

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

Committee	Full Planning Committee - 25/08/2015	Item No: 5.4
Report Originator	Rebecca Collins Development Team Leader	Application No: KET/2015/0297
Wards Affected	Welland	
Location	Desborough Airfield, Desborough Road, Stoke Albany	
Proposal	Full Application with EIA: Solar Photovoltaic park of up to 49.9 megawatts and ancillary infrastructure	
Applicant	Mrs M Crew RAF Desb' 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 Local Planning Authority shall be notified in writing of the date when electricity from the development is first supplied to the grid and the development shall be removed from the site following the expiry of 25 years from that date: the solar panels shall be decommissioned and the panels and all related above-ground structures shall be removed from the site. Any lighting associated with the decommissioning of the solar farm shall only be installed and used in accordance with a scheme which has first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Following the removal of the panels and structures, the land shall be re-instated in accordance with a Decommissioning Method Statement that shall first be submitted for the approval of the Local Planning Authority at least 18 months before the date of the decommissioning of the solar farm. That method statement shall include details of the manner, management and timing of the re-instatement works to be undertaken and shall be accompanied by a Transport Statement. The removal works and the reinstatement of the site shall not be carried out other than in accordance with the approved scheme.

REASON: In recognition of the expected life of the proposal and to prevent an unacceptable impact on the landscape and the surrounding environment in accordance with Policy 4 and 11 of the NPPF, and policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

3. Prior to the erection of the solar panels and any other associated equipment exact details of their location, design, specification and colour shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To ensure the proposal does not have a detrimental impact on quality of life or the natural environment in accordance with policy 7 and 11 of the NPPF, and policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

4. Any lighting associated with the construction of the solar farm shall only be installed and used in accordance with a scheme that has first been submitted to and approved in writing with the local planning authority before the commencement of development. No external lighting is approved during the operational period of the solar farm.

REASON: In the interests of protecting the natural environment and to minimise visual impact in accordance with policies 4 and 11 of the NPPF, and policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

5. All cabling shall be laid underground in accordance with a scheme to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to installation.

REASON: In the interests of protecting the natural environment and to minimise visual impact in accordance with policies 4 and 11 of the NPPF and policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

6. The substation, control room and inverter, hereby permitted, shall not be erected until details of the siting, design, foundations and external materials for the building, and for any associated compound or parking area, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out 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.

7. If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to operate for a continuous period of 6 months then, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, a scheme for the replacement, repair or decommissioning and removal of the panels and any other ancillary equipment, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority within 3 months of the end of the cessation period. If the operation of the solar farm is to cease, then a scheme shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority to include details for the restoration of the site. The scheme for either replacement, repair or decommissioning and removal of the panels and any other ancillary equipment shall be implemented within 18 months of the date of its agreement by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: In recognition of the expected life of the proposal and to prevent an unnecessary impact on the landscape and the surrounding environment in accordance with policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

8. No electricity shall be exported to the local grid until details of a scheme, to limit and mitigate or eliminate any negative impacts from glint and glare has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The panels shall not be operated other than in accordance with the approved details.

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

9. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the submitted construction traffic management plan received on 7 April 2015. Prior to the commencement of development, details of traffic management and highway signage shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: Traffic management measures are required prior to the commencement of development, in the interests of highway safety and in accordance with policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

10. In the interests of protecting local species and ecology the works shall be carried out in accordance with the following:

- Ecological/biodiversity mitigation, management and enhancement measures outlined in section 8.6 of the submitted Environmental Statement: Volume 1: Main Report dated April 2015.

- A Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEMP) and Local Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development. The LEMP will include a scheme for the sowing of the grassland mix and management prior to the installation of the solar panels or any of the associated equipment. The development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: Ecology and biodiversity plans are required prior to the commencement of development in the interests of protecting ecology and biodiversity in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF and policy 13 of the CSS.

11. No development shall take place until details of investigative archaeological works, to be undertaken on the site including a geophysical survey and trial trenching, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Those works shall be carried out as approved and the findings, together with details of any measures designed to protect archaeological remains, shall be reported to the Local Planning Authority within 3 months of completion of the investigative works. No development shall take place until the Local Planning Authority has given its written approval to the report and to any protective measures that it identifies for archaeological remains of significance. Protective measures shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: Archaeology surveys are required prior to the commencement of development in the interest of the historic environment in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF and Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

12. In relation to the construction of the development hereby permitted; no machinery shall be operated, no process shall be carried out and no construction traffic shall enter or leave the site outside the hours of 07.00 - 19.00 Monday to Friday, nor outside the hours of 07.00 - 13.00 on Saturdays, nor at any time on

Sundays or Bank Holidays unless first approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: In the interests of protecting the occupiers of nearby dwellings in accordance with Policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

13. Prior to the installation of the solar panels a plan showing the existing landscaping to be retained and/or removed and a scheme of soft landscaping works which shall specify species, planting sizes, spacing and numbers of trees and shrubs to be planted, the layout, contouring and surfacing of open space shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works approved shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the erection of the first solar panel 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: To improve the appearance of the site in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF.

14. Prior to the installation of the Solar Panels a landscape management plan, including short and long term design objectives, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules for all landscape areas including landscaping to be retained, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The landscape management plan shall be carried out as approved.

REASON: To ensure that due regard is paid to the continuing enhancement and maintenance of amenity afforded by landscape features in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF.

15. Prior to the installation of the Solar Panels a scheme for boundary treatment shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with these approved details.

REASON: In the interests of the visual amenity of the local area in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF and policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

16. Prior to the installation of the Solar Panels, a scheme detailing the security measures/standards to be incorporated within the development at construction and operation stage with reference to secure standards shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with these approved details.

REASON: To reduce the potential for crime in accordance with policy 13 of the Core Spatial Strategy for North Northamptonshire.

17. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the noise mitigation and enhancement measures as outlined in section 10.6 of the submitted Environmental Statement: Volume 1: Main Report dated April 2015.

REASON: To protect the neighbouring properties from the impacts of noise in accordance with policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

18. No electricity shall be exported to the grid until the exact location, design and content of the proposed interpretation boards has been submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The boards shall be erected in accordance with the approved details prior to first exportation of electricity to the grid.

REASON: In the interests of preserving a non-designated heritage asset in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF.

19. No development shall commence until an assessment of all on-site historical features associated with the airfield have been identified and assessed and a scheme submitted demonstrating how these will be recorded or retained.

REASON: In the interests of preserving a non-designated heritage asset in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF.

20. No electricity shall be exported to the grid until the applicants have entered in to with Northamptonshire County Council for improvements to rights of way and the designation of permissive paths as shown on plan reference 14/7249/001/GLA/010 F1 received 07/04/2015. The agreement shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To provide a net gain in green infrastructure in accordance with policy 5 of the North Northamptonshire CSS and to not lead to a loss of recreation facilities and promote healthier lifestyles as required by policy 13 (g) and (i) of the CSS.

Officers Report for KET/2015/0297

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

3.0 Information

Relevant Planning History

KET/2014/0685, Desborough Air Field Solar Farm – Screening Opinion
KET/2014/0875, Desborough Air Field Solar Farm - Scoping Opinion
KET/2011/0230, Agricultural storage (approved)
KET/2009/0434, Conversion of former cart shed to habitable rooms (approved)
KET/2007/1171, Change of use to concrete slab work (approved)
KET/2007/0395, Change of use to concrete slab work (refused)
KET/1998/0220, Change of use to equine (approved)
KE/1997/0457, Renewal – Change of use for road safety, driver training facility (approved)
KE/1995/0380, Change of use for road safety, driver training facility (approved)
KE/1994/0481, Change of use of hanger to car spraying/repairs, open storage etc (refused)
KE/1993/0766, Change of use of hanger to processing of green waste (refused)
KE/1992/0176, Change of use of hanger to car spraying/repairs, open storage etc (refused)
KE/1991/0571, Change of use of hanger to B1, B2 and B8 (refused)
KE/1991/0765, Change of use of hanger to B1, B2 and B8 (refused)
KE/1986/0815, Vehicle weighbridge and office building (approved)
KE/1983/0239, Erection of portacabins (approved)
KE/1983/0414, Erection of portacabins (approved)

Site Description

Officer's site inspection was carried out on 28/04/2015.

The application site is the former Desborough airfield. Within the site remains a number of historic 'hangers' and parts of the original runway running around the perimeter of the site, as well as areas of hardstanding used by the Ministry of Defence during World War Two for the operational training of Wellington bomber Crews between 1943 and 1945. After the end of the war, the airfield remained in operational use in a civilian capacity until it was purchased by the Rockingham Estate in the 1960s, at which time the airfield was closed. Contained within the runway and outside of it lies grade 3b and 4 agricultural land (on which the site falls) owned and managed by Rockingham Estate. The existing hangers are used for a variety of uses.

The application site is located 2km to the north of Desborough and 4km to the west of Corby. The settlements of Wilbarston and Stoke Albany lie approximately 1.2km to the north and 1.5km to the north-west respectively, while The Pastures Mobile Home Park, the closest residential, is approximately 125m to the south west. The application site is approximately 112.8 hectares in size.

The site is bounded by gently undulating agricultural land, with blocks of woodland, including ancient woodland, to the northeast and southwest. The land is reasonably flat within the former runway but the ground levels slope to the south significantly in the southern most fields outside of the runway close to The Pasture site. Land levels also drop away outside the runway to the north with properties on the edge of Wilbarston visible but in a dip. Part of the former runway cuts through the centre of the otherwise circular route and a strong line of popular trees mark the boundary of this hardstanding. Pipewell Woods SSSI is immediately adjacent to the southern boundary of the site, and Bowd Lane Woods SSSI is adjacent to the north-west boundary.

The Pastures is set on a raised concrete hard-standing with a 1.8m close boarded fence surrounding the boundaries of the site. There are other residential properties and farmsteads visible from within the application site, including The Old Barn, Bowd Lodge, Upper Lodge Farm and Cottage, Stoke House and Woodlands Farm, however, these are some distance away.

A public right of way wraps around the eastern, northern and western sides of the former airfield following the former airfield access tracks. From the east the footpath emerges from Rawhaw Wood, and passes through a narrow strip of the site, before running adjacent to the northeast section of the site. This is met by another footpath, which follows the lane running adjacent to the northwestern side of the site. The footpath continues west around the former airfield, running adjacent to the western edge of the site, before connecting to the track to the northwest of The Pastures.

The Jurassic Way long distance footpath runs from the west of Brampton Wood northwards, crossing the A426, before passing through Stoke Albany and Wilbarston, and heading northeast to East Carlton.

The proposal includes an underground electrical connection which extends from the site in a north-easterly direction. This area generally comprises of agricultural land, cutting through some field boundaries/hedgerows, using natural breaks between fields and along a short section of the A427 before passing under the road to the point of connection with the distribution network, approximately 1.8km north-northeast of the site. The electrical connection strip is approximately 20m wide to allow working space for the installation of underground cables.

The connection to the distribution network (POC) is to be made to a pylon approximately 165m to the north-west of the A427 and 0.5km to the east of Wilbarston. A substation will be located on agricultural land to the south west of the POC, which will be accessed via a new access track which makes use of an existing farm track entrance off the A427.

Proposed Development

The proposal is for a Solar Photovoltaic park of up to 49.9 megawatts and ancillary infrastructure including the following:

- Up to 208,000 solar panels mounted on metal frames and positioned up to 2.5m above ground level.
- Up to 36 inverters, up to 3m tall with maximum dimensions of 12m by 5m.
- A control building to be located in the north eastern corner of the site. This will be a single storey building approximately 10m x 10m containing switchgear, communications equipment, control room and store room. The control room will be located adjacent to the 18.5m by 2.8m transformer/generator compound. The compound will be surrounded by a 2.4m palisade fence.
- The solar farm will also be deer fenced by 2.5m fencing with CCTV cameras to monitor the site.

Additional information has been received including a revised site layout plan, a plan of cultural heritage features within the 4.5km Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) as well as other responses on the issues arising (see comment under Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) part of Planning Considerations section of this report).

Any Constraints Affecting the Site

Public Footpath HH006, HH008, HH018 and HH025

Jurassic Way

Goodman's Spinney County Wildlife site

SSSI's – Pipewell Woods and Stoke and Bowd Lane Woods

Scheduled Ancient Monument - The Round Barrow

Rawhaw Wood – Ancient Woodland and TPO

4.0 Consultation and Customer Impact

Parish/Town Council

Wilbarston Parish Council

Supports the application. However, wish to make the following comments:

- The proposed permissive paths, which have been in use for several decades, should be formal rights of way.
- The application is not clear on the mitigation measures to protect The Pastures.
- The proposed access roads are not suitable for heavy vehicles and the Parish Council wish to see all damage to carriageways and verges to be made good.

Desborough Town Council

Object on the basis that there are outstanding issues regarding rights of way across the airfield. Concern is raised over the suitability of access roads and the loss of agricultural land. Surrounding Parish views should be a priority.

Rushton Parish Council

No objection. However, Rushton Parish Council are becoming increasingly concerned about the number of such applications coming forward.

Environment Agency

No objections.

Highway Authority

No objection subject to conditions with regards to access, visibility, upgrading of the agricultural access track and signage.

Public rights of way should be protected. Under the Northamptonshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan, opportunities must be undertaken to help create a safe, joined up network of paths for all users. The applicant should therefore provide upgrades to those footpaths around the parameters of the track and footpath HH25 should be upgraded to bridleway status. Also, it is requested that the developers seek a legal agreement with local Parish Councils with regards to the permissive paths proposed.

The developer should be aware that some potential claims for public rights of way, not currently recognised, on routes across the former airfield have been made. Whether these claims have merit or not it may be worth the developer agreeing to a combination of new bridleway routes and permissive paths in order to meet the needs of local people.

Further Comments

The Highways Authority have no further observations in response to the additional information submitted.

Historic England

In particular Historic England advises that the Local Planning Authority consider whether the applicant has taken account of all opportunities to minimise the harm to a designated heritage asset of the highest significance under the policies of the NPPF.

Historic England (HE) welcomes the Government's commitment to reduce the emissions which contribute to global warmer. However, contrary to the descriptions of this advice in the submitted ES documentation we clearly indicated that historic asset setting impacts are much more wide ranging than just visual and that any ES produced should take full account of this in its assessment.

The site is located on an historic airfield and to the south east of the site is the scheduled ancient monument of the Round Barrow. The earthworks of the historic mound are visible. HE considers that the nature and extent of the proposals will cause harm to the significance of the scheduled ancient monument and its setting. The harm would result from the visual intrusion of the development and damage to non-designated archaeological remains.

HE do not agree with the methodology for assessment of significance or magnitude of impacts within the ES. Cultural heritage issues do not appear to have been fully taken in to consideration. The application fails to show how local assets will be protected through the design of the scheme. The ES is also unclear on how mitigation planting will be used to reduce visual impacts on the scheduled ancient monument.

The potential visual impacts are to be reduced by reducing the amount of development in the southern part of the site nearest the scheduled ancient monument.

Further Comments

Historic England continue to object to the application on the basis that the amendments will not result in any improvement in relation to the harm caused to designated heritage assets, in particular the scheduled ancient monument of Round Barrow. The area of development should be drawn back in the southern part of the site in order to minimise the harm caused to the designated heritage asset of high significance.

Loss or damage to non-designated archaeological remains within the setting of the scheduled ancient monument which make a positive contribution to its significance is not reversible and therefore will not cease when the solar panels are removed. Therefore, the proposed approach to evacuate associated archaeological remains in advance of planting rather than identifying how the planting scheme might avoid such features, is inappropriate.

NCC Archaeology

The desk based and geophysical archaeological assessment undertaken has highlighted the potential for a range of activity from the prehistoric to World War Two. The evaluation of the survey works undertaken demonstrates that this is currently unclear and not understood and lacks the benefits of trial trenching to support its conclusions. These works should be taken in advance of determination of the application, without this NCC Archaeology object to the application.

Natural England

As the application is adjacent to two SSSI's a condition is recommended to prevent any adverse impacts, as set out in the submitted ES.

The proposal is unlikely to lead to significant and irreversible long term loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

The LPA should consider the potential impacts of the development on local wildlife sites, landscape character or local and national biodiversity priority habitats.

The LPA should consult Natural England's standing advice with regards to protected species.

NE are supportive of the intention to create species rich grassland and new hedgerow planting, which should be secured by condition.

Further Comments

Regarding the amendments submitted NE state no objection to the proposal in

regard to the statutory nature conservation site (of Pipewell Wood). This SSSI does not represent a constraint in determining this application, as amended.

Wildlife Trust

For a development of this size, the perimeter buffer strips at only 6m in width are too narrow and a buffer of 10m or more would be more appropriate to ensure sufficient space to suitably manage nature conservation objectives.

The application includes the imposition of badger gates but it is intended to be grazed for sheep, this will need revisiting if it is going to work for both species.

Subject to conditions with regards to requiring a Local Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) and Construction Ecology Management Plan (CEMP) based on the information provided then no objections are raised.

North Northamptonshire Badger Group

No comments subject to badger mitigation measures being implemented in full.

Northamptonshire Police

Suggest the following conditions / informatives to help reduce the likelihood of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour:

- Fencing and gates: the fencing should be certified to LPS 1175 sr1-3 or equivalent and/or the perimeter should be connected to a monitored alarm system.
- All buildings associated with the development should be linked to the perimeter alarm system.
- Ideally the CCTV system should be monitored.

Further Comments

No further comments with regards to the amendments received.

Environmental Health

No comments.

Corby Borough Council

No objection.

Neighbours

Seven letters of objection have been received, their concerns are as follows:

- The proposal is contrary to the Development Plan.
- The site is very large and an unwelcome intrusion on the open countryside.
- Solar farm sites should be in brownfield locations or on rooftops.
- The site lies in open countryside.
- The installation lies outside the perimeters of the airfield.
- There will be cumulative impacts with this solar farm and others in the locality.

- No consideration has been given to minimise or limit views from The Pastures. The Mobile homes are on a higher ground level and views across open fields will be spoilt by the panels.
- The landscape and visual intrusion is pronounced from West Lodge Farm Park /Desborough Cricket Club and Pipewell.
- The area is treated like a Country Park by local residents and should remain this way with rights of way protected. The health benefit from the use of this site for leisure outweigh its potential gains in solar power.
- The proposal will be noisy and intrusive during construction.
- The proposed screening will take time to reach its full effect (15 years) and therefore there will be significant impacts for the majority of the lifetime of the solar farm.
- The perceptive change to the local area will be from rural to industrial.
- There is no local benefit from the proposal or local employment.
- The substation will have a significant impact on the Jurassic Way and planting to mitigate will take 15 years to establish.
- The impacts of HGVs using Wilbarston to get on to the A14 has not been assessed.
- The proposal will spoil the view for users of the site.
- The proposal will have an unacceptable impact on wildlife, including affecting the free roaming of deer and birds and the wildlife benefits fall well short of the natural habitats lost through this development.
- The proposal will impact food production.
- The roads proposed for the vehicle movements are not suitable and have weight restrictions.
- Twenty five years cannot be referred to as temporary.
- These developments do not produce as much energy as they claim to.
- The proposed deer fencing needs to be dog proof to protect the sheep.
- On the submitted plans there are two blue squares either side of the A427, which are not explained. There should be no over-ground features in this location.
- Green inverter huts should be avoided as these are large structures and clearly visible.
- The materials for the substation are considered unacceptable.
- The proposed fencing for the substation is unacceptable and industrial in character. The style and colour of this fencing should be reconsidered.
- The proposed planting scheme is not clear.
- The construction management plan fails to explain who will be responsible for the proposed temporary one-way system for vehicles entering and exiting the site.

An application for a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) has been made for a number of routes within and crossing the airfield.

5.0 Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

The overarching aim of the NPPF is to help to achieve sustainable

development.

Within the NPPF there are a number of planning policies which contain relevant

planning considerations to this application:

Policy 1. Building a Strong; Competitive Economy

Policy 3. Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy

Policy 7. Requiring Good Design

Policy 10. Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change

Policy 11. Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Policy 12. Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

Development Plan Policies

North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy

Policy 1. Strengthening the Network of Settlements

Policy 5. Green Infrastructure

Policy 6. Infrastructure Delivery and Developer Contributions

Policy 9. Distribution and Location of Development

Policy 13. General Sustainable Development Principles

Policy 14. Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Construction

Local Plan

Policy 7. Open Countryside

Emerging Policies (Local Development Framework)

Joint Core Strategy

Site Specific Proposals LDD

SPGs

Sustainable Design SPD

6.0 Financial/Resource Implications

None

7.0 Planning Considerations

The key issues for consideration in these applications are:-

1. Principle
2. Environmental Impact Assessment
3. Visual and Landscape Impact and Cumulative Effect
4. Impact on Ecology
5. Use of Agricultural Land
6. Amenity
7. Impact on Historic Assets

8. Highway and Access
9. Flood Risk
10. Other Matters

1. Principle

The proposed application site is located 2km to the north of Desborough and 4km to the west of Corby. The settlements of Wilbarston and Stoke Albany lie approximately 1.2km to the north and 1.5km to the north-west respectively. The site is located outside of any designated settlement boundary within open countryside, where new development is restricted by policies 1 and 9 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) and policy 7 of the Local Plan for Kettering Borough.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports the transition to a low carbon future in changing climate and encouraging the re-use of renewable resources. Policy 10 states this is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Paragraph 97 aims to increase the use and supply of renewable energy through having a positive strategy; design policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy whilst ensuring the adverse impacts are addressed, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts; and to consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy.

Paragraph 98 states that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy; and approve applications if they can be made acceptable.

The National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) contains guidance on the delivery of large scale solar farm development. It states that although large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.

Particular factors a Local Planning Authority will need to consider include; encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land. Where a proposal involves greenfield and, when (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

The NPPG goes on to say that relevant considerations include:

- Solar farms are temporary features and installations, which are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;
- The proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare

- on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;
- The need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;
- Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting;
- The potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;
- The energy generating potential;
- The approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large scale solar farms. This is likely to be the same as assessing the impact of wind turbines. However, in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography, the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero.

Policy 14 of the CSS requires all new development to meet the highest standards of resource and energy efficiency and a reduction in carbon emissions.

The Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy emerging policy 26 outlines a number of criteria for renewable energy at this site, including ensuring the most appropriate technology is selected for the sites; the development links to a decentralised energy network or where this is not possible, to the National Grid; avoid substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset and its setting; landscape impacts are minimised and mitigated against; the siting of development does not create a significant noise or odour intrusion; not result in an adverse impact on the highways network; includes a managed programme of measures to mitigate against any adverse impacts; and not create an overbearing cumulative noise or visual impact.

Given the size and scale of the proposed Solar Farm then it is unlikely that this type/size of development could fall within a designated settlement boundary in accordance with policies 1 and 9 of the CSS and policy 7 of the Local Plan for Kettering Borough. However, with the gently undulating nature of the majority of the site, the temporary nature of the proposal and the poor quality agricultural land, it is considered that the choice of site is in line with the NPPG. Furthermore, there is a strong policy presumption in favour of sustainable and renewable energy outlined in policy 10 of the NPPF. It is considered that the principle of a solar farm in this location is acceptable, subject to mitigation of any of its potential impacts, which are further discussed below.

2. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The applicants have previously submitted Screening and Scoping Opinions for Solar Farm development across an area of land including the sites referenced above. The application has been submitted with an EIA, which covers the potential landscape and visual impacts, ecology, historic, noise and cumulative impacts, as requested by the LPA. The applications contain further detailed information with regards to flood risk, construction and highways but these

matters do not form part of the EIA.

Following submission of the EIA, the Case Officer made a formal Regulation 22 request for further additional information. Further information with regards to cultural heritage, site character, existing site uses, photomontages, ecology, landscaping and an amended site plan has been submitted. The LPA is satisfied that the application as submitted complies with the request for submission of an EIA which adequately addresses any significant environment impacts.

3. Visual and Landscape Impact and Cumulative Effect

Policy 11 of the NPPF and Policy 13 (h) of the CSS seek to conserve and enhance landscape character, the historic landscape and designated built environmental assets and their settings, and biodiversity of the environment.

The site lies in National Character Area 92 – Rockingham Forest, a broad undulating plateau; patchworks of woodland which remain a significant feature; ancient woodlands and SSSi's; fields bounded by well managed hedgerows; and prominent quarries and disused airfields. This 112ha and the surrounding area is truly representative of the character explained here. The Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment characterises the area encompassing the site as 7: Wooded Clay Plateau and 7a: Geddington Chase, which encourage local authorities to conserve and enhance the unity of the character of the landscape; conserve the balance between open agricultural and woodland; discourage hedgerow removal, restore hedgerows and hedgerow trees and conserve hedgerow patterns; conserve field patterns; and seek to limit the effects of infrastructure on the wider rural landscape.

The submitted Landscape and Visual Assessments (LVIA) concludes that, as a result of the topography, the presence of woodlands, spinneys and layers of hedgerows in the landscape, the existing former RAF Desborough airfield has limited visibility from the wider landscape.

The applicants state that 'the siting of the proposed development has had due regard to effects on visual receptors, both in terms of extent of proposed solar PV panels within the solar park site, and also in terms of the proposed underground cabling for the electrical connection, the selection of the point of connection and location of the proposed connection compound. Furthermore, mitigation is proposed to minimise the proposed development's landscape and visual effects, such as use of deer fencing and new tree and hedgerow planting. At 15 years after planting, when it is assumed that the proposed tree and hedgerow planting has established and is maturing as landscape features, landscape effects are further reduced'.

Primary landscape measures proposed include a buffer zone from ancient woodland, retention of existing trees, tree root protection, new native planting, deer fencing and grassland beneath panels. Also, the use of vernacular materials or appropriate form, detailed designs, colours and finishes or incorporation of key views and vistas. In addition no lighting is proposed for the site.

The electrical connection route to the north of the solar park site is situated at the edge of an area of elevated topography, where the land is starting to fall away to the north-west, and where the landscape character becomes more enclosed and intimate. Here medium sized arable fields are bound by trimmed low to medium height hedgerows. The electrical connection passes through two hedgerows and two areas of semi-improved grassland.

The submitted LVIA does conclude that there will be landscape impacts from the development on Round Barrow, the footpath within the solar park and Jurassic Way. However, these impacts are greatly reduced within the implementation of the proposed planting after 15 years. Also, the panels and associated equipment are temporary features and are a low feature in the landscape. The proposed substation is a significant feature but will be located some distance from local properties, off the A427 and adjacent to an existing pylon. The proposed POC has been set away from the Jurassic way. On this basis the landscape impacts are considered acceptable.

A number of concerns have been raised with regards to the lack of a planting strategy and the appropriateness of what has been currently proposed. The applicants have submitted further information stating that the proposed planting strategy is for new native hedgerow planting. The proposed planting is based around integrating the proposed development in to the local landscape and mitigating potential effects. Extended buffer strips (as requested by the Wildlife Trust and agreed by the applicant) will further enhance the integration of the proposals in to the landscape. Appropriate planting details will be secured by condition.

Cumulative Impacts

The submitted Environment Statement looks at the potential cumulative impacts from the development with other renewable energy sites including Burton Wold Energy Park (approved with wind turbines constructed), Eckland Lodge Solar Farm (approved), Gaultney Farm Solar Farm (approved and under construction) and Braybrooke Solar Farm (previous screening and scoping opinions received). The cumulative assessment concludes that there are unlikely to be significant cumulative landscape and visual effects.

The proposal also looks at the potential cumulative impacts combined with New Albion Wind Farm (under construction). The submitted assessment concludes that the cumulative impacts are between negligible adverse and slight adverse and of minor significance.

The addition of the proposed development will not lead to the redefinition of key characteristics of landscape character at a national or local scale, will not dominate the landscape or setting of settlement or impose a new 'renewable energy landscape' character type, will not occupy every incident of a specific landscape characteristic or reduce distinction between landscape types; and it will relate to landform in terms of positioning, scale and extent.

The applicants state that 'the Round Barrow Scheduled Monument located

approximately 0.1km from the solar park site boundary has been assessed, above, as being subject to a long term, but reversible, adverse and indirect landscape effect of moderate significance as a stand-alone scheme. In considering the proposed development in addition to the New Albion Wind Farm, the setting of the Round Barrow to the northwest will be occupied by solar PV panels and, to the southeast, will be occupied by wind turbines. Renewable energy development in the landscape will therefore become a long term, but reversible, part of the landscape setting of the Round Barrow. The cumulative landscape effect of the proposed development would be slight, adverse, long term but reversible, and indirect; which when combined with the high sensitivity of the Round Barrow, results in a moderate significance'.

Subject to conditions with regarding landscaping and mitigation in accordance with the proposed scheme then the development is considered in accordance with Policy 11 of the NPPF and Policy 13 (h) of the CSS and would have an acceptable impact on landscape and landscape character.

4. Impact on Ecology

Policy 11 of the NPPF and policies 5 and 13(o) of the CSS require new development to conserve and enhance local biodiversity and deliver a net gain in green infrastructure.

An ecological assessment reports that the proposed development will not result in any negative effects on the statutory designated sites for nature conservation located adjacent to the site boundary. A 6 metre buffer zone has been proposed within the development layout but the Wildlife Trust suggested this should be widened to a minimum of 10 metres. The applicants have agreed to extend the buffer strips to 10 metres, this can be secured by a suitably worded condition and note with regards the siting of the panels. Sensitive construction methods will also be used to ensure that indirect effects are avoided.

Avoidance measures (comprising construction exclusion zones), which are embedded within the development design, will ensure that no ponds, ditches, or minor watercourses will be directly affected, and all hedgerows and woodland within the solar park site will be retained. A 50 metre buffer will be retained around all ponds known to support Great Crested Newts. Further ecological enhancements include the planting of species rich hedgerow (a scheme to be agreed), the installation of bird boxes, grassland creation, the planting of pollen and nectar strips, improved habitat connectivity and foraging resources for birds, bats, badgers and other wildlife. Exclusion zones around the 'main' and 'subsidiary' badger setts within the site will also ensure that setts are not affected by the proposed development. Given the site is currently farmed land then the proposal would result in improving local environment for ecology.

Small sections of hedgerow will be removed associated with the construction of the electrical connection. Provided works take place outside of bird nesting season then this is likely to be acceptable as alternative planting is taking place. A planting showing hedgerow removal and planting will be required by

condition.

Overall, the scheme has the potential to deliver biodiversity gain in line with the NPPF and local planning policies. New habitats will provide increased foraging resources and opportunities for species dispersal. These habitats will be managed during operation to deliver additional biodiversity enhancements, including for invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, turtle dove (a county rare species), small mammals, birds of prey (red kite, kestrel and buzzard) and foraging bats.

The new habitats will provide increased connectivity across the site and with the wider landscape for these species groups, and will contribute to local green infrastructure policy. The appropriate management of habitats within the site during the operation of the solar park will be delivered through the implementation of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP). The LEMP will include details on an appropriate cutting/ grazing regime and stocking densities in order to ensure the successful delivery of the ecological mitigation and enhancement measures.

A concern was raised about the requirement for badger gates and the practicalities of providing grazing for sheep also. The applicants have stated that a 20/30cm gap will be retained beneath the fencing to facilitate the movement of badgers. The applicants state that this is unlikely to pose a problem with sheep but this will be further assessed and agreed. Details are to be provided in the submitted LEMP, which will be the subject of a condition.

The Wildlife Trust and Natural England raise no objection to the proposals and subject to the enhancement and mitigation measures being the subject of suitably worded conditions as outlined in the submitted EIA, as well as conditioning a CEMP and LEMP, then the proposal is considered in accordance with Policy 11 of the NPPF.

Cumulative Impacts

The applicants state that the 'cumulative extent of suitable habitat that will be lost (if all four proposed renewable energy schemes located within 6km of the site are implemented) represents a small proportion of the overall extent of farmland habitat present and accessible to the breeding and wintering bird assemblages in the area. Alternative suitable habitat to accommodate any displaced birds will therefore be available. Appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures as part of these developments such as planting with nectar and pollen rich species between rows of solar panels will also reduce the extent of cumulative habitat loss. No significant cumulative effects as a result of habitat loss on the local breeding or wintering bird populations are therefore expected'.

Subject to conditions with regards to landscaping, planting and landscape management the proposals are considered in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF and policy 13 (o) of the CSS.

5. Use of Agricultural Land

The site area has been assessed as agricultural Grade 3b and 4 agricultural land. The NPPG states that large scale solar farms should be focused on previously developed and non-agricultural land. Any use of agricultural land should be shown to be necessary and on poorer quality land; and that the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

Whilst the land will be temporarily taken out of arable production, the permission sought is only temporary, for 25 years with minimal ground intrusion. There will be no permanent loss of the agricultural land or degradation of the existing soil quality.

After the 25 year period, all equipment and hard-standing shall be removed from the site and it returned to its former use, in accordance with a decommissioning statement which shall be conditioned and submitted prior to this. Also, as the land would have been set aside from farming for this period, there is a possibility that its agricultural quality will actually improve. Furthermore, the applicant states that the site will be used for the grazing of sheep, which is supported by the NPPG.

The NPPG is supportive of this approach for large scale solar farms when, the use of agricultural land has been shown to be necessary; and where the development encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

6. Amenity

Policy 13 (l) of CSS states that new development should 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.

There may be some very low level noise from the operation of the PV farm, from the inverter stations rather than the panels themselves as fixed panels generate no noise. Therefore, a noise assessment has been prepared to complement the baseline studies and to predict the likely noise impact. Furthermore, this assessment used the noise model to determine any areas that require mitigation and to test and demonstrate the efficacy of any proposed mitigation measures. The results of the assessment show that the noise impact of the proposed fixed plant would be classed as 'not significant' for all noise sensitive receptors. No mitigation measures are required.

Environmental Health raises no objections to the submitted information and require no conditions for noise mitigation. Working hours will be defined in the construction management plan. On this basis it is not considered that the proposals would have an unacceptable impact on amenity through noise.

Concern has been raised to the applicants with regards to the potential impacts on the residents of The Pastures who will sit very close to the site. This part of the site, ground levels slope significantly towards the south and The Pastures, which is on a raised ground level. The applicants have therefore proposed to revise the site layout and exclude a field adjacent to The

Pastures. The panels still remain reasonably close to this site. There are no noise impacts envisaged from the development, as outlined above, and the majority of the occupants of The Pastures reside in single storey units behind a high fence. Also, there is additional screening in the form of the existing hanger and bunding, which will be reinforced as part of the development. As discussed above it is not viable to further reduce the size of the site and retain an underground POC connection, nor is it possible to relocate the panels further north of the proposed siting. On this basis and as the panels are a temporary feature it is considered that any negative impacts on The Pastures can be suitably mitigated against through the addition of planting and bunding, which can be secured by condition. The revised layout will also be conditioned to move the panels further away from this site.

Additional information has been submitted to show that other residential properties are suitably distanced from the site and with additional planting will be suitably protected in amenity terms.

A condition is proposed to control lighting, as well as any effects from glint and glare, which are unlikely as the solar panels are designed to absorb sunlight to maximise energy generation, which has the additional benefit of minimising reflection and glare from the panels. The proposals are therefore considered in accordance with policy 13 (l) of the CSS.

7. Impact on Heritage Assets

Policy 12 of the NPPF states 'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the assets conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm . . . Local Planning Authorities should refuse consent. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal'.

The Baseline Report submitted revealed that there were no listed buildings or conservation areas within or adjacent to the site, but identified a landscape which was well utilised during the Prehistoric and Roman period. There is some evidence of settlement and activity dating to both periods from both within and in close proximity to the site, including a Scheduled mound that is thought to be a Bronze Age round barrow to the south east of the solar park site.

The extent of development has been limited to avoid any direct impacts on the scheduled mound and the avoidance of large areas of concrete foundations for the PV panels will mean that there is limited impact on buried artefacts. The submitted EIA concludes that the proposals will have only a minor residual effect on the known sites of prehistoric and Roman archaeology, as well as the potential site wide presence of Prehistoric and Roman activity. The effect on the line of a Prehistoric Trackway (The Jurassic Way), as well as some World

War II Bunkers would not be significant as they are both outside of the application site.

The NPPG states that 'as the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset'.

The information submitted with regards to heritage primarily focuses on archaeology and failed to make any analysis either of the setting or character of local Conservation Areas or locally Listed Buildings other than highlighting their location. Paragraph 128 of policy 12 of the NPPF requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage asset affected by development and any contribution to its setting. Also, given the historic use of area as an airfield and the continued existence of the hangers, bunkers and runway, amongst other features no information was submitted with regards to the impact of the proposed use on the historic reading of the airfield.

The Regulation 22 request sought further information with regards to the potential impacts on local historic assets and their settings, the impact on surrounding Conservation Areas and thought to be given to the historic significance of the airfield and how this can be maintained.

Some further information has been submitted stating that there are no listed Conservation Areas or Listed Buildings identified in the 5km study area. The heritage assets and churches in the local area have been overlaid with the zone of theoretic visibility which has demonstrated that as a result of their distance from the site, the topography and intervening development that they fall outside the zone of theoretic visibility.

With regards to the airfield, the applicants state that its history is brief, as it was established by the RAF in 1943. The applicants state that there will be little or no direct physical impact to any of the identified airfield features. The archaeological assessment undertaken identified a number of buried features related to the airfield. Here micro siting of the panels can be employed to avoid erecting panels over these features. This can be secured via a suitably worded condition.

The applicants considered that due to the limited heritage value of the airfield and the limited impact of the development, as it is only temporary, the effect of the development will not affect the significance of heritage assets. However, in recognition of the history of the site, interpretation boards will be erected at key access points to include reference to the World War II airfield and archaeological finds. These can again be secured by condition.

Concern has been raised by officers with regards to the impact of this development on the historic character of the airfield. The current proposal includes the development of fields outside of the existing circular runway,

including additional development beyond the southern boundary of the runway and its eastern element. The preference of the Local Planning Authority would be that the solar farm is wholly contained within the circular of the runway, respecting its historic significance. This is considered particularly important to the south as ground levels drop away significantly. Also, for users of the rights of way and indeed the permissive paths around the runway, the presence of panels on both sides would significantly impact their experience of using these routes. The applicants have stated that the scheme would not be viable, especially to have an underground connection, without the full extent of the land proposed resulting in a 49MW scheme. Further land is available to the north of the proposed site, within the runway which could compensate for the loss of land to the south and east. The applicants have shown that this land has greater agricultural value and potential visibility from Wilbarston and Stoke Albany and therefore is not a viable alternative for the siting of panels.

On the basis that the proposal is not viable without the additional fields to the south and east and that the panels are a temporary feature, which will be removed from the site after 25 years and it restored to its previous state, then subject to conditions with regards to interpretation boards and that historic features should be identified and retained, including areas of hardstanding (i.e. the runway) which contribute to the historic reading of the site. Then the proposal is, on balance, considered in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF and 13 (h) and (o) of the CSS.

Archaeology

Concerns have been raised by NCC Archaeology and Historic England with regards to the lack of a suitable Archaeological Assessment being undertaken. The applicants are therefore undertaking the necessary additional assessment in consultation with NCC archaeology including trial trenching.

NCC Archaeology refer to paragraph 128 of the NPPF, which states “Where a site on which development is proposed includes or has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate deskbased assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation”. The results of the additional archaeological assessment will be reported to Members on the night of the Planning Committee.

Concerns were also raised that the potential for impacts on the Round Barrow Scheduled Ancient Monument had not been properly explored. The applicants state that the Round Barrow lies beyond the southern limit of the proposed development. The cultural and landscape impacts of the development were assessed and it was concluded that there would be no direct effect from the development on the above-ground Round Barrow remains.

The further archaeological investigation, as mentioned above will include trial trenching within the site, adjacent to Round Barrow to assess its current condition, which has been effected by local agricultural practice, taking place since the medieval period. Historic England raised concerns about the potential impacts of planting near to Round Barrow and the applicants state

that the further archaeological survey currently being undertaken will inform a detailed planting strategy. Any archaeological remains associated with the Scheduled Monument can be Preserved by Record and areas which need to remain in situ can be avoided through the careful siting of planting, cable runs, fencing and access routes etc. If approved a condition can be applied to any subsequent approval to agree the exact location of the panels and associated equipment.

Subject to the results of the further archaeological assessment currently being undertaken and on the advice of NCC Archaeology then the proposal could be considered in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF and Policy 13(h) of the CSS. This is to be completed prior to the issuing of planning permission if Members are resolved to grant it.

8. Highways

During operation the PV Farm generates little traffic, except for routine visits to maintain the plant. The applicants state that more traffic will be generated by the farmer visiting and moving the sheep that will graze around the panels than from the actual operation of the plant itself. However, during the construction phase there will be significant movements of traffic as the panels and associated infrastructure are delivered to site. It is anticipated that this might be over a period of approximately 16-20 weeks.

A Construction Management Strategy has been proposed to create a one-way traffic system between the A427 and the solar park site via Pipewell Road. The one-way traffic system will apply to all vehicular traffic using Pipewell Road but will only be introduced temporarily for the duration of the construction phase of the development. This will remove the need for construction vehicles to pass each other, or other general traffic, along sections of road which have limited passing opportunities. It should also create a safer environment for all users of the highway in this area.

All construction traffic travelling inbound to the solar park site will turn onto Pipewell Road at the junction with the A427 at Wilbarston. However, in order to minimise disruption to the occupants of the farm situated next to the A427 / Pipewell Road junction, the one-way system will start just beyond their access onto Pipewell Road. Upon leaving the solar park site, all construction traffic will travel northeast along Pipewell Road to the junction with the A427 at East Carlton.

The one-way system will need to be accompanied by appropriate traffic signage along the route, including at the A427 junctions, the solar site access junction and the priority junction leading to Pipewell village.

NCC has confirmed that the existing Amenity Weight Restriction (AWR) present on the inbound section of Pipewell Road will not prohibit construction vehicles from using this section of road in the manner proposed. This is on the basis that the AWR will still permit access for premises that are generating Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV's).

The access road connecting Pipewell Road to the solar park site will not be subject to one-way working because there is a formalised passing bay available. The scheduling of deliveries to the site will however be carefully managed to minimise the need for large vehicles to pass each other along the access road.

Consideration has been given to the visibility splays that can be achieved on the outbound route from the solar park site, specifically at the locations where construction traffic would join Pipewell Road from the access road and the A427 at East Carlton.

The Point of connection (POC) will be accessed via an existing agricultural track, which would be upgraded as required, from the A427. The 4m wide access track that will run parallel to the hedgerow along the southern field boundary before connecting to the proposed substation. A turning area is provided close to the substation so that large vehicles can enter and exit the site in a forward gear.

Public Rights of Way

There are a number of rights of way within the site. A public right of way wraps around the eastern, northern and western sides of the former airfield following the former airfield access tracks. From the east the footpath emerges from Rawhaw Wood, and passes through a narrow strip of the site, before running adjacent to the northeast section of the site. This is met by another footpath, which follows the lane running adjacent to the northwestern side of the site. The footpath continues west around the former airfield, running adjacent to the western edge of the site, before connecting to the track to the northwest of The Pastures.

The Jurassic Way long distance footpath runs from the west of Brampton Wood northwards, crossing the A426, before passing through Stoke Albany and Wilbarston, and heading northeast to East Carlton.

There is no formal access to the former runways of the solar park site. However, over the years a number of users have accessed the runway in this manner. During the public consultation the applicants held a number of comments received highlighted the importance of the use of the site for leisure. The applicant has therefore designed a number of permissive paths which will be retained during the life time of the solar farm to provide continued access for local people. A draft legal agreement is being prepared to be entered in to between the owners of the site and Northamptonshire County Council to ensure the long term preservation of the permissive paths. An update with regards to this will be provided to Members on the night of the Planning Committee.

An application has been made to the County Council for a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO), which proposes a number of routes across the site be designated as public rights of way. This DMMO is very much at its early stages and although a material planning consideration can only be

afforded very limited weight as it has only just been submitted at the end of June. If the DMMO is successful then this would become a legal matter for the applicants to deal with and therefore is not a consideration for the planning application at this time.

The Highways Authority have requested a number of upgrades to existing Public Rights of Way and for HH25 to be upgraded to Bridleway status. An update from the Highways Authority and the applicants has been requested with regards to this and will form part of an update to Members on the night of the Committee.

Subject to conditions and notes with regards to access, visibility, upgrading of the agricultural access track and signage, then the Highways Authority raise no objection to the proposal. Providing the applicants are able to provide a draft agreement with regards to the permissive paths and public rights of way upgrades can be achieved then the development is considered acceptable and based on the information provided in the Construction Method Statement and other supporting documentation and relevant conditions then it is considered in accordance with Policy 13 of the CSS.

9. Flood Risk

The applicants have submitted a Flood Risk Assessment, which concludes the 'site falls within flood zone 1. The risks to vulnerable receptors from all sources is considered to be insignificant. Access and egress to the site is not affected by fluvial or tidal flooding. During extreme surface water flood events access will not be required. Mitigation measures proposed to prevent onsite flooding include filter drains and swales'.

Comments from the Environment Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority have been sought and will form part of the update to Members on the night of the planning committee.

Whilst the panels themselves will be impermeable surfaces, the permeability of the soil underneath will largely be unaltered. As such, it is considered that rain water will effectively run off the solar panels onto the soil and will therefore not increase water run-off rates at any level of significance. A small area of impermeable surface of the site will be created as part of the proposed development of hard-standing. Subject to comments from the Environment Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority, the proposal is considered in accordance with policy 10 of the NPPF.

10. Other matters

Public consultation

The consultation and public exhibition was held at Wilbarston Village Hall on February 11th 2015 between 2.30pm and 7pm. Various display materials were available to those attending the events as well as having people available to answer questions.

The exhibition boards illustrated the proposals, mitigations, electrical connections and general information about solar energy. The boards also

included examples of photomontages that were created to show the point of connection options and the solar panels themselves from different viewpoints.

Feedback forms were also available and an electronic version of this form was posted on the project website. A total of 25 feedback forms were received. The applicants state that In general there was support for the use of the site for solar PV providing that public access is retained.

The applicants have attempted to address the comments received by careful project planning and design and state that the proposals will:

- Not impact on the existing public rights of way, which will remain open during the construction and operation phases of the project
- Have fixed apparatus which will not move with the sun. As such the noise emitted from the array, inverters and sub-station will be negligible
- The area below and between the panels will remain in agricultural practice through sheep grazing. The site will be surrounded by fencing which will enable small mammals and birds to easily access and exit the site but keep the sheep in and deer, who might damage the panels, out.
- The land will become more species rich than its current state
- The development will be protected by CCTV and infra-red lighting which will not be visible to the naked eye. There will not therefore be any light pollution.
- HGVs will only access the site during the construction phase. The route to the site and hours of construction have been agreed with the Highways Authority to minimise impact on local communities.
- The applicant has agreed to designate the majority of existing runways and perimeter roads as permissive paths for the operational life of the scheme.
- The selected POC is located as far as possible from the Jurassic Way.

The planning application has been advertised in accordance with relevant Planning and EIA Regulations and in accordance with the adopted North Northamptonshire Statement of Community Involvement (November 2013).

Consultation responses received

Policy 10 of the NPPF prevents Local Planning Authorities from questioning the need or productivity of Solar Farms. The applicants state there is no local benefits from the scheme but it will produce renewable energy which is supported by policy 10. A scheme for permissive paths and footpath upgrades is also conditioned.

The size of the site should be reduced – the site size is necessary to generate 49mw of electricity to warrant an underground connection. If the site is reduced in size further then it would not be viable.

The right to a view is not a material planning consideration.

Concern has been raised about the potential damage to the carriageway. However, this will be covered by the conditioned Construction Management Plan and can be enforcement by the local Highways Authority.

A query was raised about one of the plans showing two blue boxes either side of the A427. The applicant has stated that these relate to compound areas for plant associated with drilling the cable underneath the road.

In response to comments made by Wilbarston Parish Council, the pre and post works highways inspections would pick up any damage to the highway.

Existing Site Uses

The applicant's state that the majority of the site is in agricultural use, obviously the installation of panels will affect the agricultural use of these parts of the site. However, it is planned to graze the site with sheep and also the panels sit on the least productive agricultural land, avoiding productive agricultural land to the north of the site. The applicants state that the existing users within the hangers will be retained.

Grid Connection

The Local Planning Authority has contacted Western Power the District Network Operator for this area. Currently a renewable energy generating project needs to apply to make a connection to the Grid. If capacity is available an offer is made, if there is no capacity then the project will queue until capacity becomes available and an offer can be made. Capacity can become available if a previous offer expires or technical upgrades are made to the Grid. The capacity of the grid is dynamic and ever changing. The applicants state they have a grid connection available and reserved on the network.

Community Benefits

Though not a material planning consideration, discussions with the applicant are ongoing with regards to a Community Benefits Fund agreement to ensure that communities in the Borough benefit from the development. This will be dealt with in line with the Borough-wide Renewables fund policy being developed by The Council. At this time no agreement has been entered in to.

Conclusion

The proposals would serve to increase the use and supply of renewable energy, in accordance with Policy 10 of the NPPF. Generally it is considered that the landscape and visual impacts of the overall development can be largely mitigated against through additional planting and landscape management, as can any impacts on historic assets, local wildlife and ecology in accordance with policies 11 and 12 of the NPPF.

Subject to the response on additional information from NCC Archaeology, Historic England, Environment Agency and The Lead Local Flood Risk Authority and further information with regards to the local footpath network, subject to conditions the proposal is recommended for approval.

Title of Document:

Ref:

Date:

Date:

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