

Application No: 22/0560M

Location: Barclays Bank Plc, Radbroke Hall, Stocks Lane, Over Peover WA16 9EU

Proposal: Installation of Photovoltaic cells above existing car parking spaces.

Applicant: Barclays Plc

Expiry Date: 12-Apr-2022

### **SUMMARY:**

The proposed development for a solar array scheme above car parking spaces at this commercial site results in numerous benefits and disbenefits and an overall planning balance of the development is subsequently required.

With regards to the disbenefits, the proposed development would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Additional harm to the Green Belt would be created in relation to openness in visual and spatial terms.

The proposals would also result in 'less than substantial' harm to heritage assets, and according to the Council's Heritage Officer, the degree of harm would be at the upper end of the scale. This harm is primarily due to the adverse impact of the development to the setting of the Grade II listed Radbroke Hall.

Harm would also be derived from possible further tree losses on site around the perimeter given their possible shading implications on the solar panels. This remains a concern given that none of the trees are afforded protection.

The key benefits of this proposal would be that over a year, the development would account for 35% of the electricity demand of the site (during daylight hours) and for the summer months, the site could potentially be completely 'off-grid' in terms of electricity. In addition, there would be electricity to power 100 EV charging points.

It is accepted that the location of the development and the type of green energy proposed is the best option for green electricity production at the site. When this is considered in conjunction with the significant environmental benefits of the scheme and the important fact that the development is easily reversible, therefore any harm to the heritage assets and natural environment would not be permanent, subject to a condition to control the temporary nature of the development and a condition to control its de-commissioning, it is deemed that the environmental benefits of the development are sufficient to represent Very Special Circumstances that clearly outweigh all of the harm identified.

The application is therefore recommended for approval.

As the proposed development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is over a certain scale and is being recommended for approval, the application needs to be referred to the Secretary of State for consideration as to whether they wish to 'call-in' the application for consideration prior to a decision being issued.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**APPROVE subject to referral to the Secretary of State for consideration, and conditions**

**REASON FOR REFERRAL**

This application has been referred to Northern Planning Committee as it is deemed that the proposals represent a significant departure from policy, on a site of between 2 and 4 hectares.

**DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT**

The application lies within the grounds of Radbroke Hall, which is located off Stocks Lane and accommodates a large employment site housing Barclays Bank plc.

The complex includes a number of office buildings, including the original Radbroke Hall which is a Grade II Listed Building which also contains a small amount of office accommodation. The site has a number of car parking areas and the site is set within extensive grounds with recreation areas & on site catering.

There are a large number of mature trees around and within the site which provides a parkland setting.

Radbroke Hall is described by the applicant as Radbroke Technology Centre and employs circa 4000 staff on the site. It accommodates the Technology Office, Architecture and Strategy, Technology Quality and Risk and the Global Infrastructure & delivery teams.

The specific site area subject of this planning application relates to two parcels of land, one comprising of a car park to the far west of the site, the other comprising of a car park to the far south-east of the site.

## **DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of Photovoltaic Cells above 925 existing car parking spaces. This is proposed at two different locations on site, to the far west and to the far south-east of the site.

The scheme would generate 1.4 million kWh (kilowatt hours) of electricity per year, which would account for 35% of the site's annual electricity demand during daylight hours (the equivalent of powering 483 homes per year). In the summer months, during daylight hours, the entire campus electricity demand would be met by the energy generated by the application proposals.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

Various on the wider site, but none directly relevant to location of application proposals

## **POLICIES**

### **Adopted Development Plan Policy**

The Cheshire East Development Plan policies relevant to this application, currently comprises of; the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (CELPS), the Site Allocations and Development Plan Document (SADPD) and the Peover Superior Neighbourhood Plan (PSNP).

#### Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2017 (CELPS)

MP1 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development, PG1 – Overall Development Strategy, PG2 – Settlement Hierarchy, PG3 - Green Belt, PG6 – Open Countryside, PG7 – Spatial Distribution of Development, SD1 - Sustainable Development in Cheshire East, SD2 - Sustainable Development Principles, IN1 – Infrastructure, EG1 – Economic Prosperity, EG2 – Rural Economy, EG3 - Existing and allocated employment sites, SE1 – Design, SE2 - Efficient use of land, SE3 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity, SE4 – The Landscape, SE5 - Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland, SE7 – The Historic Environment, SE8 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy, SE12 – Pollution, Land Contamination and Land instability, SE13 – Flood Risk and Water Management, CO1 - Sustainable Travel and Transport and CO4 - Travel Plans and Transport Assessments

#### Site Allocations and Development Plan Document (SADPD)

GEN1 - Design Principles, GEN5 – Aerodrome safeguarding, ENV1 - Ecological network, ENV2 - Ecological Implementation, ENV5 - Landscaping, ENV6 - Trees, hedgerows and woodland implementation, ENV7 - Climate Change, ENV10 – Solar Energy, ENV16 – Surface water management and flood risk, HER1 – Heritage Assets, HER4 – Listed

Buildings, HER5 – Registered Park and Gardens, HER7 – Non-designated heritage assets, RUR10 – Employment development in the open countryside, EMP1 - Strategic employment areas, HOU12 - Amenity, HOU13 – Residential Standards, INF3 - Highway safety and access

#### Peover Superior Neighbourhood Plan (July 2021)

LCD1 – Local Character and Design, LCD2 – New development, ENV1 – Biodiversity, ENV2 – Trees, Hedgerows and Watercourses, INF3 – Surface Water Management and ECON1 – Rural Economy

#### **Other Material Considerations**

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)

#### **CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

**Head of Strategic Transport (CEC Highways)** – No objections, subject to a condition requiring the submission/approval of a Construction Management Plan

**Environmental Protection (CEC)** - No objections, subject to informatives

**Flood Risk Manager (CEC)** – No objections in principle, subject to informatives

**Manchester Airport** - No objections, subject to an informative

**Cheshire Gardens Trust** – Support the concerns of the Council's Heritage Officer and advise that their original comments still stand (below). Additionally, advise that assets are a finite resource and the Council have a duty to safeguard.

*Original comments: No objections to the part of the site concerned with installing photovoltaic cells above existing car park spaces in the south car park, but strongly object to the part of the application concerned with installing photovoltaic cells in the west car park*

**Peover Superior & Snelson Parish Council** – Support the application

#### **OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

No neighbouring comments received.

#### **OFFICER APPRAISAL**

## **Green Belt**

The application site lies within the Green Belt.

The acceptability of proposals within the Green Belt are considered against Policy PG3 (Green Belt) of the CELPS. The Green Belt paragraphs within the NPPF are also a material planning consideration.

The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. When considering planning applications Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) should ensure that substantial weight is given to the Green Belt harm. 'Very Special Circumstances' (VSC's) will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

An LPA should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. However, there are several exceptions listed in policy.

The application proposals do not fall squarely within any of the listed exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. However, paragraph 151 of the NPPF states that:

*'When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.'*

As such, the proposals are deemed to represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt and will only be deemed acceptable if very special circumstances exist that will clearly outweigh the harm. These are considered later in this report.

## **Other Green Belt Harm**

The proposed development would be constructed on two different sections of car park within the site, which comprises of various car park areas as well as the various office buildings and heritage assets.

The whole site is well screened from wider viewpoints by mature trees and woodland.

The individual PV structures, including the PV panels themselves, would each be 13.3 metres wide and have a maximum height of 4.2 metres according to the plans submitted. As such, despite the site being well screened from external viewpoints, development of this

scale will reduce the openness of the Green Belt in visual and spatial terms, due to their scale and positioning.

Given that the development is proposed on an existing car park, encroachment into the Green Belt is not considered to be a factor, and there is not considered to be any conflict with other purposes of Green Belt defined in the NPPF.

## **Trees & Landscape**

Policy SE5 of the CELPS states that development which will result in the loss of, or threat to, the continued health and life expectancy of trees, hedgerows or woodlands, that provide a significant contribution to the amenity, biodiversity, landscape character or historic character of the surrounding area, will not normally be permitted.

Policy LCD2 of the Peover Superior NP states that as part of new development, certain local landscape features should be retained and enhanced, where applicable, including; mature trees and vegetation.

Policy ENV6 of the SADPD seeks the retention of protected trees, woodlands and hedgerows. Policy ENV5 sets out landscaping requirements.

In addition, Policy SD2 of the CELPS states that development will be expected to respect and, where possible, enhance the landscape character of the area.

Policy SE4 of the CELPS specifically relates to landscape considerations. It states that all development should conserve the landscape character and quality and where possible, enhance and effectively manage the historic, natural and man-made features that contribute to local distinctiveness.

The application has now been supported by an updated Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) by Treework Environmental Practice (230327-1.4-Radbroke PV-AIA-MW) dated 19<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The updated AIA was partially informed by a site meeting with Council Officers.

Extensive tree losses have already been accepted on this site as part of approved planning application 20/4747M, which granted approval for the re-development of the campus, confirmed within the Method Statement accepted to discharge 22/1881D and referenced in the Decision Notice (230327-2.0-AMS-RHK-JP-MW).

This latest application now proposes the need for further tree losses to accommodate the Photovoltaic (PV) Cells above existing car parking spaces which presently benefit from semi-mature and early mature trees.

The AIA specifically considers a total of 68 tree features within the 2 areas proposed for the PV areas, and others which are in the vicinity of sub stations and cable routing. The trees considered comprise of 8 individual high quality A Category trees, 19 individual and 21 groups of moderate quality B category trees and 10 individual and 7 groups of low-quality C Category trees. A total of 2 poor quality U Category trees have been identified which will require removal irrespective of the development by virtue of their condition. Of these, 19 moderate quality trees in group G17 and 11 low quality trees in group G35 are proposed for removal to accommodate the proposal (Total of 30 individual trees).

It should be noted that the ongoing erosion of tree cover on this site presents concerns given the extent of tree losses already conceded with the approved re-development application, and compensatory planting will be required if this application is approved. Policy SE5 of the CELPS requires that all developments should ensure the sustainable management of trees, woodlands and hedgerows including the provision of new planting within new development to retain and improve canopy cover, enable climate adaptation resilience, and support biodiversity. The Council's Tree Officer recommends that if planning permission is granted a condition should be attached which requires the submission of a landscape scheme for tree replacement planting to meet the requirements of this policy and to demonstrate accordance with Policy SE5.

The site meeting between the Council's Tree Officer and the applicant identified that works had commenced on site in advance of planning consent being provided and that excavation and soil stripping which have been back filled with compacted aggregates has occurred within the Root Protection Areas of trees T37, T38 and T39. Remedial measures have been proposed for reinstatement of ground following completion of the project. The submitted plans now reflect the existing position on site in terms of the connecting access to the car park from the A50 driveway. It's noted that the Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) approved with 22/1881D is referenced at 3.1.3 which states that the site wide AMS (230327-1.9-AMS-JP-MW) is relevant to understand the overall tree management of the site, the same plan is also referenced on the tree protection plan in relation to no dig construction in the RPA of G34 (formally G157). The re-numbering of trees within this project does present concerns with regard to interpretation and implementation of the site wide AMS. It's also noted that the AMS already discharged was (230327-2.0-AMS-RHK-JP-MW), not version 1.9 which is referenced within this document and for the avoidance of doubt the correct conditioned report version should be updated.

There are concerns as to why G28 of this latest application, formerly shown as retained group of trees G133 with the wider AMS is now shown as greyed out suggesting that the trees have been approved for removal, which is not the case. The Council's Tree Officer considers that all trees formally shown to be retained within the AMS (230327-2.0-AMS-RHK-JP-MW) which are within influencing distance of the proposed development, which do not require removal to accommodate the PV panels should be shown clearly with tree protection/mitigation to demonstrate consistency across the Tree Protection/retention plans.

Further to repeat requests for supporting information or some form of evaluation which demonstrates that the anticipated shading bordering the PV areas will not have a detrimental impact on the energy output, an e-mail has been provided by the agent for the application, confirming several points;

- No shading assessment has been undertaken but shade has been considered.
- Tree growth has been factored into annual generation output and degradation over a 30-year period.

- A 5-10% loss on output is anticipated over the 30-year period and the calculations are alleged to overstate the estimated loss of output from shading.
- The client is aware of potential energy losses of up to 10% and is happy to accept them.

The agent has suggested a condition to provide assurances that further tree losses will not be required, however this is not considered to be enforceable and notwithstanding the written statements which allege that the trees will not negatively affect anticipated outputs from the PV cells, there remain concerns regarding the potential for ongoing erosion of tree cover on this site.

Despite this concern, the Council's Tree Officer concludes that subject to the conditioning of an updated landscape plan to ensure the planting of replacement trees to account for losses and the receipt of a further updated AMS (which should include an updated Tree Protection Plan), to correct inaccuracies and to include a method statement for the removal of aggregate and reinstatement of ground should also be provided, no objections are raised.

With regards to landscape, the Council's Landscape Officer advises that, subject to the suggested tree planting mitigation, any visual effects of the proposals could become negligible.

## **Heritage & Design**

Policy SE1 (Design) of the CELPS advises that proposals should achieve a high standard of design and; wherever possible, enhance the built environment. It should also respect the pattern, character and form of the surroundings.

Policy SD2 of the CELPS states that development should contribute positively to an area's character and identity, creating or re-enforcing local distinctiveness in terms of; height, scale, form, grouping, choice of materials, design features, massing and impact upon the streetscene.

Policy LCD1 of the Peover Superior NP states that new buildings, features and materials should be characteristic of the settlement and demonstrate consideration of the Cheshire East Design Guide SPD.

Policy GEN1 of the SADPD states that development should be of high-quality design.

In addition to these general design policies, heritage is also a consideration. This is because at the centre of the Radbroke Hall campus is the Grade II listed Radbroke Hall itself and the adjacent pavilions and stone walls which are also Grade II listed in their own right.

The Rose Garden does not have a statutory designation but according to the Council's Heritage Officer, can be considered along with the Parkland, to be a Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA), as identified by the Cheshire Gardens Trust.

As such, there are two Grade II listed buildings on site and Non-Designated Heritage Assets on the site. On the opposite side of Stock Lane to the application site is a Grade II Park and Garden, Peover Hall.



Within Policy SD1 of the CELPS, it is detailed that development should, wherever possible, amongst various other considerations, contribute to protecting and enhancing the historic environment.

Policy SD2 of the CELPS details that development will be expected to, again amongst various other considerations, respect and where possible, enhance the significance of heritage assets, including their wider setting.

Within Policy SE1 of the CELPS, it is advised that development proposals should ensure sensitivity of design in proximity to designated and local heritage assets and their settings.

Policy SE7 of the CELPS states that *'All new development should seek to avoid harm to heritage assets and make a positive contribution to the character of Cheshire East's historic and built environment, including the setting of assets and where appropriate, the wider historic environment.'* This is the over-arching heritage policy of the development plan.

Policy HER1 of the SADPD sets out submission requirements in relation to development affecting heritage assets.

Policy HER4 of the SADPD relates specifically to listed buildings. This policy states that when considering works affecting a listed building, the council will have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possessed.

Policy HER7 of the SADPD sets out that when considering the direct or indirect effects of a development proposal on a non-designated heritage asset, a balanced judgement will be required, having regard to the significance of the heritage asset and the scale of any loss of harm.

### *Significance*

At the centre of the Radbroke Hall site is the Grade II listed Radbroke Hall which dates from the 1910s, built from Ashlar. It is two storeys in height and includes an attic. The building is of architectural and artistic interest. Originally constructed as a dwelling for Claude Hardy to designs by Percy Scott Worthington, it has a three-sided courtyard plan with a large entrance portico. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the property is one of the last country houses designed by Worthington and potentially is the only one of this period, built in a neo-Georgian style.

The southern and western elevations to the building look over the open parkland and parking areas to the west. The eastern elevation faces onto a Rose garden with its Grade II listed pavilions and stone walls also designed by Worthington. The character to this part of the site is largely characterised by large lawns, open parkland and a dense tree belt/woodland, albeit with an area for parking, with the listed house at its core. The Rose Garden does not have a statutory designation but the Council's Heritage Officer advises that it can be considered in conjunction with the Parkland to be a Non Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA), as identified by the Cheshire Gardens Trust. The garden was detailed in an Arts and Crafts style with carefully laid out hard landscaping. It is the only part of the original formal garden spaces to survive. The pavilion and configuration are similar to designs by Worthington at Kerfield House, Knutsford. Both the Hall and Rose Gardens are substantially complete and the Council's Heritage Officer advises that these are enhanced by the parkland setting and tree lined approach to the

west of the site. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that there is a strong visual connection between the house and Rose Garden with the gardens enhancing the setting of the house.

The hall is also of historic interest being an early 20<sup>th</sup> century country house, utilising an 18<sup>th</sup> century classical design. It continues the tradition of classical houses within the local area and was most likely designed with views of the sandstone ridge and Welsh hills, now concealed by the tree belt. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the building and its garden contribute to this tradition of country houses and the garden is a rare survivor of a pre-war garden "of the golden afternoon", as referred to by the Cheshire Gardens Trust.

The site changed use to offices from the 1960's onwards with a significant amount of new development to the north and east of the historic building. The current owner Barclays acquired the site in the 1970's.

To the south of the main site is the Registered Park and Garden to Peover Hall and the Grade II listed Knutsford Lodge, also associated with the Hall. The Council's Heritage Officer agrees with the Heritage Statement that the arrays would not be visible from the Peover Hall Registered Park and Garden and listed assets.

### *Impact upon Significance*

The application seeks consent for the installation of a large set of PV arrays installed on supporting steel gantry structures in the south-eastern and north-western areas of car park. The south-eastern car park lies in closest proximity to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. The north-western car park is closest to the designated assets and within the open landscape and gardens.

Plans and a section show the scale of the PV arrays and their support structures. These would rise to 4 metres in height and with some of an approximate length of 100m. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the canopies for the photovoltaic cells would be highly prominent and incongruous.

The Heritage Officer advises that their concerns in terms of impact largely relate to the western range, which is closest to the listed building (Radbroke Hall). The existing car parks have a beech hedge screening which the Council's Heritage Officer advises are recessive in terms of their impact upon the wider landscape and listed building, softening the appearance of the parking areas. The current views out from the historic building across the western grounds, are of open lawns (interspersed by established trees) with tree belt/woods around the boundary and hedging to the parking areas.

When approaching from the western access road and viewing the building from the south-west across the grounds, the Council's Heritage Officer advises that the PV arrays and their structures would be highly obtrusive in the context of the building and landscape and would have a significant impact upon the listed hall and its setting. The arrays would also be visible from within the building looking west. The Council's Heritage

Officer advises that the green and sylvan appearance to this part of the site and parkland (NDHA), with a listed building at its core, would be harmed by an installation totally out of character and alien to this context and better suited to an urban or industrial setting.

The Council's Heritage Officer advises that whilst the significance of the parkland is low because it is not a designated asset, but a NDHA, the impact of development would result in adverse harm to this part of the designed landscape. This part of the parkland is significant in that it remains picturesque, sylvan and open, with individual specimen trees set within the lawns. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that it is accepted that the car park has eroded some of the parkland setting, but what is left is the wider spacious and open parkland with views back to the listed former house. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the solar farm would intrude into the undeveloped part of the parkland, taking elevated built form into areas where it does not currently exist.

The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the installation of the application proposals would have a significantly greater impact on the character and appearance of this part of the historic garden than the existing car park. It is advised that the installation would appear as a discordant development within the designed landscape. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance to this part of the estate and in particular, the way in which the landscape is experienced. The Council's Heritage Officer advises that the proposal would therefore diminish the significance of this NDHA.

The supporting Heritage Statement states that the harm to the Grade II listed Radbroke Hall would be at the lower end of the 'less than substantial' categorization, but that this harm is offset by the benefits.

The Council's Heritage Officer agrees that the harm would be categorized as being 'less than substantial' but considers that the degree of harm would be towards the higher end of the scale.

Policy SE7 of the CELPS details that in relation to designated heritage assets (the grade II listed Radbroke Hall in this case), consideration of the level of harm in relation to public benefits should be made. Similarly, Policy HER4 of the SADPD details that where proposals involving less than substantial harm to the significance of a listed building, the harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. These matters will be considered as part of the overall planning balance.

## **Ecology**

Policy SE3 of the CELPS states that developments that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on a site with legally protected species or priority habitats (to name a few), will not be permitted except where the reason for or benefits of the proposed development outweigh the impact of the development. Policy ENV1 of the Peover Superior NP is broadly similar. Policy ENV1 of the SADPD considers environmental networks and Policy ENV2 relates to ecological implementation.

The Council's Nature Conservation Officer has reviewed the proposals and advised of the ecology impacts. This assessment is broken down as follows:

#### *Wildlife sensitive lighting*

It is not clear from the submissions whether the proposals will involve additional external lighting to the site, which could potentially disturb wildlife which uses the marginal vegetation. If additional lighting is proposed, then in accordance with the BCT Guidance Note 08/18 (*Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK*), prior to the commencement of development details of the proposed lighting scheme should be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme should consider both illuminance (lux) and luminance (candelas/m<sup>2</sup>). It should include dark areas and avoid light spill upon bat roost features, bat commuting and foraging habitat (boundary hedgerows, trees, watercourses etc.) aiming for a maximum of 1lux light spill on those features. In the event of approval, this detail can be conditioned.

#### *Breeding birds & ecological enhancement*

In the event of approval, a condition to protect nesting/breeding birds is proposed. In addition, a condition is proposed requiring the submission/approval of ecological enhancement features on site.

Subject to these conditions, the proposals are deemed acceptable in ecology terms, adhering with the above-mentioned ecology policies of the development plan.

#### **Residential Amenity**

Policy HOU12 of the SADPD states that development should not cause unacceptable harm to the amenities of adjoining or nearby residential properties or sensitive uses due to (amongst other considerations); loss of privacy, sunlight and daylight, an overbearing impact and environmental considerations. Policy SE1 of the CELPS states that development should ensure an appropriate level of privacy for new and existing residential properties.

The closest neighbouring dwelling to any aspect of the application proposals would be Radbroke Cottage, over 65 metres away to the south of the site, on the other side of Stocks Lane, with intervening mature boundary treatment. Due to this considerable distance and intervening features no concerns are deemed to be raised by the application proposals in relation to; privacy, light or an overbearing impact.

In consideration of environmental amenity (noise, air and land pollution), the Council's Environmental Protection Team have raised no objections, subject to an informative relating to hours of construction.

The application proposals are subsequently deemed acceptable in relation to amenity adhering with the above-mentioned amenity policies of the development plan.

## **Highways**

Policy CO1 of the CELPS refers to sustainable travel and transport. The policy expects development to reduce the need to travel by; guiding development to sustainable and accessible locations; ensuring development gives priority to walking, cycling and public transport within its design; encourages more flexible working; support improvements to communication technology and support measures that reduce the level of trips made by single occupancy vehicles. It also states that development will improve pedestrian facilities so that walking is attractive for shorter journeys and improve cyclist facilities so that cycling is attractive.

Policy CO2 refers to enabling business growth through transport infrastructure. It states that the Council will support transport infrastructure that will mitigate the potential impact of development proposals including supporting measures to improve walking, cycling and sustainable travel environment on routes relieved of traffic and by supporting schemes outlined within the Transport Delivery Plan.

SADPD Policy INF3 considers highways safety and access and Policy INF1 considers cycleways, bridleways and footpaths.

The proposals would not result in the loss of any of the existing parking spaces. The Council's Highways Officer has reviewed the submission and raises no objections on that basis, subject to the inclusion of a condition requiring the submission/approval of a Construction Management Plan (CMP). This document would also provide the opportunity for the parish council's comments to be addressed.

Subject to this condition, the proposed development is deemed to adhere with the requirements of the highway policies of the development plan.

## **Flood Risk & Drainage**

Policy SE13 of the CELPS relates to flood risk and water management. It states that all development must integrate measures for sustainable water management to reduce flood risk, avoid an adverse impact on water quality and quantity within the borough and provide opportunities to enhance biodiversity, health and recreation in line with national guidance.

Policies ENV16 (Surface water management and flood risk) and ENV17 (Protecting water resources) of the SADPD are also relevant.

According to the Environment Agency flood risk maps, the whole of the application site falls within a Flood Zone 1 (FZ1). FZ1 is the lowest of the flood risk category in England and means that the land has less than a 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river flooding.

Nonetheless, the Council's Flood Risk Officers have reviewed the application proposals and raised no objections, subject to informatives (advice notes). As such, the proposals are deemed to be acceptable in relation to the above-mentioned policies of the development plan.

## **Manchester Airport**

Policy GEN5 of the SADPD sets out that development which would adversely affect the operational integrity or safety of Manchester Airport or Manchester Radar will not be permitted.

The Safeguarding Authority for Manchester Airport has assessed this proposal and its potential to conflict aerodrome Safeguarding criteria. Upon review, Manchester Airport raise no objections, subject to an informative.

The application proposals are subsequently deemed acceptable in relation to air traffic safety, adhering with the above-mentioned policy of the development plan.

### **Jodrell Bank**

The application site falls outside of the Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope consultation zone. Subsequently, no concerns are raised in relation to the development upon this World Heritage Site and the work it carries out.

### **Renewable and Low Carbon Energy**

Policy SE8 of the CELPS refers to renewable and low carbon energy schemes. Policy ENV10 of the SADPD refers to solar proposals. These policies should be read alongside one another.

Policy SE8 details that such schemes will be positively supported and considered in the context of sustainable development and any impact on the landscape. Criterion 2 sets out that weight will be given to the wider environmental, economic and social benefits arising from renewable and low carbon energy schemes, whilst considering the anticipated adverse impacts, individually and cumulatively upon:

- i. The surrounding landscape including natural, built, historic and cultural assets and townscape; including buildings, features, habitats and species of national and local importance and adjoining land uses; and/or
- ii. Residential amenity including visual intrusion, air, dust, noise, odour, traffic generation, recreation and access; and/or
- iii. The operation of air traffic, radar systems, electromagnetic transmissions, and the Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope

Policy ENV10 of the SADPD details that such development:

1. Should be sited on previously developed land where possible
2. Should avoid the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land
3. The impacts of the scheme will be considered in line with the landscape, ecology, amenity and operation factors detailed in Policy SE8
4. Associated development must be designed to minimize visual impact and not harm public safety

5. Should not have a detrimental impact upon air traffic safety or result in unacceptable harm to the natural or historic environment, heritage assets and their settings
6. Should include a decommissioning statement, detailing the anticipated lifespan of the technology and how the removal of all structures and machinery will be delivered alongside the full restoration of the site.

In response, it has already been established that the application proposals represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would result in additional Green Belt harm to openness. In addition, there is potential for further tree losses in the future given that the trees surrounding the solar panels are not afforded protection. As such, the proposals would result in harm to the natural environment.

The proposals would also result in 'less than substantial' harm to designated and non-designated heritage assets.

No issues have been identified in relation to ecology, residential amenity, air traffic/radar systems of Jodrell Bank, subject to conditions where deemed necessary.

The proposed solar panels would be located on areas of existing car park, classified as previously developed land, and as such, would not result in any loss to best and most versatile agricultural land.

In terms of decommissioning, the agent for the application has provided a statement on this to address this aspect of Policy ENV10 during the assessment process. The key points made in this statement include:

- Typically, PV panels have a lifespan of 25-30 years. At this point, the scheme would be decommissioned, and the car park areas returned to their previous condition. As such, the proposed development is fully reversible.
- The decommissioning of the installation would be a reasonably straightforward exercise. The steel supporting the PV panels is modular, therefore it would just be a case of removing the panels and dismantling the steel into three sections.
- With regards to foundations, you would need to cut the bolt boxes out or cut the bolts back and retarmac the small areas at the base of each post. All cables are below ground and could therefore be disconnected/ spiked and abandoned or pulled back via the draw pits.

Based on the above, the applicant has advised that they would be happy to agree that in the event of approval, the permission be conditioned to be temporary in nature, for a period of 30 years, and that appropriate planning conditions be attached requiring the submission/approval of a de-commissioning strategy. This approach is deemed to be appropriate.

Policy SE8 of the CELPS details that consideration should also be given to appropriate mitigation measures.

The Council's Heritage Officer does not consider that landscape mitigation would help reduce the impact of the proposals. This is because the height of any hedging and tree planting would likely need to be limited so that it does not impact upon the performance of the panels and if accepted as a mitigation measure, its permanence would be difficult to control, which in turn would have a detrimental impact on setting.

### **Strategic Employment Areas**

Radbroke Hall is defined as a 'Strategic Employment Area' by Policy EMP1 of the SADPD. This policy sets out that proposals for further investment for employment uses in these areas will be supported, subject to other policies in the development plan.

### **Planning Balance**

The proposed development for a solar array scheme above car parking spaces at this commercial site results in numerous benefits and disbenefits and an overall planning balance of the development is subsequently required.

With regards to the disbenefits, the proposed development would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Additional harm to the Green Belt would be created in relation to a loss of openness in visual and spatial terms.

The proposals would also result in 'less than substantial' harm to heritage assets, and according to the Council's Heritage Officer, the degree of harm would be at the upper end of the scale. This harm is primarily due to the adverse impact of the development to the setting of the Grade II listed Radbroke Hall.

Harm would also be derived from possible further tree losses on site around the perimeter given their possible shading implications on the solar panels. This remains a concern given that none of the trees are afforded protection.

With regards to the benefits, the applicant submitted justification for the proposals. The key points raised within this statement included:

- Has been major investment on the site in recent years and is a major employer in Cheshire East
- Improving the sustainability credentials of the site is a major priority for the bank
- In addition, electricity to power 100 EV charging points would be generated over and above this
- No energy would be supplied back to the grid. All energy would be utilized on site
- If required, the proposed installation has been futureproofed for battery storage if required in the future
- The number of parking spaces would not be impacted
- Will assist in working towards the UK Government's current net zero carbon by 2050 target
- Barclays have a target to power all of their on-site operations with 100% renewable energy by 2025



- Proposals would meet 35% of the campus's annual electricity demand (during daylight hours) and reduce 440 tonnes of carbon.
- The western car park installation would account for 73% of the energy output from the whole scheme
- A predicted yield table of the scheme has been provided that shows that the proposals will enable the site to be completely 'off-grid' in terms of electricity use, for part of the year (summer)

As such, the key benefits of this proposal would be that over a year, the development would account for 35% of the electricity demand of the site (during daylight hours) and for the summer months, the site could potentially be completely 'off-grid' in terms of electricity. In addition, there would be electricity to power 100 EV charging points.

Another significant consideration is that the proposed development is easily reversible. The proposed solar arrays would be constructed above existing car park spaces that comprise of hard standing. The applicant has advised that typically, PV panels have a lifespan of 25-30 years after which, they would be decommissioned, and the car park areas returned to their previous condition.

The mechanics of decommissioning is advised as being a relatively straightforward exercise. The steel supporting the PV panels is modular, therefore it would just be a case of removing the panels and dismantling the steel into 3 sections. In terms of the foundations, the bolt boxes would then be cut out or the bolts cut-back to the hard standing level. It is advised that this process would take approximately 3-6 months. The applicant advises that they would be happy to agree that this consent is for a temporary period of 30 years and a condition be imposed in the event of approval to ensure appropriate decommissioning.

In addition, the applicant was asked whether there were any other parts of the site the scheme could be sited. Other than the 2 car parks where the development is proposed, a 3<sup>rd</sup> car park was considered to the north of the site. However, this was dismissed as an option because it was heavily shaded because of existing mature trees meaning that the yield from the array would be inadequate to meet the demand. It was also dismissed because the routing of the required cabling would need to cross a brook which would result in construction difficulties.

Another factor to consider is that the applicant advises that the panels proposed on the western car park, those that would result in heritage harm, would account for 73% of the energy output from the whole scheme. As such, without the solar panels being in the location that results in most harm, the development as a whole, would not be worthwhile.

In consideration of the utilization of roof spaces of buildings to install solar panels, a feasibility report concluded that this alone would not deliver sufficient energy results. On two of the buildings there would be insufficient space to erect the panels and on another, there were issues relating to safe access. Combining the remaining useable roof areas

would give a total PV area of 2697sqm, whereas the car park spaces subject to this application have an area of approximately 10,800sqm.

The applicant was also asked what other options were available to them for green electricity production on site. In response, the submitted feasibility report considered, hydropower, biomass boilers, combined heat and power engines as well as solar thermal hot water. For various reasons these have all been discounted.

Hydropower was discounted because the site is remote from any significant flowing water source. Biomass boilers were discounted because a) they require regular fuel deliveries, b) require fuel storage areas and c) can reduce local air quality. Combined heat and power engines are reliant on natural gas, another fossil fuel and solar thermal hot water was discounted due to the lengthy payback period.

No reference to wind energy was made in the feasibility report. However, other than the internal car parks and buildings, the site is heavily dominated by mature, tall tree cover. Subsequently, it is unlikely that the site would lend itself to being suitable for effective wind energy generation.

A balance of the public benefits of the scheme is required when considering the heritage harm. A balance of the harm versus the benefits of the scheme is required in relation to the renewable energy policies of the development plan. Also, there needs to be consideration whether very special circumstances exist that clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, plus any other harm.

It is encouraging that a major local employer is taking positive steps towards addressing the issue of climate change, and it is accepted that the location of the development and the type of green energy proposed is the best option for green electricity production at the site. When this is considered in conjunction with the significant environmental benefits of the scheme and the important fact that the development is easily reversible, which means that any harm to the heritage assets and natural environment would not be permanent, subject to a condition to control the temporary nature of the development and a condition to control its de-commissioning, it is deemed that the environmental benefits of the development, which are considered to be public benefits, are sufficient to clearly outweigh the identified 'less than substantial' harm to the heritage asset, the threat of further tree losses and the substantial weight afforded to the harm to the Green Belt to the extent that very special circumstances are considered to exist.

The application is therefore recommended for approval.

As the proposed development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is over a certain scale and is being recommended for approval, the application needs to be referred to the Secretary of State for consideration as to whether they wish to 'call-in' the application for consideration prior to a decision being issued. Therefore any resolution of the Committee to approve will be subject to consultation with the Secretary of State.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**APPROVE** subject to referral to the Secretary of State and the following conditions

- 1. Commencement of development (3 years)**
- 2. In accordance with approved plans**
- 3. Materials as per application**
- 4. Temporary for a period of 30 years**
- 5. Submission/approval of a de-commissioning statement**
- 6. Submission/approval of an updated Arboricultural Method Statement (including updated Tree Protection Plan)**
- 7. Submission/approval of an updated Landscaping Scheme (*to include replacement tree planting*)**
- 8. Landscape - Implementation**
- 9. Submission/approval of proposed external lighting scheme**
- 10. Submission/approval of a Construction Management Plan**
- 11. Nesting birds**
- 12. Submission/approval of ecological enhancement scheme**
- 13. If cease to be used for solar panels / renewable energy purposes structures to be removed from site**

*In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add Conditions and/or Informatives or reasons for approval prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Planning has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.*

