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<b>Plaxtol</b>	<b>561053 153111</b>	<b>21 August 2008</b>	<b>TM/08/02700/EL</b>
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Proposal:	Proposed reconductoring and refurbishment of overhead lines within the Parishes of West Peckham, Hadlow, Plaxtol and Ightham.
Location:	Land Between Ivy Hatch Plaxtol And West Peckham Including Long Mill Lane Dunks Green Tonbridge Kent
Applicant:	EDF

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**1. Description:**

- 1.1 The proposed work entails replacing the existing bare wires with insulated conductors that are proposed to be strung along the same route as the existing overhead lines.
- 1.2 The lines affected by this work are not the low voltage lines that feed individual properties and follow the route of the local highway network; but the 11,000 volt lines that run across the countryside to feed the lower voltage lines. Typically, these cables are strung in pairs, side by side rather than one above the other. Where single phase wires would be replaced, they would be upgraded with an additional (third) wire. The application information also states that where necessary existing poles and fittings would be replaced with new ones to conform to safety standards.
- 1.3 The applicant has also stated that the proposed work would reduce the need for regular tree cutting and reduce the likelihood of transient faults caused by wind borne materials.

**2. Reason for reporting to Committee:**

- 2.1 Two of the local Members requested that this application be reported to Committee.

**3. The Site:**

- 3.1 The site covers a wide geographical area between West Peckham and Ivy Hatch. Some of the replacement electricity lines would be located within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Two small sections of the electricity lines affected by this proposal are located within the West Peckham and Roughway Conservation Areas.

**4. Planning History:**

- 4.1 None relevant to the application.

## **5. Consultees:**

### 5.1 PCs:

Ightham: 27.09.08: We believe that EDF should take this opportunity of major capital expenditure to put the lines concerned underground. This would:

- a) avoid interruption to supplies by the impact of high winds
- b) end the need for extensive (and often visually unattractive) tree cutting,
- c) enhance the appearance of these areas of landscaping in the AONB or Green Belt

Hadlow: 27.09.08: Agreed

Plaxtol: 27.09.08: No Objection. Wherever possible please can cables be laid underground?

West Peckham: 27.09.08: No objection as long as using existing support system

### 5.2 Private Reps (including publication in the local press and by site notices) 10.10.08: 332: 5/0X/0S/5R. The reasons for the objections are as follows:

- The existing lines and poles fail to maintain the natural beauty of the countryside and character of the Conservation Area.
- The replacement lines should be placed underground to enhance the character of this sensitive rural area.
- Overhead lines require regular tree cutting for many years.
- The application is not sufficiently detailed to understand the full implications of the proposed works.

## **6. Determining Issues:**

6.1 This is not a conventional planning application and the Borough Council is not the determining Authority. In this case the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform will determine the application.

6.2 The Borough Council is required to complete a standardised form, in which the only choice that the Council has to either object or not object to the proposed work. The Council also has to state whether it requests a public enquiry be held before the Secretary of State determines the application.

6.3 The main issue relates to the visual impact of the proposed works upon the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas and the AONB.

- 6.4 The proposal would replace the existing overhead electricity wires with modern compact conductors that are covered. A compact covered conductor is one where the strands of the wires have been compressed together to reduce the gaps between the individual strands and, as such, has a smaller diameter than other types of conductor.
- 6.5 The proposed replacement cables would have a similar appearance as the existing ones and be located in the same position. It should also be noted that the electricity cables that are affected by this proposal are mainly located across open fields rather than along rural road frontages lined with mature hedgerows or rows of trees where lower voltage electricity lines are located. As such, any tree cutting that would need to occur would not be as significant or visually prominent as where it is required to protect lower voltage lines that run along road frontages.
- 6.6 It has been stated that existing poles would be replaced where necessary to meet current safety standards. Whilst precise details of the replacement poles has not been submitted, previous experience has shown that they would be of a similar size, form and material as the ones they would replace. The poles that were seen during a visit of the area affected by this proposal were of timber construction.
- 6.7 I agree with Ightham PC that benefits would be gained by putting some of the cables underground. However I do not consider that the proposed development would cause demonstrable harm to the character or appearance of the Conservation Areas or the natural beauty of the AONB given the provision of the existing over ground electricity infrastructure in this area. Undergrounding while desirable, is not, in my view demonstrably a necessity justifying an objection being lodged.
- 6.8 In light of the above I would recommend that no objection be raised to the development, but would also recommend that the applicant be informed that the Borough Council would strongly recommend that the cables be placed underground wherever possible.

## **7. Recommendation:**

- 7.1 **No Objection Be Raised**, in accordance with the following submitted details:  
Letter dated 21.08.2008, Location Plan dated 21.08.2008,

## **Informative**

1. The Borough Council would urge the applicant to underground as many of the proposed replacement cables as possible in order to reduce the impact of overhead electricity cables and their associated support structures upon the character of the locality.

Contact: Matthew Broome