

Application No: 15/1541C

Location: Land South Of, WOOD LANE, BRADWALL

Proposal: Installation and operation of a solar farm

Applicant: Lightsource SPV 178 Limited

Expiry Date: 30-Jun-2015

SUMMARY

The proposed development would provide a source of renewable energy to power 1,600 homes. This would contribute to tackling the challenges of climate change, lessening dependence on fossil fuels and benefiting energy security. These benefits would accord with the Framework's renewable energy provisions, which indicate that the delivery of renewable, low carbon energy is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In environmental terms, the proposal would have positive environmental planning benefits via the provision of renewable energy. Furthermore, it is considered that the proposed impact upon the landscape, subject to the implementation of the submitted revised landscaping scheme would not be significant.

The development would be on grade 3a agricultural land and therefore the loss of BMV land must also be weighed in the planning balance. The development would not be for a permanent use. It would however, have a limited agricultural use during this period.

The landscape effects would be limited to the site and its immediate surroundings and the proposed mitigation would provide a slight beneficial effect. Therefore the proposals would not result in any significant adverse landscape or visual effects.

It is considered that the positive planning benefits by way of the provision of renewable energy on a well contained site, outweighs the other environmental dis-benefits and as such, it is considered that the proposal would adhere to Policies PS8 (Open Countryside), NR9 (Renewable Energy) and GR5 (Landscape) of the Local Plan and would be considered as sustainable.

As a result of the above reasons, the application is recommended for approval

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE subject to conditions and completion of a legal agreement

PROPOSAL:

The proposal is for a solar farm.

The photovoltaic panels would cover 14.16 hectares of the site and provide the annual power needs of approximately 1,600 households. It is advised within the Design and Access Statement that the development would avoid 2,800 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

The energy generated would be fed directly into the local power grid network for use by the nearest points of demand.

It is advised that the farm will be temporary, medium term, use of the site. At the end of its operational life (approximately 30 to 35 years), all equipment associated with solar farm will be removed from the site, and the land restored to its former condition.

The photovoltaic panels will each be 1.65m x 0.992m x 0.05m. The mounted panels will have a height of 2.3m above the ground level and at the lower end will be 0.8m above the ground. The frames and panels would be angled to 30 degrees. They would be fixed in place and would not move to 'track' the sun. The mounting frames would be either galvanised aluminium or steel with a rough matt finish. The glass surfaced panels are coated to maximise daylight absorption and minimising glare.

SITE DESCRIPTION:

The application site lies within approximately 14.16 hectares of agricultural land located on the south-western side of Wood Lane, Bradwall to the north of Sandbach within the Open Countryside.

The site consists of 3 agricultural fields comprising of 2 adjacent elongated fields extending in a north-east to south-west direction constrained by Wood lane to the north-eastern boundary. A field spanning the width of both of these fields to the south-western end of the site forms the 3rd field. On the south-western boundary is a woodland and a stream.

The site is relatively flat but drops to a lower gradient at the juncture of all 3 fields. The site is currently used for grazing stock.

RELEVANT HISTORY:

14/4315S – EIA Screening Opinion - EIA not required 3rd October 2014

19414/1 - New 18 hole golf course, clubhouse and leisure facilities, residential development – Refused 21st June 1988

NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY

National Policy:

The National Planning Policy Framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Of particular relevance are paragraphs:

14 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development, 17 – Core planning principles, 93-108 – Climate change, 109-125 – Natural environment

Development Plan:

PS8 (Open Countryside), GR1 (New Development), GR2 (Design), GR4 & GR5 (Landscaping), GR6 (Amenity and Health), GR9 (Accessibility, Servicing and Parking Provision), GR16 (Footpath, Bridleway and Cycleway Networks), GR19 (Infrastructure), GR20 (Public Utilities), GR21 (Flood Prevention), NR1 (Trees and Woodlands), NR2 (Wildlife and Nature Conservation), NR3 (Habitats), NR4 (Non-statutory Sites), NR8 (Agricultural Land), NR9 (Renewable Energy) and E5 (Employment Development in the Open Countryside)

The saved Local Plan policies are consistent with the NPPF and should be given full weight.

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (CELP)

The following are considered relevant material considerations as indications of the emerging strategy;

PG2 (Settlement Hierarchy), PG5 (Open Countryside), PG6 (Spatial Distribution of Development), SD1 (Sustainable Development in Cheshire East), SD2 (Sustainable Development Principles), SE1 (Design), SE2 (Efficient use of Land), SE3 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity), SE4 (The Landscape), SE5 (Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland), SE6 (Infrastructure), SE7 (The Historic Environment), SE8 (Renewable and Low Carbon energy), SE9 (Energy Efficient Development), IN1 (Infrastructure), IN2 (Developer Contributions)

Other Considerations

The EC Habitats Directive 1992

Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010

Circular 6/2005 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System

CONSULTATIONS:

Jodrell Bank (University of Manchester) - No comments received at the time of report.

Natural England – No objections

United Utilities - No comments received at the time of report

Head of Strategic Infrastructure (HSI) - No objections, subject to condition that HGV movements are restricted to 10 per day

Environmental Protection - No objections, subject to an hours of construction informative

Environment Agency - No objections, but recommend an informative regarding the construction of any development within 8 metres of the bank of the brook on site

Flood Risk Manager (Cheshire East Council) - No objections, subject to a condition that the development be carried out in accordance with the submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA)

Archaeology (Cheshire East Council) – No objections

Manchester Airport - No objections

Cheshire East PROW – No objections

Bradwall Parish Council – No objections

REPRESENTATIONS:

Three letters of support has been received relating to this application..

One of the letters received from the South East Cheshire Cycling Action Group requesting that if developer contributions are sought, the developer contribute to the upgrading of certain nearby footpaths.

APPRAISAL:

The key issues are:

- Principle of the development
- Sustainability (Environmental, Social and Economic). More specifically, the acceptability of;
 - Landscape
 - Loss of Agricultural Land
 - Ecology
 - Highways
 - Trees and Hedgerows
 - Drainage and Flooding
 - Highway Safety
 - Archaeology
 - Amenity

Principle of Development

The proposed development should be considered against the NPPF. This document identifies that in assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Local Plan Policy

The relevant policies relating to the principle of development, as contained within the Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005 are Policies PS8 (Open Countryside) and NR9 (Renewable Energy).

Policy PS8 identifies that the Open Countryside should be protected from inappropriate development. Where development is proposed, it should preserve its openness and maintain or enhance its local character.

The policy states that in the open countryside development will only be permitted if it is for one of a number of purposes including;

- Agriculture and forestry
- Facilities for outdoor sport, recreation and tourism, cemeteries, and other uses of land which preserve the openness of the countryside and maintain or enhance its local character
- New dwellings
- Controlled infilling
- Affordable housing
- Employment development in accordance with Policy E5
- The re-use of rural buildings
- The re-use or re-development of existing employment sites

As it is not considered that the proposal clearly falls into any of the above-mentioned criteria, its acceptability in principle, is determined on its impact upon the openness of the countryside and its impact upon the local character. This is largely determined by its impact upon the landscape which is considered later in the report.

Policy NR9 is considered to be consistent with the NPPF in that it is intended to ensure that such proposals cause minimum harm to the landscape, ensuring a quality environment for all residents of the Borough. Policy NR9 states that development will only be permitted where:

- *The proposal would not have an unacceptable impact on landscape or townscape*
- *The proposal would not have an unacceptable impact on features and areas of recognised nature conservation, archaeological, geological, environmental, architectural, historic, cultural or landscape interest or value.*
- *The proposal would not have unacceptable consequences for residential amenity or other local land uses;*
- *The proposal would not have unacceptable consequences for the health and safety of local residents or other members of the public*

Emerging Policy

The most relevant policy of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy Submission version is Policy SE8 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy) which states that *'the development of renewable and low carbon energy schemes (including community-led initiatives), together with any ancillary building(s) and infrastructure, will be positively supported and considered in the context of sustainable development and any impact on the landscape'*.

The Policy then goes on to state that weight will be given to the wider environment, economic and social benefits arising from renewable and low carbon energy schemes, whilst considering the anticipated adverse impacts, individually and cumulatively upon:

'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'.

The justification to the Policy then goes onto identify the technologies that will be most viable and feasible including *'solar thermal and photovoltaics on south facing buildings throughout the Borough. Ground mounted schemes may be more appropriate where they do not conflict with other policies of the plan'.*

Policy PG5 relates to Open Countryside and largely echoes the requirements of Policy NE.2 of the adopted local plan.

Sustainability

The National Planning Policy Framework definition of sustainable development is:

"Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations. Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices. We must respond to the changes that new technologies offer us. Our lives, and the places in which we live them, can be better, but they will certainly be worse if things stagnate. Sustainable development is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment"

The NPPF determines that sustainable development includes three dimensions:- economic, social and environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy

an economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

These roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent.

The National Planning Policy includes the core planning principles of encouraging *'the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy)'* and *'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'.*

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF then goes on to state that local planning authorities should approve applications for energy development unless material consideration indicate otherwise if its impacts are or can be made acceptable.

Environmental Role

Landscape

A key issue in the determination of this application is the landscape impact of this large scale development upon the open countryside and landscape character. This is a core principle of the NPPF and also identified within the Planning Practice Guidance and Local Plan Policies.

The application is supported by a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (VIA).

The Council's Landscape Officer originally reviewed this information and raised an objection to the scheme. However, following a further meeting between the Planning Officer, agent, the Council's Landscape Officer and the applicants Landscape Officer, a revised landscaping scheme was submitted.

The topography of the area is generally flat, the land slopes from approximately 55m AOD at the northern corner, to a level of approximately 50m AOD along the south western boundary.

The Landscape and Visual Impact assessment identifies that it has been based on the methodology set out in the Landscape Institute and The Institute of Environmental management & Assessment Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, 2013, and Landscape Character Assessment Guidance. As part of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment the baseline landscape character is identified at both the national and regional level. The application site lies within the National NCA 61 Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain. At the regional level the application site is located in the area identified in the Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment (2009) as Landscape Character Type 7: East Lowland Plain, and specifically the Wimboldsley Character Area (ELP5). The application site has many of the characteristics of this character area.

The LVIA identifies a number of residential receptors, transport corridors and footpaths within the immediate vicinity of the application site, as well as a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). As part of the landscape assessment a description of the site and surrounding area is given. This notes that the site is in pastoral use, surrounded by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees, and mature deciduous woodland. It also notes that the woodland cover in the vicinity of the site forms an important landscape feature and that Hollins Wood, to the south west of the site is ancient, semi-natural broadleaved woodland that is also designated as a Local Wildlife Site (SBI).

It is considered that the proposed development would impact upon the landscape in the immediate vicinity of the site. It is also considered that the physical characteristics of the site and land use pattern would be affected during the construction phase and that this would have an impact on the perceptual characteristics of the local area, such a tranquillity; however, the nature of these effects would be temporary and would be very localised. The proposed development would introduce new features into the landscape, but with the mitigation and enhancement that is proposed it is considered that it would result in 'a slight beneficial effect'. It is considered that the visual

assessment is acceptable, and that the mitigation and enhancement proposed would mean that any visual effects are temporary in nature.

The landscape effects will be limited to the site and its immediate surroundings; however it is considered that the proposed mitigation will provide a slight beneficial effect. As such it is not considered that the proposals will result in any significant adverse landscape or visual effects.

As such, it is considered that the proposed development would not have a significant detrimental impact upon the landscape and as such, would adhere to Policy NR9 and GR5 of the Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005.

Agricultural Land

An Agricultural Land Classification Report has been submitted with the application.

This report concludes that the grading of the land is Grade 3a quality across the site.

Grade 3a means that the land is;

‘Good quality agricultural land capable of producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops or moderate yields of a wider range of crops.’

Policy NR8 of the Local Plan refers to Agricultural Land. Policy NR8 advises that proposals which involve the use of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1,2 and 3a based on the MAFF classification) for any form of irreversible development not associated with agriculture will only be permitted where a number of criteria are satisfied including;

- *‘The circumstances and need for development are supported in the Local Plan; and*
- *The development cannot otherwise be accommodated using;
Another site which is suitable and available for the proposed use
Derelict or non-agricultural land
Land of a lower quality (Grades 3B, 4 or 5 based on the MAFF classification) and*
- *The proposal does not break up a viable agricultural holding or holdings.’*

The National Planning Policy Framework highlights that the use of such land should be taken into account when determining planning applications. It advises local planning authorities that, ‘significant developments’ should utilise areas of poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 & 5) in preference to higher quality land.

The Planning Practice Guidance states that Local Planning Authorities should consider ‘where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (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 guidance references a Ministerial speech of April 2013 by the Rt Hon Gregory Barker MP which includes the statements “Solar is a genuinely exciting energy of the future, it is coming of age and we want to see a lot, lot more. But not at any cost... not in any place....” And “Where

solar farms are not on brownfield land, you must be looking at low grade agricultural land which works with farmers to allow grazing in parallel with generation....”

As it has been identified that the land is Grade 3a, the proposed development would result in the loss of 14.16 hectares of best and most versatile agricultural land for the approximate 30-35 year lifetime of the development.

The issue of loss of BMV was a key issue at the other solar farm applications considered by Cheshire East Council and recent appeals where the solar panels were proposed for 25 years resulting in the loss of BMV. As part of two appeals (Swale District Council and Bebergh Borough Council) the Inspector concluded that the word *necessary* requires a developer to provide a sequential test to support their application, which demonstrates that there are no more suitable alternative sites (brownfield and then greenfield) within the vicinity. The Inspectors also concluded that the search area should not be confined by district boundaries.

In respect of both appeals, the Inspector was very dismissive of the lack of evidence provided by the developer to justify the use of a greenfield as opposed to a brown field site and agricultural land of an inferior quality. The Inspectors set a very high bar in respect of what was needed to demonstrate that the proposal was *necessary*.

In this case the applicant has undertaken search for non-agricultural land. More specifically, the applicant has submitted a sequential analysis study. This study considered alternative sites within a 10km buffer of the application site. The study concludes that;

- *The use of agricultural/greenfield land is necessary in the absence of previously developed land and barriers to the deployment of large-scale commercial roof-space for solar photovoltaic development;*
- *There are no potential alternative sites of any poorer agricultural quality land and subject to any less environmental constraints than the application site within the study area; and*
- *That the application would remain in agricultural use and that biodiversity improvement would be delivered as part of the proposed development.*

Consequently, the applicant has demonstrated that the use of this particular agricultural land is necessary. The loss of BMV land must therefore be weighed in the planning balance. The development would not be for a permanent, irreversible use. It would however, for a 30 year period have an impact on agricultural use during this period. Taking account of past applications and appeals and to take account of the ‘temporary’ nature of solar farms it is considered that a legal agreement to secure a bond for restoration after a 25 year period should be secure on any approval.

Ecology

Sandbach Flashes SSSI

Natural England have reviewed the proposal and advised that the proposals would not have an impact upon the features for which this SSSI was designated.

Hollins Wood Local Wildlife Site

This local wildlife site which supports ancient woodland habitats is located adjacent to the southern boundary of the application site. In accordance with current best practice the submitted ecological assessment recommends the provision of an undeveloped 15m buffer between the proposed development and the boundary of the woodland. The Council's Nature Conservation Officer has advised that if planning consent is granted, a condition should be attached to secure the provision of the undeveloped 15 buffer in this location.

Great Crested Newts

No evidence of this species was recorded during the submitted survey.

Bats

A number of trees are present on site that have the potential to support roosting bats. Based upon the submitted layout plan it appears that all mature trees would be retained as part of the proposed development. The Council's Nature Conservation Officer therefore concludes that roosting bats are therefore not reasonable likely to be directly affected by the proposed development.

'Other' protected species

Evidence of 'other' protected species activity including the presence of a number of setts has been recorded on the application site. The submitted report recommends that a further more detailed protected species survey be undertaken to allow an assessment to be made of the potential impacts of the proposed development upon this species.

The Council's Nature Conservation Officer advises that the applicant must submit a detailed assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed development upon 'Other' protected species which should include mitigation and compensation proposed designed to address any potential impacts upon this species. This report can be provided as part of a planning condition.

To enable the 'Other' protected species to have free movement around the site following the installation of the panels, it is also recommended that the proposed security fence incorporates a 200mm gap at its base.

Hedgehog and Polecats

These two priority species have been recorded within the board locality of the application site.

The Council's Nature Conservation Officer has advised that the incorporation of the suggested 200mm gap at the base of the security fence would ensure that these species continue to have access across the application site.

Hedgerows

Hedgerows are a material consideration. However, none are to be removed as part of the proposal and as such, no objections are raised.

Nesting birds

The marsh area located towards the centre of the application site appears to have potential to support priority wading bird species. If this habitat was utilised by open country wading birds, the Council's Nature Conservation Officer has advised that it is likely that the installation of the proposed panels would deter such birds from using this habitat.

The Conservation Officer recommended that a more detailed assessment of the usage of the marsh area by wading birds be undertaken and submitted in support of this planning application.

This initial finding of the first of 3 surveys proposed has subsequently been submitted and advises that the proposal should not have an impact upon wading birds.

Habitat Management Plan

A Habitat Management Plan has been submitted in support of this application.

The management plan recommends that the application site continues to be grazed. In the event that grazing is not implemented on site it will be necessary for the grassland habitats to be cut. The Council's Nature Conservation Officer recommends that the submitted management plan be amended to include details of a suitable cutting regime designed to maximise the botanical value of the grassland habitats.

It is recommended that if planning consent is granted a condition should be attached requiring the implementation of the management plan for the duration of the operational life of the proposed development.

Trees and Hedgerows

The site is bordered to the south by two areas of woodland (Barlow Wood & Hollins Wood) both of which are formally protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). The application is not supported by any specific arboricultural detail.

The Council's Tree Officer has advised that the main areas of concern relate to the possibility of tree root damage during the erection of the solar panels, their management, and possible restriction of light attenuation.

The Tree Officer has advised that the site edged red and the associated ground has been used for the purposes of agriculture, which brings with it issues of compaction associated with heavy machinery and root severance through ploughing. Any additional direct impact is considered to be limited, but this can be mitigated by the use of an appropriate tree protection scheme for both the protected and un-protected trees

Whilst the northern field aspect supports panels almost across its full expanse, the southern field immediately adjacent to both identified woodlands contains panels within the central area excluding a significant strip around the south eastern and western edges. The Council's Tree Officer has advised that his set back mitigates any significant negative issues in terms of restricting light attenuation, and possible applications to undertake un-acceptable pruning/felling of protected trees.

As a result there are no tree objections to this development subject to the imposition of a tree protection condition

Flood Risk/Drainage

The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA).

The Environment Agency have reviewed that application and advised that they have no objections, but recommend an informative regarding the construction of any development within 8 metres of the bank of the brook on site.

The Council's Flood Risk Manager has advised that should the application be approved, it should be implemented in accordance with the recommendations detailed within the submitted FRA.

Highways Implications

The applicant has submitted construction and traffic generation figures expected as part of the development. This information shows that it is the construction element of the solar farm that needs to be considered as once erected, the site will not generate vehicles movements except for maintenance vehicles.

Within the report, the predicted HGV movements are between 4-6 per day over 8 -12 week construction period. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure (HSI) has advised that even though Bradwall Lane is a narrow rural lane it can accommodate low HGV movements over the course of a day.

The HSI has advised that it is important that the figures presented are representative of the actual HGV movements that will occur during construction, and therefore would want to attach a condition that limits the HGV movements to 10 per day.

Subject to the condition, the HSI raises no objections to the development.

Archaeology

The application is supported by a Cultural Heritage study which has been prepared by Cotswold Archaeology on behalf of the applicants.

The Council's Archaeologist has reviewed the submitted report and advised that given the limited ground disturbance that will be caused by the development, there are unlikely to be any significant archaeological deposits to be disturbed and no further archaeological mitigation is advised.

Conclusion

The development would have positive environmental planning benefits via the provision of renewable energy. Furthermore, it is considered that following the provision of a revised proposed landscaping plan for the site, the development would not have a significant impact upon the landscape.

The development would be on grade 3a agricultural land and therefore the loss of BMV land must be weighed in the planning balance. The development would not be for a permanent use. It would however, have a limited agricultural use during this period.

Subject to conditions, and the outcome of a further ecology survey via condition, it is not considered that the proposal would have a detrimental impact upon ecology.

No issues in relation to trees and hedgerows, flooding and drainage, highway safety and archaeology would be created subject to conditions where necessary.

As such, subject to the implementation of the submitted revised landscaping scheme and a number of other conditions, it is considered that the proposed environmental benefits of the scheme outweigh the environmental dis-benefits and it is considered that the proposal would be environmentally sustainable.

Social Role

The proposal would contribute to the distribution of renewable energy which would be of benefit to the population by virtue of contributing to energy security. In addition;

Amenity

Given the isolated rural nature of the site, the closest neighbouring properties to the application proposal would be the occupiers of 2 farmhouses. These include Wood Lane Farm which would be located approximately 84 metres to the north-west and the occupiers of Hollinswood Farm approximately 150 metres to the northwest.

Given the nature of the development large distance of the development to these neighbouring dwellings, it is not considered any issues in relation to loss of privacy, light or visual intrusion.

With regards to environmental disturbance, the council's Environmental Protection team has raised no objections.

Aircraft Safety

Manchester Airport have reviewed the proposed development and raised no objections.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the landscape issues of the proposal, it is considered that the development would be socially sustainable.

Economic Role

Government policy is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. It is considered that the proposal would create limited short term employment opportunities during the construction of the facility which would be an economic benefit.

CIL Regulations

In order to comply with the Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 it is necessary for planning applications with planning obligations to consider the issue of whether the requirements within the S106 satisfy the following:

- (a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- (b) directly related to the development; and
- (c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

Securing a bond for restoration after 25 years is considered necessary and reasonable in the context of the solar farm and taking account of the agricultural land matters directly relates to the development of the solar farm.

Planning Balance

The proposed development would provide a source of renewable energy to power 1,600 homes. This would contribute to tackling the challenges of climate change, lessening dependence on fossil fuels and benefiting energy security. These benefits would accord with the Framework's renewable energy provisions, which indicate that the delivery of renewable, low carbon energy is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In environmental terms, the proposal would have positive environmental planning benefits via the provision of renewable energy. Furthermore, it is considered that the proposed impact upon the landscape, subject to the implementation of the submitted landscaping scheme would not be significant.

The development would be on grade 3a agricultural land and therefore the loss of BMV land must be balanced accordingly. The development would not be for a permanent use. It would however, have a limited agricultural use during this period. To tip the balance in support of the scheme a bond to secure the restoration of the agricultural land is considered necessary and this should be by means of a legal agreement.

The landscape effects would be limited to the site and to its immediate surroundings, and the proposed mitigation would provide a slight beneficial effect. Therefore the proposals would not result in any significant adverse landscape or visual effects.

It is considered that the positive planning benefits by way of the provision of renewable energy on a well contained site, outweigh the other environmental dis-benefits and as such, it is considered that the proposal would adhere to Policies PS8 (Open Countryside), NR9 (Renewable Energy) and GR5 (Landscape) of the Local Plan and would be considered as sustainable.

As a result of the above reasons, the application is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

APPROVE subject to completion of a s106 legal agreement to secure a bond for the clearance and restoration of the land to agricultural use after 25 years

And the following conditions;

- 1. Time**
- 2. Plans**
- 3. Materials as per application**
- 4. Landscaping – Implementation**
- 5. Provision of an undeveloped 15m buffer between the proposed development and the boundary of the woodland**
- 6. Prior submission of a detailed assessment and mitigation of the potential impacts of the proposed development upon ‘Other’ protected species**
- 7. Prior submission of security fence details - including 200m gap at base**
- 8. Prior submission of an updated management plan to include details of a suitable cutting regime designed to maximise the botanical value of the grassland habitats. To be implemented for lifetime of solar farm**
- 9. Tree protection**
- 10. Flood Risk Assessment – Implementation**
- 11. HGV Movements – 10 per day**

In order to give proper effect to the Board’s/Committee’s intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Planning Manager (Regulation) in consultation with the Chair (or in their absence the Vice Chair) of the Strategic Planning Board and Ward Member, to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.

