



Strategic Planning Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee held at The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Tuesday 18 July 2023 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Kevin Parker (Vice Chair in the Chair)
Councillor Alan Chantler
Councillor Rosie Herring
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Cathrine Russell
Councillor Danielle Stone

Substitute Members:

Councillor Stephen Clarke
Councillor Jonathan Harris

Also Present:

Brian Skittrall
John Thomason
John Smith
Darren Cuming

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Ann Addison
Councillor André González De Savage
Councillor Rosie Humphreys
Councillor David James
Councillor Charles Manners

Officers:

Erica Buchanan, Principal Planning Officer
James Rodger, Development Management Manager
Pritpal Singh-Swarn, Planning Solicitor
Diana Davies, Democratic Services Officer

131. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

132. **Minutes**

The Committee were advised of three amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023:

- Councillor Parker's attendance be recorded.
- The list of apologies should omit Councillor Bignell.
- The decision for WND/2023/0155 Farthingstone Hotel and Golf Course, would read:
Prior to the commencement of works affecting any existing Public Right of Way, full details of any enhancement, improvement, signage, diversion or closure shall be submitted for the approval of the local planning authority. To ensure that the Public Rights of Way remain accessible and safe for users throughout, and on completion of development.

Resolved: That, subject to the amendments above, the Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee of 20 June 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

133. **WND/2022/0410 Land at Glassthorpe Hill and Land off Brington Road, Flore**

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the information in the report and provided a presentation which included maps, master plans, site layout, illustration of solar panels, panoramic views and photographs from various viewpoints overlooking the proposed site.

- Badger gates would be included in the security fencing.
- Access gates would be gated on completion.
- Bio-diversity net gain, 36% on habitats and 11% for hedgerow.
- Visual impact mitigation from additional planting and existing hedgerows.

The Development Management Manager outlined the benefit of attending a site visit for the development, to view topography of the landscape, the existing hedgerow, to determine any impact on the site and consider the landscaping measures proposed to mitigate the impact on the area.

In determining the planning balance for the application, the Committees would need to refer to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as referenced in the case officers report.

From November 2023 the environment act would introduce an automatic requirement for a biodiversity net gain of 10%. The applicant had carried out a biodiversity net gain calculation and would provide 36% habitat units and 11% in hedgerow unit which was set out in Condition 16 of the report.

Further comments provided by CPRE in objection to the application were summarised in the supplementary information.

The Development Management Manager provided a verbal update to the Committee relating to two proposed amendments, for the Committees consideration. That the Condition 17 would include:

- a reference to hard landscaping
- and an additional line referencing badger gates be included in the fencing

In response to members questions the Principal Planning Officer advised:

- Access points would remain for decommissioning but would be gated.

- the period of 40 years was an industry standard.
- Land under the solar panels would remain in agricultural use and be used for grazing sheep.

In responses to members questions the Development Management Manager advised:

- EDF had received a grid connection offer through the West Northampton substation.

Brian Skittrall addressed the Committee in objection to the application. Objections included, loss of agricultural land, climate change, food security, protected landscape, degradation of land, misleading carbon statistics, benefit insufficient to offset harm.

John Thomason, Flore Parish Council addressed the Committee in support of the application and requested that:

- Should Photovoltaic systems improve, and fewer numbers be required to produce the output, that the panels planned for the land off Brinkton Road be excluded.
- The new access be through Upper Heyford and that the watercourse be bridged to take large vehicles.
- Ensure the solar farm was more eco-friendly.

John Smith addressed the Committee in support of the application and cited the improved biodiversity, the benefit to the eco system, reduction in chemicals on the land, improvement of the soil structure, the requirement to provide alternative power and the benefit to the Parish Council through long term commitment to community schemes.

In responses to members questions John Smith added:

- A farmer would receive an annual rate from the solar production. That margins on farming were small and quoted that 95% of profits were from diversification and 5% from farming.
- The proposal would enhance the existing environmental improvements.

Darren Cuming, the applicant addressed the Committee in support of the application, explained the commitment of EDF renewables response to the climate emergency, installing an array of renewal energy solutions. Had undertaken consultations with the community and engagement with officers for pre-application advice. And highlighted, landscape mitigation, bio-diversity net gain, badger gates, the construction management plan, a commitment to the community fund for 40 years, grid connection at Northampton West sub-station.

In responses to members questions Darren Cuming added:

- A condition to ensure the plot of land created by the new A45/M1 access point was maintained could be included.
- Solar panels were installed on roofs of industrial and commercial properties.
- Operation hours would be agreed in the construction management plan

- Degradation of panels, due to heat about 28 degrees, would have a minor effect on the output of the panels. The panels were robust and designed to accommodate heat.
- A decommissioning program would restore the land, 85% of the panel's materials would be recovered and recycled.
- The solar panels were manufactured in China and the East.
- Interpretation panels would be included along the route of the footpaths.

The Development Management Manager summed up the Committees comments relating to amendments to and additional conditions:

- Condition 9, decommissioning, would include an additional point that would refer to the materials and recycling.
- Condition 12, that the construction management plan, would include the HGV delivery hours and construction working hours.
- Condition 17, landscaping, would include:
 - a reference to full details of the hard landscaping being submitted.
 - the requirement that details of the badger gates be included in the landscape mitigation strategy.
 - A reference to ensure the parcel of land created by the new A45/M1 access point would be maintained.

The specific wording of the conditions would be delegated to the Development Management Manager.

In response to members questions, the Development Management Manager further advised:

- At appeals of solar farms on agricultural land, Planning Inspectors, would put weight on the climate emergency. The proposed use of high-quality agricultural land would be given consideration and reflected in the appeal decision.
- Planning guidance, the government supported low carbon development proposals.
- The NPPF supported the protection of high-quality agricultural land.

In reaching its decision, the Committee considered the officer's report, presentation, representations and verbal update.

Councillor Pritchard proposed the application be approved, subject to the amendments to the conditions, the proposition was seconded by Councillor Chantler and on being put to the meeting was declared carried unanimously.

Resolved: That permission be granted subject to the conditions in the report and subject to the amendment of Conditions, 9, 12 and 17 below, with delegated authority to the Assistant Director – Planning and Development to approve any amendments to conditions as deemed necessary:

- Condition 9 add: and iv) full details of proposed methods of materials recycling of the solar panels and associated infrastructure.

- Condition 12 add: The construction management plan should also include details of proposed construction working hours and HGV delivery hours.
- Condition 17: Prior to the installation of any solar panels on the site full details of the hard and soft landscaping to be retained/provided in accordance with the details as illustrated within ES figure 6.6 and within the ES Landscape Mitigation Strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. In addition full details of landscaping of the parcel of land including the new access road into the eastern part of the site (taken from Main road at Upper Heyford) shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All new planting shall be implemented in accordance with the details so approved no later than in the first planting season following commencement of the development. The landscape mitigation strategy should also include the details of the badger gates within the deer fencing.

The meeting closed at 3.20 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____