



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Strategic Planning Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee held at Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester on Monday 17 October 2022 at 2.00 pm.

Present Councillor Phil Bignell (Chair)
 Councillor Ann Addison (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor Rosie Herring
 Councillor Stephen Hibbert
 Councillor James Hill
 Councillor David James
 Councillor Charles Manners
 Councillor Bob Purser
 Councillor Jake Roberts
 Councillor Cathrine Russell
 Councillor John Shephard

Substitute Councillor Rosie Humphreys
Members: Councillor Kevin Parker

Also
Present:

Apologies Councillor Jonathan Harris
for Councillor Ken Pritchard
Absence:

Officers Simon Aley, Planning Solicitor
 Diana Davies, Democratic Services Officer
 Jeverly Findlay, Committee Officer
 Rebecca Grant, Major Projects Officer, Planning Department Daventry
 Paul Seckington, Head of Development Management and Enforcement

79. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Roberts declared an interest at Agenda Item 6, WNS.2021/1858 Land at Milton Road, Gayton, and advised that he would leave the room during the discussion and voting thereon.

80. Minutes

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 September 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

81. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair advised that only those people who had registered, in line with the Committee's speaking procedure, could address the Committee. Members of the public were requested not to call out during the Committee's discussions on any item.

82. **WNS/2022/0557/EIA - Land at Halse Road, South of Greatworth, Northamptonshire - Construction of a solar farm and battery stations together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure.**

The Senior Manager, Development Management outlined the application for full planning permission for a solar farm through the installation of ground mounted static photo-voltaic (PV) panels and associated infrastructure. Members' attention was drawn to the committee updates and that the Flood Authority had withdrawn their objections.

Members received a presentation which included maps and photographs from various vantage points of the proposed sites; the measures proposed to mitigate the visual impact on the respective areas and from public rights of way and the means of connecting the solar panels, via a new substation and connection to pylons. Photomontages were shown which illustrated the view with 15 years' worth of growth of the trees to provide screening.

In response to Member's enquiries, the Senior Manager, Development Management advised that alternative traffic routes had been explored for construction traffic. The impact on Greatworth conservation area to the north of site had been re-evaluated as the application had been amended from an earlier submission to remove solar panels on 2 fields. The Conservation team now considered that the impact on the conservation area had been greatly reduced. As a consequence, the reasons for refusal were now limited to the visual impact of the proposal. The proposal would ensure a biodiversity of 32.68% net gain for hedgerows/trees units and 70.82% net gain for habitat units; 96 letters of support and 133 letters of objection had been received from the area surrounding the solar farm. The landscape visual assessment classified the landscape as 'sensitive'.

Veronica Ward addressed the Committee in objection to the application and concurred with the case officer's findings. The application would have a significant adverse effect on the landscape and character of the area.

Mr Foote addressed the Committee in objection to the application and expressed concern that the application constituted an unacceptable loss of productive agricultural land and would have a direct impact on existing wildlife.

Mr Morris from Farthinghoe Parish Council addressed the Committee in objection to the application expressing concerns regarding the suitability of the highway route, the risk of traffic congestion in the village, the size of the solar farm and the estimated megawatt output projected.

Mr Bingham from Greatworth Parish Council addressed the Committee in objection to the application and expressed concerns regarding the siting and size of the solar

farm, that the the topography limited the mitigation measures of the visual impact and that Northampton Police had objected to the application.

Connor McAllister, for and on behalf of David Sherborn-Hoare, the landowner, addressed the Committee in support of the application and advised that the proposed application would provide an income for what was considered poor arable land. It would provide stability to ensure the continuance of the farm.

Connor McAllister, the applicant, addressed the Committee in support of the application to provide solar power in response to the national climate emergency and the current energy crisis. It would provide clean and renewal energy to assist in meeting the net zero target by 2045. The scheme would provide additional landscaping and improve biodiversity and the benefits of the scheme outweighed any harm caused.

Councillor Bignell invited Councillor Herring, Ward Member for Middleton Cheney to address the Committee, who advised on local concerns pertaining to: articulated lorries unable to negotiate turns on B4525 causing road closures, the associated health and safety risks and the impact on the surrounding area.

Members considered the Committee reports, the presentation and the representations made by the speakers and discussed; the visual impact of the proposed solar panels from various vantage points; proposed visual impact mitigation; the balance of protecting the heritage of the landscape and the need for land for agricultural purposes with the need to improve renewable energy sources; the National Planning Policy Framework guidance; the benefits of the development; the scale and volume of panels; accessibility of the site for HGV's; West Northamptonshire Council's commitment to net zero by 2045.

In response to a Member's question as to whether the HS2 contractors had been included in the consultation, the Senior Manager, Development Management undertook to provide an answer outside of the meeting. Councillor Bignell invited Hayley Usher, Development Management from Highways to remote access the meeting to answer questions; however the audio link failed. The Senior Manager, Development Management provided an update in the absence of Highways and advised that the proposed access procedures would mitigate risks associated with large vehicles and the sharp turns on the route.

Councillor Herring proposed that Officer's advice to refuse the application be accepted. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Manners and on being put to the meeting was declared carried with 8 voting in favour and 5 against.

RESOLVED:

That the application be refused for the following reasons:

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).

Councillor Roberts, having previously declared an interest in the following item, left the room and took no part in the debate.

83. **WNS/2021/1858/EIA - Land at Milton Road, Gayton, Northamptonshire
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.**

Members received a presentation which included maps and plans from various vantage points of the proposed sites and an explanation of the measures proposed to mitigate the visual impact on the respective areas.

The Senior Manager, Development Management outlined the proposed construction route management and arrangements for HGV access during the construction phase and the subsequent storage and supply within the development. Members' attention was drawn to the amendments set out in the Committee updates.

In response to Members enquiries, the Senior Manager, Development Management advised that the Officer's analysis of the application had taken into account the proximity of the site to the canal conservation area, landscape value and whether the application would change the character of the landscape. Additional landscaping had been proposed as part of the application; however, the landscape consultant had advised that was insufficient. Natural England had initially raised objections but since mitigation measures had been secured, they had withdrawn their objection.

Roger Clarke from Gayton Parish Council addressed the Committee in objection to the application and advised the residents had significant concerns at the magnitude of the development and that 85% of them had voted against it. In response to the development the parish had produced a document outlining 11 major areas of concern, many of the concerns remain unaddressed by the applicant.

Councillor Cooper, the ward member for Bugbrooke addressed the Committee in objection to the application whilst acknowledging the importance of renewable energy. Councillor Cooper raised concerns that the applicant had not satisfied the question of how the power generated would be fed into national grid. The application would adversely effect the landscape and the renewable energy that would be provided was not sufficient to outweigh the harm it would cause. The land was productive in agricultural terms as it was classed as grade 3a and 3b. The area provided a quintessential rural landscape. Residents considered that both of the proposed developments sites were contentious and each would have a significant impact on the grand union canal.

Dr Jonathan Taylor, addressed the committee and read out a statement which provided the opinion and sentiment expressed by Mr Jens Buus, a supporter of the application. Mr Buus expressed concerns regarding the handling of the application, omissions, inconsistencies and errors in the committee report and asked that the decision be deferred. In response to Members' queries, the Senior Manager, Development Management advised that the concerns referred to in Mr Buus' statement had been addressed on Page 8 of the written updates.

Laura Murphy, the applicant, addressed the Committee and advised that the application would improve energy security and was consistent with the government targets for carbon reductions. The land had been carefully selected, it was not a sensitive site in landscape terms, and additional visual impact mitigation had been included to enhance the existing screening around the canal.

The applicant in response to Members enquiries, confirmed that the solar panels would be connected by underground cables to the substation to the north east of the site and further clarified that it could be arranged for the cables to be directionally drilled under the railway and canal. The solar panels would be raised up to 2.3 metres off the ground to avoid major equipment being flooded.

Councillor Bignell invited Councillor Addison, Ward Member for Bugbrooke to address the Committee. Councillor Addison stated that she supported sustainable energy, but it had to be in the right place. Gayton was a small rural village located on the top of the hill and the solar panels would be visible. Councillor Addison raised concerns that: the site was next to the canal conservation area; the proposal would lead to a loss of productive farmland; the bridge over the canal had a weight limit and was unsuitable for HGV traffic.

Councillor Hill considered that the proposal would impact on the conservation area proposed that Officer's advice to refuse the application be accepted. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Parker and on being put to the meeting was declared carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the application be refused for the reasons set out in report:

Owing to the location and size of the site the magnitude of change would result in major and moderate adverse effects on landscape and visual character, both on site and in the local context. The proposed mitigation measures would not overcome the harmful landscape and visual effects for the landscape type at the site and its surrounding quintessential rural agricultural character. This is a significant adverse effect that makes the application contrary to paragraph 174(b) of the NPPF, Policies S10(i) and S11 of the West Northants Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (LPP1) and Policies SS2(1b and 1d) and EMP6(1b) of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2)

At 4.30 pm the Committee adjourned for a comfort break and reconvened at 4.45 pm.

Councillor Roberts returned to the meeting.

84. **WND/2021/0860 Land at corner of Sywell Road/Kettering Road, Overstone - Hybrid application for detailed approval for site access, provision of petrol filling station with convenience store, two food & drink units (with drive-thru lanes), retail units & 119 parking spaces & public access routes. Outline application (with matters of scale, access & layout to be determined) for an employment unit; a nursery, 21 parking spaces and public access routes**

The Major Projects Officer explained that the application fell within Overstone Leys local centre, however it was outside of the parameters of the 2015 outline consent. It was a standalone hybrid application, with a mixture of a full and outline application. Concerns had been received from residents with regards to this application including highway safety, proposed uses and sustainability, and a petition containing 234 signatures had been received.

The Major Projects Officer advised that whilst provision had been made in the outline consent for 'hot food outlets' it had been envisaged that these would be small retail units. West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, (WNJCS) Policy N3 defined a 'local centre' as including local retail facilities of an appropriate scale (including a convenience store), health care services and community facilities. It was noted that the Highway Authority had withdrawn their objections. However Public Health Northamptonshire had objected due to the proximity of the proposed takeaways to the new school.

Insufficient evidence had been provided as to whether the application would result in unacceptable noise levels. There was also insufficient evidence that the proposal would result in a net gain of biodiversity and therefore was contrary to the Daventry Local Plan (Part 2).

John Austin from Overstone Parish Council addressed the Committee in objection to the application as it would not provide a local community centre. Concern was expressed for the risks associated with the sustainability of a second service station in the area and the resultant contamination of the land. There was already considerable traffic congestion in the area.

David Arrons from Moulton Parish Council addressed the Committee in objection to the application and raised concerns regarding the proposed fast food outlets which would be in close proximity to the new school opening in the following year.

Sophie Drury, the Agent, addressed the Committee and advised that the mix use components of local centre would be deliverable in the short term, as businesses had already expressed an interest. A detailed noise assessment had been carried out to assess the impact on residents and the opening hours reduced. The applicant would work with the Wildlife Trust to increase biodiversity.

The Agent, in response to Members queries, advised that no expressions of interest had been received for the provision of a public house on the site and therefore the application had been amended to remove it.

Councillor Bignell invited Councillor Shepherd, Ward Member for Moulton to address the Committee. Councillor Shepherd considered that the application was not in line with provision of a local centre as required in the outline application.

Councillor Shepherd proposed that Officer's advice to refuse the application be accepted. The proposition was seconded by Councillor James and on being put to the meeting was declared carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the application be refused for the reasons set out in the report.

85. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 5.08 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____