



Ms L Chandler  
Suffolk Coastal District Council  
Melton Hill  
Woodbridge  
Suffolk  
IP12 1AU

23 October 2014

Dear Ms Chandler

### **Aldhurst Farm Habitat Creation Scheme – Request for an EIA Screening Opinion**

On behalf of EDF Energy, I am writing to formally request a Screening Opinion from Suffolk Coastal District Council for the proposed Aldhurst Farm Habitat Creation Scheme with reference to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (SI No. 1824) (the 'EIA Regulations'). EDF Energy requires the Council to consider whether the proposed scheme constitutes EIA development pursuant to Regulation 5(1).

The proposed scheme would be centred on creation of lowland ditches and a mosaic of reedbed and open water habitat occupying approximately 6.3 ha of low-lying land alongside two existing watercourses (the Aldhurst Valley Stream and a ditch receiving treated effluent from Leiston Waste Water Treatment Works).

These wetland habitats would grade into a mosaic of acid grassland, heathland, scrub and deciduous woodland across the remainder of the 67ha Aldhurst Farm site.

The conceptual design of the scheme, in particular the wetland habitat, has been informed by a series of hydrological and hydrogeological studies and consultation with the Environment Agency, Natural England, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, RSPB, as well as your authority. The key objectives of the conceptual design of the scheme, agreed in consultation with the relevant consultees, are to:

- establish and maintain 6.3 ha of resilient wet reedbed habitat and lowland ditch habitat, which will provide appropriate conditions to support typical plant and invertebrate assemblages;
- deliver connectivity with the adjacent Sizewell Marshes SSSI;
- ensure no significant change to the flows of the Leiston Waste Water Treatment Works drain and Leiston Drain downstream of Lover's Lane;
- ensure no significant deterioration in water quality in Leiston Drain downstream of Lover's Lane;
- ensure no net loss of biodiversity interest on the Aldhurst Farm Site and provide landscape and ecological enhancements, where:
  - o the proposed wet reedbed habitat would support typical reedbed species invertebrate, fish, mammal and bird species; and
  - o further species diversity would be provided by a mosaic of other semi-natural habitats.

In determining the need for an EIA, a 'shadow' screening exercise has been undertaken by EDF Energy. In summary, EDF Energy considers that the Scheme is not Schedule 1 development but is potentially Schedule 2 development. The scheme could be considered to fall within category 10(i) "*Dams and other installations designed to hold water or store it on a long-term basis (unless included in Schedule 1)*" or 10(n) "*Groundwater abstraction and artificial groundwater recharge schemes not included in Schedule 1*" where the threshold for both is "*The area of the works exceeds 1 hectare*". In addition, the works are adjacent to, and connect with, the Sizewell Marshes SSSI which is considered a 'sensitive area' as defined by the EIA Regulations. The Scheme has therefore been appraised in line with the requirements of Schedule 3 of the

EIA Regulations to determine whether it is likely to have any significant environmental effect. Schedule 3 requires that the 'characteristics' of a development, its 'location' and the 'characteristics of the potential impact' must be considered.

An EIA Screening Report has been prepared to accompany this Screening Request. In accordance with Regulation 5(2) of the EIA Regulations, the report includes:

- a plan sufficient to identify the land;
- a brief description of the nature and purpose of the development and of its possible effects on the environment; and
- such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make.

The report provides descriptions of the site, the proposed scheme (including the functionality of the wetland habitat) and an appraisal of the likely implications of the scheme on groundwater, surface watercourses, ecology, landscape and archaeology.

In summary, the proposed scheme would provide wet reedbed and lowland ditch habitat in the valley, with a mosaic of other semi-natural habitats in the wider Site. Management measures would be incorporated into the scheme design (e.g. weirs to permit flow between basins and watercourses) and a number of specific management plans (e.g. a Materials Management Plan) would be submitted as part of a planning application. In conclusion, EDF Energy considers that the proposed scheme would not have any significant environmental impacts but rather would change an area which is predominantly arable farmland of limited biodiversity value, into a mix of habitats that can, over time, develop to support typical wetland vascular plant and invertebrate assemblages as well as a variety of other species, and also enhance the landscape character of the area.

We look forward to receiving your Screening Opinion. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Katy McGuinness

EDF Energy