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Dear 

**Screening Opinion of Newcastle City Council - The Town and Country Planning
(Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, Regulation 6**

Proposal: Screening Opinion in respect of the Installation and operation of solar farm and associated infrastructure

Location: Land to the East of Walbottle Road and North of Hospital Lane, Walbottle, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Applicant: Northumberland Estates

Reference: 2025/0205/01/SCR

Thank you for your correspondence received on 13 February 2025 requesting a Screening Opinion of the local planning authority under the provisions of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ("the 2017 Regulations").

The City Council is of the opinion that the proposal would be Schedule 2 development within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations. The proposed development would be 'Industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water' as defined by Column 1, category 3a of the table in Schedule 2 to the 2017 Regulations as the development would be greater than 0.5ha. At 34ha the development would be well in excess of this threshold.

When screening Schedule 2 development, the City Council is required to establish whether the proposed development would be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of its nature, size, or location, having consideration to the three broad categories of selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 to the 2017 Regulations, namely:

- Characteristics of development
- Location of development
- Characteristics of the potential impact

The City Council's consideration of the proposed development against the selection criteria is set out in the attached Screening Checklist and summarised below.

Characteristics of the Development

At 34ha the development would be a major scheme and result in the development of an area of open countryside within the Green Belt, albeit on an extended temporary basis of 40 years. The characteristics of the site's design would be fenced in parcels of land to accommodate 68,000 solar PV panels on frames at a height of circa 3m.

In terms of the use of natural resources, it is recognised that the scheme would be to produce renewable energy, and so beyond the embodied resources in the panels and other infrastructure, it would not use significant amounts energy or water.

There would likely be some loss of biodiversity to enable site access, but there are also opportunities for biodiversity net-gain on or near site. The scheme would result in the loss of Best and Most Versatile ('BMV') land, in the form of Grade 3a land ('Good Quality'). It is recognised that the loss of the land would not be permanent, although it would be taken out of productive use for significant period. However, it is not clear if there would be a reduction in quality of the soil for agricultural purposes if it is not farmed and indeed if it is used for habitat creation over the lifetime of the scheme. This would need to be evidenced in a planning application, but it is not considered that the impact would be significant enough to require this aspect of the scheme to be covered in an EIA.

It is not considered that the production of waste or pollution would be significant. Noise and dust would be likely be generated during the construction phase, but measures could be put in to reduce this through management procedures agreed as part of a planning application.

In terms of cumulative impact, whilst delivery of the scheme will likely overlap during the construction phase with developments within a reasonable distance of the site (set out in your letter), the nature of the traffic generation in terms of volume and distribution, does not give rise to concerns of significant cumulative impact. The location of major schemes are also likely to be detached from the proposed development in landscape and visual impact terms because of topography and existing tree cover.

It is considered that the characteristics of the development do not constitute the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Location of Development types and characteristics of the potential impact

The proposed development site is within open countryside and the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. However, it is recognised that the site not located within a 'sensitive area' as defined in Regulation 2(1) and the Environmental Impact Assessment Planning Practice Guidance. The site does have some screening from natural and built features in the landscape, but given its position on the slope of the Tyne Valley, it will be visible from a wide area and across administrative boundaries. There is potential for some harm to the landscape. A planning application would need include a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, which it is indicated will be provided.

In terms of biodiversity, there are no statutory designations within the proposed site, but it is within an SSSI Impact Risk Zone due to its proximity to Hallow Hills SSSI (located approximately 1.1km to the west) and Ryton Willows SSSI (located approximately 1.7km south west). However, given the nature and degree of separation from the SSSI, it does give rise immediate to concerns for significant adverse impact. Locally, Walbottle Brickworks LNR is located to the south west. It is unclear if there will be need for tree removal for construction access, but this is

likely to be minimal, and any impact on local hydrology would need to ensure the LNR is not adversely affected. There would also need to be landscape removal for access into the site itself and potentially for cabling to the grid connection point. Any impacts would need to be mitigated, but it is not considered that these are likely to be significant.

Listed buildings are within close proximity of the site, and it is immediately to the south of a scheduled ancient monument, Hadrian's Wall, and partly within the World Heritage Site Buffer Zone. Historic England have reviewed the screening request and have advised likely to be no more than a minor impact on those aspects of the historic environment which lie within Historic England's statutory remit (scheduled ancient monuments and the world heritage site). The impact on archaeology and the impact on the setting of the WHS will need to be fully investigated. Archaeological trial trenching should be carried out in order to confirm the presence or otherwise of archaeological remains. If archaeological remains are present then further work may be required to determine their significance, and to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost, in order to understand the nature and significance of any archaeological remains present. Given the nature of the development, it is reasonable to assess at this point that any impact will not be of sufficient significance to require an EIA, subject to the work set out above.

It is not considered that the location of the development is such that there would be sufficiently significant environmental impacts as a result of the proposed redevelopment of the site, and the impact of the location of the development can be assessed as part of the planning application process. It is also concluded that proposed development would be unlikely to result in any sufficiently significant impacts in terms of the use of natural resources, production of waste, pollution, noise and disturbance, contamination and any substances that could be harmful to people or the environment.

Conclusion

Overall, in the opinion of the City Council and having taken into account the selection criteria in Schedule 3 to the 2017 Regulations, the proposed development would not be likely to have significant effects on the environment. **The City Council is therefore of the opinion that the proposed development is not EIA development within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations and does not require the submission of an Environmental Statement.**

You should note that the City Council's opinion on the likelihood of the proposed development having significant environmental effects is reached only for the purposes of this Screening Opinion.

In accordance with Regulation 28 of the 2017 Regulations, a copy of this Screening Opinion will be made available for public inspection on the planning register.

If you have any queries about this matter, please contact the case officer. Contact details are given at the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

James Cowen
Senior Planning and Project Officer
On behalf of Newcastle City Council

