

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

Committee	Full Planning Committee - 28/07/2015	Item No: 5.5
Report Originator	Rebecca Collins Development Team Leader	Application No: KET/2015/0421 KET/2015/0422 KET/2015/0423
Wards Affected	Burton Latimer	
Location	Wold Lodge, Burton Wold Farm, Wold Road, Burton Latimer Top Lodge, Burton Wold Farm, Wold Road, Burton Latimer Burton Spinney, Burton Wold Farm, Wold Road, Burton Latimer	
Proposal	Full Application with EIA: Construction of solar photovoltaic PV farm including ancillary access tracks, inverter and transformer stations, substations, cabling, CCTV, fencing and landscaping	
Applicant	First Renewable	

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 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 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.

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: Details of construction traffic 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.

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

- Ecological/biodiversity retention, protection, enhancement measures and future management inputs outlined in Chapter 4 of the 'Environmental Statement', dated May 2015, including Section 4.8, 'Impact Assessment' and Section 4.9 'Ecological Enhancement Opportunities'

- A comprehensive Ecological/Biodiversity Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development.

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.

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: Details of archaeology 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.

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 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. 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.

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 development shall be carried out in accordance with the mitigation measures as outlined in section 7.2 of the Hayes McKenzie noise report HM:2862/R02 dated 14th July 2015.

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

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: A phasing programme is required prior to the commencement of development in the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policy 13 of the CSS for North Northamptonshire.

21. No development shall take place until a surface water drainage scheme for the site, based on sustainable drainage principles and an assessment of the hydrological and hydro geological context of the development, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: A surface water drainage scheme is required prior to the commencement of development, to prevent the increased risk of flooding, both on and off site in accordance with the NPPF and Policy 13(q) of the Core Strategy for North Northamptonshire.

Officers Report for KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423

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

3.0 Information

Relevant Planning History

Site A

KET/2015/0421 – Wold Lodge Solar Farm (Pending)

KET/2015/0422 – Top Lodge Solar Farm (Pending)

KET/2015/0423 – Burton Spinney Solar Farm (Pending)

Site B

KET/2015/0438 – Windmill Solar Farm (Pending)

KET/2015/0440 – Bryant Field Solar Farm (Pending)

KET/2015/0445 – Latimer Solar Farm (Pending)

KET/2015/0446 – Wold Cottage Solar Farm (Pending)

KET/2015/0424 – Construction of a 132kw connection compound consisting of DNO and customer compounds (Pending)

KET/2015/0426 – Installation of cable service corridor between Cranford Quarry North Solar Area and the Local Distribution Network Compound (Pending)

KET/2015/0427 – Installation of a cable/service corridor between Burton Wold Farm East Solar Farm and the Local Distribution Network Compound (Pending)

KET/2014/0863 – Burton Wold Solar Farm northern site – APPROVED

KET/2014/0861 – Burton Wold Wind Farm Southern Extension (comprising 3 turbines, 136.5m to the tip (APPROVED).

KET/2014/0540 – Burton Wold Solar Farm Southern site – APPROVED

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

KET/2014/0215 – Screening Opinion for Burton Wold Solar Farm – EIA required

KET/2014/0216 – Scoping Opinion for Burton Wold Solar Farm – EIA required on the grounds of landscape and visual impact

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 lawful commencement).

KET/2012/0075 – Scoping Opinion – Revision to Burton Wold Wind Farm northern extension.

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/2010/0755 – Anemometry Mast – APPROVED.

KET/2007/1033 – Wind Farm comprising 7 no. wind turbines (100m to tip height) – APPROVED.

KET/2007/0054 – Scoping Opinion – Extension to wind farm

KET/2006/1008 – Erection of 50m guyed anemometer mast for a 12 month period to measure wind speed and direction – APPROVED.

KET/2005/1012 – Modifications to existing junction - APPROVED

KET/2003/0559 – 10 wind turbines, generators, anemometry mast, substation and associated infrastructure – APPROVED.

Site Description

Officer's site inspection was carried out on 17/06/2015.

KET/2015/0421 – Wold Lodge Solar Farm

The application site comprises the northern portion of a large arable field, a total area of approximately 8.41 hectares within Burton Wold. The site lies to the south of Wold Road, approximately 2.2km north of the village of Finedon, 2km east of the settlement of Burton Latimer and 2km south of Cranford. The A510 (Thrapston Road) is located approximately 700m to the east.

The northern site boundary adjoins Wold Road, a small private road that connects the individual farm properties of Burton Wold with Burton Latimer. The site is bounded to the north, east and west by a mature hedgerow, the western boundary borders a hedgerow, ditch and arable fields, Burton Wold Wind Farm and a line of electricity pylons. The closest property, Burton Wold Farm, adjoins the north-western boundary. The southern boundary adjoins the Burton Wold Farm East Solar Farm.

The site is currently accessed via the A510, which was the entrance used for the construction of the Burton Wold Wind Farm and Northern Extension. It is proposed that this will continue to be the main access into the solar sites. The access route of Wold Road will follow along an existing hedge on the western boundary of the site.

The application site gently slopes towards the north-west with ground levels ranging from 93m to 85m AOD.

KET/2015/0422 – Top Lodge Solar Park

The application site comprises the central southern portion of a large arable field, measuring approximately 9.11 hectares and lies to the south of Wold Road, approximately 2km north of Finedon, 2km east of Burton Latimer and 2.2km south of Cranford.

The site is currently accessed via the A510, which was the entrance used for the construction of the Burton Wold Wind Farm and Northern Extension. It is proposed that this will continue to be the main access into the solar sites. The access route of Wold Road will follow along an existing hedge on the western boundary of the site.

The application site gently slopes towards the north-west with ground levels ranging from 93m to 85m AOD.

KET/2015/0423 – Burton Spinney Solar Array

The application site comprises the southern portion of a large arable field which measures approximately 10.7 hectares and lies to the south of Wold Road, approximately 1.5km north of Finedon, 2km east of Burton Latimer and 2.5km south of Cranford.

The site is currently accessed via the A510, which was the entrance used for the construction of the Burton Wold Wind Farm and Northern Extension. It is proposed that this will continue to be the main access into the solar sites. The access route of Wold Road will follow along an existing hedge on the western boundary of the site.

The application site gently slopes towards the north-west with ground levels ranging from 93m to 85m AOD.

Background

Wold Lodge Solar Farm, Top Lodge Solar Park and Burton Spinney Solar Array are three resubmissions each based on a small area of a previously consented 19.5MW solar scheme known as Burton Wold permitted under decision notice KET/2014/0540. Due to funding changes and restrictions the applicant has divided the overall site into four, resulting in three resubmission applications and the fourth area to be implemented under the extant consent. The overall layout of the solar farm and ancillary infrastructure for the resubmissions remains generally as permitted under the KET/2014/0540 scheme.

The three resubmission applications planning references KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423 are all considered within this single report and should be considered as both three individual applications as well as one overall strategic solar farm. Therefore the decision making should be a decision per resubmission (therefore three votes) as three decision notices would be produced.

Proposed Development

This proposal relates to three sites: KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423 comprising of a total of approximately 28 hectares of Solar Panels (formerly known as Site A). The proposed development for the three sites constitutes the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic PV farm running east-west across the site. It would include:

- Panels and associated supporting frames and ground mounting
- Inverters (housed in prefabricated containers) and transformers
- A sub-station housed in a prefabricated container to allow connection to the Local Distribution Network
- Underground cabling connecting the inverters to the sub-station (generally following the service road)
- Fencing and CCTV
- Internal service road

Each of the three sites would have the potential to generate an estimated 5MWp each of renewable electricity which results in enough power for approximately 1,575 homes per year.

Any Constraints Affecting The Site

A14 and A6

Public Rights of Way

Protected Species EIA/ Env. Statement Outside settlement boundary Cranford St John SSSI

Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits (SPA)

Adjacent to historic waste site

Grade II Listed Buildings – The Roundhouse and The Barn

4.0 Consultation and Customer Impact

Burton Latimer Town Council

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 3rd July 2015.

No objection subject to conditions with regards to all fence and CCTV parts to be high quality hardwood and the hedge on Wold Road to be allowed to grow to a height of 2 metres and any gaps to be filled with suitable planting.

Other comments made include that the Town Council support the re-routing of the Footpath UA6 to avoid the crossing of the A6 and to proceed along Wold Road.

Northamptonshire Highways

KET/2015/042, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 18th June 2015.

No objections subject to the following conditions:

- A phasing plan showing no more than 2 parcels of development coming forward at the same time (to be submitted prior to the commencement of development).
- A full Construction Traffic Management Plan to be submitted and approved prior to the commencement of development.
- Standard requirements and specifications with respect to Public Rights of Way and Construction works.
- A condition providing details to prevent loose material migrating onto the highway.

Natural England

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 1st July 2015.

Internationally designated sites – No objection.

SSSI – No objection, no conditions requested.

Protected Species – please refer to Standing Advice.

We would expect the Local Planning Authority to assess and consider the other possible impacts resulting from this proposal on the following:

- Local sites
- Local landscape character and
- Local or national biodiversity priority habitats and species

Biodiversity enhancements – Natural England recommends that a condition be attached to any planning decision requiring a Biodiversity Management Plan which provides details on the establishment and maintenance of landscaping to benefit biodiversity.

Soils and Agricultural Land Quality – We consider that the development is unlikely to lead to significant and irreversible long term loss of best and most versatile agricultural land as a resource for future generations.

Northamptonshire Police

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 19th June 2015.

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.

Highways England

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 24th June 2015.

The proposed development is not expected to have a material impact on the closest strategic route, the A14 – therefore no objections.

Historic England

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422, KET/2015/0423: Response received 29th June 2015.

Urge the LPA to address the following issues and determine the application in accordance with National and Local Policy guidance.

Advice has not changed from that previously provided on application KET/2014/0540. This advice focused on ensuring that the assessment of impacts on the significance of all heritage assets potentially affected by the proposals together with the contribution made by their setting and the magnitude of potential impacts would form a sufficient basis from which your authority could ensure that any direct or indirect impacts on assets of local, regional and national importance could be avoided or mitigated. The heritage assessment reveals that the Grade II Listed Building (The Round House – NHLE 1052096 & 1226090) will be affected by the proposals.

It is also indicated that the site has a high potential for direct impacts on a series of multi-period archaeological remains of Iron-Age and Romano-British origin. We consider that insufficient investigation has been conducted to assess the archaeological potential of any archaeological remains within the Wold Lodge site. It is therefore not possible in our opinion to determine an appropriate course of action with regard to the mitigation of impact on any such heritage assets.

Advise that regardless of whether the significance of any non-designated archaeological remains would be likely to preclude development, the cumulative impacts arising from this development can result in significant physical impacts on archaeological remains. A well informed and nuanced approach to mitigation is required based on an appropriate level of prior evaluation. Refer to the advice of the County Archaeological Advisor.

Ensure that sufficient information has been submitted in order to understand the potential impact of the proposals and the significance of all heritage assets and their settings.

NCC Archaeology

KET/2015/0421: KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 07th July 2015. 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

KET/2015/0421: Response received 12th June 2015.

No objection to the application as submitted. The lead local flood authority should provide comments on surface water management.

KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 15th June 2015.

No objection to the application as submitted. The lead local flood authority should provide comments on surface water management.

Lead Local Flood Authority

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422, KET/2015/0423: Response received 30th June 2015. Object.

- The FRA submitted with this application does not comply with the requirements set out in Paragraph 9 of the NPPF and does not provide a suitable basis for assessment to be made of the flood risks arising from the proposed development.
- The FRA states that there will be a 700 square metre increase in impermeable surfacing. It needs to demonstrate there will be no increase in runoff from the proposed development. Therefore calculations are required for the pre-development Greenfield runoff rates, potential impacts of increased impermeable area and the attenuation volumes required to reduce the runoff from the developed site to the Greenfield runoff rates. The calculations should only consider the impermeable areas and not the whole site.
- We consider attenuation via swales and infiltration trenches to be the most appropriate form of SuDS for a solar farm of this size.
- A drainage ditch runs along the boundary of the site. A 9m buffer should be maintained from the edge of the watercourse for maintenance access in line with Policy 7 of the Northamptonshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.
- All sensitive infrastructure such as inverters/transformers and substations should be located outside of the area of flood risk.

KBC – Environmental Health

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 13th July 2015. No objection subject to noise and working hours conditions and notes.

The National Planning Casework Unit

KET/2015/0421: Response received 15th June 2015.

No comments.

KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 16th June 2015.

No comments.

East Northamptonshire Council

KET/2015/0421: KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Awaiting response.

The Borough Council of Wellingborough

KET/2015/0421: KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423: Response received 9th July 2015.

No objection subject to the consideration of cumulative landscape and visual impacts with reference to solar farm sites within the Borough of Wellingborough.

Neighbours

KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422, KET/2015/0423: No representations received.

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’s 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’.

The Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy, Emerging Policy 26 states that proposals for renewable and low carbon energy generation will be supported where they meet a set of criteria. Land at Burton Wold has also been identified as an Area of Opportunity for an Energy Park to build on the range of renewable energy technologies already present. The development will link the energy production to high tech employment opportunities, new development at East Kettering and strategic development at Junction 10 of the A14.

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 principle of renewable energy development on this site is already established by virtue of the extant planning permission reference (KET/2014/0540) for 19.5MW solar scheme known as Burton Wold – Site A.

The proposed application sites (KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422, KET/2015/0423 collectively known as Site A) are located to the west of A510, to the south of Cranford on the opposite side of the A14 to this Village and to the east of Burton Latimer on the opposite side of the A6. The sites are 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; not create an overbearing cumulative noise or visual impact. Furthermore proposals at the Energy Park should be subject to a comprehensive masterplan; make provision for on-site research facilities; demonstrate how the proposal will contribute towards meeting energy needs; retain and enhance onsite biodiversity; create a model for zero carbon energy; be of a high quality design to mitigate landscape impact.

Given the size and scale of the proposed Solar Farm sites 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. However, with the gently undulating nature of the site and existing boundary landscaping, it is considered that the choice of site is in line with the NPPG. Furthermore, given the strong policy presumption in favour of sustainable and renewable energy outlined in policy 10 of the NPPF. This site is considered to be emerging allocation within the Joint Core Strategy as an Energy Park and on this basis, 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 the sites referenced above. These applications make reference to other areas within this wider site and the potential cumulative impacts of these developments on the wider area and landscape character. The applications have been submitted with EIAs, which cover the potential landscape and visual impacts and ecology impacts, as requested by the LPA. The applications contain further detailed information with regards to noise, land use; historic assets, flood risk and highways but these matters as requested do not form part of the EIA.

The LPA is satisfied that the three applications as submitted comply with the request for submission of an EIA which adequately addresses any significant environment impacts. As the proposal sites are smaller than what was submitted with the previous Screening and Scoping Opinions it is considered that no further significant environmental impacts will arise 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 for all Site A sites combined. 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; it is an emerging allocation in the Joint Core Strategy; and the obvious positive benefits of renewable energy generation then the proposal is considered acceptable subject to conditions with regards to landscaping.

Cumulative Impacts

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 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 submitted Environment Statements state that there are no other solar farm schemes within 5km of the application site, other than those at Burton Wold. The submitted cumulative assessment considers the three strategic solar farm schemes, previously the subject of Scoping and Screening Opinions at Burton Wold, each subject to separate applications (Sites A, B and Site C – (Site A contains the three applications that this report is considering: Wold Lodge Solar Farm, Top Lodge Solar Park and Burton Spinney Solar Array)).

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 all three strategic sites (A, B and C) from the central area of Burton Wold in the area between strategic 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.

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 sites. However, 715 linear meters of new hedgerow for all the sites will be planted to fill any existing gaps around the perimeter of the application sites.

The sites have 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, the provision of additional hedgerow/tree planting, provision of bird boxes and badger gates, will enhance biodiversity across the site. Natural England has raised no objections to the proposed sites.

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.

Cumulative Impacts

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. These proposals 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 proposals are considered in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF and policy 13 (o) of the CSS.

5. Use of Agricultural Land

The sites have 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 sites have been demonstrated to be of poor grade agricultural land, currently grassed pastoral field. 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 sites in the Emerging Pre-Submission Joint Core Strategy and the Site Specific Proposals LDD as potential sites for further intensification of renewable energy technologies and the obvious positive benefits of renewable energy generation then use of these sites is considered acceptable on this basis.

The operational lifespan of the solar farm is 25 years. Therefore once each phase commences so would the 25 year time period. After which, all equipment and service roads shall be removed from each site and they will return to their former use.

Whilst the land will be temporarily taken out of arable production, each of the three permissions sought are only temporary in nature, for 25 years with minimal ground intrusion. There will be no permanent loss of the agricultural land or degradation of the existing soil quality. Furthermore, if desired in the future during the operational phase of the solar farms, the sites could still be utilised for agricultural grazing if desired.

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; 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.

The Noise Assessment, submitted as part of the planning applications 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. Also, with the nearby A14 noise levels are constant in this location and could be masked by traffic noise.

Subject to conditions regarding noise levels at the boundaries of the sites and for key residential receptors as well as working hours and a construction management plan, it is not considered that the proposals 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. Also, the panels are sufficiently distanced from neighbouring properties. However, a condition is proposed to prevent any potentially negative effects caused by glint or glare. The proposals are 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 sites, 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 Arbutnot 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 farms 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 would, if built, be far more prominent in the view than the proposed Solar Farms.

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 sites have 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 public benefits of renewable energy production, as proposed.

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 three application sites. 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.

NCC Archaeology and Historic England have raised concerns that a more comprehensive assessment of the extractive industry within this area is required to establish any impacts on archaeological remains. Despite this it is considered that the nature of the development would allow suitable alterations to the schemes, 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 previous agricultural use of these sites. These could be constructed through scraping off the only the very top layer of soil prior to the pouring of the concrete base or the laying of crushed aggregate. These matters could, if necessary, be controlled via conditions.

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 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 previously approved strategic site in which these applications relate to and the Gaultney Farm Solar Farm application were approved with a similar condition applied. The Gaultney Farm Solar Farm had 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 for the reasons outlined above, therefore the proposal is considered acceptable and in accordance with Policy 12 of the NPPF.

8. Highways

The overall 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 northern 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 these three solar farms would result in the temporary generation of construction and staff-related traffic. During this period, there will be overall 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 developments will not generate any increase in traffic during the operational phase, except for ad hoc maintenance visits. Thus, the development would not have any permanent effects on highway capacity during this time.

Planning permission for each of the three sites 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 the sites 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 sites 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.

NCC Highways and Highways England have to date raised no objection to the development in highway capacity or safety terms. Conditions have been requested by the Highways Authority with regards to; a phasing plan showing no more than 2 parcels of development coming forward at the same time; a Construction Traffic Management Plan; and Standard requirements and specifications with respect to Public Rights of Way and Construction works. A condition providing details to prevent loose material migrating onto the highway is also requested, however, it is considered this can be covered through the Construction Traffic Management Plan and that Site A is so significantly distanced from the A510 that the migration of loose material to the highway is unlikely.

Subject to this condition, the proposals are considered to be acceptable in highway safety terms and in accordance with policy 13 (d) and (n) of the CSS.

9. Flood Risk

The sites are located outside of an area which has been modelled by the Environment Agency to be susceptible to flooding from rivers and the sea. BGS Flood data maps indicate that the site has no potential for groundwater flooding to occur. Whilst the Risk Management System Flood data indicates that the south-western boundary of the application site could be susceptible to flooding during a 75, 100 and 1000 year return flood, the depths of the flood water associated with these events are not considered to be significant, and the solar panel and associated infrastructure deployment area has been sited to avoid these areas.

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, so flood risk elsewhere would not be increased as a result of the proposed development.

The Lead Local Flood Authority object to the three proposals. They set out that the submitted FRA does not comply with the requirements set out in Para. 9 of the NPPF and that it does not provide a suitable basis for assessment to be made of the flood risks arising from the proposed development. They also have concerns regarding the proposed impermeable surfacing and potential runoff. The applicants have been asked to submit further information to address the concerns of the Lead Local Flood Authority.

The Environment Agency has raised no objection to any of the proposed sites subject to a condition. It is considered that the proposed condition by the Environment Agency covers drainage and would mitigate any risk arising from the proposed development. This condition is included in the recommendation. The proposal is therefore considered in accordance with policy 10 of the NPPF.

10. Other matters

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 and these sites has been identified in the Emerging Joint Core Strategy. 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. These applications have been determined on their own merits and recommendations have been made on this basis.

Other developments

The other consented developments for this area including to the turbines to the north and west of the existing. The impacts of these developments on local settlements were considered as part of these permissions. These applications consider the cumulative impacts of this development in association with the existing development within the wider site and the proposed further sites for Solar Panels. This consideration is outlined in the relevant part of this report.

Public consultation

Public exhibitions were held in Cranford and Burton Latimer, which were advertised via an email to Parish Clerks, and Local Councillors, 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).

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

Though not a material planning consideration, the applicant has made clear that they are willing to enter into 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.

Air quality

Solar developments have no direct point source of emissions to atmosphere during the operational phase. Possible impacts to local air quality only have the potential to occur during the short period of the construction phase through vehicular and plant emissions or through the creation of dust.

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 local wildlife and ecology in accordance with policy 11 of the NPPF. Other relevant policies of the NPPF including those in section 12 (Heritage) have been considered. Also, the sites form part of an emerging allocation as an Energy Park.

The benefits and effects of the proposals have been weighed in accordance with National and Local Planning Policies and subject to conditions stated applications reference KET/2015/0421, KET/2015/0422 and KET/2015/0423 are recommended for approval.

Background Papers

Title of Document:

Date:

Contact Officer: Rebecca Collins, Development Team Leader on 01536 534316

Previous Reports/Minutes

Ref:

Date: