

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

Committee	Full Planning Committee - 23/09/2014	Item No: 5.10
Report Originator	Rebecca Collins Senior Development Officer	Application No: KET/2014/0540
Wards Affected	Burton Latimer	
Location	Wold Road (land south of), Burton Latimer	
Proposal	Full Application with EIA: Solar photovoltaic farm and ancillary infrastructure	
Applicant	Mr T Watkins First Renewable Developments 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

Subject to the satisfactory resolution of the Environment Agency objection, then planning permission be APPROVED and the matter be delegated to the Head of Development Services to finalise the permission subject to the following Condition(s):-

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 5 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. 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, operation or decommissioning 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.

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 buildings, 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. The invertors including any housing equipment, hereby permitted, shall not be erected until details of the siting, design, foundations and external materials, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. 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.

8. 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 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. The scheme shall include details for the restoration of the site. The scheme 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.

9. No electricity shall be exported to the local grid until details of a scheme, to limit and mitigate 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.

10. No development shall take place until a construction traffic management plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan shall include details of:

- (i) The timetable for works on site;
- (ii) The routing of vehicles to and from the site;
- (iii) Temporary warning signage;
- (iv) Expected levels and timings of development traffic;
- (v) Measures to control traffic, in and around the site;
- (vi) All loading and unloading areas which will be used for the delivery or despatch of materials related to the development;
- (vii) Measures to ensure that delivery vehicles and construction traffic will not park on the county highway for loading, unloading or waiting for site entry; and
- (viii) details of the location and composition of the onsite track layout.

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Construction Traffic Management Plan, or in accordance with any subsequent variation to that plan which has first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety and in accordance with policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

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

Badger Mitigation Measure
Bird Boxes

REASON: In the interests of protecting ecology and biodiversity in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF and policy 13 of the CSS.

12. 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: 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.

13. 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 07.30 - 18.00 Monday to Friday, nor outside the hours of 08.00 - 12.00 on Saturdays, nor at any time on Sundays or Bank Holidays unless 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.

14. No development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority 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. The works approved shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the erection of the first turbine 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.

15. No development shall take place on site until 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, has been 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.

16. No development shall take place on site until a scheme for boundary treatment has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall not commence until the approved scheme has been fully implemented in accordance with the 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.

17. Prior to the commencement of development, a scheme detailing the security measures/standards to be incorporated within the development at construction and operation stage with reference to secure standards have been 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.

18. Prior to the installation of the solar panels or any of the associated equipment a scheme for the sowing of the grassland, mix and management shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To sustain and enhance biodiversity in accordance with Policy 11 of the NPPF and the guidance outlined in the NPPG.

19. The Rating Level LArTr (to include the 5dB characteristic penalty) of the noise emanating from the approved scheme, shall be at least 5dB below the measured background noise level at any time at the curtilage of any noise sensitive premises lawfully existing at the time of the consent. The rating level (LArTr) and the background noise level

(LA90) shall be determined in accordance with the guidance and methodology set out in BS4142: 1997.

REASON: To protect the neighbouring properties from the impacts of noise in accordance with policy 13 of the CSS.

20. Prior to construction a phasing programme for the development of the site shall be 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 phasing programme.

REASON: In the interests of achieving a well laid out development Policy 13 of the CSS for North Northamptonshire.

Officers Report for KET/2014/0540

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

3.0 Information

Relevant Planning History

Application Site

KET/2014/0215 – Screening Burton Wold Solar Farm – EIA Required

KET/2014/216 – Scoping Burton Wold Solar Farm – EIA Required on grounds of Landscape and Visual Impact

Wider Site

KET/2011/0506, 5 wind turbines (100m height to tip), control building and substation within a secure compound, underground electrical cables connecting the turbines to the substation, alterations to existing site access, access tracks and crane hardstandings, temporary construction compound and anemometry mast 65m height (Approved).

KET/2003/0559, 10 wind turbines, generators, anemometry mast, substation and associated infrastructure. (Approved)

KET/2005/1012, Modify existing junction. (Approved)

KET/2006/1008, Erection of 50m guyed anemometer mast for 12 month period to measure wind speed and direction. (Approved)

KET/2007/0054, Scoping Opinion - Extension to wind farm.

KET/2007/1033, Wind farm consisting of 7no. wind turbines (100m tip height). (Approved)

KET/2010/0755, Anemometry mast. (Approved)

KET/2012/0075, Scoping Opinion - Revision to Burton Wold wind farm northern extension.

KET/2012/0249, Lawful Development Certificate - Commencement of planning permission reference KET/2007/1033 by the marking out of the access tracks and hedge removal positions. (Deemed a lawful commencement of planning permission).

KET/2014/0479 – Scoping Opinion Burton Wold Wind Farm Southern Extension

Site Description

Officer's site inspection was carried out on 06/08/2014.

The application site lies to the south of the existing, Burton Wold Wind Farm that consists of 10 turbines, 100m to the tip and 9 turbines 125m to the tip. There is a

further permission for 5 turbines to the south of the existing (and to the south-west of the application site), 100m to the tip. Although, a recent screening opinion has been received proposing only 3 turbines here but up to 130m to the tip.

To the west of the application site is the A6 and Burton Latimer. Significantly distance to the north is the A14 and the village of Cranford with significant planting to the south of Cranford in between the village and the A14. To the east of the site is A510, which leads to Finedon to the South of the application site. Access to this site is off the A510 and runs along the northern boundary of the application site. This site is approximately 1.5km from Finedon, 2km from Cranford and 2km from Burton Latimer and lies on the boundaries of Kettering Borough with neighbouring Authorities East Northants and Wellingborough.

The site area is approximately 34 hectares, which is currently active farmland. There are a small number of properties close to the application site namely Top Lodge and a few other properties close to the application site and not on the opposite side of major highways to the application site including Poplar Lodge, Wold Lodge, Windmill Cottages, Blackbridge Farm. On the opposite side of A510 and adjacent to the application site are The Roundhouse (Grade II Listed Building) and Fox Covert Farm.

The ground levels in this location are reasonably flat with a general decrease in levels to the southwest of the application site with some variance towards the external boundaries of the application site. There are two small wooded areas, one in the middle of the site and one just off the A510 to the east of the application site. There are existing dense hedgerows running along the boundaries of the site and along the highway boundaries with A510 and A6. There are only limited gaps for farm accesses in these hedgerows which will provide screening and cover for the proposed development. The wider countryside is largely relatively flat farmland, gently sloping to the south. The site is largely segregated from this wider area by the main roads and high-hedgerows which surrounded the wider site.

There is a designated SSSI and wildlife site running along the northern edge of the previously quarried land adjacent to the boundary of the application site and a potential wildlife site over Cranford Landfill and a separate site to the north of the application site covering a small pond.

Proposed Development

The proposal is for Solar Photovoltaic farm running east-west across the site and ancillary infrastructure. The site will have a potential to generate an estimated electrical output of approximately 19.5MW, enough to power approximately 6,174 homes per year.

The Solar Farm will comprise the following:

- Panels and associated supporting frames and ground mounting
- Inverters and transformers
- A substation
- Underground cabling
- Fencing and CCTV
- Internal service road.

The different aspects of the proposal are further explained below:

Solar Panels

The panels will be arranged in rows of arrays in an east-west alignment. Each array will be mounted on a metal frame. The highest part of the panel will be no greater than 3m from ground and the lowest part 900mm above ground level. The rows of panels will be 3-5m apart for scheduled maintenance.

The mounting frames will be matt finished galvanised steel with steel posts driven into the ground, without the need for concrete foundations to a depth of 1.5m.

Invertors

The solar farm will be connected to inverters which convert electricity generated by the PV panels from Direct Current (DC) to Alternating Current (AC). The associated transformer ensures that electricity can be transferred around the site. Cabling, located within trenches, will transfer electricity from the transformers to the proposed onsite substation.

The invertors will be housed in prefabricated cabins set on concrete bases.

Site Security

The application site will be secured by a 2m high deer fence or similar. Infra red (non visible at night), pole mounted CCTV cameras (2.5m in height) will also be provided at appropriate intervals along the boundary fence. This will enable remote surveillance of the site.

Site Access

The existing site access to the Burton Wold Wind Farm will be utilised, which is located off A510. An additional internal service road will be required to serve this site.

The internal road will be constructed using compacted crushed stone and will measure approximately 4m wide.

Landscaping

A scheme for landscaping will be provided to infill the gaps along the existing vegetation on the site boundaries and a new stretch of hedgerow. A wildflower meadow mix will be sown around the site perimeter and in between the rows of panels.

Other Solar Farm sites

This application is for planning permission for Solar Panels to be sited on land otherwise referred to in the application as 'Site A'. This proposal is solar panels covering 34 hectares of land to generate an electrical output of approximately 19.5MW. The Screening and Scoping Opinions outlined a further two potential sites for Solar Farms within this area, Sites B and C. Although, referred to within this application submission and considered, where relevant, these additional site do not form part of this planning permission and would require further applications for planning permission to be submitted. Any subsequent decision with regards to this

application would not prejudice decisions on any further applications in this area.

Any Constraints Affecting the Site

SSSI , Grade II Listed Buildings The Roundhouse and The Barn

4.0 Consultation and Customer Impact

Parish/Town Council

Burton Latimer Town Council – 28th August 2014

No objection subject to clarification as to the positioning of the energy storage buildings on site and that the revenue from the Solar Farm goes to Burton Latimer Town Council.

Woodford parish Council – 27 August 2014

No objection subject to suitable parameter planting. Could the panels be raised by 1m at the front to allow grazing underneath?

Finedon Parish Council – 1st September 2014

Object to the application on the grounds that the panels will be an eyesore and we already have more turbines that will be getting closer to Finedon.

Borough Council of Wellingborough – 4th September 2014

No objection subject to consideration of schemes within the Borough of Wellingborough.

Highway Authority – 28th August 2014

No objection.

English Heritage – 26th August 2014

The only designated heritage asset which will be affected by the proposals is a Grade II Listed Building of The Roundhouse. This impact should be viewed cumulatively in relation to the other renewable energy developments in this area.

English Heritage note the identification of potential impacts on archaeological remains and disagrees with the suggestion in the application that any archaeological fieldwork could best be considered via condition.

NCC Archaeology – 29th August 2014

The development is located in potentially archaeologically sensitive landscape. The main potential being for Late Iron Age and Roman activity. The application suggests a condition be applied to any subsequent application requiring a geophysical survey followed by a watching brief. However, NCC archaeology are concerned that undertaking these works post determination is premature. It is noted that the application proposes details to lessen the impact on archaeologically sensitive areas. However, NCC Archaeology believe this can only be done after appropriate evaluation and therefore evaluation in the form of a geophysical survey and trial trenching needs to be done in advance of determination of this application.

Environment Agency – 21st August 2014

In the absence of an acceptable flood risk assessment the EA object to the application.

Natural England – 19th August 2014

The proposal is unlikely to affect any statutorily protected sites or landscapes. Therefore, Natural England raises no objections subject to the developments accordance with their standing advice.

The Wildlife Trust

Response to follow.

North Northants Badger Group – 5th August 2014

No objection subject to badger mitigation measures as outlined in the application.

Northamptonshire Police – 21st August 2014

- Weld mesh fencing is considered to be more secure. If deer mesh fencing is to be used the police suggest the planting of hedgerow.
- Windows and doors in onsite buildings should meet LPS 1175 SR2
- Thermal imaging detection could be installed.

Neighbours

Woodford Lodge Farm, Cranford has raised objections to the concept of locating an Energy Park in this location, especially if it was to contain Biomass and AD plants.

Patch Lodge, Cranford Road, Great Addington has raised objections on the grounds of the proposal would be a further blight on the landscape creating an industrial area; the access to the site is dangerous off a fast, busy road; concerns over why they were not consulted; that there will be vibrations from the development; and the impact on wildlife.

Woodford House, Addington Road, Cranford object to the proposal on the grounds that no neighbour consultation letter has been received; the application will set a precedent allowing for the development of further on site solar development, which is a concern in terms of site suitability, impact, infrastructure support and access.

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

The Energy Park

The Site Specific Proposals LDD – Option Paper identified Burton Wold Wind Farm and the wider site area as providing ‘a focus for the Borough’s renewable energy production’. It went on to say that the site is ‘well located and provides the opportunity for an intensification of renewable energy technologies and the provision of strategic facilities that could provide energy to support the existing and growing needs of the community’.

A set of draft policies for the Emerging Joint Core Strategy were publically consulted upon between August-October 2012. Policy 26 of the emerging plan focuses on *Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks*. This policy was broadly supported. This policy provides an indication of the direction of travel that the emerging Joint Core Strategy will take with regards to this subject. Since this time the promoters have submitted their proposals for the Kettering Energy Opportunity area to the Joint Planning Unit for consideration as a potential allocation. A revised version of the Plan should be out for publically consultation later this year.

A press release has also been issued identifying the potential for this site as an Energy Park but the exact details are yet to be confirmed either through an adopted or emerging planning policy or planning application. First Renewable Ltd have undertaken a considerable amount of public consultation on the Energy Park proposals, including a launch event, open consultation events in Burton Latimer and Cranford, and the publication of a website - www.ketteringenergypark.co.uk

SPGs

Sustainable Design SPD

6.0 Financial/Resource Implications

None

7.0 Planning Considerations

The key issues for consideration in this application 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. Highways and Access
9. Flood Risk
10. Other Matters

1. Principle

The proposed application site is located to the west of Burton Latimer, to the north of Finedon and surrounded by main roads including the A6 to the west and A510 to the east. 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 recently released 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 land, 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.

In August 2012 a draft version of the emerging Joint Core Strategy, was publically consulted upon, it included draft Policy 26 which relates to renewable energy. The emerging policy states:

- a) The most appropriate technology is selected for the site having regard to site characteristics and the Regional Renewable Energy Study;***
- b) The siting of development avoids substantial harm to the significance of a historic or heritage asset;***
- c) The impact of the development on local landscape character is minimised and mitigated against;***
- d) Ensure that the siting of development does not create a significant noise for residential dwellings;***
- e) The development includes measures to mitigate against any adverse impacts on the built and natural environment;***
- f) The development does not create an overbearing cumulative noise or visual impact when considered in conjunction with smaller developments and permitted proposals;***
- g) Where appropriate, the development provides community benefits, including contributions to energy efficiency measures, which would outweigh any residual harm.***

Given the size and scale of the proposed Solar Farm then it is unlikely that this type 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. Given the 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 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 this site. This application makes reference to the other areas within this wider site and the potential cumulative impacts of these developments on the wider area and landscape character. The application has been submitted with an EIA, which covers the potential landscape and visual impacts and ecology impacts, as requested by the LPA. The application does contain further detailed information with regards to noise, land use, historic assets, flood risk and highways but, as requested these do not form part of the EIA. 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. As the proposal site is much smaller than what was submitted with the Screening and Scoping Opinions and that no further significant environmental impacts have been raised to warrant a request for EIA on any further grounds.

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 is classed as part of National Character Area 'NCA 89 Northamptonshire Vales' and is identified at a local level by the Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment as being located within 5c 'Clay Plateau – Burton Wold'. The application site does not fall within any National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or area designated for its landscape character.

The submitted Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) considers that the overall sensitivity of the site's landscape to change is low and that the landscape can accommodate the development proposed without undue effects upon landscape character. The LVIA concludes that the solar farm would not be widely visible from the surrounding landscape due to the scale of the development, existing landform and screening and distance from sensitive receptors.

The report concludes that no significant effects are expected for residential properties, key transport or recreational routes and most viewpoint locations. The only viewpoint location concluded to experience a 'significant' effect is from a public footpath immediately to the north of the site and mitigation planting as proposed will in the future screen this view.

The proposal includes a significant landscaping scheme which will enhance the planting and biodiversity at the boundaries of the site including enhancing the species in the hedgerows and blocking up gaps. The hedgerow planting includes 715 linear meters of hedgerow. No trees or woodland will be lost/impacted as a result of the development and 28 new trees are proposed as part of additional hedgerow planting. A very small area of hedgerow will be lost to facilitate the site access; however, this will be more than compensated for with the proposed landscaping scheme. In addition, 33.8 hectares of meadow grassland will be planted to the benefit of wildlife including farmland birds, foraging bats, small mammals and

invertebrates and 1.47km of existing hedgerows around and within the site will be protected and retained.

The land levels in this location are reasonably flat and there are existing high dense hedgerows around the site providing good screening. The wood to the south east of the site provides good coverage as you approach the site from the south along A510. This combined with the proposed landscaping will block, in time, easily accessible views to the application site from main roads and properties to the south. Properties within the application site may have views to the solar panels. However, these are a temporary feature which would be removed from site after 25 years returning the land to its earlier condition. Given the identification of the site in the Councils Site Specific Proposals LDD as a potential site for further intensification of renewable energy technologies and the obvious positive benefits of renewable energy generation then the proposal is considered acceptable subject to conditions with regards to landscaping.

The cumulative landscape effects have also been considered within the application. The Landscape Institute Guidelines for LVIA 3rd edition (2013) refers to the scope of the assessment focussing '*on cumulative landscape effects that are likely to be significant*' (para 7.20).

With regards to the study area, the guidance states, '*The study area should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around which the proposed development may influence in a significant manner. This will usually be based on the extent of Landscape Character Areas likely to be significantly affected either directly or indirectly*' (para 5.2).

The cumulative assessment considers the three solar farm schemes (Sites A, B and C). Cumulative landscape effects are considered within the 5km study area but in most detail within 1km of the application site.

A Cumulative Zone of Theoretical Visibility plan is utilised to establish areas where there is the potential for visibility and landscape effects. The Cumulative Zone of Theoretical Visibility illustrates that there is theoretical visibility to Site B and C in addition to Site A from the central area of Burton Wold in the area between Site A and Thrapston Road (A510). From within the western area of Burton Wold, between Burton Wold Farm and the A6 visibility is shown to Site B in addition to Site A. Considering the separation distances between the site areas, 750m to Site B and 1.4km to Site C, combined with subtle variations in topography and intervening vegetation and buildings, inter visibility between the sites would be restricted. Site B is predominantly within the Burton Wold Landscape Character Area and Site C is within the Irthlingborough Slopes Landscape Character Area.

Considering the scale of the solar farm proposals (max 3m high panels within an enhanced landscape structure) the development of the Site A solar farm, within an area already characterised by renewable energy development (in the form of large scale wind turbines), would result in a slight additional change, in conjunction with other developments to landscape character, a low magnitude of change. Considering the established low level of landscape sensitivity to the site the submitted assessment concludes that the proposal would result in a minor

significance of effect, a not significant cumulative landscape effect.

The 5km study area has been determined by the applicants Chartered Landscape Architect. Given the small scale nature of the development in height (up to 3m) and the ability for intervening screening from existing built development and vegetation, as well as screening enhancements proposed as part of the development. The applicants state that it is not considered likely that significant impacts beyond 5km will be experienced. This 5km study area is a standard approach for most solar applications and was agreed through scoping with the LPA.

The LPA has requested consideration be given to Gaultney Farm Solar Farm at Desborough. The applicants states that the site is approximately 14km away from Burton Wold Site A, on the opposite side of Kettering. Given the distance, intervening built development and existing vegetation, combined with the proposed landscape and screening enhancements on both sites it is considered that there would be no cumulative visual or landscape impacts. None of the proposed schemes in Wellingborough fall within 5km of the application site.

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 Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey was undertaken. Cranford St John Quarry SSSI is located approximately 1.2km to the north of the site, three local wildlife sites and eight potential wildlife sites, fall within 2km of the application site. Further survey work was undertaken for hedgerows, grassland, woodland, ponds and wildlife including, birds, bats, reptiles and great crested newts.

The survey concluded that the main habitat on site to be affected by the proposal is arable crop which is of minimal biodiversity value. No trees are proposed to be removed and the majority of hedgerows will remain; a small area of hedgerow will be removed to facilitate the access point to the site. However, 715 linear meters of new hedgerow will be planted to fill any existing gaps around the perimeter.

The site has the potential to be used by foraging badgers, nesting birds, and bats. However, the proposed development is unlikely to have any effect on these species, and mitigation during construction works are proposed and can be secured via condition. Furthermore, permanent enhancements are proposed which include wildflower meadow creation which will benefit a variety of wildlife including farmland birds, foraging bats, small mammals and invertebrates. Also, additional hedgerow/tree planting, provision of bird boxes and badger gates, all of which will enhance biodiversity across the site.

In addition to the above, climate change is widely acknowledged as the single greatest long-term threat to ecology and biodiversity. By reducing CO2 emissions, the proposed development can help to mitigate the causes of climate change.

The cumulative effects of the proposed development have also been considered. The two wind farm extensions are committed to provide mitigation to reduce any negative impacts to local habitats and fauna. This proposal with the other two proposed solar farm development sites (B and C) will comprise arable and improved grassland field compartments bounded by native species, which will result in a minor positive impact on wildlife generally.

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

5. Use of Agricultural Land

The site has been assessed as agricultural Grade 3 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.

The site has been demonstrated to be of poor grade agricultural land. The applicants have stated that the remaining land will be grassed over and managed for biodiversity over the operational lifetime of the solar farm to provide enhanced foraging opportunities for wildlife, which is supported by the NPPG. A condition could be applied to any subsequent approval to ensure the site is adequately managed for these purposes.

Given the identification of the site in the Councils Site Specific Proposals LDD as a potential site for further intensification of renewable energy technologies and the obvious positive benefits of renewable energy generation then use of this site is considered acceptable.

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.

The Noise Assessment, submitted as part of the planning application used BS5228-1:2009 calculation methods to estimate the highest likely generated noise during peak noise operations of the construction phase and BS4142:1997 calculation methods to estimate the noise during the operational phase. The methodology takes into account source position and distance to the nearest sensitive receptors. The noise modelling assumes that all inverters (including extractor fans) and transformers are in operation continuously at full capacity and therefore the noise predictions provide an indication of the highest likely noise level.

The Noise Assessment concludes that the predicted noise levels at each sensitive receptor location as a consequence of the operation of the solar farm would be masked by the existing noise environment found at the neighbouring dwellings and are significantly less than the guideline sound levels for the protection of residential amenity.

The anticipated noise generation from the construction phase will not be unlike some modern agricultural practices and will be temporary in nature.

Subject to conditions regarding noise levels at the boundaries of the site and for key residential receptors as well as working hours and a construction management plan, it is not considered that the proposal would have an unacceptable impact on amenity through noise.

Vibration is considered not to be an issue for the proposed development due to the low impact nature of the groundworks, i.e. no piling or significant earthworks are required. Trenching for the cabling will be undertaken by back actor over a temporary period of time. The frames to which the panels will be attached are driven (screwed) into the ground to a depth of between 1.2 to 2m by using a mechanical auger.

There is no lighting proposed during the operational phase of the development but a condition is proposed to control lighting for the benefit of local residents. Any effects from glint and glare 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. However, a condition is proposed to prevent any potentially negative effects caused by glint or glare. The proposal is therefore considered in accordance with policy 13 (l) of the CSS.

7. Impact on Heritage Assets

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'.

Within the submitted Historical and Archaeological Report the applicants state that within 2km of the site there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments, designated historic landscape or Conservation Areas. There are two Listed Buildings within this area including the Grade II Listed The Roundhouse and a 17th Century Barn, also Grade II. The barn, located to the south of the application site, is hidden from view from the site by an existing mature hedgerow, which it is proposed to be extended to between 3 to 4 metres. The applicants state that the increased hedge height will not have an impact on either the setting or the physical building. There is will be no impact on the views to the barn from other parts of the landscape.

The Roundhouse, located opposite the entrance to the site on the A510, has the potential to have its setting affected from the proposed development. This building was constructed by the Arbuthnot family after the Duke of Wellington, a regular visitor to Woodford House their family home, said the scene reminded him of the

fields of Waterloo. The proposed solar farm will have a visual impact on The Roundhouse, with both the views of the site from the building towards the west, and the views of The Roundhouse from the western part of the Wold being affected. The building occupies a slightly elevated location and stands out against the skyline when viewed from the west. However, the proposed development is relatively low lying and will not interrupt the view but will be noticeable in the foreground, from first floor windows. Views from ground floor windows are likely to be blocked by existing hedgerow, which will be allowed to grow, as part of the proposed landscape mitigation scheme, and gaps can be plugged in the hedges limiting the direct views to the site.

The view from the first floor windows has already been compromised by the construction of the Burton Wold Wind Farm. The further five approved turbines to the south of the existing wold, if built, be far more prominent in the view than the proposed Solar Farm.

The proposed Solar Farm development would, if permitted, be granted a temporary permission for 25 years. Any changes to the settings of listed buildings within the scheme can be fully reversed after the site has been decommissioned and remedial work can be carried out promptly within an agreed methodology, to be conditioned as part of any subsequent permission.

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'.

Taking into consideration the temporary nature of the development and that any impacts on these historic assets are reversible, which is a material planning consideration and that the proposed landscaping would, after a short period time help to mitigate any negative impacts. Then the proposed development is considered to have less than substantial harm, outweighed by the benefits of renewable energy production, as proposed. English Heritage raises no concerns about the impacts of the proposed Solar Farm on any local historic asset.

The proposal is therefore considered in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF and 13 (h) and (o) of the CSS.

Archaeology

The applicant has submitted a Desk Based Archaeological Assessment, which identifies the potential for archaeological remains within the application site. The applicant has suggested a condition be applied to any subsequent application requiring further archaeological works including a geophysical survey followed by a watching brief.

English Heritage and NCC Archaeology are concerned that leaving archaeological works to a condition could have unacceptable impact on archaeological remains and have requested that geophysical surveys and trial trenching is done prior to permission being granted. Despite this it is considered that the nature of the development would allow suitable alterations to the scheme, if permitted, for necessary changes to be made if archaeological remains are found.

The exact location of the panels and associated equipment is not fixed. This can be dealt with via condition so if any archaeological remains are discovered and need to be kept in-situ the exact locations of the equipment could be relocated. Also, all impacts on archaeology could be avoided by 'floating' the panel foundations and re-routing cable trenches and locating invertors to avoid any sensitive areas identified during further investigation works. Furthermore, the ground works required to lay concrete bases for the invertors and substation and the works for the access tracks would not be to a depth that would be likely to encounter any archaeology given the existing intense agricultural use of the site. These could be constructed through scraping off the very top layer of soil (that which will already be disturbed by ploughing) prior to the pouring of the concrete base or laying of crushed aggregate. These matters could, if necessary, be controlled via conditions.

English Heritage and 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 desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation". The results of the submitted desk-based assessment conclude that in this instance a field evaluation is not necessary.

The imposition of a condition to ensure a development is acceptable and in accordance with the NPPF is at the discretion of the Local Planning Authority. The NPPF, paragraph 203 states that "Local planning authorities should consider whether otherwise unacceptable development could be made acceptable through the use of conditions or planning obligations". The approved Gaultney Farm Solar Farm application was approved with a similar condition applied with the support of NCC Archaeology. It is not considered necessary to require the archaeological works in advance of a decision being made on the application and the proposal is considered in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF.

8. Highways

The site is currently accessed via Wold Road, a private un-adopted road. It is proposed to continue to utilise this site entrance point which has been used for the construction of the existing Burton Wold Wind Farm and the Northern Extension and does not require any upgrades works.

A public right of way extends up Wold Road to the site. During construction of the proposed development signage will be in place and users of the footpath separated from the construction traffic.

The construction of this solar farm would result in the temporary generation of construction and staff-related traffic. During this period, there will be approximately 421 deliveries to site, or 842 vehicle movements. Should this site be developed in

one phase it is anticipated that the vehicle movements would be condensed into a 4 month period, with each month experiencing the highest number of deliveries to site at 115 deliveries, spread out over a 4-week period there would be an average of 5 HGV deliveries per day. As all deliveries will result in a return journey for the vehicle, there will be an average of 10 vehicle movements per working day.

The development will not generate any increase in traffic during the operational phase, except for adhoc maintenance visits. Thus, the development would not have any permanent effects on highway capacity during this time.

Planning permission is sought for the Solar PV Farm for an operational period of 25 years. After which the site would be decommissioned with all equipment and service roads removed from the site and it returned to its former use.

During the decommissioning stage it is anticipated that the same route to site would be utilised as that proposed for the construction vehicles. Should the road layout have changed during the operational period, a revised route would have to be agreed with the LPA, through the conditioned decommissioning statement.

It is anticipated that vehicles required to dismantle and remove the site equipment would be similar in magnitude to those required during the construction phase therefore the level of impact on wider highway network would be minimal. Traffic management measures proposed for the construction phase will be implemented during the decommissioning phase to ensure safe access/egress from the Wold Road/A510 junction and the safety of users of the public right of way along Wold Road.

The Highways Authority raises no objection to the development in highway capacity or safety terms. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in highway safety terms and in accordance with policy 13 (d) and (n) of the CSS.

9. Flood Risk

The Environment Agency originally objected to the planning application on the grounds that it did not include an acceptable flood risk assessment, further information has been provided and it is considered that as this is a surface water drainage issue and that the exact location of the turbines is not fixed that this can be adequately dealt with by condition. The proposal is therefore considered in accordance with policy 10 of the NPPF.

10. Other matters raised

The economic case for energy production

Policy 10 of the NPPF prevents Local Planning Authorities from questioning the need or productivity of Solar Farms.

Energy Park

As outlined above the Site Specific Proposals LDD – Options Paper identified this area as having the potential for further renewable energy technologies. The site has also been submitted through the Emerging Joint Core Strategy consultations and could form part of a future Renewable Energy policy. Paragraph 216 of the NPPF states that from the day of publication, decision takers may also give weight to

relevant policies within emerging plans, according to its stage of preparation; the extent to which there are unresolved objections; and its degree of consistency with the NPPF. At this time, these emerging policies can only be afforded limited weight. It is therefore; only appropriate to consider the application(s) as they are submitted. This application has been determined on its own merits and recommendations have been made on this basis.

Other developments

The other consented developments for this area including the turbines to the south of the existing have planning permission. The impacts of these developments on local settlements were considered as part of these permissions. This application considers the cumulative impacts of this development in association with the existing development within the wider site and the proposed further two sites for Solar Panels. This consideration is outlined in the relevant part of this report.

Public consultation

Two public exhibitions were held in Cranford and Burton Latimer, which were advertised via an email to Parish Clerks, and Local Councillors, 2300 leaflets were distributed in the local area and a public notice advertising the exhibitions was placed in the ET. The exhibitions were attended by 120 members of the public, 28 comment forms were completed. The following concerns were raised; loss of agricultural land; impact on the public footpath; landscape and visual impact; the vehicular access to the site and a lack of financial gain for the local community.

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

Grazing underneath the panels?

The applicant is proposing to plant a wildflower meadow under and around the solar panels, the creation of which will benefit a variety of wildlife including farmland birds, foraging bats, small mammals and invertebrates. The NPPG supports this approach for large scale solar farms when, the use of agricultural land has been shown to be necessary where the development encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

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.

Community Benefits

The applicant's willingness to support a community fund for energy efficiency measures is acknowledged. They have offered £125,000 + indexation for the 25 year period towards a Community Fund to support locally sustainable projects. Whilst this offer is not a reason for granting planning permission, it is welcomed.

Conclusion

The proposal 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 development can be largely mitigated against through additional planting and landscape management, as can any impacts on local wildlife and ecology in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF.

The benefits and effects of the proposal have been weighed in accordance with National and Local Planning Policies and subject to conditions stated is recommended for approval.

Background Papers

Title of Document:

Date:

Contact Officer:

Previous Reports/Minutes

Ref:

Date:

Rebecca Collins, Senior Development Officer on 01536 534316