime Down D. You are also asked to comment on whether a license would be required.

White-clawed crayfish are afforded only partial legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended); making it an offence to take, possess or transport, or sell them. Unlike many other species they are not legally protected against killing or injury. However, as the species is severely declining, and they are listed as a Species of Principal Importance under S.41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Natural England supports the application of the hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures. In particular, we strongly encourage schemes to avoid the death of native crayfish wherever possible. This is considered responsible application of a "best practice" approach. To enable schemes to move White-clawed crayfish to safety wherever possible, Natural England does issue a standardised type of licence called a 'class' licence to enable schemes to do this as easily as possible, provided schemes can comply with this licence's conditions.

Based on the information presented in ES Volume 1, Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity (May

2026), it is unclear whether a protected species licence is being sought. No site-specific surveys have been undertaken; instead, the Applicant has assumed the possible presence of the species based on desk study records and the availability of suitable habitat along the cable route corridor. The Applicant has stated that impacts will be avoided, where possible, through micro-siting of the cable route or the use of alternative crossing methods. However, where impacts cannot be avoided, the applicant states that mitigation measures will be implemented. These measures include approaches designed to minimise damage to ditches and watercourses that may support white-clawed crayfish, as well as to reduce the risk of direct harm to individuals. This may include seasonal timing of works to avoidance sensitive periods.

Wiltshire County Council are correct to raise that temporary or permanent crossings are proposed with a width of 6m within assumed White Clawed Crayfish habitat. Natural England agrees that more detail is required to understand how the applicant intends to approach White-clawed crayfish- both lawfully and within best practice. Further advice from Natural England on how to undertake developments sensitively around White clawed crayfish habitats is available through our standing advice, which can be found at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/white-clawed-crayfish-advice-for-making-planning-decisions.

HRA1.1 Survey Work

Given the original HRA [APP-275] submitted into the examination did not have the benefit of 17ha worth of survey work (the ExA note the missing survey work has now been submitted into the examination), does not provide specific details contained in the BNG Assessment Report [REP1-089] regarding hedgerow removal, and lacks specific surveys to fully inform functionally linked land (FLL) to the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC), is Natural England confident a positive assessment of the HRA can be made? The ExA asks that you justify your response.

The HRA should be based on the most up to date information regarding the scheme, it must be informed by the additional detail referenced in the Examining Authorities question above. However, Natural England is content that a positive assessment of the HRA can be made.

The BNG Assessment Report confirms that hedgerow loss has been avoided as far as practicable. The HRA has assessed the impact of proposed hedgerow losses including the length of sections of hedgerow which will be removed within sensative areas for SAC bat species. It is our understanding that detail regarding hedgerow loss and mitigation included in the most recent HRA and the detail provided in the BNG Assessment Report are consistent. Natural England are content that provided that all measures detailed in the HRA relating to hedgerows are secured, the proposed development would not result in adverse impacts to the integrity of the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC as a result of fragmentation.

Bat surveys undertaken provide sufficient information to assess the potential functional linkage of the site to the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC. The high level of static detector survey effort undertaken across the Solar PV site provides detail on the use of the habitats within the site by different bat species including those associated with the SAC. Assessment of the abundance of calls, and the spread of calls across both the survey season and survey nights (the abundance of calls at different times of the season or night) has been presented in the application documents. Natural England and the applicant have reached a shared position on the assessment of functionally linked land across the application site which has informed the most recent HRA.

HRA1.2 Bath and Bradford-on-Avon SAC

Following Natural England's WR [REP1-156] regarding their position on bats and the ability for Lime Down C to provide FLL for lesser horseshoe bats associated with the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC, the applicant and Natural England should provide an update on their discussions. It is

also noted that Natural England and the applicant have agreed mitigation measures to reduce the harm on bats.

Both Parties: Both parties should comment on what discussions took place with regard to avoiding any impacts on the SAC, before discussing and agreeing mitigation measures.

The applicant: In addition to the above, the applicant is asked to provide details as to how the mitigation measures would be secured through the dDCO.

Further discussions have been undertaken regarding assessment of Lime Down C to provide FLL for lesser horseshoe bats associated with the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC. Through these discussions, the applicant and Natural England have reached a shared position that Lime Down C should be classed as functionally linked to the SAC. As noted in the Examining Authority's question, mitigation measures to reduce harm on lesser horseshoe bats using this area have been agreed between Natural England and the applicant. Provided these measures are secured in the DCO, Natural England consider that the proposed development would not result in adverse impacts to the integrity of the SAC as a result of loss or fragmentation of functionally linked land in Lime Down C. The applicant has shared a revised HRA with Natural England which reflects the above, Natural England have reviewed and agree with the conclusions set out in this report.

Regarding avoidance of impacts, previous discussion between the applicant and Natural England included discussion of the inclusion of a minimum of 15m buffer zones to all hedgerows, trees, and woodland edges to avoid impacts specifically to avoid and retain the functionality these habitats provide to bats. Further, retention of potential roosting habitats and associated commuting habitats was discussed and agreed. Habitats within the Solar PV site largely do not represent high quality foraging habitats for SAC bat species due to the limited insect prey biomass which these habitats support. Avoidance of installation of Solar PV within habitats of low foraging value was therefore not considered necessary to minimise impacts to SAC bat species.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]
Wessex Team