

**ELECTRICITY ACT 1989 (SECTION 36 AND SCHEDULE 8)
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (SECTION 90)
THE ELECTRICITY GENERATING STATIONS AND OVERHEAD LINES (INQUIRIES
PROCEDURE) (ENGLAND AND WALES) RULES 2007**

**PUBLIC INQUIRY TO CONSIDER SECTION 36 ELECTRICITY ACT 1989 APPLICATION BY
STEADINGS WIND FARM LIMITED FOR CONSENT AND DEEMED PLANNING PERMISSION
TO CONSTRUCT AND OPERATE A WIND FARM AT KIRKWHELPINGTON,
NORTHUMBERLAND (KNOWN AS STEADINGS)**

REBUTTAL STATEMENT BY

WILLIAM LATIMER, BSc., MSc., PhD.

**ON THE PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF THE NATURAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NORTHUMBRIA
(NHSN1/1, 1/2 & 1/3)**

ON BEHALF OF STEADINGS WIND FARM LIMITED

BERR REFERENCE: GDBC/001/00278C

TYNEDALE COUNCIL REFERENCE: 20060540

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNCIL REFERENCE: 06/00023/CPC

1. Introduction

This statement considers the evidence presented by the Natural History Society of Northumbria with respect to their concerns for wildlife expressed in sections 4, 6, 7, 8 & 9 of their Proof (NHSN1/1). It should be noted that the Society was consulted during the Environmental Assessment of the Steadings windfarm proposal and the original data provided by the Society, presented with additional information in an appendix (NHSN1/3) to their evidence, was taken fully into account in the assessment process and layout design of the windfarm.

2. Steadings Borrow-pit and Site Road

The Society raises concerns over dust emissions from the temporary borrow pit and the potential effects on the Vicarage Burn, the risk of accidental spillages of fuels and oil into watercourses and the effects of vehicle exhaust emissions

The indicated location of the proposed borrow pit is situated around 700 metres to the south of Vicarage burn. Extraction of material from the borrow pit will be managed so as to prevent the loss of particulate material in surface run-off or by fugitive emissions by the use of standard techniques to manage surface water flows following rainfall events and for the control of dust by machine shrouds and dust screens, wind fences, water sprays and the dampening down of working surfaces. Regular audits of environmental performance at the construction site shall be undertaken as indicated in the Proof by Mark Alan Dowdall (SWFL 11.2). Given the progressive implementation of these measures as necessary, the direction of the prevailing westerly wind and the likely distance from the watercourse, the pollution risk from the borrow pit is minimal.

The risk of accidental spillages from vehicles is considered to be very low under modern working standards. All plant and site vehicles shall be subject to daily inspections and emergency spill kits will be available in each vehicle and at the site office in the unlikely event of any spillage. An emergency response plan shall be in operation throughout the construction and operational phases of the windfarm.

During the construction phase, works adjacent to watercourses will be limited to the construction of the crossing points and works at these locations will be strictly managed by work practices dictated by method statements agreed with the Environment Agency. Emissions from vehicle exhausts during the relatively short on-site construction phase (considered to be around 10 months: Proof by Stephen Pears SWFL 2.2) will be therefore both limited in time and in location according to the alignment of the internal roads. Exhaust

gasses will be rapidly dispersed and diluted in the normally exposed conditions of the proposal site. Both the internal access road and the borrow pit are located to the east and north-east, and therefore normally downwind, of the Bavington Craggs SSSI over which the Society has expressed concerns in relation to sensitive plant species. It should be noted that no objections in this respect have been received from Natural England

During operation of the windfarm, traffic on the internal roads will be very light and limited to occasional operational and maintenance use. Pollution from traffic during the operational life of the windfarm is considered to be negligible.

3. Risks to Watercourses.

The Society re-iterates its concerns over the potential for the pollution of watercourses, particularly with reference to the population of white clawed crayfish in the Wansbeck catchment. This has been addressed in the paragraph above and it is concluded that, given appropriate working standards and mitigation, the risk of pollution of the watercourses is low and any concomitant risks to crayfish from the Steadings proposal will be negligible. It should be noted that the statutory regulators, Natural England and the Environment Agency have raised no objections to the proposals with regard to this issue.

4. Risk to Local flora

The Society notes the conservation interest and importance of the flora, both higher plants and lichens, of the local crags, at Great Bavington SSSI in particular. The Society notes that other similar crags occur in the vicinity (north and south of the proposed borrow pit site) but acknowledges that it does not know the precise current locations of many of the rare and uncommon plants of concern. The botanical surveys undertaken for the EIA included an assessment of plant distribution data with grid references supplied by the Northumberland recorder of the Botanical Society of the British Isles and as noted above, the design of the windfarm layout has taken account of the information gained on the distributions of plant species and areas of species-rich habitat.

The plants of concern are likely to be restricted to the areas of species rich grasslands associated with the crags. It appears highly unlikely that the footprint of the turbines and access roads, being mainly limited to the more intensively farmed areas, will impinge on areas with rare plants present. The data given by the Society in their Proof appendix NHSN 1/3, where grid references are given for some plant species, do not reveal any direct impacts from the Steadings development from the construction footprint.

Concerns mainly with respect to air pollution are expressed by the Society with reference to traffic pollution and emissions of sulphur dioxide.

The expected rapid dispersion of vehicle exhaust emissions and the prevalent dispersion pathways along the direction of the prevailing winds in carrying any traffic emissions away from the more sensitive locations at Great Bavington have been referred to above. Reference should be made to the current use of ultra-low sulphur fuels and continuing measures to reduce the sulphur content in diesel, thus reducing the output of sulphur dioxide from diesel exhausts to very low levels.

Given the relatively short construction period, the low traffic volumes during operation, the layout of the windfarm site and the rapid dispersion of emissions in this open area, environmental damage from vehicle exhaust emissions is not anticipated. Measures for the control of fugitive dust from the borrow pit have also been referred to in paragraph 2 above. In addition, it can be re-iterated that the relative locations of sensitive receptors in relation to the borrow pit and the prevailing winds also reduces significantly any likelihood of any environmental damage from dust deposition.

5. Bat Surveys

The Society expresses concern at the quality of the bat surveys and refers to perceived shortcomings in the coverage for the Ray windfarm site in particular. With reference to the EIA undertaken for the Steadings proposal it is considered that the bat surveys undertaken were thorough and exhaustive, identifying roosting sites and flight corridors. These factors were taken into account in the detailed design of the turbine and road layout at Steadings as noted in paragraphs 3.4, 5.2 5.3 and 5.4 of my Ecology Proof (SWFL 6.2).

6. Bird Surveys

The Society expresses satisfaction with the design and conduct of the surveys but has reservations as to the interpretation of the results. While the views, knowledge and expertise of the Society is noted, these are not based on detailed specific study of the area in question. The EIA for the Steadings proposal has included comprehensive surveys and a collision risk assessment based on many hours of detailed observation undertaken for each season according to the methodology prescribed by the statutory regulator for Scotland, SNH, a method acknowledged to provide the best results available for impact assessment of windfarms given the current state of knowledge. Mitigation undertaken to reduce both the effects of displacement and the collision risk to birds, e.g. avoiding areas of higher quality habitat for waders and the movement of some turbine locations away from geese flight corridors, is considered in my Proof, paragraphs 5.2 - 5.4. It is not disputed that the windfarm, as is the case with any new structure, may pose a small risk of collision to bird species but that the risk at Steadings, as determined by the assessment, is of a very low and acceptable order.