Our Ref: SS1023/1/SR
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Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
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Dear Sirs

Request for Screening Opinion for Remediation of land at Higginshaw Lane, Oldham

On behalf of our client, National Grid Property (NGP), we write to you to request a Screening Opinion under the Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England & Wales) Regulations 1999 (EIA Regulations) as amended, to establish whether or not the proposed works should, in the Council's opinion, fall to be treated as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development.

The proposal seeks to carry out remediation works on the former Gas Works site at Higginshaw Lane, Oldham. It should be noted that the proposed works do not involve demolition of any buildings or structures.

The proposed remediation works do not fall within any of the categories identified within Schedule 1 or 2 of the EIA Regulations, and therefore we consider that the proposals are not EIA development. Notwithstanding, to enable further assessment of the proposals, we have provided a screening assessment against Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations, which sets out the selection criteria if the works were classified as Schedule 2 development.

We would emphasis that the proposed remediation works are to enable future development options for the site to be considered, and this does not preclude that any subsequent development on the site maybe the subject of an EIA.

This letter sets out details of the site, environmental issues, purpose and nature of the development and screening criteria. We conclude that the development does not raise environmental issues of such significance that an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is required.
The Site

The site is located approximately 1 km east of the centre of Oldham, and is centred on National Grid Reference 393040, 406580. The site comprises a series of terraced areas with a number of tenanted buildings and a National Grid compound in the eastern site area. The total site is area is approximately 6.3 hectares, has shown on the attached site layout plan, Ref: SS1023/2/01.

The site is bounded by open ground to the north, light industry to the east, and commercial property and a sports field to the south and west. A small stream is present on the open ground to the north of the site. The stream discharges onto the open ground from a number of culverts on the western side of this area and flows in an easterly direction.

Historically, a large gas works was present on site. This was modified and extended over a number of years. The main processing plant was located in the north-western portion of the site, extending up to the current northern boundary. A number of facilities were also located on the open ground to the north. The gas works included five gas holder bases, all dating from the late 1800s and understood to have below-ground bases. The largest, Holder No.5 adjacent to the southern site boundary, was used for a number of years as a ‘water store’.

The geology of the site comprises made ground overlying boulder clay and alluvial gravels which, in turn, overlie Carboniferous Coal Measures bedrock. Some groundwater is present in the made ground, perched above the lower permeability clay. Shallow groundwater is also present in the superficial deposits, although this is interpreted to be primarily associated with the sand and gravel deposits distributed within this unit.

Commentary on Environmental Issues

Whilst the proposed development will inevitably raise a number of planning-related issues, these will not be so significant in environmental terms to warrant classification of the proposal as EIA development. There is no reason why any environmental issues cannot be addressed through the preparation and submission of supporting studies and environmental/technical assessments as part of or following the planning application process.

The EIA Regulations indicate that requests for Screening Opinions should be accompanied by an appropriate level of information to assist the authority in reaching its decision. Such information should include the following and we deal with each of these matters in turn:

- Purpose of Proposed Development;
- Nature of Proposed Development; and
- Consideration of Screening Criteria.
Purpose of Proposed Development

The purpose of the development is to carry out remediation works in potentially four to five areas of the site to remove potential risks to human health and controlled waters and enable the site's use for open storage. Several phases of intrusive site investigation have been completed at the site and detailed design work will commence shortly. Possible sources of contamination include:

1. **Former Process Area.** Comprising the tar and liquor tanks, condensers, washers and other 'wet purification' plant, storage and separation plant.

2. **Gas Holder Bases Nos. 1 - 4.** Four holder bases, each with a diameter of 30 m, are located in the central terraced area of the site. The structures appear to contain significant volumes of demolition rubble with some evidence of tar-related contamination within the fill materials and contained water.

3. **Gas Holder Base No.5.** The base of this holder is 70 m in diameter and located close to the site boundary. The holder dated from the 1800s, but appears to have been removed in the 1950s, with the tank subsequently utilised as a water reservoir. A photograph of the holder base in the 1940s, indicates that the holder comprised at least three lifts.

4. **Diffuse Soil Contamination.** Gas works made ground extends across the site containing ash, clinker, spent oxide and asbestos. Soil contaminants include hydrocarbons, cyanide and heavy metals.

5. **Perched and Shallow Groundwater.** Typical gas works contaminants including PAHs and ammonium are present in the perched and shallow groundwater within the alluvial deposits.

Nature of the Proposed Development

Following a detailed review of recent site investigation works, Sirius (National Grid’s nominated Preferred Contractor) will develop an outline remediation strategy that gives due consideration to:

- the site setting and associated health, safety and environmental considerations;
- the project objectives and constraints;
- the likely extent of contamination at the site and the potential pollutant linkages; and
- National Grid’s operating requirements.

Based on available information and experience, Sirius interpret that the primary risk drivers to both human health and controlled waters will be the presence of potentially volatile and mobile free phase tars. The broad strategy will be the removal of 'gross contamination', and specifically, tar impacted material, across the site. Five potential areas requiring remediation have been identified.
Screening Criteria

Paragraph 32 of Circular 02/99 (EIA) states that the key question for any local planning authority should be whether the development is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

A planning application for the proposed remediation works will be submitted along with various assessments and surveys to address the environmental and technical considerations associated with the works.

Another key issue is whether the site is located in a ‘sensitive area’ as defined in Regulation 2(1)(paragraph 36) of the Circular. Sensitive areas include SSSIs and other designated sites of nature conservation value. The site does not fall within a designated ‘sensitive area’.

A further consideration is whether the development is of more than local significance (ref: paragraph 35 of 02/99). This proposal will serve to regenerate and revitalise this site, whilst also generating wider benefits for Oldham itself. It will however not be of a scale or nature to be considered as being of more than local significance.

A further criterion is whether the development is unusually complex or potentially hazardous. As aforementioned, the site was previously occupied by a number of structures and buildings associated with the former gas works. The remediation of the site will be undertaken using standard industry techniques and will seek to retain and use as much in-situ material where possible.

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations sets out the criteria to be considered as part of any Screening Opinion. These include details of the characteristics of development; the location and the potential impacts of the development.

In terms of the characteristics of the proposal, this is set out in broad terms above, and also illustrated on the enclosed indicative layout plan. Whilst the redevelopment of the site will inevitably raise planning and environmental considerations, we contend that these will not be significant enough to warrant or necessitate an EIA. The site is located within a semi-rural/industrial and commercial context within close proximity to Oldham Town Centre.

Considering the characteristics of the development as set out in Schedule 3 of the Regulations, the size and scale of the development is entirely appropriate and suitable in this location and cannot be described as unduly excessive. The remediation treatment process will be temporary in nature (circa 4 - 5 months) and does not require earthworks operations of a large scale nature due to the relatively small areas requiring treatment.
There are no other recent or proposed developments nearby which would cumulatively raise environmental concerns. The proposal will not consume any valuable natural resources; similarly there will be no significant production of waste, nor any material pollution or nuisance due to the temporary nature and proposed method of remediation treatment.

The development will seek to clean a previously contaminated site, using on site treatment techniques and materials. It is anticipated that most of the contaminated material can be treated and reused on site. A minimal amount of contaminated material will be removed offsite, thereby reducing vehicles movements to those mainly associated with daily operatives and the mobilisation/de-mobilisation of plant and equipment.

Ecology/nature conservation, transport, contamination, hydrology/hydrogeology, flood risk, noise, air quality and amenity issues will be fully considered and addressed as appropriate during the planning application process.

Concerning the location of the development, this cannot be considered ‘sensitive’. As reiterated above, the site must be viewed in its context on the edge of Oldham urban fringe, close to railway lines, industrial / commercial area and in an urban area identified by planning policy as being suitable for redevelopment.

Turning to the potential impacts of the development, we maintain that the environmental impacts of the remediation the site will not be so significant to warrant EIA, but acknowledge that various assessments will need to be undertaken as part of the planning application submission. The site’s semi rural setting and surroundings must be taken into consideration and the type of development proposed. The potential environmental impacts can be summarised as follows:

**Contamination/Geo-environmental Issues**

Details of the various site investigation studies carried out over the site will be reported, which have been used to inform the proposed remediation strategy, together with a summary of the ground conditions and level of contamination. A comprehensive assessment will be provided covering hydrology and the hydrogeological and the potential risks to surrounding receptors, and the proposed mitigation options.

**Surface Water & Groundwater Management & Flood Risk**

Details for surface water management and groundwater treatment during the works will be provided together with a Flood Risk Assessment.
Traffic & Transport related matters

It is anticipated the works will not give rise to a substantial amount of traffic as the majority of material to be remediated will remain on site. It is anticipated that less than 10% of the remediated material will be removed off site. Traffic will be mainly associated with the mobilisation/demobilisation of plant and machinery, and the daily commute of site operatives. A traffic statement to this effect will be provided.

Noise

The site is in a semi rural area, away from notably receptors, and due to the mobile and temporary nature of the operations, it is not expected that the noise impact of the proposal will be of concern, however this will also be assessed during the planning application process, including consideration for mitigation for neighbouring residential uses where appropriate. It is intended that a noise assessment would accompany the planning submission.

Air Quality Management

The site is located in a relatively low sensitive area. There are no residential properties in immediate vicinity of the site. An assessment and strategy for Dust, Particulate Matter and Odour monitoring will be provided as part of the submission documentation.

Ecology/Nature Conservation

Various parts of the site are covered by vegetation which has developed due to the non-operational status of the site. These areas have the potential to provide wildlife habitats, a baseline survey will take the form of a Phase 1 Habitat Survey in line with techniques outlined in the Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 1993). Details for mitigation measures and best practices will be put forward to ensure that the proposed works do not have an adverse ecological impact.

Arboricultural Survey

An assessment of the arboricultural implications of the works, detailing trees to be retained/removed and appropriate protection measures, detailing the means of tree protection, implementation and phasing of works will be provided.

A full planning application for the remediation works will be submitted and accompanied by a Supporting Statement/Design Access Statement, which is likely to cover the following issues:
• Introduction and background to the proposals;
• The site and the surroundings;
• Description of the development proposals;
• Planning policy framework appraisal;
• Environmental/Technical matters to cover the following:
  • Traffic and Highways;
  • Ecology and Nature Conservation (to including Phase 1 Habitat Survey and Arboricultural Survey);
  • Air Quality Assessment (Noise, Dust and Particulate Matter);
  • Ground Contamination & Land Quality Assessment;
  • Hydrology and Hydrogeology, Flood Risk;
• Drawings/Plans.

Conclusion

In summary, this request for a Screening Opinion relates to remediation works that will be undertaken on contaminated areas of land on the former Gas Works site, at Higginshaw Lane, Oldham. We trust that you will consider the scope of works outlined in this letter is sufficient to assess the direction of travel for the planning application.

The proposal does not raise environmental issues of such proportion to warrant an EIA. In conclusion and having regard to all aforementioned factors, we respectfully request the Council’s formal confirmation of its determination on this matter, in the form of a Screening Opinion.

We look forward to hearing from you due course, but in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact us, should you require further information.

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

David Baker

for and on behalf of

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