

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

Committee	Full Planning Committee - 28/07/2015	Item No: 5.6
Report Originator	Rebecca Collins Development Team Leader	Application No: KET/2015/0438 KET/2015/0440 KET/2015/0445 KET/2015/0446
Wards Affected	Burton Latimer	
Location	Windmill Farm, Wold Road, Burton Latimer Bryant Field, Wold Road, Burton Latimer Latimer Solar Park, Wold Road, Burton Latimer Wold Cottage Farm, Wold Road, Burton Latimer	
Proposal	Full Application with EIA: Construction of solar photovoltaic farm including ancillary access tracks, fencing, inverter and transformer stations, substations, cabling, CCTV 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: Traffic management measures are required prior to the commencement of development, in the interests of highway safety and in accordance with policy 13 of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy.

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 4.7, 'Impact Assessment' and Section 4.8 'Ecological Enhancement Opportunities'

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

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/R1 dated 17th July 2014.

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: Phasing 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: Details of surface water drainage are 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/2015/0440

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

3.0 Information

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/2015/0440 – Bryant Field Solar Farm

The application site comprises a central portion of a large arable field, located in open countryside, a total area of approximately 10.4 hectares within Burton Wold. The site lies to the east of the A6, approximately 1.5km to the east of the centre of Burton Latimer.

Wold Road, a small private road that connects the individual farm properties of Burton Wold with Burton Latimer, lies to the south, over the A6 in a cutting. The site is boarded by a mature linear block of trees and scrub to the west and the closest residential properties are found on the eastern edge of Burton Latimer, approximately 215m to the west of the western boundary. The northern boundary adjoins the proposed Windmill Solar Farm, beyond which lies Mill Cottages (a small residential terrace) and the Old Piggeries small employment units. The southern boundary adjoins the proposed Latimer Solar Park.

The site is currently accessed via the A510 on to Wold Road, a private road, 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 its southern boundary.

There are no public rights of way that pass through the site. The nearest footpath runs through the proposed Wold Cottage Solar Farm approximately 220m to the south with Cranford Road approximately 575m to the north-west and Wold Road approximately 400m to the south.

The application site gently slopes towards the north-west with ground levels ranging from 80m to 86m AOD.

KET/2015/0438 – Windmill Solar Park

The application site comprises of the northern portion of a large arable field, in the open countryside, measuring approximately 11.3 hectares and lies to the east of the A6, approximately 1.7km to the east of the centre of Burton Latimer.

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.

There are no public rights of way that pass through the site. The nearest footpath runs through the proposed Wold Cottage Solar Farm approximately 450m to the south with Cranford Road approximately 370m to the north-west.

The application site gently slopes towards the north-west with ground levels ranging from 83m to 99m AOD.

KET/2015/0445 – Latimer Solar Park

The application site comprises the southern portion of a large arable field, located in open countryside, which measures approximately 10.2 hectares and is bordered by the proposed Bryant Field Solar Park to the north and the proposed Wold Cottage Solar Farm to the south and mature Hawthorn hedgerows to the west and east. The site lies to the east of the A6, approximately 1.5km to the east of the centre of Burton Latimer and measures approximately 10.2 hectares.

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.

There are no public rights of way that pass through the site. The nearest footpath runs through the proposed Wold Cottage Solar Farm approximately 100m to the south.

The application site gently slopes towards the north-west with ground levels ranging from 83m to 78m AOD.

KET/2015/0446 – Wold Cottage Solar Park

The application site comprises the southern site of four solar farm sites, bordered by Latimer Solar Park site to the north and Wold Road site to the south. The site is split in two separate areas on an approximate west to east alignment by an existing Public Right of Way (PRoW) that will remain. The site lies to the east of the A6, approximately 1.5km to the east of the centre of Burton Latimer. It is part a large arable field, located in open countryside, which measures approximately 12 hectares.

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.

A Public Rights of Way (PRoW) crosses through the site and will be maintained upon the definitive map alignment. A 12m corridor will be left containing the footpath grass verges and hedgerows.

The site's topography to be elevated at c. 70m AOD, with a gentle fall to the south-west.

Report Format

These four applications, planning references KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/2015/0445 and KET/2015/0446 are all considered within this single report and should be considered as both four individual as well as one overall strategic solar farm. Therefore, the decision making should be a decision per submission (therefore four votes) as four decision notices would be produced.

Proposed Development

This proposal relates to four sites: KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/2015/445 and KET/2015/0446, comprising of a total of approximately 43.9 hectares of Solar Panels (formerly known as Site B). 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 four 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 including UA006 running through the southern part of the application site and a bridleway, GF017, to the east of the sites

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Outside settlement boundary

Cranford St John SSSI

Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits (SPA)

Adjacent to historic waste site

Grade II Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

4.0 Consultation and Customer Impact

4.0 Consultation and Customer Impact

Burton Latimer Town Council

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: Response dated 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/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: Response dated 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.

KET/2015/0446 – Wold Cottage Farm is bisected by PRoW UA6 and the applicant proposes to fence a 12m corridor with hedging and verges to maintain the PRoW. This is deemed acceptable but care must be taken to ensure that the PRoW is available to users throughout all stages of the project. Any permissive paths are to be maintained or temporarily diverted where the need arises and it is recommended that the applicant liaises closely with the NCC PRoW team prior to any changes.

Natural England

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: 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/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: 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/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: Response received 22nd 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/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: 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.

The impact 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 application includes a limited assessment of the visibility of the proposed development from designated heritage assets within the study area and zone of theoretical visibility but does not address their significance, any contribution made by the application site to that significance, or the nature of any impacts experienced. The assessment is viewed in relation to the existing renewable energy developments in the area.

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

No Response received.

Lead Local Flood Authority

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: Response received 1st July 2015.

Object on the following basis:

- 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 584 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.

North Northamptonshire Badger Group

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446; Response received 8th July 2015.

No objection subject to a condition protecting badgers during the construction phase as outlined in the submitted EIA.

CPRE

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446; Response received 11th June 2015.

We have been unable to find an Agricultural Land Classification report in the EIA, which would normally form part of a planning application. This has become particularly important since the recent update to Planning Guidance, which precludes the development of Solar Farms on the best and most versatile agricultural land. It is therefore impossible to grant planning permission without this information.

KBC – Environmental Health

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: Response received 13th July 2015.

No objection subject to noise and working hours conditions and notes.

The National Planning Casework Unit

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: Response received 16th June 2015.

No comments.

East Northamptonshire Council

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: Awaiting response.

The Borough Council of Wellingborough

KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: 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/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446: No representations received.

5.0 Planning Policy

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

7.0 Planning Considerations

The key issues for consideration in these applications are:-

1. Principle
2. Environmental Impact Assessment
3. Visual and Landscape Impact and Cumulative Effect
4. Impact on Ecology
5. Use of Agricultural Land
6. Amenity
7. Impact on Historic Assets
8. Highway and Access
9. Flood Risk
- 10 Other Matters

1. Principle

The proposed application sites (KET/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/0445 and KET/2015/0446, collectively known as Site B) are located to the east of Burton Latimer on the opposite side of the A6 and to the south of Cranford on the opposite side of the A14 to this Village. 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 sites lie within National Character Areas 'NCA 89 Northamptonshire Vales' AND is identified at a local level by the Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment as being located within LCT 4 'Rolling Ironstone Valley Slopes' (western site boundary) and 4g 'Irthlingborough Slopes' (small part of the south western site area). The sites do not fall within any National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or area designated for its landscape character.

The submitted Landscape and Visual Assessments (LVIA) consider that the overall sensitivity of the site's landscape to change is low and that the landscape can accommodate the developments 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.

No significant effects are concluded for settlements, national and regional recreational routes, major transport corridors and recreational designations within the study area. With regards to residential receptors, whilst some properties will experience limited visibility to the proposed development, it was concluded that no

receptors would experience significant visual effects. This is because of the majority of views are from first floor windows of properties and mitigation planting and the management of perimeter hedgerows would assist with existing screening to limit views to the proposal.

Specific mitigation measures for the proposed development include:

- The retention of existing boundary hedgerows,
- A 4metre wide meadow grassland between the boundary hedges and site security fence,
- Low intensity grazing meadow to be sown underneath the panels.
- The infilling of existing gaps in hedgerows,
- Additional standard sized hedge trees.

The land levels in this location are raised from Wold Road to a ridge in the bottom half of the site, the ground levels are then reasonably flat and there are existing high dense hedgerows to the northern side of Wold Road, high dense trees and vegetation to the eastern boundary of the A6 and a dense hedgerow to the eastern field boundary of these sites. This existing vegetation provides good screening for the sites. The proposed infilling landscaping will block, in time, easily accessible views to the application sites from Wold Road. Clear views to the site from the intervening public right of way will be possible and the existence of panels will change the experience of users of this footpath. The applicants have discussed the potential for re-routing the footpath around the edge of the site. However, this does not form part of this proposal. On the grounds existing turbines form part of the character of this area and that this site is an emerging allocation in the Joint Core Strategy, it is considered that although there will be a visual impact on the users of the footpath, these are material considerations which outweigh this potential impact.

The closest properties to the site are Wold Cottages, which may have clear views to the site, however, due to existing boundary treatments these are only likely to be from first floor windows. Given that the panels are a temporary feature which would be removed from the site after 25 years and then returning the land to its earlier condition and this site is an emerging allocation and the obvious positive benefits of renewable energy generation then the proposals are considered acceptable subject to the imposition of landscaping conditions.

Cumulative Impacts

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.

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 these four sites as well as the other two consented solar farm schemes.

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 collective sites (A, B and C), given the subtle variations in topography and intervening vegetation and buildings, inter visibility between the sites would be restricted.

Considering the scale of the solar farm proposals (max 3m high panels within an enhanced landscape structure) the development of these sites, 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 assessments conclude that the proposals 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.

A Phase 1 Habitat survey was undertaken, which incorporated an assessment of habitat suitability for protected species including badgers, bats and great crested newts (GCN). A single pond was found approximately 350m to the east. The pond has been surveyed and a medium population of GCN identified as present. No destruction, modification or disturbance of the pond or adjacent habitats is proposed.

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 or hedgerows are proposed to be removed and further hedgerow and tree planting is to take place to fill any gaps in the existing. Root protection zones will also be employed to protect hedgerows and trees. The sowing of a wildflower meadow in the 4m margin around the site and a grassland mix underneath panels will provide better foraging and biodiversity enhancements for the local area.

The sites were identified as having low potential to support roosting for bats. However, no artificial lighting is proposed during the operation phase of the solar farm so as not to disturb foraging/commuting bats. No works are proposed within 250m of any pond or other waterbody.

The grassland, hedgerow and tree line provide some suitable foraging and cover suitable for badger sett creation. An active sett and an unused outlier sett were also found. No evidence of badger activity was noted during the site survey. A further survey for badgers is recommended two months prior to construction commencing; no works will be undertaken within the vicinity of the off-site main sett or outlier sett; a series of badger gates will be inserted into perimeter fencing so as

the site remains accessible; and deep excavations will be covered or in filled at the end of a working day.

The site was considered as negligible importance to native reptile species. However, ground cover will be cut in the direction of the hedgerows to encourage reptiles to disperse out of the works areas. Eighteen species of bird including 6 species listed as priority species. However, given the proposal it will have a low magnitude of effect on any of these species. No vegetation clearance will take place during bird nesting season and buffer zones around active nests found. A further five bird boxes of a variety of designs will be erected on suitable trees along the eastern boundary of the site to increase bird nesting opportunities.

These ecology measures can be captured in suitably worded planning conditions.

There are no internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance. Cranford St John Quarry SSSI is located approximately 1.2km to the north of the application sites and Quarry End, Cranford SSSI lies c1.4km to the north-east. Hogs Hole Local Wildlife site lies 950m approximately to the west and two other unnamed local wildlife sites lie within a 1km radius of the site. Two small wooded copses lie to the east. 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 (combined site A and site C) will comprise arable and improved grassland field compartments bounded by native species, which will result in a negligible-minor 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 site is currently an arable field. The CPRE have requested further information from the applicants as to whether the site is Grade 3a or 3b agricultural land. Further information will be provided to Members on the night of the Committee.

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. Also, the land would have been set aside from farming for this period thereby improving its agricultural quality.

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 A6 and 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'.

The applicants have submitted an historical assessment in support of their applications. This assessment states that there are '*58 listed buildings reported within the 2km buffer zone; these are largely situated within the Cranford and Burton Latimer Conservation Areas. There are no listed buildings located within 250m of the proposed solar farm. Some of the listed buildings in Cranford are located within the Zone of Theoretical Visibility of the development. However, this view is limited due to the local topography. In addition, the development site is screened from these listed buildings by extant structures as well as hedgerows and trees*'.

The applicants go on to state that '*the Church of St Mary stands in a churchyard of mature trees so it has no eye level sight of the development area which is screened by established trees and landscaping for the A6. Burton Latimer Hall and the Jacobean House do not have a direct line of sight, so the wider setting of these heritage assets will be unaffected by the proposed development. There is potentially a limited view of the Roundhouse, located some 2km to the east/south-east of the application. This view is also obscured by hedgerows and the existing wind turbines*'.

There are clear views to the Church of St Mary spire from the application site, especially from the right of way which runs through KET/2015/0446 – Wold Cottage Solar Park, the southern part of Site B. Given the significance of the Church it is considered to have a wide historic setting that this site has the potential to impact. However, there is significant intervening screening in between the site and the Church, including screening either side of A6 to the west of the application site. The panels are also a temporary feature which would be removed from the landscape after a period of 25 years. Given the distance between the panels and the Church, the intervening screening, buildings and the A6 and the temporary nature of the panels then any impact on the setting of the St Mary's Church is considered acceptable on this basis.

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'.

The Burton Latimer and Cranford Conservation Areas are located some 0.36km and 1.5km from the development site. Given these distances and intervening screening then the proposal is unlikely to have a significant impact on the character or appearance of these Conservation Areas.

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 four application sites at Site B. 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 practices on 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, the Northern Solar Farm (Site C) 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 footpath (UA006) crosses through application reference KET/2015/0446 – Wold Cottage Solar Park, the southern site of the four solar farm sites. During construction of the proposed development signage will be in place and users of the footpath separated from the construction traffic. Following construction the footpath can be used in the usual way. The applications propose a 12 metre corridor for the footpath, grass verges and hedgerow.

The construction of these four solar farms would result in the temporary generation of construction and staff-related traffic. For each of the four sites, it is considered that there will be approximately 120 deliveries to site, or 240 vehicle movements. Should this site be developed in one phase it is anticipated that the vehicle movements would be condensed into a 3 month period, with each month experiencing the highest number of deliveries to site at 65 deliveries, spread out over a 4-week period there would be an average of 3 HGV deliveries per day for each site. As all deliveries will result in a return journey for the vehicle, there will be an average of 6 vehicle movements per working day for each site.

The developments 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 for each of the four 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 B is so significantly distanced from the A510 that the migration of loose material to the highway is unlikely.

The proposals are therefore considered 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. EA Flood Advice maps indicate that the site has no potential for groundwater flooding to occur. Pluvial flooding is also predicted to occur on the north-western and south-eastern areas of the site during a 1,000 year return event. There are no sewers, canals,

reservoirs or other water bodies in close proximity to the site. To mitigate the potential risk from pluvial flood events and surface water flows all substations and inverters will be raised at least 300mm above the surrounding land.

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 four 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.

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 south and east 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/2015/0438, KET/2015/0440, KET/2015/445 and KET/2015/0446 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: