

Extract from Examining Authority's Report of Findings and Conclusions and Recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in respect of Navitus Bay Wind Park and connection works.

Section 8: Landscape and Visual Impact Onshore

New Forest National Park

8.3.21 EN-1 accepts that development consent in National Parks may be consented in exceptional circumstances.

8.3.22 Figure 12.5 of the LVIA identifies the cable route through the New Forest National Park (NFNP). The applicant described the landscape of the southern outer edge of the NP around the cable route as "*relatively flat agricultural fields bounded by mature hedgerows and tree belts.*" It was further described in the LVIA as "*not deemed to provide a significant contribution to the special qualities of the New Forest National Park.*"

8.3.23 Policy in relation to National Parks (NP) affords the highest protection to all parts of the designated area. The Panel therefore agrees with the NFNPA that no one area is more important than another. The applicant's findings on the landscape qualities of the southern outer edges of the NP are therefore of little relevance to the Panel's consideration of the following tests invoked in EN-1:

- whether the Project is in the public interest and there is a clear national need for elements of it to be located within the National Park;
- that the national need for renewable energy cannot be met outside the New Forest National Park; and
- that the impacts on the environment, landscape and recreational opportunities within the New Forest National Park can be mitigated.

8.3.24 On the first point, the Application Project falls within the category of infrastructure covered by NPSs, to be assessed on the basis that the Government has demonstrated that there is an urgent need for new renewable electricity generation projects. The public interest element of the above considerations is therefore met.

8.3.25 As for locating parts of the Onshore Cable Corridor in the NFNP, the Panel's conclusions in Chapter 4 confirm that there was limited scope to develop outside the designated area and we were satisfied that the applicant had adequately explored the possibility of locating the Cable Corridor outside the NP.

8.3.26 The LVIA identified that construction of those sections of the Onshore Cable Corridor that would be located within the NP would lead to limited and localised disruption to the landscape of the NFNP. The works would include some 10% loss of woodland at New Close Wood, 7.1% loss at Allensworth Wood and 2.6% loss of woodland at Stanley's Copse.

8.3.27 The Panel notes that undergrounding the cables is a substantial part of reducing impacts. Specific measures in the LEMP are also proposed to ensure that impacts on the NP were temporary and result in no long term landscape harm [REP-3313]. The measures include:

- Reinstatement of hedgerows

- Restoration of open cut woodland
- A Visual Tree Appraisal (VTA) to avoid impacts on trees that contribute to landscape and amenity
- Replacement of trees removed within the onshore development area, outside of the permanent cable easement.

8.3.28 The Biodiversity Funds, to be secured through the s106 planning agreement [REP-4083], would fund the planting and management of at least 100% of the trees initially lost through construction.

8.3.29 It is clear that loss of trees and parts of woodland, loss of hedgerows and the construction activities would disrupt pockets of the NP's landscape character, its natural beauty and tranquillity. The movement of machinery, removal of trees and hedgerows and other construction-related works would be apparent from a number of publicly accessible locations. Furthermore, the permanent loss of trees along the cable route would bring about marked changes to the woodlands affected.

8.3.30 The Panel accepts, however, that the construction impacts would be short to medium term and much of it would be reversible. We are also satisfied that the applicant has sought to mitigate or offset the longer term effects of tree and hedgerow losses. Restoration and protection measures provided for in the LEMP, as well as the funds offered in the development consent agreement, would effectively limit the long term impacts, subject to addressing two matters raised in the evidence. One concerns replacement of protected trees and the second is related to long term management of woodlands. They are considered in paragraphs 8.3.53 8.3.57 of this Chapter.

8.3.31 Subject to longer term tree and hedgerow management obligations in the LEMP and the Panel's suggested wording for Requirement 20(4) the localised landscape impacts inevitably incurred by a project of this size and in the NP, although not completely addressed, would be reduced.

8.3.32 The Panel broadly agrees with NE's conclusion that the character and quality of the NP would be largely unharmed. However, if the overall balance does not fall in favour of the Application Project, then the exceptional circumstances for consenting development in the NFNP would not arise.

For the full report and appendices please follow this link:

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/south-east/navitus-bay-wind-park/>