

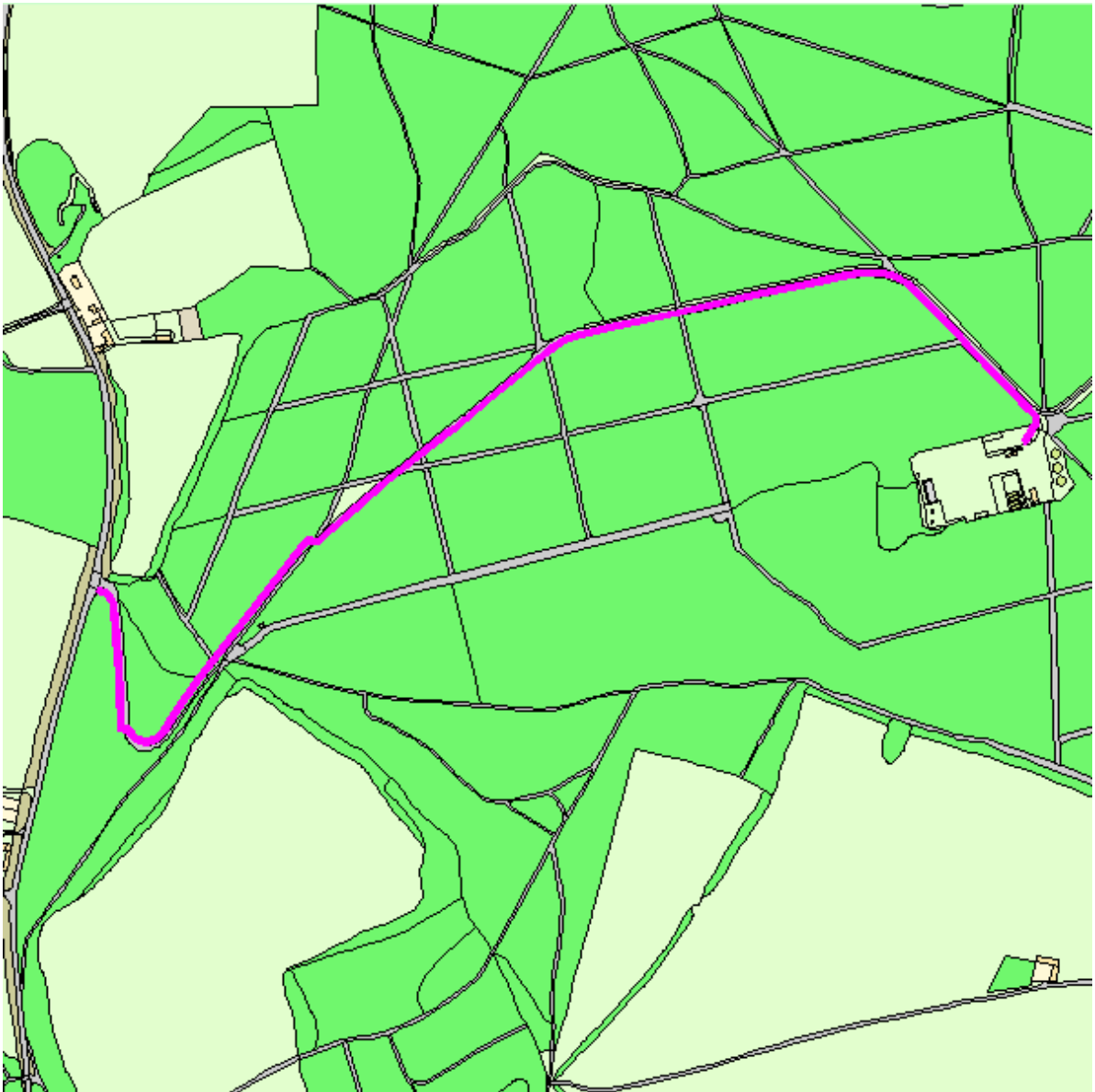
Agenda Item 11
Report PC25/26-06

Report to	Planning Committee
Date	10 July 2025
By	Director of Planning
Application Number	SDNP/24/05114/FUL
Applicant	Mr Nigel Brook (Star Energy Group PLC)
Application	Construction of a below ground cable connection to the local distribution network, to allow for the exportation of electricity generated on site, to the National Grid.
Address	Singleton Oilfield, A286 Cobblers Row to Middlefield, Singleton, West Sussex, PO18 0HL

Recommendation:

- 1) That planning permission be granted subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 8.1 of the report,**
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Site Location Map



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Executive Summary

The proposal seeks the installation of approximately 1.4 km of underground high-voltage cable to connect generators at the Singleton Oilfield to the National Grid. The cable would be routed primarily within an existing tarmac access track, with no above-ground infrastructure proposed.

The principle of electricity generation for exportation from the site has been established through an extant planning consent. Concerns have been raised by the Parish Council and third parties that the cable forms part of a larger scheme for the generation of energy on site, and that the application seeks to artificially subdivide or 'salami-slice' the proposal so as to avoid full consideration. This matter has been reviewed by officers who are satisfied that artificial subdivision has not occurred in this instance, and the scheme has been given full consideration.

The proposed development is, therefore, considered acceptable in principle and would not result in new or isolated development outside of a settlement boundary. The proposal is considered to conserve the character and appearance of the area, and to be acceptable in terms of landscape impact, amenity, and highways safety.

While the cable route passes through an area of Ancient Replanted Woodland, the works are confined to the existing sealed surface of the access track. Mitigation measures have been proposed to avoid harm to soils, tree roots, and associated habitats. These mitigation measures have been reviewed by relevant consultees and are considered sufficient to ensure that the development would not result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitat.

Subject to the recommended planning conditions, the proposal is considered to comply with all relevant planning policies and is recommended for approval.

The application is placed before the Planning Committee due to the objections raised by the Parish Council and other third parties.

1. Site Description

- 1.1 The application site comprises a section of tarmac access track connecting the Singleton Oilfield with the A286 public highway. Singleton Oilfield is an established well site and compound located within Singleton Forest, between the settlements of Singleton and Cocking.
- 1.2 The access track is approximately 1.4km in length and 8m in width. Of this, approximately 1.1km passes through Ancient Replanted Woodland within Singleton Forest. The red line boundary also includes a small area within the well-site compound, specifically the section between the compound entrance and the generator infrastructure.
- 1.3 The surrounding area consists of dense woodland forming part of Singleton Forest, which is designated as ancient woodland. A public bridleway (WSCC Bridleway 3412) crosses the access track near its junction with the A286. There are no residential properties in the immediate vicinity of the site.

2. Relevant Planning History

- 2.1 The following is the most relevant planning history pertaining to the site:
 - WSCC/097/10/SE/SDNP - Proposed installation of four 800 kW gas powered generators within a new generator enclosure for the generation of electricity from the excess natural gas that is currently flared without energy recovery. – Approved 03.12.2010
 - 097/10/SE/SDNP – NMAI - Changes to approved plans and development description: installation of two generators in place of four generators; realignment of approved generator housing and reduction in size; and addition of two low-level cooler units. – Approved 10.10.2011
 - SDNP/16/01680/CND - Conditions(s) Variation: Condition Number(s): 2 and 3, Seeking extension to life of operations until 31st December 2031 and Amendment of cessation date to 31st December 2031 from Application Reference Number: WSCC-097-10-SE-SDNP. – Approved 20.07.2016

- SDNP/23/03573/NMA- Non-material amendment to planning approval SDNP/16/01680/CND to allow for an update to approved generators and ancillary plant. Approved – 06.10.2023

3. Proposal

- 3.1 The application seeks the installation of approximately 1.4 km of below-ground high-voltage cable between Singleton Oilfield and the A286. The cable would connect on-site generators to the National Grid to enable the export of electricity generated on-site.
- 3.2 The cable would be set within the existing access track, with the exception of the final section between the A286 and the first hairpin bend, where the cable would be routed alongside the track. The red line boundary also includes a short section within the well-site compound to facilitate the final connection to the generator infrastructure.
- 3.3 Installation would require the excavation of a trench approximately 1.4 metres deep and 0.75 metres wide in which ducting and the proposed cable would be installed. Following installation, the trench would be backfilled and the track surface reinstated.
- 3.4 No above-ground infrastructure is proposed as part of the development. The well-site compound would remain operational throughout and would be unaffected by the proposed works, aside from the final connection of the cable to the generators. No changes are proposed to the current operations of the site.

4. Consultations

4.1 The Woodlands Trust – Objection

- Initially raised a number of concerns regarding the impact of the proposal:
 - Loss of ancient woodland, in particular soils and ground flora, arising during construction of the trench.
 - Damage to ancient woodland soils, ground flora, and fungi situated adjacent to trench – for example where adjacent habitat is used for temporary storage of soils or equipment, or for machinery access.
 - Encroachment on the root systems and rooting environments of trees within the ancient woodland adjacent to the cable trench.
 - Deterioration of irreplaceable habitat through disturbance, pollution and other indirect impacts.
- It has also been commented the entire access road and adjacent verge within Singleton Forest is designated as ancient woodland , and works are therefore not within a buffer zone and the existing ecological condition of the site does not form justification.
- It is not possible to mitigate impacts in relation to the construction of the cable connection where this is proposed within ancient woodland. All elements of the development should be sited outside of, and a suitable distance away from the ancient woodland. If this is not possible, the application should not be taken forward.

4.2 An additional comment, sustaining this objection, has been received following the proposed relocation of the cable from adjacent to the access track, to being set within the access track. The comment includes the following:

- The cables within the amended route would likely to reduce potential adverse impacts on any tree roots.
- Concerns regarding noise, dust and air pollution during construction, and the cumulative long-term impacts that further development within Singleton Forest will have on this irreplaceable habitat.
- It would not be possible to locate ‘dust-causing activities’ away from sensitive receptors like the ancient woodland as indicated within the Outline Construction Method Statement (OCMS) and Construction Management Plan (CMP).

- The existing track does not negate the site's designation as Ancient Woodland and woodland condition should not be factored into the planning balance.

4.3 WSCC Highway Authority – No Objection.

- No changes are proposed to the existing vehicle movements or access strategy which are considered acceptable.
- 20 two-way vehicular trips could be generated during the proposed works, comprising 8 LGV visits and 2 HGV visits.

4.4 Singleton and Charlton Parish Council – Objection.

- The application appears to be one of several applications and is 'salami slicing' of a larger scheme, including the generators and connection to the substation at Midhurst.
- The cables should not be considered in isolation, but as part of the wider project, the 'bridge to nowhere' caselaw has also been provided.
- The Environmental Impact of the entire project should be considered as a whole and a full Environmental Impact Assessment should be provided.
- The site is nearing the end of its permission and may form part of a wider project to extend the existing permissions and oil reserves.

4.5 Nature England – No objection

4.6 Environmental Health: No objection

- No objection to the application in principle although, if minded to permit, it would be suggested that a condition be included requiring compliance with the Construction Management Plan.

4.7 Ecology – Comments:

- The proposals are not considered to be in line with Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice, which does not support any excavations within Ancient Woodland and requires a 15m buffer between any works and the woodland.
- The proposal is required to deliver a statutory 10% net gain in biodiversity in relation to reptiles, would the excavation of the route not be required to be carried out outside the hibernation period?
- Officers and the Tree Officer would need to be satisfied that there would be no adverse impact on the Ancient Woodland and to decide if the need for the development in that location outweighs impacts on biodiversity.
- Should the application be approved a condition to restrict any excavation within areas of suitable reptile habitat during the hibernation season (November – February inclusive) and an informative in relation to nesting birds if any pruning of the tree branches is required.

4.8 Tree Officer – Comments:

- There are no trees subject to a TPO nor is the site within a Conservation Area but surrounding the site is ancient woodland.
- It is noted that the NPPF set out principles for development within Ancient Woodland.
- Comments initially noted that the proposal could be achieved; however, requested additional information, including regarding the depth of the trench, and methods of working within RPAs, and treatment of soils.
- Following the submission of additional details, the officer has provided an updated comment.
- A small number of lower value small trees and understory species, which are all category C trees, will require enabling works to the edge of their RPAs." This should be in accordance with BS3998 (2010)

- Fencing details are considered acceptable and should be secured via a condition.
- Details of working methods with RPAs is considered acceptable, including hand digging and severing roots below 25mm.
- Roots, including fibrous roots, should be covered with wet hessian as opposed to dry hessian.
- Roots under 25mm outside of RPA where mechanical digging is proposed should be cleanly cut or protected as per guidance using NJUG10.

5. Representations

5.1 Eight letters of objection have been received from three commentators raising the following concerns:

5.2 Safety Concerns: Explosion and Fire Risk

- Concerns have been raised about the potential risks of explosion and fire at the site.
- It is suggested that all equipment used on site should be explosion-proof and that previously approved generators were not explosion-proof.
- Concerns have also been raised regarding the adequacy of existing fire breaks and the capacity of the local fire service to respond effectively.
- The specification of the generators has changed from four 800 kW units to two larger 2,200 kW units.

5.3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and ‘salami slicing’

- Several comments express concern that the proposal has been divided into multiple planning applications, potentially to avoid triggering the requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment.
- It is requested that the application be considered in its entirety, including the generators, the cable, and the connection to the National Grid.

5.4 Operational Emissions and Methane

- Reducing the waste of gases is welcomed, however, flaring or venting of gases will still be required at times, even with the proposed changes.
- Every effort should be made to minimise pollution and ecological harm throughout the development.
- Compressing and tankering the gas off-site would be preferable to the use of on-site generators.

5.5 Noise Pollution

- - There are concerns that noise levels from the proposed generators would exceed the limits permitted within the site.

5.6 Impact on Ancient Woodland

- The proposed works are located within Ancient Replanted Woodland, raising concerns about potential ecological impacts.

5.7 Traffic Management

- Concerns have been raised about traffic management during the installation phase of the project.

5.8 Other matters

- Questions have been asked about the timing of the application, given that the site is currently scheduled to cease operations in 2031.
- Clarification is sought on whether the National Grid has the capacity to accept the generated

energy, and whether a formal agreement is in place to facilitate this connection.

- 5.9 In addition, one additional neutral representation has been received providing support to comments from the County Ecology regarding the designation of Ancient Woodland.

6. Planning Policy

- 6.1 A full list of policies and applicable legislation can be found in Appendix I

- 6.2 Relevant Sections of National Planning Policy Framework:

- NPPF12 - Achieving well-designed places
- NPPF15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

- 6.3 Most relevant Policies of Adopted South Downs Local Plan (2014-2033)

- SD2: Ecosystem Services
- SD3: Major Development
- SD4: Landscape Character
- SD5: Design
- SD6: Safeguarding Views
- SD9: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- SD10: International Sites
- SD11: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
- SD19: Transport and Accessibility
- SD21: Public Realm, Highway Design and Public Art
- SD25: Development Strategy

- 6.4 Most relevant Policies of West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan July 2018 (Partial Review March 2021)

- M12: Character
- M13: Protected Landscape
- M17: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- M18: Public Health and Amenity
- M20: Transport

- 6.5 Relevant Policies of South Downs Management Plan (2020-2025)

- Policy 1
- Policy 3
- Policy 5

- 6.6 Other Relevant Policy Documents (including SPDs and TANs)

- SDNPA Biodiversity Net Gain (TAN) (March 2025)
- Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) (TAN) (March 2021)
- SDNPA Ecosystem Services (TAN)

7. Planning Assessment

- 7.1. The main matters for consideration relate to:

- Principle of Development

- Landscape and Visual Impact
- Ecology and Ecosystem Services
- Impact to Ancient Woodland
- Highways and Site Access
- Amenity
- Other matters

Principle of development

- 7.2. West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan (WSJMLP) Policy M13 (Protected Landscape) sets out criteria for the siting of mineral development within protected landscapes, including the South Downs National Park. SDLP Policy SD25 directs new development to within settlement policy boundaries, where proposals are of a scale and nature appropriate to the character and function of the settlement in its landscape context.
- 7.3. In this instance, the proposals seeks approximately 1.4km of underground high voltage cable between Singleton Oilwell and the National Grid. The cable is proposed to facilitate the export of electricity generated on-site from natural gas that is currently flared.
- 7.4. The Singleton Oil wellsite is an established site within the National Park. The siting of generators and the principle of exporting electricity to the National Grid was first established within WSCC/097/10/SE/SDNP and now forms part of extant consent SDNP/16/01680/CND. It is noted that the connecting cable was initially proposed to be delivered by a statutory undertaker within permitted development rights; however, for expedience, the applicants now seek the cable to be laid by a private contractor, requiring full planning permission. This has been subject to a number of comments, which are addressed in full within 'other matters'.
- 7.5. As such, whilst the application site falls outside of an established settlement boundary for the purposes of SD25, the proposed connection is to an established Wellsite and would not result in new or isolated development outside of a settlement boundary. Additionally, the principle of exporting energy has been established.
- 7.6. The proposal is not considered to constitute major development for the purposes of South Down Local Plan (SDLP) policy SD3 and paragraph 190 of the NPPF. The NPPF accompanying footnote 67 advises that 'major development' in designated landscapes is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.
- 7.7. In this case, the proposed cables would be underground, and the access track would be reinstated following construction works. The impact during construction would be localised. Whilst this report will set out potential impacts to ancient woodland, this impact is not considered a significant adverse impact, which would be sufficient to render the proposal as major for the purposes of SD3 or M13.
- 7.8. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in principle and to accord with SD3, SD25 and M13.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- 7.9. The first statutory purpose of the National Park is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, and development within it must accord with this purpose.
- 7.10. SDLP SD4 and SD5 require proposals to conserve and enhance existing landscape character features, make a positive contribution to the overall character and appearance of the area, and be of a landscape-led design. Policy SD6 supports proposals that preserve the visual integrity, identity and scenic quality of the National Park, including views from public rights of way.
- 7.11. WSJMLP M12 supports proposals that would not have an unacceptable impact on the character, distinctiveness, sense of place of the different areas of the County and the special qualities of the South Downs National Park.

- 7.12. The application site / access track extends for approximately 1.4km through Findon Forest. The track is enclosed by trees and is not prominent within the public realm, with the exception of a public right of way (Bridleway 3412) which crosses the proposed cable route / access track.
- 7.13. The cables are proposed to be undergrounded and no above ground infrastructure is proposed. Where the cables would be within the existing access track, the track will be resurfaced following installation. The cables would therefore not be visible following installation.
- 7.14. As such, the proposal is considered to conserve the overall character and appearance of the area and is therefore acceptable in design and landscape terms accordance with policies SD4, SD5, SD6 and M12.

Ecology and Ecosystem Services

- 7.15. Policies SD2 and SD9 and M17 support proposals that conserve and enhance biodiversity; retain, protect and enhance features of biodiversity and supporting habitat, and identify and incorporate net gains for biodiversity. Policy SD10 states that proposals sites which are likely to have significant effects on international sites are required to undergo an appropriate assessment in order to ascertain that there will not be adverse impacts on the integrity of the international site.
- 7.16. The applicant has submitted an Ecological Impact Assessment in support of the application. This report sets out that the proposal would impact an area of mixed scrub and other neutral grassland, and outlines a series of mitigation measures for the avoidance and mitigation of impacts to protected species. This report has been reviewed by the County Ecologist, who has requested that, should the proposal be approved, these measures are secured via a suitably worded planning condition.
- 7.17. The County Ecologist has also requested a condition to restrict any excavation within areas of suitable reptile habitat during the hibernation season (November – February inclusive).
- 7.18. Additionally, the application site also falls within the Singleton & Cocking Tunnels Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) has therefore been undertaken by the Authority concluding that effects on The Singleton & Cocking Tunnels SAC can be ruled out.
- 7.19. The application is also required to deliver a statutory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This is proposed to be achieved via the purchase of off-site biodiversity credits within the National Park, as opposed to on-site enhancements. This is primarily due to the limited site area, and the third-party ownership of the land adjacent to the application site. This is considered acceptable in this instance and can be secured within a Biodiversity Gain Plan planning condition.
- 7.20. With the above conditions in place the proposal is considered to be capable of delivering a 10% biodiversity net gain and to accord with SD2 and SD9.

Impact to Ancient Woodland

- 7.21. SD11 provides support to developments that conserve and enhance trees, hedgerows and woodlands and should be informed by a full site survey, including an Ecological Survey, Arboricultural Method Statement and associated Tree Protection Plan.
- 7.22. SD9, M17 and Paragraph 193 c) of the NPPF outlines that “development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists”. Footnote 70 of the NPPF outlines that this may include infrastructure projects where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat.
- 7.23. Approximately 1.1 km of the proposed cable route passes through an area designated as Ancient Replanted Woodland, with the remainder of the route passing through an area of neutral grassland and mixed scrub.
- 7.24. Natural England and Forestry Commission’s standing advice outlines potential direct and indirect impacts to ancient woodland. Direct impacts include the damage and loss of ancient woodland, including the loss of soils and loss of ground flora or fungi, damage to roots and understorey, and the compacting of soils. Indirect impacts include increasing the amount of dust, light, water, air and soil pollution, reducing the amount of semi-natural habitats next to ancient woodland and increasing damage to habitat, for example trampling of plants and erosion of soil by people

accessing the woodland or tree root protection areas.

- 7.25. The applicant has submitted an Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement, Ecological Impact Assessment, Construction Management Plan and a Construction Method Statement in support of the application. These details have been reviewed by the County Ecologist, Tree Officer and The Woodland Trust.
- 7.26. The cable is proposed to be installed within a trench approximately 1.4 metres deep and 0.75 metres wide. Where the route passes through ancient woodland, excavation would be confined entirely to the existing access track, which is an existing sealed tarmac surface approximately 8 metres wide. It is noted that, although the track is a sealed surface, it falls within the designated ancient woodland boundary and is therefore still classified as ancient woodland. This matter has been outlined by The Woodland Trust, who have also highlighted that the existing condition of woodland should not be taken into account within the planning balance.
- 7.27. All excavations within the Ancient Woodland are proposed to be limited to the existing tarmac surface of the access tracks. As such, all soils impacted are those currently sealed beneath the track. Soils are proposed to be excavated in short sections, and would be segregated to avoid mixing, and stored alongside the trench for a limited time before being used to infill the trench on the same day.
- 7.28. The construction/excavation of the trench also has the potential to impact soils within the verges adjacent to the track. To protect against this, fencing is proposed to be erected on either side of the track. All construction activities, including vehicle movements and the temporary storage of excavated soil, would be contained within this fenced-off section of the track. This ensures that undisturbed soils on either side of the track are not impacted during construction. With these mitigation measures in place, the proposed excavation is therefore not considered to result in any additional loss or deterioration of soils, ground flora or fungi within the Ancient Woodland.
- 7.29. The cable has been routed so as to avoid the majority of Root Protection Areas (RPAs) within the Ancient Woodland. There are, however, short sections where the trench is proposed within RPAs. The submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement (AIAMS) outlines mitigation measures for excavation in these areas. These details include hand digging under arboricultural supervision within RPAs, and ensuring all roots identified below 25mm are clearly severed with a hand tool. The tree officer reviewed these details, and has additionally requested that all exposed roots, including fibrous roots, should be wrapped in wet hessian and that where mechanical digging is proposed, any identified roots under 25mm be cleanly cut or protected as per guidance using NJUG10. These measures have subsequently been updated within the AIAMS and can be secured alongside the full measures within the AIAMS via a suitably worded planning condition.
- 7.30. In addition to the above direct impacts, the proposal also has the potential for indirect impacts, including dust generation, noise, air pollution, and increased vehicle movements. The Woodland Trust have highlighted that it would not be possible to locate dust-producing activities away from sensitive receptors as the application site falls within Ancient Woodland. The applicant has, therefore, proposed dust suppression measures including the use of solid screens / barriers around dusty activities, and the use of water sprays or local extraction systems. These measures are outlined within the Construction Management Plan and can be secured via a suitably worded planning condition.
- 7.31. It is additionally noted that the potential for indirect impacts would be temporary in nature and limited to the construction phase of the development. The excavation and backfilling of the trench is anticipated to take one working week. With these mitigation measure in place, and given the limited scope of the works, the potential for dust generation is, therefore, not considered to result in the loss or deterioration of the ancient woodland.
- 7.32. As previously outlined, SD9, M17 and Paragraph 193 c) of the NPPF outlines that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons.
- 7.33. In this instance, whilst the proposal has the potential for impacts upon the Ancient Woodland, it is considered that these can be satisfactorily mitigated via the methods set out above and would

not result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats. This includes the loss or deterioration of trees, soils and fungi.

- 7.34. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with SD9, SD11, M17 and the NPPF.

Highways and Site Access

- 7.35. Policies SD19 and SD21 requires a proposal to demonstrate the continued safe and efficient operation of the strategic and local road networks and to promote the safety and amenity of all road users and safe, direct walking and cycling routes. M20 requires a proposal to demonstrate that vehicle movements associated with the development will not have an unacceptable impact on the capacity of the highway network and that the development will not have an unacceptable impact on the safety of all road users.
- 7.36. The construction phase of development is expected to take approximately three weeks, of which up to one week would be required for works to the access track. During this time, it is estimated about 20 two-way vehicular trips could be generated during the proposed works, comprising 8 LGV visits and 2 HGV visits. These details have been reviewed by the highways authority who have raised no objection, noting that post-construction, traffic would be limited to maintenance vehicles.
- 7.37. Additionally, it has been outlined by the applicant that work to the track be undertaken in sections, allowing the track to be reinstated each day to permit scheduled vehicle movements.
- 7.38. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with SD19, S21 and M20.

Amenity

- 7.39. Policy SD5 k) requires proposals to have regard to avoiding harmful impact upon, or from, any surrounding uses and amenities. M18 requires proposals to demonstrate lighting, noise, dust, odours, vibration, and other emissions, including those arising from traffic, are controlled to the extent that there will not be an unacceptable impact on public health and amenity
- 7.40. The application site is isolated from residential development, with the closest dwelling approximately 500m to the south of the wellsite, and 250m from the site access onto the A286.
- 7.41. Concerns have been raised regarding the noise produced by the on-site generators. The generators form part of an extant planning consent (reference: SDNP/23/03573/NMA) and are not subject to this application. It is noted, however, that noise levels have been previously assessed within extant consents and have been deemed acceptable by planning officers. This assessment was made following a no-objection comment from Environmental Health officers.
- 7.42. In regard to the current application, the initial construction phase of development is expected to take approximately three weeks, including set up. During this time, there will be some construction-related noise and vehicle movements. A construction management plan has been submitted by the applicant, outlining measures including the reduction of noise, dust and hours of construction. These details have been reviewed by Environmental Health Officers who have raised no objection, subject to securing these details via a suitably worded planning condition.
- 7.43. Following installation, the cables are not expected to generate any additional noise beyond that which has already been considered and would result in no further amenity loss.
- 7.44. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with SD5 and M18.

Others Matters

- 7.45. Requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and subdivision of the proposal
- 7.46. A number of concerns have been raised by members of the public, Singleton and Charlton Parish Council, and Singleton Forest Watch regarding the alleged artificial subdivision of the approved generators and connecting cable into two separate planning applications. This is referred to as 'salami slicing'. The core concern within these comments is that 'salami slicing' may be used to avoid consideration of the proposal as a whole, and to circumvent the requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- 7.47. The proposal for the generation of electricity from natural gas was first considered within

application WSCC/097/10/SE/SDNP. This application did not include the installation of below ground cables, which, at that time, were planned to be installed under permitted development rights by a statutory undertaker. Notwithstanding this, the need for cables was understood by officers, and the Authority provided an EIA screening opinion which considered the scheme as a whole, including exporting electricity and the need to install cables. This screening concluded that an EIA was not required.

- 7.48. Since this time, the approved generators have been subject to two non-material amendments which have amended the proposal from 4 x 800kw generators to 2 x 2,200kw generators. These amendments have been assessed on their merits and are not considered to have materially altered the principal decision.
- 7.49. The current application (SDNP/24/05114/FUL) seeks to install an underground cable in place of those previously expected to have been delivered via permitted development rights. The cable is to export electricity generated on site by natural gas generators. The Authority has again formally screened the proposal, adopting the screening opinion that the development does not require an Environmental Impact Assessment. This screening opinion has again considered the scheme as a whole, including the cumulative impact of the cable and the generation of electricity on site.
- 7.50. It is additionally noted that the proposed cable installation and generation of electricity, seeks to use waste gases and would not alter the site's ongoing operations or the intensity of oil extraction .
- 7.51. The Authority is therefore satisfied that the applicant has not attempted to come forward in a piecemeal fashion, to avoid proper consideration under the EIA Regulations.

Pollution

- 7.52. Concerns have been raised regarding pollution from the ongoing operation of the site. While the proposed cables and associated energy generation infrastructure are intended to harness waste gases, they would not alter the site's permitted operations or increase the intensity of on-site extraction. As such, the installation of the cables would not result in any additional pollutants. These concerns, therefore, fall outside the scope of the current application, which does not propose changes to the existing extraction or operational processes.
- 7.53. Concerns have also been raised regarding the risk of methane leaks. The regulation of site emissions falls under the Environment Agency (EA) who monitor the site. Paragraph 201 NPPF states that planning decisions should focus on whether the proposed development constitutes an acceptable use of land, rather than the regulation of processes or emissions that are subject to separate pollution control regimes. Planning authorities are expected to assume that these regimes will operate effectively. This matter, therefore, also falls outside of the scope of the application.

Safety Concerns: Explosion and Fire Risk

- 7.54. Concerns have also been raised within public comments regarding the risk of fire and explosions from the approved generators. These concerns specifically reference the design of the approved generators, the risk of methane leaks, the condition of current fire breaks and the resources of fire and rescue services. This application seeks solely the installation of below ground cable. The generators form part of an extant planning consent and have previously been considered acceptable.

Conclusion

- 7.55. The proposal is considered acceptable in principle, and would conserve the overall character and appearance of the area. The proposal would be acceptable in terms of neighbouring amenity and highways safety. Whilst the proposal has the potential to impact upon an area of Ancient Woodland, officers consider that the mitigation proposed is sufficient to ensure the proposal would not result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitat.
- 7.56. The development is considered to accord with relevant policies of the South Downs Local Plan, the West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan, and the National Planning Policy Framework and is

recommended for approval subject to the conditions set out below.

8. Reason for Recommendation and Conditions/Reasons for refusal

8.1. It is recommended that the application be approved subject to the conditions set out below.

Planning Conditions and Reasons

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the plans listed below under the heading "Plans Referred to in Consideration of this Application".

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

3. The development hereby approved shall be undertaken in accordance with the measures set out within the following reports:

- Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement' Reference LLD3369-ARB-REP-001 Rev 04, dated 19/06/2025
- Construction Management Plan, Revision D, reference '24/8249/CMP02', dated 17/04/2025
- Outline Construction Method Statement, Revision A, reference 24/8249/CMS03, dated 17/04/2025
- Transport Statement, Revision D, reference 24/8249/TS0, dated 17/04/2025

Reason: To ensure the management, conservation and enhancement of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows within the South Downs National Park in accordance with policies SD9, SD11 of the South Downs Local Plan (2019), policy M17 of West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan July 2018 (Partial Review March 2021) and the NPPF.

4. Any roots over 25 mm in diameter shall not be severed without prior consultation of an Arborist and the agreement (in writing) of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the management, conservation and enhancement of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows within the South Downs National Park in accordance with policies SD9, SD11 of the South Downs Local Plan (2019), policy M17 of West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan July 2018 (Partial Review March 2021) and the NPPF.

5. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in strict accordance with the Ecological Impact Assessment, reference LLD3369-ECO-REP-001-03-EcIA, dated 30/04/2025 by LIZARD Landscape Design and Ecology, Archer Associates.

Reason: To safeguard protected species and their habitats.

6. No excavation shall take place within areas of suitable reptile habitat during the hibernation season (November – February inclusive).

Reason: To safeguard protected species and their habitats.

7. The Biodiversity Gain Plan shall be prepared in accordance with the Ecological Impact Assessment, dated 30/04/25, BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN STATEMENT, dated 20/02/2025, and BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN METRIC, dated 14 May 2025 by LIZARD Landscape Design and Ecology, Archer Associates

Reason: To ensure the development delivers a biodiversity net gain on site in accordance with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act, Policy SD9 of the South Downs Local Plan (2014-33) and the SDNPA Biodiversity Technical Advice Note.

8. No development shall commence until evidence that the off-site BNG credits have been purchased from a registered Habitat Bank located within the SDNP has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the development delivers a biodiversity net gain on site in accordance with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act, Policy SD9 of the South Downs Local Plan (2014-33) and the SDNPA Biodiversity Technical Advice Note.

Informatives

1. The applicant is reminded that, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended (section 1), it is an offence to remove, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built. Planning consent for a development does not provide a defence against prosecution under this act. Trees and scrub are likely to contain nesting birds between 01 March and 31 August inclusive. Trees and scrub are present on the application site and are to be assumed to contain nesting birds between the above dates, unless a recent survey has been undertaken by a competent ecologist to assess the nesting bird activity on site during this period and has shown it is absolutely certain that nesting birds are not present.
2. Based on the information available, this permission will require the approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan by the local planning authority before development is begun because none of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements are considered to apply.

The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition ("the biodiversity condition") that development may not begin unless:

- i) A Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and
- ii) The planning authority has approved the plan.

The planning authority is the South Downs National Park Authority.

There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply. These can be found in the legislation.

3. The Biodiversity Gain Plan must relate to development for which planning permission is granted, and specify the following matters:
 - i) Information about the steps taken or to be taken to minimise the adverse effect of the development on biodiversity,
 - ii) The pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat,
 - iii) The post-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat,
 - iv) Any registered offsite biodiversity gain allocated to the development and the biodiversity value of that gain in relation to the development,
 - v) Any biodiversity credits purchased for the development.

Commencing development which is subject to the biodiversity gain condition without an approved Biodiversity Gain Plan could result in enforcement action for breach of planning control.

TIM SLANEY

Director of Planning

South Downs National Park Authority

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Appendices	I – Information concerning consideration of applications before committee
SDNPA Consultees	Director of Planning, Legal Services
Background Documents	All planning application plans, supporting documents, consultations and third party responses National Planning Policy Framework (2024) South Downs Local Plan (2014-33) South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (2020-25) WS Joint Minerals Local Plan July 2018 (Partial Review March 2021) SDNPA Biodiversity Net Gain TAN (March 2025) SDNPA Corporate Plan (2020-25) SDNPA Ecosystem Services TAN

