

<b>Planning Reference No:</b>	10/0872W
<b>Application Address:</b>	Hill Top Farm, Warmingham
<b>Proposal:</b>	Operation of drilling machinery and associated plant between the hours of 18:30 and 07:30 Monday to Friday and 16:00 to 07:30 Saturday and for continuous drilling operations on Sundays
<b>Applicant:</b>	EDF Trading Gas Storage Ltd
<b>Application Type:</b>	Full Mineral
<b>Grid Reference:</b>	369685 360962
<b>Ward:</b>	Cholmondeley
<b>Earliest Determination Date:</b>	
<b>Expiry Dated:</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> May 2010
<b>Date of Officer's Site Visit:</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> March
<b>Date Report Prepared:</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>Constraints:</b>	Wind Turbine

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:**

Continuous drilling recommended to be approved for 9 of the 10 borehole compounds, and refused on compound 4, where existing limited hours of working should be retained.

**MAIN ISSUES:**

Impact of lighting and noise on properties within close proximity to the proposed operations.

## 1. REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application has been referred to the Strategic Planning Board as the proposal would be considered to be a Major Waste application, and under the Council's scheme of delegation should be automatically referred to the Strategic Planning Board for determination.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The site is located 1km west of Warmingham, 3.5km south of Middlewich and 5km north of Crewe.

The site is located on Parkfield and Hill Top farms which are predominantly a mix of pasture and arable land, divided into medium to large fields by hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees, relatively typical of the Cheshire Plain. This area is bounded to the west by the West Coast Railway Line and to the east by the River Wheelock, both of which run from north to south. The topography of the area rises steeply from the River Wheelock and forms a generally flat/slightly undulating plateau. Existing access tracks, brine wellhead infrastructure, gas wellheads, gas processing plant, compounds, car park and offices associated with the existing British Salt brine extraction at Hill Top Farm and the EDFT gas field at Hole House Farm are set within this landscape. Hedgerow improvements and a limited degree of

new planting to help screen the existing brine and gas fields are beginning to become established. Generally the site infrastructure is not obvious from outside the site. Hill Top Farm lies within the site and Park House and Parkfield farms just outside the site boundary. Five public footpaths cross the site, Minshull Vernon FP8 and 13, and Warmingham FP's 4, 7 and 13. Access to the site is taken from the existing access to the brine and gas fields off School Lane, Warmingham next to the Bears Paw Public House.

### **3. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This application, submitted on behalf of Energy de France Trading Gas Storage Ltd (EDFT), seeks to continuously (24 hour hours, 7 days a week) drill boreholes that already have planning permission (7/2008/CCC/15) for day-time working only. The 10 separate borehole drilling compounds comprising the application site, extends to just over 5ha, within the total approved brinefield/gas storage facility that extends to over 100ha. The site is unallocated on the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011.

### **4. RELEVANT HISTORY**

British Salt has operated the Warmingham Brinefield since 1975. They remove salt by solution mining, (water dissolves the salt, producing brine) transporting it by pipeline to their works at Cledford Lane, Middlewich, for processing. Over a dozen completed cavities have been created since works commenced and other cavities are currently being formed by continued extraction under a 1999 permission (Review of Mineral Permission) which lasts until 2042. The cavities have been formed within the salt strata approximately 250m below ground; each cavity is between a quarter and a third of a million cubic metres in size. The integrity of each cavity is maintained as they are filled with saturated brine.

EDFT currently operates the existing Gas Processing Plant at Hole House and stores significant quantities of gas at high pressure in four former brine cavities linked to it under a planning permission granted in 1995 (P/95/350). The four cavities lie on the southern part of the Warmingham Brinefield.

Planning permission (7/2007/CCC/13) was granted to British Salt in October 2008 for the creation of 11 new cavities and conversion of these together with 10 existing cavities to gas storage on the Warmingham Brinefield. The permission also includes a new gas processing plant at Cledford Lane and pipelines linking the two sites, together with a new connection to the national transmission grid.

A further planning permission (7/2008/CCC/15) was granted to EDFT for the conversion of the ten existing cavities referred to above together with associated infrastructure in March 2009. Several schemes and pre-commencement conditions required by the planning permission and

associated Section 106 legal agreement, have now been agreed in advance of works commencing. Agreement between the two companies will now lead to EDFT becoming the developer of the approved gas storage on this site.

Whilst the British Salt permissions enable drilling operations to be carried out around the clock, the EDFT permission has limited hours of working as stipulated within their planning application.

## **5. POLICIES**

### **Regional Spatial Strategy**

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which replaces Regional Planning Guidance for the North West was adopted in September 2008. The RSS provides a framework for development and investment in the region for the next 15 to 20 years, together with a broad vision for the region that builds on National Policy Statements, Circulars and White Papers. Whilst the strategy should be read in its totality, the following policies are of relevance, DP1 Spatial Principles, DP4 Make the Best Use of Existing Resources and Infrastructure, DP7 Promote Environmental Quality, RDF2 Rural Areas and EM1 Integrated Enhancement and Protection of the Region's Environmental Assets.

### **Local Plan Policy**

The Cheshire Replacement Minerals Local Plan makes no provision for gas storage although the need to develop policies has been identified in the consultation paper for the Minerals Development Framework (Minerals Issues and Options Paper 2007). Policies 9 and 12 of the Plan relate to residential amenity and hours of working.

The Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan is in conformity with and builds on to the other plans. It sets out local policies for the period up to 2011. Of particular relevance are policies NE2 Open Countryside, NE17 Pollution Control, BE21 Hazardous Installations and E6 Employment Development Within Open Countryside.

### **Other Material Considerations**

Applications for planning permission should be determined in line with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

## **6. CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

**Environmental Health:** The Environmental protection Officer has concerns relating to the impact the nearest of the boreholes would have on Hill Top Farm, see section on noise.

**Public Rights of Way:** No objection subject to normal conditions protecting PRoW.

## **7. VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL**

Warmingham Parish Council have no objection to the proposal but consider the operations should be monitored to ensure noise levels do not exceed predicted levels and the company should establish a phone 'hotline' in case complaints arise. They also wish to see existing traffic movement conditions maintained.

## **8. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:**

The occupier of Hill Top Farm, the closest property to the site has written stating she has no objection to the proposed change of working hours subject to the use of straw bales to help screen activity.

## **9. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION:**

Planning Statement dated March 2010, including site and planning history, a technical justification for the proposal and assessment of environmental impacts.

Assessment of Operational Noise Impacts dated February 2010.

## **10. OFFICER APPRAISAL**

### **Principle of Development**

The principle of utilising brine cavities for the storage of high pressure gas has been established by a number of planning permissions issued since 1995, the last and most relevant being 7/2008/CCC/15 granted in March 2009. The use of the site is supported by planning policy and also Government Energy Policy as gas storage will aid energy security. In determining the existing permission (7/2008/CCC/15), which was supported by a full Environmental Impact Assessment, consideration was given to the impact the development would have on all material matters such as flood risk (PPS25), and ecology and appropriate conditions were applied to the permission. As the current proposal seeks only to amend working hours on the drilling operations already approved, it is considered the impacts of such will be limited to temporary noise and lighting disturbance, further consideration therefore has not been given to those other issues that remain unaffected.

### **Hours of Drilling and justification**

In accordance with existing permissions ten existing brine cavities are being converted to gas storage. In order to convert the cavities a second borehole needs to be drilled into the cavity through which pressurised gas will be introduced thereby displacing the existing brine contained therein. The existing brine is forced up the existing borehole, to then be fed by existing pipeline to the British Salt Cledford Works. The rate of this de-brining exercise is restricted by the ability of the

Cledford Works to process the brine and it is estimated it will take 5 years to completely replace all of the brine with gas. The current permission (7/2008/CCC/15) only sought drilling operations during a standard working day, the permission therefore was granted on this basis, however, on reflection the operators now consider it necessary to complete the drilling operations utilising equipment round the clock. They indicate correctly that other permissions for drilling on the site have no limit on hours of working.

The applicants consider that working round the clock would half the time needed to complete each borehole, reducing overall disruption at each of the ten compounds to just a month each. Continuous drilling would also be more accurate than a process that involved stopping and starting the operation.

Since this application was submitted drilling has started on the site with the operator complying with the existing hours of working. Two of the boreholes have in fact now been completed and two others are under development.

### **Lighting**

The existing permission already has a condition controlling any likely nuisance from lighting of operational areas. Each compound will require a minimum of illumination to enable working in the dark. The use of down and inward directed lights would limit any disturbance. Activity would be temporary and in view of the limited number of receptors it is considered the operation proposed is acceptable subject to conditions.

### **Noise**

The application is supported by a noise assessment which indicates that with the exception of Hill Top Farm all other receptors are below the required criteria for the most sensitive period, i.e., night-time, which is established at LAeq 1 hour 42dB. Three of the drill locations would produce night-time noise levels at Hill Top Farm at or near the criteria level. These levels can be mitigated by using a barrier such as straw bales next to the drilling rig. This has been used on this site previously with some success. However, the nearest compound to Hill Top Farm, number 4, which is within 186 metres, exceeds the criteria and in the view of the Council's Environmental Protection Officer, could not be made acceptable even with mitigation. In view of the temporary nature of the operations and likely effectiveness of the mitigation it is recommended that 24 hour drilling is acceptable for the proposed compounds with the exception of number 4 and that this remains conditioned to limited hours.

It should be borne in mind that the occupier of Hill Top Farm, who has recent experience of drilling in close proximity to her house, carried out by British Salt, has written stating she has no objection to the present proposal subject to the use of straw bales.

## **11. CONCLUSIONS**

The existing planning permission to convert 10 brine caverns at Hole House and Hill Top Farms, Warmingham, to gas storage, limits the hours of drilling to standard day-time operations, in accordance with submitted detail. On reflection the operators EDF Trading Gas Storage Ltd, now wish to drill on a continuous basis and bring current operations to the same level of control as previous permissions, which have accepted continuous drilling. The applicant considers continuous drilling would result in a more accurate and efficient operation which would reduce almost by a half the time period needed to drill each of the required boreholes.

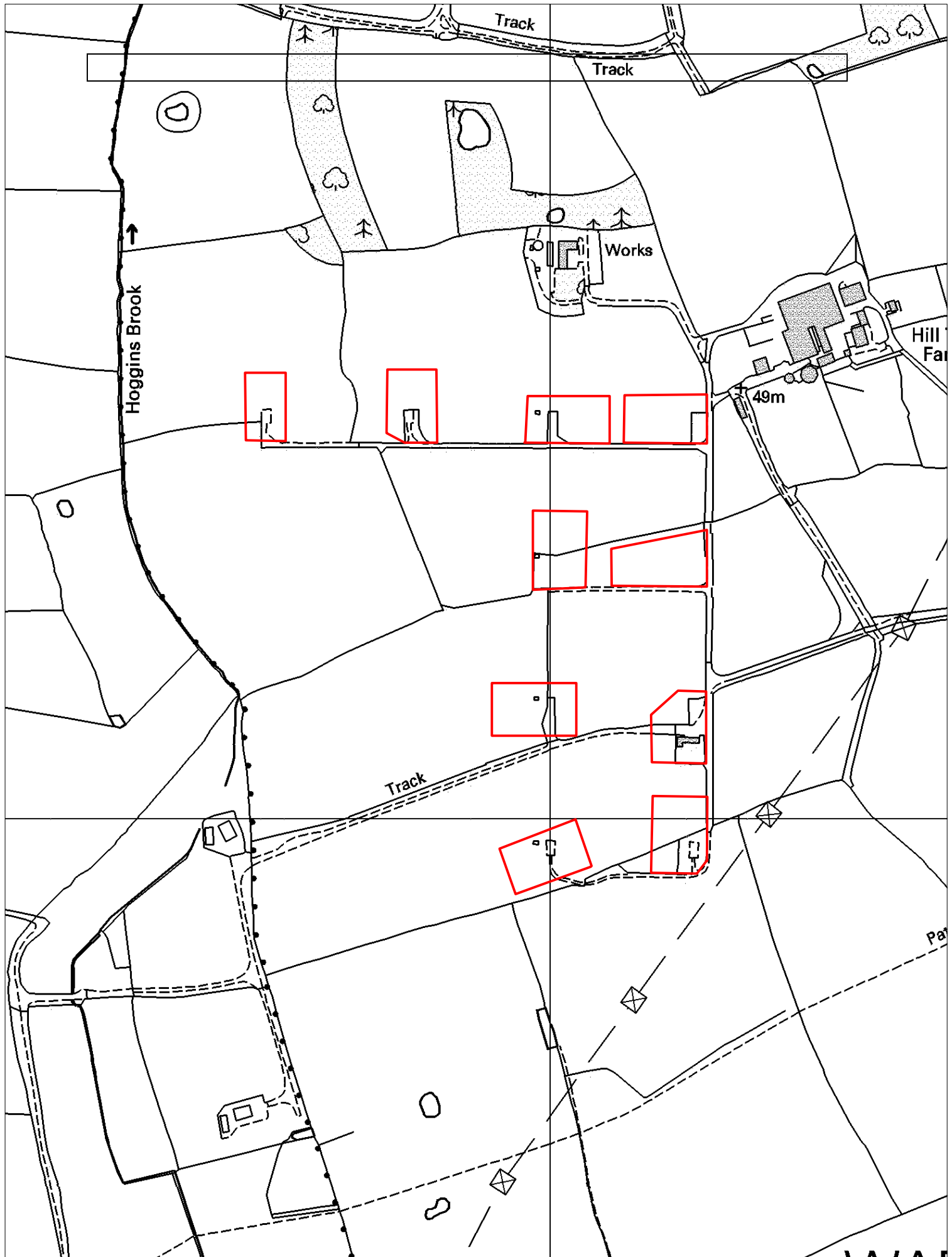
The area surrounding the brine and gas field is a rural one, however, farm units are in close proximity to the site and likely to be effected by night-time drilling in terms of lighting and noise. Existing lighting conditions can be duplicated to ensure a minimum and acceptable impact during the temporary nature of the operation; each borehole is anticipated to take just less than a month. It is considered that mitigation measures could be applied to ensure noise falls within acceptable limits for properties on nine of the ten borehole sites. It is therefore considered the continuous drilling applied for could be accepted on nine borehole sites, but rejected on compound 4, where existing limited hours of working would continue.

## **12. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**APPROVE subject to the following conditions:-**

- 1. Standard time**
- 2. In accordance with submitted plans and conditions attached to 7/2008/CCC/15**
- 3. Use of straw bale barrier to reduce noise**
- 4. Subject to maximum night-time noise level of LAeq 1 hour 42db**
- 5. Lighting to be subject to approved scheme**
- 6. Compound 4 drilling to be limited to between the hours of 0730 to 1800.**

<p><b>LOCATION PLAN:</b> <b>740-05-05 Noise sensitive receptors</b> <b>740-05-04 Location/statutory Plan</b></p>
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**HILL TOP FARM, WARMINGHAM ROAD, WARMINGHAM, CREWE, CW11 3QN**  
**NGR- 369,960:361,210**

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