



URGENT BUSINESS AND SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Strategic Planning Committee

Monday 17 October 2022

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West Northamptonshire Council**Strategic Planning Committee****17 October 2022****List of Public Speakers**

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13 - 44	Agenda Item 5 WNS/2022/0557/EIA Land at Halse Road, South of Greatworth, Northamptonshire. Middleton Cheney	Mr Foote	Objector
		Veronica Ward	Objector
		Mr Morris	Farthinghoe Parish Council
		Mr Bingham	Greatworth Parish Council
		Connor McAllister, fob David Sherborn-Hoare	Supporter
		Connor McAllister	Applicant

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45 - 70	Agenda Item 6 WNS/2021/1858/EIA Land at Milton Road, Gayton, Northamptonshire Bugbrooke	Roger Clarke	Gayton Parish Council
		Cllr Cooper	Ward Councillor
		Dr Jonathan Taylor fob Jens Buus	Supporter
		Laura Murphy	Applicant

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71 - 98	Agenda Item 7 WND/2021/0860 Land at corner of Sywell Road/Kettering Road, Overstone Moulton	John Austin	Overstone Parish Council
		David Aarons	Moulton Parish Council
		Sophie Drury	Agent

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**West Northamptonshire
Strategic Planning Committee
South Northamptonshire Area**

UPDATES

for the planning applications to be discussed at the

Strategic Planning Committee

(17th October 2022)

Committee Updates

The schedule below details those letters etc. that have been received since the Committee reports were drafted:

Application Details:	Item No.
Case Officer: Sangeeta Ratna Presenting Officer (if different) Ward: Middleton Cheney Application No: WNS/2022/0557/EIA Development description: Construction of a solar farm and battery stations together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure Location: Land at Halse Road, south of Greatworth,	5

Local Lead Flood Authority: No objections subject to conditions. There is sufficient information available to comment on the acceptability of the proposed surface water drainage scheme for the proposed development.

Neighbour responses: Since the writing of the report there have been further letters of objection to the application and a large number of comments received in support of the application.

In total, since the application has been submitted there have been:

- 133 people writing in objection to the application
- 96 people writing in support of the application
- 15 people writing in with comments/observations

A summary of the objections is contained within the committee report. The comments of support are on the basis of not adversely affecting the landscape;

biodiversity enhancements; need for renewable energy, energy crisis, climate change, cut down on fossil fuel emissions, great for wildlife

Applicant/Agent The applicant has queried the assessment upon Greatworth Conservation area. They state that the Conservation officer comments are from the previous withdrawn application whom identified harm (albeit less than substantial harm) on Greatworth Conservation Area and Greatworth Manor. They advise that this scheme has been pulled back considerably from these two heritage assets and submitted detailed setting assessments for both heritage assets as part of this new application, which sets out that the site does not contribute in any way to the significance of the setting of both heritage assets, and therefore there is no harm.

The Applicant also wishes to state that the application would provide biodiversity net gain in the following two ways

- **32.68% net gain for hedgerows/trees units**, (not habitat units as stated in the committee report). They go onto stated that a very comparable figure of 31.95% net gain for hedgerows was presented at our Cotmoor Solar appeal which was successful and the Inspector applied substantial positive weight in his planning balance exercise citing a Major Beneficial long term Effect on Landscape Character. Moderate positive weight is unreasonable.
- **70.82% net gain for habitat units** – this figure is not mentioned in your report or in your planning balance, which is a significant omission. They go onto state that a very comparable figure of 73% net gain was presented in our Cotmoor Solar appeal, which as pointed out above was successful and the Inspector assigned Substantial positive weight to this in his planning balance. Our very comparable figures here at Copse Lodge of c. 71% should be acknowledged in the report and planning balance. The clear omission from the report and planning balance is unreasonable.

Officer comments: In response to the above, the ecology officer has confirmed that the application proposes a biodiversity net gain of 32.68% in hedgerow units and 70.82% in habitat units, which exceeds the mandatory 10% set in place by the Environment Act. In addition the conservation team confirm that with the solar panels removed from the northern side of the Halse Road (compared to the original application), that the impact upon Greatworth Conservation Area and Greatworth Manor is greatly reduced. Furthermore, with the LLFA confirming they are satisfied with the application, this reason for refusal is omitted.

In light of the above the planning balance at the end of the report and the recommendation is amended to the following:

Matters weighing in favour of the proposed development may be summarised as:

- National and local policy emphasise a presumption in favour of sustainable development, including renewable energy projects that reduce carbon emissions. The proposed development will make a significant contribution to this, producing enough renewable power for 12,000 homes annually and reducing carbon footprint by 22,000 tonnes per year. This is to be given very significant weight.
- The development will include a biodiversity net gain of 32.68% in hedgerow units and 70.82% in habitat units. This is to be given moderate weight as all developments should achieve a biodiversity net gain and the development is not the only means of achieving it in this instance;
- The development includes the creation of a permissive path along the former railway line through the site as well as other community assets such as an orchard, picnic area, and outdoor classroom. This is to be given limited weight as these matters do not fully mitigate the effects of the development on existing rights of way through the site.
- The site is not subject to any statutorily protected landscape or environmental designations. This is to be given limited weight as it represents the absence of the weight of a specific policy or designation rather than an outright benefit of this proposal;

Matters weighing against the proposed development may be summarised as:

- Owing to the location of the site in a valley it is highly visible from a number of vantage points across the wider surrounding countryside. The development would result in harm to the landscape and visual character of the area. Mitigation measures would not appropriately overcome this harm, again especially due to the highly visible location of the site. Mitigation measures themselves would result in undesirable screening of existing panoramic views. Due to the scale of the development and its adverse effects on multiple receptors especially PRow users, this is to be given very significant weight in the planning balance.
- The development would result in minor harm to the settings of Greatworth Conservation Area and Greatworth Manor. This is less than substantial harm that must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal in its own right (i.e. separate to the overall planning balance) but is to be given little weight in the overall planning balance.

- The development would result in the loss of around 3.5Ha of Grade 3a agricultural land, which is classified as best and most versatile. This is to be given moderate weight in the planning balance due to the small proportion of the site it represents, and the absence of any objection from Natural England on these grounds.
- The development would result in some local disruption during its construction. This is to be given very limited weight due to proposed mitigation and limited duration.

The agent has provided reference to applications where planning permission has been granted. It must be considered that each site must be assessed on its merits. Due to their own individual settings sites are not considered comparable on the basis of planning permission being granted and refused on its own. In conclusion, Officers consider that the planning balance weighs in refusal of planning permission. The benefits of the development are very significant but are considered by Officers to be outweighed in this instance by the harm to landscape and visual character that has been identified and for which mitigation measures are not considered to be adequate to overcome the resulting harm.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSAL FOR THE REASONS SET OUT BELOW

1. The proposed development would not be sensitively located and would harm the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Its scale and siting would be incompatible with its surroundings, landscaping setting, and distinctive local character. The proposed landscape treatment is not suitable to mitigate this and so the proposed development would have a significant adverse effect on the landscape and visual character of the area. The application is therefore contrary to Paragraph 174(b) of the NPPF, Policies S10(i) and S11 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (LPP1), and Policies SS2(1b & 1d) and EMP6(1b) of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan (LPP2).
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Application Details:	Item No.
<p>Case Officer: Sangeeta Ratna</p> <p>Presenting Officer (if different)</p> <p>Parish : Bugbrooke</p> <p>Application No: WNS/2021/1858/EIA</p> <p>Development description: Construction of a temporary 49.72MW Solar Farm, to include the installation of Solar Panels with transformers, a substation, a DNO control room, a customer substation, GRP comms cabin, security fencing, landscaping and other associated infrastructure</p> <p>Location: Land at Milton Road, Gayton</p>	<h1>6</h1>

Corrections to the report:

The Executive summary highlights a highway and flooding reason for refusal. This is not correct and differs from the main body of the report and the recommendation which does not include these reasons for refusal. The Executive summary is corrected below.

Whilst the executive summary includes the one letter of support, the main body of report does not. There are also some clarifications to be made to neighbour responses section. This is corrected below.

The report at 8.28 to 8.46 assesses the visual impact on the landscape. During the course of the application the council received an amended LVIA and landscape strategy, seeking to provide further mitigation and clarification of landscape impact. This too was independently assessed by the Council’s appointed landscape consultant. This is detailed below.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE for the reasons set out below

Proposal

The application seeks full planning permission for the construction of a temporary 49.72MW Solar Farm, to include the installation of Solar Panels with transformers, a substation, a DNO control room, a customer substation,

GRP comms cabin, security fencing, landscaping and other associated infrastructure.

Consultations

The following consultees have raised **objections** to the application:

- Gayton Parish Council, Blisworth Parish Council, Rothershorpe Parish Council CPRE, Canal and River Trust,

The following consultees have **commented or raised no objection** to the application:

- Ramblers Association, National Highways, Inland Waters, Health and Environment Protection, Environment Agency, Conservation, Anglian Water, Local Highways Authority (LHA)

A total of 30 letters have been received, commenting/objecting to the application. The matters raised are summarised below -

- Loss of arable land
- Adverse impact on landscape
- Impact on ecology
- Impact on the Conservation Area
- Impact on local economy
- Impact on highways
- Noise
- Impact on local tenant farm businesses & jobs
- Contrary to policy
- Carbon impact at decommissioning
- Unjustified scale

One letter has been received in support of the proposal on grounds that the proposal would not use Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land but that of low agricultural quality, impact on landscape and conservations areas would not be adverse, the proposal would provide higher biodiversity value compared to an agricultural field, impact of construction traffic would be for a limited amount of time, noise nuisance would not affect residential properties and would be less as compared to the use of the site as agricultural field. They include benefits of the proposal in relation to contribution to overcoming the current energy crisis.

Conclusion

The application has been assessed against the relevant policies in the NPPF, the adopted Local Plan and other relevant guidance as listed in detail at Section 8 of the report.

The key issues arising from the application details are:

- Principle of development;
- Landscape and visual impact;

- Highway safety and access;
- Impact on designated heritage assets;
- Archaeology;
- Ecology;
- Noise and amenity;
- Flood risk.

The report looks into the key planning issues in detail, and Officers conclude that the proposal is unacceptable for the following reasons:

- The proposed development would harm the landscape and visual character of the area.

Members are advised that the above is a summary of the proposals of key issues contained in the main report below which provides full details of all consultation responses, planning policies, the Officer's assessment and recommendations. Members are advised that this summary should be read in conjunction with the detailed report.

7 RESPONSE TO PUBLICITY

Below is a summary of the third party and neighbour responses received at the time of writing this report.

7.1 There have been a 30 letter of objections/comment raising the following issues:

- Visual impacts on landscape;
- Disruption from construction;
- Adverse impacts on ecology;
- Adverse impacts on archaeology;
- Adverse impact on highways
- Adverse impacts on Conservation Areas and listed buildings;
- Noise;
- Contrary to policy;
- Solar panels are inefficient;
- Carbon impact at decommissioning
- Unjustified scale;
- Loss of agricultural land for food produce;
- Urban areas should be used for renewable energy;
- Loss of amenity for rights of way users;
- Harm to private business interests (*Officer comment: this is not a material planning consideration*).
- Climate emergency means development should be supported.

7.2 One letter has been received in support of the proposal on grounds that the proposal would not use Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land but that of low agricultural quality, impact on landscape and conservations areas would not be adverse, the proposal would provide higher biodiversity value compared to an agricultural field, impact of construction traffic would be for a limited amount of time, noise nuisance would not affect residential properties and would be less as compared to the use of the site as agricultural field. They include benefits of the proposal in relation to contribution to overcoming the current energy crisis.

Landscape Consultant's response to updated landscape strategy plan and visual impact is attached as an appendix to this update

Agent/Applicant: The landscape and heritage sections do not report the update landscape plan and the benefits of the additional mitigation on views from the south.

On this latter point (heritage and landscaping), officers previously agreed their only perceived heritage 'harm' was on the GUC CA resulting from gaps in the hedgerow. These gaps are to be planted (as per the updated landscaping plan) thus effectively preventing visibility between the GUC CA and the development. However, this is not reported to committee.

We also have comments to make on the council's landscape consultants comments on the revised landscape plan:

- Firstly, it appears the consultant's comments focus on View Points (VPs) 1, 2, 6, 8 and 11. Hence, it is seemingly agreed there are no particular concerns with other VPs. We welcome this narrowing of the matters for discussion.
- Of those, three VPs (VPs 1, 2 and 6) are taken from within the red line boundary. It is not uncommon for greater impacts when seen at very close proximity (as would be expected for any development) but in this case those views areas are localised as the affected areas are relatively short stretches of path. Indeed, these local routes did not show signs of being very well trodden nor are they part of strategic recreational or long-distance walking routes which reduces the potential sensitivity. The additional planting now provided along the GUC reduces the visual impact of development.
- This leaves two remaining VPs (8 and 11).

- VP8 is seen in the context of the railway, trackside fencing, and associated infrastructure, which sit in the foreground of the view and which lowers the value of the view. The affected views are localised, and the path is only very lightly trodden, suggesting it is not heavily used (as seen in the VP photos). This further reduces the sensitivity of any change.
- VP11 is wider view due to the expanse of site visible at closer proximity. However, again, this is a generally localised view and not particularly sensitive. Furthermore, hedgerow will be reinforced and allowed to grow which will further limit views and address visual impact concerns.
- In terms of landscape effects in general, the AN further review refers to adverse effects within the site itself. Clearly there will be a change character to the fields within the red line, albeit of a temporary nature which is inevitable for all solar applications (as we have explained in the context of VPs 1,2, and 6). The adverse effects within the site are not significant in the overall assessment. AN also refer to 'other' landscape effects but are non-specific in terms of locations, other than broadly stating that the character will change 'in places' within 500m of the site. It is unclear how AN's comments on this latter broad point are relevant given the agreed VP analysis and its findings.
- Therefore, overall, we conclude the impacts are localised and not significant. With reference back to NPPF 158 any perceived impacts can be made acceptable.

Officer comments: Whilst the above is noted and the updated landscaping plan did improve the visual impact, including seeking to minimise the impact on the conservation area, it is still considered to have a significant visual impact on the landscape as detailed in the report. No change to recommendation.

West Northamptonshire Council

Planning Application No WNS/2021/1858/EIA

Application for a Solar Farm on Land at Milton Road, Gayton

Review of the Applicant's updated Landscape Strategy Plan and their 'Landscape and Visual Advisory Review'

- 1.1 In September 2022, the applicant issued an updated Landscape Strategy Plan (LN-LP-07 Rev B, 26.09.2022), also a Landscape and Visual Advisory Review (September 2022). I have been asked to review these two documents.

Updated Landscape Strategy Plan

- 1.2 The Landscape Strategy Plan adds 197 more native hedgerow plants to reinforce the existing hedgerow along the southern boundary of the northern parcel, along the Grand Union Canal. Other than that I can see no other changes.

Landscape and Visual Advisory Review (LVAR)

- 1.3 This document was commissioned by the applicant to review its own LVIA and comments received from WNC.
- 1.4 It is quite correct in 5.1 where it states that the Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study (NLSGIS, 2009) applies primarily to major mixed-use urban extension development however the analysis of local landscape character and visual context is relevant to this application.
- 1.5 The LVIA and LVAR both find the detracting influences on the site to be greater than I do. I find its rural character to be quite strong, predominantly agricultural in nature, with fields enclosed by robust hedgerows and woodland mosaic and the Grand Union Canal. The railway is visible in places and the sight and sound of trains intermittently pierce the rural tranquillity. Industrial buildings are visible 2-3km to the north from high ground around Gayton but their detracting influence is not particularly great. I would consider the site to have higher sensitivity than both the LVIA and LVAR suggest: medium or medium-high in places.
- 1.6 The LVAR considers the visual effects from the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area. The additional planting proposed should help mitigate the more harmful effects. I would suggest that more planting (a copse with understorey shrubs/edge planting) be added at the junction where footpath RL003 meets the canal to minimise visibility from the canal. I would also extend the proposed scrub planting along the north side of the canal and add in larger native tree species and more holly. This will all give greater strength to the canal-side planting.
- 1.7 There appears to be no additional mitigation for adverse landscape & visual effects where footpaths RL003 and RL004 cross the northern parcel. Both footpaths have an established hedgerow on one side but the panels would be openly visible on the other. Simply planting another parallel hedgerow, forming a narrow corridor, should be avoided.

- 1.8 I found the northern parcel to be more visible from the public domain than the LVIA and LVAR assert: it is overlooked openly from a number of locations, e.g. Viewpoints 1, 2, 6, 8 and 11, also from Milton Road where it passes the east side of the northern parcel. The parcel is openly visible from the Gayton – Kislingbury Road c.500m west of the site, especially when travelling north. Visual receptors at these locations are likely to experience significant and residual adverse effects. Because of the landform, vegetation will not be able to mitigate the harmful effects. Visibility of the site from Viewpoints 3, 4, 5, 7, 16 and 20 is more restricted and the residual visual effects are likely to be less significant.
- 1.9 I would expect significant residual adverse landscape effects on the application site, also in places within the local landscape context (c.500m of the site) where the rural character will be changed by this extensive proposal. The southern parcel is less visible in the local landscape (from the public domain) with only partial visibility from two Viewpoints 16 and 20. A woodland belt is proposed along the west and southern boundaries of the parcel to mitigate adverse effects. The impact on landscape character is likely to be restricted to the site itself and immediate local context.
- 1.10 Again I would draw the Council's attention to the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character (NCLCA) Strategy and Guidelines for this landscape type and suggest that its aspirations are not met: *“New development, change and land management should be controlled to conserve and enhance the balance of the rural elements that contribute to the intrinsic character of this productive agricultural landscape..... Large scale development should be resisted within this rural landscape and particularly in the open and remote areas... ensure that the integrity of this quintessential rural agricultural landscape is not diminished through inappropriate development and loss of the characteristic combination of elements.”* Harmful landscape and visual effects will, inevitably, be most significant on the two parcels of the application site but I would also expect them to be experienced in the wider local landscape, most notably around the northern parcel.

Max Askew
Askew Nelson Ltd
30th September 2022