

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

Committee	Full Planning Committee - 18/11/2014	Item No: 5.5
Report Originator	Steve King Development Officer	Application No: KET/2014/0538
Wards Affected	Queen Eleanor and Buccleuch	
Location	Home Farm, Duck End, Cranford	
Proposal	Full Application: Installation of a 500kW silage fed anaerobic digester	
Applicant	Cranford AD Ltd	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To describe the above proposals
- To identify and report on the issues arising from it
- To state a recommendation on the application

2. RECOMMENDATION

THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL MANAGER RECOMMENDS that this application be APPROVED subject to the following Condition(s):-

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this planning permission.

REASON: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and to prevent an accumulation of unimplemented planning permissions.

2. The anaerobic digester facility hereby permitted shall be run on 100% maize or wheat farm crop only, that is grown on the surrounding farm holding known as the Cranford Estate, and shall not use any other material, or material grown elsewhere beyond the confines of the Estate.

REASON: To prevent odour pollution in the interests of residential amenity in accordance with Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

3. Prior to the commencement of use of the development hereby permitted, an odour management plan shall be submitted to, and approved by the local planning authority. This plan shall identify the points in the process that may generate odour and what steps will be taken to prevent this odour affecting the amenity of residents. The plan should include the storage of feedstock and waste products, as well as the process itself, the liquid digestate lagoon, the run off lagoon serving the feedstock storage area, and any plans for maintenance periods or unforeseen circumstances such as breakdowns. Following approval of this odour management plan, the approved plan shall be implemented, and any changes only made with the prior approval of the local planning authority.

REASON: To prevent odour pollution in the interests of residential amenity in

accordance with Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

4. Prior to the commencement of the use of the development hereby permitted, all new plant and equipment associated with the operation of the anaerobic digestion plant, shall be acoustically treated, in accordance with a scheme that shall be first submitted to, and approved by the local planning authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented prior to the commencement of use of the development hereby permitted, and shall ensure that the background noise level at the boundary of the site or the nearest noise sensitive dwelling is not exceeded. Any particular tonal or intermittent characteristics should be taken into account.

REASON: To prevent noise nuisance in the interests of residential amenity in accordance with Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

5. No development shall commence on site until details of the types and colours of all external facing materials, and external finishes, to be used have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall not be carried out other than in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of the visual amenities of the area in accordance with Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

6. No development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping which shall specify species, planting sizes, spacing and numbers of trees and shrubs to be planted. The approved scheme shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the commencement of the development hereby permitted. Any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the date of planting, die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

Officers Report for KET/2014/0538

This application is reported for Committee decision because there are unresolved, material objections to the proposal.

3.0 Information

Relevant Planning History

KR/73/81-Additional farm buildings

KR/83/428-Light industrial workshop-Approved 13/07/83

KE/89/0715-Erection of gantry crane-Approved 31/08/89

KET/2012/0620-Anaerobic digestion plant with associated access and landscaping-Approved 13/02/2013

Site Description

Officer's site inspection was carried out on 24/10/2014

The application site is part of the working farm known as Home Farm, Cranford, which is accessed by a private track from Duck End at Cranford St Andrew. Home Farm itself is a grouping of farm related buildings and structures, and associated yard and farmyard parking. The buildings, etc are of different types and ages reflecting the evolution of the farm, and the most recent addition is the anaerobic digestion plant granted permission in 2013.

The proposed development the subject of this current application, is to be erected on agricultural land adjoining the farm yard, and close to the existing anaerobic digestion plant and its ancillary structures.

Home Farm is well separated, physically and visually, from the main core of the village, and scattered properties to the east on Duck End are screened by the high, dense trees of Sandy Spinney.

Proposed Development

The application seeks full planning permission for the installation of a 500kW silage fed anaerobic digester plant which will involve the construction of one large cylindrical digester tank (height 6.3m) topped by a fermenter dome (giving a combined max height 12.75m), a small digester dosing feeder building(height 3m), and a related Multimix building(height 4.4m), a digestate storage tank(height 6.8m), an emergency flare stack(height 7m),two containers(height 2.9m) housing a control and pump unit and housing an engine unit, plus supporting plant ,together with a roadway, running around the new facility.

For clarity as to the nature of the proposed scheme, anaerobic digestion (AD) is the breakdown of biodegradable organic material by microorganisms in the absence of air. By controlling the process two useful products are obtained: biogas (which can be combusted directly to produce electricity and heat), and residual digestate (which is a nutrient- rich fertiliser).

The new digester facility will make use of the existing silage clamps and digestate lagoon, which are already in place and being used as part of the existing anaerobic digester facility previously granted planning permission.

A Design and Access Statement with Planning Policy Statement has been submitted with the application which makes the following summarised points:-

-The project is being developed as an extension to a farm diversification enterprise to produce renewable energy and bio-fertiliser from crops grown on the farm.

-Maize silage and whole crop wheat silage will be the main feedstocks used in the plant. These feedstocks will be converted into biogas and fertiliser by anaerobic digestion, a natural biological process carried out by naturally occurring microbes.

-Biogas (approx 55% methane and 45% carbon dioxide) is a source of renewable energy, making a contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. At Home Farm the biogas will be used to fuel a single combined heat and power unit which will produce electricity mainly to be exported to the grid, with only a fraction being used to run the machinery, and high temperature hot water(some of which will be used to keep the anaerobic digester at an elevated temperature, with the rest being available to extend the district heating system that uses heat from the existing anaerobic digester in order that more village properties can be heated using a renewable heat source.

-The core of the process is a steel, clad, circular digester 26.87 m in diameter and 6.3m high. . Biogas is captured from the digestion tanks and is stored in a double-membrane gas holder taking the shape of a dome which forms the roof of the digester. The dome roof is termed a fermenter and will be externally coloured green. The height of the dome roof will extend to a maximum of 6.45m above the level of the digester. The maximum height of the digester and its dome roof, will therefore be 12.75m.

-Maize and wheat silage will be fed into the digester via a feeding mechanism, and silage will be produced on site in the existing silage clamps from wheat and maize grown on the neighbouring farmland.

-Digestate is discharged from the digester in two forms-a fibre fraction and a liquid fraction, both of which can be used as an organic fertiliser on the local farmland to replace the use of fossil fuel-derived , inorganic fertilisers. The liquid fraction is stored in a tank that is 3.78m high which can store a weeks worth of liquid digestate before transferring it to the existing open lagoon in case of pump failure.

-From the dome, the biogas is piped to a combined heat and power

(CHP) unit and to a standby biogas burner, which are housed in a process building. The CHP unit is enclosed in a sound-attenuated cabinet to minimise noise levels.

-Some of the electricity produced by the CHP unit (approx 7%) is used by the digester processes. The majority of the electricity will be exported to the local grid and used by local residents and agricultural processes.

-The heat from the CHP unit is connected to a hot water header. From this header, some of the available heat (approx 10%) is used to maintain the digester at optimum working temperature, and the excess heat will be used to provide heat for an extension to the district heating system to heat properties in Cranford.

-In terms of national planning policy, a key objective of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is to support the UK's transition to a low carbon economy, including through the development of renewable energy schemes. The Framework in particular promotes the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses. The Framework specifically provides that renewable energy applications should be approved if any impacts are, or can be made, acceptable.

-In terms of local planning policy, this is supportive of the proposal.

-The 2009 UK Renewable Energy Strategy includes recognition that anaerobic digestion is a key provider in achieving stated goals, indicating the local planning authorities have a role to play in ensuring that the UK meets its target for renewable energy. Support for such projects is also given in the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan and in DEFRA's Climate Change plan.

-In terms of a Planning and Development Appraisal of the scheme, it is pointed out that:

...the NPPF lends significant support to appropriate renewable energy development schemes, providing that any impacts are, or can be made, acceptable

...the proposed AD plant represents sustainable development involving the development and diversification of a rural farm business. This will involve the production of renewable energy, and the production of a nutrient rich organic fertiliser, and the digestate, which will also work as an effective soil conditioner and improver

...the proposed AD plant will result in a number of economic and social benefits, and will be operated by the applicant and will help support his livelihood and those of his employees for a minimum of 20 years ensuring the longevity of the business as a source of local employment

...the scheme will help support the energy requirements of local

households and businesses

...the scheme is not anticipated to give rise to any unacceptably adverse impact on local residential amenity or the quality and character of the surrounding landscape...the scale of the proposal is appropriate for the setting and the plant will be agricultural in appearance, linked to the agricultural activity at Home Farm, and thereby an extension of farming operations as opposed to isolated development in the countryside

...this farm diversification project will utilise products from the holding on which the plant is sited, and will help to meet local, regional national and international objectives on renewable energy provision and the reduction of CO2 emissions, all assisting to minimise the impacts of climate change

...the plant will process 14,800 tonnes of digester feedstock a year and will produce more than 3,600 MWh of electricity per year, enough to power over 1,200 homes, and will produce 4,200 MWh of heat per year

...since the facility will be run on wheat and maize silage, no food waste is used in the process and therefore little or no hydrogen sulphide will be produced resulting in little or no odour. The biogas produced, mainly methane, is burnt in the engine so there are minimal emissions from there and hence little or no odour

...the proposed siting will minimise its visual impact and will be perceived as a natural development of the farm

...the site is well screened from all public vantage points by buildings, mature trees and mature hedgerows

An Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication report undertaken by specialist firm, Pre-Develop Archaeology, has been commissioned by the applicant, and has been submitted to inform the impact of the scheme upon any archaeological remains.

Following the period of public consultation on the application, the applicant has noted that various concerns have been raised by local residents regarding the nature and impact of the scheme. In an effort to address these concerns, the applicant's agent has submitted an 8 page Supplementary Report, explaining the operation of the proposal, the containment of the process and pollution prevention, the choice of location, local opportunities and conclusion. This Supplementary Report contains an Appendix 1 which gives a Visual appraisal of the scheme via view point photographs, and an Appendix 2 which is a Ecological Report undertaken by Rebecca Barrett, an ecologist, following an

ecological walkover survey of the site.

The Supplementary Report has been placed on the Borough Councils website and its contents are available for inspection.

In terms of the concern of the Parish Council regarding the importation of material to feed the new facility, the Supplementary Report, includes the following statements:-

.....The AD plant will be fed (as it currently is) from crop grown solely on the farm.....the extent of fuel required to support the new AD can be easily provided from the existing farming unit. The current 125Kw AD unit consumes about 8 tonnes of crop per day which is derived from 100 acres of the estate. The new plant will consume about 18 tonnes per day via 350 acres of crop from the estate. The entire land holding comprises 1,200 acres. The AD unit is therefore consuming a fraction of the crop grown in the estate.....There is clearly no reason why the estate would need to bring in crop to feed the digester, indeed it would not be economic to do so.....

Any Constraints Affecting The Site

Cranford Conservation Area

Two listed buildings and curtilages nearby

4.0 Consultation and Customer Impact

Cranford Parish Council

One letter was received from the Parish Council conforming that they resolved to object to the application for the following reasons:-

- Bad odours from the current plant and lagoon
- The Council has calculated that there is insufficient material from the farm to cope with the additional plant. This means stock will have to be brought onto site from other contractors
- The extra noise from the additional plant will make for disturbance to local residents
- The current lagoon storage has bad smells when disturbed and the additional plant will only exacerbate the problem

A further e-mail communication was received from the Parish Council, stating that following their meeting on 8th October 2014, the Council resolved to continue its objection to the application for a further anaerobic digester at Home Farm, Cranford, and that Councillors were concerned that there was still no security fence around the lagoon/slurry pit. Bearing in mind that many accidents on farms involve slurry pits, Councillors were disturbed at this lack of action, especially since a recent running event passed alongside it. Several competitors noticed a leakage of liquid into a ditch. On occasions the bad smell has affected local residents.

Highway Authority

On the basis that the proposed facility will be using crops grown on the applicants farm, no objections are raised.

Northamptonshire County Council Archaeology

The County Archaeologist is satisfied that all necessary fieldwork has been completed as evidenced by the report undertaken by Pre-Develop Archaeology and her further comments on the contents of that report are anticipated, and should be available by the date of the meeting.

Northamptonshire County Council Waste Planning Authority

Do not wish to offer comments as the proposal relates to crop grown on the farm estate, rather than imported material.

Kettering Borough Council Environmental Health Service

The proposals do have the potential to impact on the community as a result of odour from the process, and noise from the machinery/plant....However this said...the impact of the proposals can be limited through conditions including a requirement to submit an odour management plan, and an acoustic treatment scheme, and to limit the feedstock material, to that grown on the estate.

In terms of the potential issue of odour, it is noted that the applicant is clearly stating that only maize or wheat will be used in the proposed bio-digester....if food waste or other feedstock is used there is a high likelihood of odour in the area. I would recommend that a condition be imposed only permitting the use of maize or wheat, as the feedstock for the plant, and a condition requiring an odour management plan, to be submitted to, and approved by the local authority, prior to the commencement of use of the new plant. This plan should identify the points in the process that may generate odour and what steps will be taken to prevent this odour affecting the amenity of residents. The plan should include the storage of feedstock and waste products, as well as the process itself, the liquid digestate storage lagoon, the run off lagoon serving the feedstock storage area, and any plans for maintenance periods or unforeseen circumstances such as breakdowns. Following approval of this odour management plan, the plan shall be implemented, and any changes only made with the prior approval of the local planning authority. Such a condition is recommended in order to protect residential amenity.

In terms of the potential issue of noise from the new facility, it is noted that the plant/equipment will generate noise and depending on the nature of the noise, its frequency and duration, it may impact on the amenity of residents. There are options to reduce the noise, and a condition is recommended requiring that before the new use commences, all plant and equipment associated with the proposed bio-digester, shall be acoustically treated to a scheme submitted to, and approved by the local planning authority. The scheme shall ensure that the background noise level at the boundary of the site or the nearest noise sensitive dwelling, is not exceeded. Any tonal or intermittent

characteristics should be taken into account. Such a condition is recommended in order to protect the amenity of residents.

In terms of the potential issue of noise from transport, it is noted that residents had concerns over vehicle movements through the village. The applicant indicated that he would be utilising a rotation system whereby different access points into the farm would be used season to season. If possible, this should be conditioned to minimise the impact on the village. In addition, concerns were raised about the possible importation of maize to feed the bio-digester and the resulting traffic movements. The applicant confirmed that only maize or wheat sourced on his land would be used and if possible, this should be conditioned to minimise the impact on the community. Such conditions are recommended in order to protect residential amenity.

In addition to these comments, Environmental Health have also stated that neither Environmental Health, nor the Environment Agency, have to date received any complaints about the existing bio-digester plant with regard to noise or odour.

English Heritage

Advise that they do not wish to offer any comments on this occasion, and recommend that the application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice

Environment Agency

The Agency have pointed out that this new proposal is for an energy crop AD plant which as it is not waste, is not currently within the remit of the EA. The AD plant will not require an environmental permit or exemption for either the operation of the plant or the beneficial use of the digestate produced. There has been a very recent visit to the site by the Land and Water team of the EA, and they have commented that they have no concerns with how the existing AD is being run. They point out that the EA has not received any formal complaints about bad odours or other pollution from this site. The EA conclude by stating that as the proposed new energy crop AD does not use waste, they have no comments on this latest application.

Neighbours and Local Residents

16 representations listing various objections and concerns giving the following summarised reasons:

- Adverse, negative impacts on the amenity of people living and walking in village, and will deter visitors, and given these impacts this low carbon energy project is not in line with Govt policy
- Concern over odour nuisance and pollution, given that there are already existing smell problems from existing AD facility(and other sites such as from the landfill site on the other side of the A14), affecting Cranford, and concern that the existing facility has not always worked properly

- Likely noise nuisance problems given that there are already such problems from the existing AD facility
- Inappropriate industrial development in a rural area, which is transforming traditional farm estate to commercial enterprise with resultant change in long standing rural character
- Another significant, non-residential use threatening this small, residential community, which is being surrounded by a variety of major new developments
- Scheme too close to existing residents
- Excessive size and scale which will be out of proportion and will dominate surroundings, and will have adverse visual impact
- Conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework since the scheme does not protect and enhance the natural environment
- Adverse impact on the Conservation Area will result from this large, inappropriate development.
- Inappropriate location and facility should be resited away from the village, to the north in open countryside
- Proposal is not an example of sustainable development on any of the three main considerations-economic, social and environmental
- Hazardous substances given that there are wastes that are toxic to anaerobic digesters, and given that methane in the biogas while not toxic, is extremely flammable and may form explosive mixtures with air, and can be violently reactive with certain compounds, and can be an asphyxiant which can displace oxygen in an enclosed space; generation of undesirable, foul smelling hydrogen sulphide which is toxic and flammable, and a broad spectrum poison; in connection with the digestate, levels of potentially toxic elements should be chemically assessed; wastewater exiting the facility has the ability to pollute the watercourse system causing negative effects; doubts of the morality and security of supply as removing food from the food chain is wrong and likely importation of feedstock from outside the village, and conflict with Govt policy regarding anaerobic digesters
- Additional traffic, including HGVs will be generated on a local highway network with inadequate and unsuitable roads
- Lack of clarity as to where the bio-product will be sourced, and doubts over viability and capacity of the new facility, and the logistics of how it will be supplied
- Concern that the new facility will lead to the shipping in of waste
- Scheme will not help the local community, but only estate properties
- Highway hazards and adverse transport impacts including damage and debris to road surfaces
- Likely environmental damage and pollution, including potential dangers from leakage into ground and local water courses
- The existing digestate lagoon is unfenced and remains a danger to wildlife, children and pets, and landscaping is not of high standard
- No need for scheme and opposed to this type of development which is financed by subsidies etc

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11 representations, some of which are from residents of Kettering and other locations beyond Cranford itself, listing support for the scheme

giving the following summarised reasons:

- Beneficial use of land in growing feedstock, rather than growing wheat, of which there is a structural surplus
- Welcome farm diversification and help to farm based employment and economy
- Support for green, renewable energy scheme, which will help address global warming
- Scheme could help provide heating to local housing

5.0 Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

Policy 3-Supporting a prosperous rural economy

Policy 10-Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Policy 12- Heritage, Conservation and Archaeology

Development Plan Policies

North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy

Objective 1-Green Living

Paragraph 3.91-Employment

Policy 5-Green Infrastructure

Policy 9- Distribution and location of Development

Policy 13-General Sustainable Development Principles

Policy 14-Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Construction

Local Plan

Policy 7-Protection of the Open Countryside

Emerging Policies

North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031-Draft Pre-Submission Plan(November 2014)

Draft Policy 25-Rural Economic Development and Diversification

Draft Policy 26-Renewable and low carbon energy

Site Specific Proposals Local Development Document-Options Paper (March 2012)

Draft Policy 10-Agricultural Diversification

Supplementary Planning Documents

North Northamptonshire Biodiversity SPD

Other

Cranford Conservation Area Appraisal

6.0 Financial/Resource Implications

None

7.0 Planning Considerations

The key issues for consideration in this application are:-

1. Principle of Development
2. Impact on Character, Conservation Area and Listed Buildings
3. Impact on Amenity and Environment, and Environmental Health considerations
4. Highways aspects and transport implications
5. Ecological impacts

1. Principle of Development

The site falls outside of the Village Boundary for Cranford and therefore lies within an open countryside area. Saved Local Plan Policy 7 states that planning permission for development within the open countryside will not be granted except where otherwise provided for in this plan, thereby seeking to strictly control development in the open countryside in order to protect its rural character from inappropriate development. However, given that the character of the site is of an existing agricultural holding and the land already functions as part of the working farm where an established farmyard contains numerous buildings, the site is not isolated land in the open countryside, which Policy 7 seeks to protect, and it located close to the settlement boundary.

There is a very strong policy directive (which supersedes the 1995 Local Plan). to support farms and farm diversification, and to support proposals for sustainable means of energy generation.

Paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear that at the heart of the policy framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means that development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay. Paragraphs 18 and 19 of the NPPF further underline the Governments objective to foster sustainable economic growth and stipulate that planning must encourage, rather than impede, such growth. The scheme would help support and diversify a working rural agricultural enterprise and associated estate and therefore is considered as acceptable economic development.

Objective 1 of the CSS promotes renewable energy and green technologies whilst Policy 14 requires the highest viable standards of resource and energy efficiency and reduction in carbon emissions. Paragraph 17 of the NPPF is clear that one of the core planning principles of the NPPF is to encourage the development of renewable energy. Paragraph 93 is clear that planning must support the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy. Paragraph 98 states that when determining planning applications for renewable energy generation, local planning authorities should :

.not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for ...renewable or low carbon energy;

.recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting ...greenhouse gas emissions ,and
.approve the application if its impacts are(or can be made) acceptable

Policy 3 of the NPPF promotes the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Paragraph 28 of the NPPF is clear that planning should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. Paragraph 3.91 of the CSS states that diversification of the rural economy will be supported.

While only limited weight can be given to emerging policies included within emerging documents, it is also important to note that the proposal is in accordance with emerging North Northamptonshire policy(the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031 Draft Pre-Submission Plan),and local policy (Site Specific Proposals Local Development Document)-Options Paper(March 2012). Draft Policy 10 of the latter document sets out a policy which encourages farm diversification where certain criteria are met, which includes environmental enterprises. The draft Policy 25 of the former document provides a more positive approach to the rural economy than the current CSS Policy 9, recognising the economic potential in rural areas as highlighted in Paragraph 28 of the NPPF. The former document states that in terms of Rural Economic Development and Diversification, renewable energy schemes are one of the listed priorities for the rural area, and at Policy 26 of the document a Renewable and low carbon energy policy is included, giving support subject to a range of criteria.

In summary, it is considered that the close association of the land with an existing working farm, and the existing Home Farm farmyard, which already contains an existing anaerobic digester facility, when combined with the significant policy support for economic development, farm diversification, sustainable rural enterprise, and renewable energy generation, indicate in favour of the proposal. The scheme is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle, in accordance with Policies 3 and 10 of the NPPF, and Policy 14 of the CSS.

2. Impact on Character, Conservation Area and Listed Buildings

The legislation requires local planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of Conservation areas and Listed Buildings. Policy 12 of the NPPF sets out requirements for proposals which would involve the harm or loss of Heritage Assets or detriment to a Conservation area. CSS Policy 13(o) requires new development to conserve and enhance landscape character and the historic landscape.

The Cranford Conservation Area Appraisal document notes that Home Farm is the one remaining working farm within the Conservation Area. This proposal does involve new built form, but it is also a scheme that will diversify and give support to the ongoing operation of the farm,

including ensuring a large acreage will be given over, to continued agricultural cultivation, and can be viewed positively in this respect.

The prevailing character of the site and its immediate surroundings, is of a modern operational farm and its farmyard, with numerous functional and working buildings and structures, which support the day to day farming practices. As a reflection of how the farm has continued to operate and develop over the years, these features are a variety of ages and sizes and include traditional stone barn buildings, and modern round topped, large, open Dutch barn buildings, sizeable storage tanks, and a large farmyard parking area, which accommodates the various vehicles and machinery associated with modern farming practice. Alongside this farmyard is the existing AD plant and the large silage clamp structure. The proposed new AD facility is functional and an example of up to date, new technology, and can be regarded as part of a continuing evolution of Home Farm. The farmyard complex contains some buildings that are of large scale. In these terms it can be argued that the scheme is not incongruous to the context of the farms overall character. Whilst the new digester with its fermenter roof is sizeable in scale, it will be located close to an existing black coloured round topped barn which extends to some 10m in height , (compared to the 12.75m height of the new digester), and both are similar in terms of their effective floorspace. In terms of land take associated with the new facility, it is relatively small, when viewed against the wider cultivated farmland to the north, which makes the largest contribution to the rural character of the area. It is considered that the proposal would not unacceptably impinge on the open rural character of these fields or detract from the general landscape character and wider agricultural setting of the farm and the Conservation Area. The site is particularly well screened from the east by high, mature and dense trees, and the imposition of a landscaping condition requiring new planting, will help to provide further screening to be carried out, as part of this new development. It is not considered that the currently proposed location, would be to the detriment of this Conservation Area.

The historic listed buildings lie south–west of the proposed site for the new AD facility, at a distance of approx 120m. The proposal will be separated from these historic assets by a variety of buildings and plant equipment. It is therefore not considered that there would be any detrimental impact to these listed buildings or to their curtilages, arising from the proposal.

3. Impact on Amenity and Environment and Environmental Health Considerations

Policy 13(l) of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy requires that development will not result in an unacceptable impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties or the wider area, by reason of noise, vibration, smell, light or other pollution, loss of light or overlooking. Policy 17 of the NPPF states that development must secure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants

of land and buildings.

While noting the concerns set out in the representations regarding potential for odour and noise pollution, given the comments of the Borough Councils Environmental Health Service, I am satisfied that appropriate conditions can be imposed, to ensure that no detrimental residential or public amenity impacts would result. These conditions, in line with the views of Environmental Health, would require the submission of an odour management plan, and an acoustic treatment scheme, and a restriction on the material being fed into the proposed new facility, to that being applied for, that is, to maize or wheat crop grown solely on the farm. While consideration has been given to the imposition of a condition to regulate vehicle movements dealing with the movement of the crop to the new plant, within the farm estate, it is considered that this would be unreasonable, and unnecessary in terms of where the farmyard is sited, and the intended location of the new facility alongside it, serving the 1200 acre estate. The Supplementary Report supplied by the applicants agent states that it is not the applicants intention and never has been, to bring in crops from elsewhere to supply the digester. Consequently, there will be no farm vehicles supplying the digester on local roads...and.. the digester will be supplied from crops grown on fields surrounding the digester confining vehicle movements to farm tracks only. The concerns regarding increased vehicle movements on local roads, mud on roads, noise and disturbance by vehicle movements etc. are unfounded.

The proposed site for the new facility is alongside the existing farmyard, which itself is well removed from residential properties, and the main built up parts of Cranford itself. This separation will therefore help to reduce the impact of the scheme for residents.

Subject to the imposition of conditions, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in amenity terms, and will have no unacceptable, detrimental impact on residential amenity, and the proposal is consequently in accordance with Policy 13(l) of the CSS.

4. Highways aspects and transport implications

Policy 13(d) and (n) of the CSS requires that developments have a satisfactory means of access and do not have an adverse impact on the highway network or prejudice highway safety.

While there have been concerns expressed on this issue, I note the comments of the highways authority who raise no objections on the basis of the new facility being fed from the applicants own farm estate, rather than using imported material, thereby reducing the scope for lorry movements adversely affecting Cranford. As now pointed out in the Supplementary Report, feedstock to supply the new facility will be using internal farm tracks rather than the local road system, and it is not considered that a condition should be imposed seeking to control traffic movements within the farm estate.

It is therefore concluded that the proposal, properly conditioned, is acceptable in highways terms and in accordance with criteria (d) and (n) of CSS Policy 13.

5. Ecological Impacts

It is considered that the ecological implications of the proposal have been addressed in the Ecological Walkover Survey now provided with the application. The Survey report notes that the site is currently arable land adjacent to both the existing plant and the farmyard. The development will not result in any loss of trees or hedges and the ditch to the south of the site will not receive liquid waste from the plant. The ecological impact is considered low... and wildlife value can be enhanced by providing a native species hedge on the boundaries of the site. In conclusion, the report states that the location of the proposal will not have an impact on local biodiversity, and there is an opportunity to plant hedgerows around most of the plant which will provide foraging and nest sites for farmland birds. As all bi-products from the plant are contained, the ditch and surface water are not at risk from pollution.

The proposal, with the imposition of a landscaping condition, is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy 5 and 13(o) of the CSS and the North Northamptonshire Biodiversity SPD, which requires the protection of, and where possible, enhancement and net gain of biodiversity.

Conclusion

While the proposal is not in accordance with Saved Policy 7 and the aims of Policy 9 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy, which set out to strictly control development in the open countryside, this consideration is outweighed by the close association of the site as part of an existing, sizeable working farm, and the proposals conformity with a significant weight of planning policy which supports economic development, farm diversification, sustainable rural enterprise, and renewable energy generation. Although the proposal has generated various concerns, subject to the imposition of conditions, it is considered that the proposal is in accordance with Policies 3, 10 and 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Objective 1 and Policies 5,9,13 (d, l, n and o) and 14 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy, and the North Northamptonshire Biodiversity SPD. Conditions can address and resolve, the various issues arising from the proposed development, and it is considered that there are no material planning considerations that would indicate against the proposal. The application is recommended for approval.

Background Papers

Title of Document:

Previous Reports/Minutes

Ref:

Date:

Contact Officer:

Date:

Steve King, Development Officer on 01536 534316