

Town & Country Planning (EIA) Regulations 2011  
**Secretary of State Screening Direction – Written Statement**

Application name:	Bramblemoor Lane
SoS case reference:	NPCU/EIASC/R/U1050/77553
Schedule and category of development:	2(d) – extractive industries – deep drilling 2(e) – extractive industries - surface industrial installations for the extraction of coal, petroleum, natural gas and ores, as well as bituminous shale.

**Full statement of reasons as required by 4(5)(a) of amended EIA Regulations including conclusions on likelihood of significant environmental effects.**

Planning Practice Guidance states that whilst all applications must be assessed on a case-by-case basis, it is unlikely that an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required for exploratory drilling operations which do not involve hydraulic fracturing. However, when considering the need for an assessment, it is important to consider factors such as the nature, size and location of the proposed development (Paragraph: 119 Reference ID: 27-119-20140306).

Planning Practice Guidance also states that individual applications for the exploratory phase should be considered on their own merits. They should not take account of hypothetical future activities for which consent has not yet been sought, since the further appraisal and production phases will be the subject of separate planning applications and assessments (Paragraph: 120 Reference ID: 27-120-20140306).

Planning Practice Guidance states that, indicatively, EIA is more likely to be required for:

- Deep drilling operations involving development of a surface site of more than five hectares, having regard to the likely wider impacts on surrounding hydrology and ecology.
- surface industrial installations for the extraction of coal, petroleum, natural gas and ores, as well as bituminous shale where development of a site of 10 hectares or more or where production is expected to be more than 100,000 tonnes of petroleum per year, with key issues being the scale of the development, emissions to air, discharges to water, the risk of accidents and arrangements for transporting the fuel.

**1 (a) – (f) regarding characteristics of development**

According to the information, the purpose of the proposed vertical exploratory core well is to evaluate the geology in the specific locality to assess its potential to support commercially-viable shale gas extraction. During the drilling and coring phase (three months in duration), the well would be drilled to approximately 2408 metres using a drill rig with a maximum rig height of 60 metres. Cores would be removed and sent to a laboratory for tests to identify geological characteristics and gas producing properties. The Secretary of State notes that the proposed development does not involve commercial shale gas extraction and is only for evaluation purposes.

The Secretary of State notes that the proposal would involve the introduction of manmade structures onto a field which is currently in agricultural use. From the information, it would appear that Stage 1 would involve construction plant, including generators, site offices, welfare cabins and stores being brought onto the site. The construction compound would be fenced for security and site access would also be created at this stage. The main site compound would cover approximately 99m x 91m and 2m high screening bunds would be created within the perimeter of the site for visual and noise screening and ultimately for

restoration. A 25m x 17m hardstanding area would be excavated within the central site area. At the end of Stage 1 construction equipment would be demobilised. During Stage 2, the drill rig (maximum height 60 metres) and associated equipment would be brought onto the site for drilling and coring activities. This equipment would be removed after a period of 3 months. The Secretary of State notes that the overall duration of the proposed development would be a maximum of five years.

The Secretary of State accepts that the introduction of manmade structures is likely to have some impact in terms of physical changes in the locality notwithstanding the bunding and other mitigation. He also recognises that the drill rig would be visually prominent in the landscape, particularly as the site is in an elevated position. However the more significant visual impact would be for a relatively short period and the site is not within a sensitive area or an area designated for its scenic or high landscape interest. Additionally, while there are areas designated as Special Landscape Areas and areas of importance to nature and historic conservation in the surrounding landscape, the Secretary of State is not persuaded that the interest features for which they are designated would be affected to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely. Overall, the Secretary of State does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of physical changes in the locality. He considers that any impact on the Green Belt would be considered against Green Belt policies should any planning application be submitted and does not in itself necessitate an environmental statement.

Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 024) states that there are occasions where other existing or approved development may be relevant in determining whether significant effects are likely as a consequence of a proposed development. The local planning authorities should always have regard to the possible cumulative effects arising from any existing or approved development. There could also be circumstances where 2 or more applications for development should be considered together. For example, where the applications in question are not directly in competition with one another, so that both or all of them might be approved, and where the overall combined environmental impact of the proposals might be greater or have different effects than the sum of their separate parts.

In this regard, on the basis of the information, the Secretary of State does not consider that there are other existing or approved development that may be relevant. Furthermore, while he notes that it is possible that other vertical core wells may be proposed in other parts of the East Midlands, there is no information to suggest that other projects have been brought forward which should be considered in cumulation with the scheme before the Secretary of State. Additionally, the Secretary of State considers that the proposal should be considered as a discrete development for the purposes of this screening development. While he accepts that the exploratory work being carried out at this site may result in shale gas extraction proposals coming forward, there is no certainty on this and there is not currently a larger project for which the vertical core well should be considered part of for the purposes of considering whether a significant environmental effect is likely. The Secretary of State notes that the test well may be used for recording micro-seismic events ('listening') caused by hydraulic fracturing activities at sites currently unknown, but there is no certainty that any fracturing activities would be carried out at other sites in the vicinity during the lifetime of the scheme.

On the basis of the information, while the Secretary of State accepts that the proposed development would use natural resources, including energy and water, on the basis of the information he does not consider that it would impact on resources, particularly those which are non-renewable or in short supply, to the extent necessary to suggest that a significant environmental effect is likely.

On the production of waste, the Secretary of State notes that the proposed development would produce operational waste in the form of drilling mud, rock cuttings and waste water, but that this would be largely contained on site. Additionally, while there is a reference to naturally occurring radioactive material, the Secretary of State does not consider that the information suggests that the release of radioactive waste material would be of the magnitude necessary, in terms of harm to the wider area, to suggest that a significant environmental

effect is likely on this basis. Overall, while waste materials would be produced, given the scale of the proposed development and the self-contained nature of any waste material generated, the Secretary of State does not consider that this would be of the magnitude and complexity necessary to suggest that a significant environmental effect is likely for this reason.

On pollution and nuisance, while the Secretary of State considers that there is likely to be some impact on air quality, this is likely to be localised and temporary and the site is not within an air quality management area. Overall, he does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely on this basis. Additionally, on the basis of the information, while materials and substances would be used as part of the proposed activities, the Secretary of State is satisfied that these could be managed in accordance with normal operating procedures. Furthermore, he does not consider that there is information to suggest that there are any areas on or around the location which are already subject to pollution or environmental damage which could be affected by the project. Overall, the Secretary of State does not consider that the risk of contamination is of the magnitude necessary to suggest that a significant environmental effect is likely.

In terms of noise, the Secretary of State considers that impacts are likely to be at their greatest during the construction and drilling phases, however these would be temporary in nature and given the distances to sensitive receptors, he does not consider that the noise landscape would be affected to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely. While lighting would be used on the site, given the small scale nature of the proposal, the Secretary of State does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely for this reason. The Secretary of State recognises that the proposal, particularly during the drilling phase, may create vibration. However, on the basis of the information, he does not consider that the radius of impact would cause nuisance in the wider area to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely.

The Secretary of State notes that the site is in or in the vicinity of Coal Authority areas, including High Risk Mining Areas, where there is the potential for instability, but these cover wide areas and the geophysical survey carried out by the developer has not revealed any known mining features which would present a risk to the proposed development. There is no specific information that the site has land stability or subsidence risks. Furthermore, as any vibration from construction or drilling would be largely contained within the site, the Secretary of State does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of the magnitude of any impact.

The Secretary of State notes that the site is in an area at low risk of flooding and on the basis of the information, he does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of hydrology.

The proposed development would generate additional HGV movements on the local highway network, with periods at the beginning and end of the drilling stage generating between 20 and 50 HGV movements daily and up to 16 movements greater than 32 tonnes at the start and end of Stage 2 as the rig is mobilised and demobilised. However, while this would be significant for short durations, the site is not in an air quality management area and the Secretary of State does not consider that there is information to suggest that there are any transport routes which are susceptible to congestion or are experiencing other environmental constraint which could be affected by the project, by the declaration of an additional air quality management area for example, to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely. Overall, having regard to the scale and duration of the proposed development the Secretary of State is satisfied that any transport impacts, including in terms of road safety, could be dealt with by assessments prepared as part of any planning application without subjecting the site to full EIA for this reason.

## ***2 (a)-(c) (i) – (viii) regarding location of development***

The Secretary of State notes that the site is not located in a sensitive area as defined by Regulation 2 of the EIA Regulations 2011. In this respect, while the nearest SSSI is 2 km from

the site, the Secretary of State notes that there are impact risk zones around each SSSI which reflect the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified. However, on the basis of the information, including the Natural England advice referred to in the Council's Screening Opinion of 28 February 2017, and having regard to the scale, nature and duration of the development, the Secretary of State does not consider that the interest features of any sensitive areas in the surrounding landscape would be affected to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely.

The Secretary of State notes that the Council's Screening Opinion of 28 February 2017 does not indicate that there are any records for protected or notable species within or adjacent to the site, nor any such records for non-designated habitats of potential ecological interest. While there are some records of protected species within 2km of the site and a locally designated wildlife site is in the vicinity, the Secretary of State is not persuaded that populations of protected species would be affected to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely.

The Secretary of State also notes that the site is not in an area designated for its high landscape or scenic beauty and while Bramley Moor Special Landscape Area is 300 metres to the north, having regard to the scale, nature and duration of the development, he is not persuaded that the features that led to the designation of this area would be affected to the extent that a significant environmental effect is likely.

The Secretary of State notes that Moss Valley Conservation Area is located 300 metres to north and West Handley Conservation Area lies about 500 metres to the south. There are also listed buildings in the surrounding area. On the basis of the information however and having regard to the scale, nature and duration of the development, the Secretary of State does not consider that the proposed development would impact on the setting of any heritage asset to the extent that a significant environmental impact assessment is likely. Overall, he does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of landscapes of historical, cultural or archaeological significance.

**3(a) –(e) regarding characteristics of potential impact**

On the basis of the information, the Secretary of State considers that the extent of any impact would be contained mainly in the immediate area. He is not persuaded that this is development of the magnitude and complexity of impact, in terms of areas and populations affected, to suggest that a significant environmental affect is likely. The Secretary of State notes that the development as a whole would be in place for a maximum period of five years, with the drilling phases lasting only three months, and that the site is to be restored as agricultural land upon completion of the project.

Is an Environmental Statement required?	No
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