

ITEM NO: 11	<u>Location:</u>	Land between Railway and Sewage Disposal Works, Royston Road, Melbourn. Cambridge
	<u>Applicant:</u>	Ms K Pell-Coggins South Cambridgeshire District Council
	<u>Proposal:</u>	Solar farm and associated development NORTH HERTS DISTRICT COUNCIL: ADJACENT AUTHORITY: CONSULTEE ONLY
	<u>Ref.No:</u>	14/02009/ ADJ
	<u>Officer:</u>	Richard Tiffin

Date of expiry of statutory period : 19 September 2014

Reason for Referral to Committee

Request made to discuss response at Committee by Cllr Hill

1.0 Relevant History

- 1.1 An associated planning application has been received for underground cabling within Royston to connect to the Grid. This application was not valid at the time of writing this report.

2.0 Policies

- 2.1 **NPPF**
10. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change.

3.0 Representations

- 3.1 NHDC Consultee only

4.0 Planning Considerations

4.1 Site & Surroundings

- 4.1.1 The application site comprises agricultural land situated directly north of the A505 opposite the Fairview Homes housing site off of Burns Road and between the Anglian Water Sewage Treatment Works and the Railway.

4.2 Proposal

- 4.2.1 The proposal comprises an area of PV panels at 20 degree angles achieving a height of 2.3m. The proposal also specifies pole mounted security cameras every 100m and on corners these attaining a height of 4m. Various other development is specified including perimeter fencing at 2m and 8 green coloured inverter cabins attaining a height of 2.9m. New hedge planting is specified on most sides of the scheme and along the entire boundary with the A505. The scheme would deliver 14 MW of power at peak (approximately equivalent to 7 large wind turbines).

4.3 Key Issues

- 4.3.1 The key issues here centre on the degree to which this proposal would impact on the residents of North Hertfordshire. This being the case this report seeks to establish the views of this Authority in relation to issues such as visual / landscape impacts that might be different or support the views of the parishes in North Herts principally the Town Council (Royston) in order that these may be forwarded to the determining authority for consideration as part of its consideration of the planning application.
- 4.3.2 This is a silent technology, unlike a wind farm. In my view they are largely benign but do have the potential to impact adversely on the best quality landscapes. This aspect, together with construction traffic activity, should be the focus of any representation.
- 4.3.3 The NPPF has the following to say on these technologies:

97. To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources. They should:

- ***have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources;***
- ***design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts;***
- ***consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure the development of such sources;***
- ***support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy, including developments outside such areas being taken forward through neighbourhood planning; and***
- ***identify opportunities where development can draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers.***

In terms of handling planning applications then the NPPF goes on to set specific limits beyond which authorities should not stray:

98. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should:

- ***not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and***
- ***approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should also expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.***

- 4.3.4 This report is clearly not aiming to make a recommendation to Members as to the merits of this scheme. Accordingly, I will follow the approach adopted in respect of the wind farm proposal on our border in Central Bedfordshire at Langford, brought to this committee some time ago, and which has now been completed and is operating following a Public Inquiry. In this regard I will outline what I consider to be the key issues and invite comments from Members while suggesting some points to raise in any response back to the determining authority, South Cambs District Council.
- 4.3.5 All construction activity to and from the site is envisaged directly from the A505. I attach the applicant's Transport Statement at Appendix 1 for information. The County Council Highways Department should be consulted by South Cambs although I have no reason to question that a road such as the A505 would not be suitable for the kind of traffic volumes envisaged during the construction phase.
- 4.3.6 Visual and landscape impacts are very much the main issue with this kind of development. Landscape impacts are generally just that, impacts in wider views of the overall landscape. Conversely, visual impacts are those which impact in more local views. Given the low level nature of the proposal and the relatively flat nature of the landscape I would suggest that both landscape and visual impacts would be minimal. However, I would suggest that the North Herts communities affected, principally the Town Council, are fully consulted and their views and concerns in this regard are taken into account by the determining Authority (South Cambs). I would also recommend that the Conservators of Therfield Heath are also consulted as there will be some views from the higher ground south of the Town. The applicant, in the accompanying DAS, characterises the appearance of the technology as follows:

"The arrays will be of a simple form and construction with panels of a glass construction with outer metal framework. The panels are likely to be of a Crystalline Silicon or a material called 'Thin Film' and consist of semi- conductors and photovoltaic cells protected by a thin layer of glass. The panel have a blue/black appearance and because they absorb sunlight there is no discernible reflection or glare produced. In this way they have an advantage over other structures commonly found in rural areas such as cement roof sheeting, glass houses and poly-tunnels. All these structures and materials are reflective, sometimes glaringly white in appearance and can detract from the overall appearance in the landscape. The solar panel arrays in comparison do not produce this reflection and the proposed array will appear as a dark coloured entity toning with the existing patchwork of fields. "

4.4 Conclusion

- 4.4.1 That the Planning Committee endorse a response highlighting the points set out under 6.0 Recommendation.
- The North Hertfordshire District Council strongly recommends that the determining authority consult Royston Town Council. Additionally, the Council recommends that the Conservators of Therfield Heath are consulted.
 - The North Hertfordshire District Council recommends that the determining authority consult the Hertfordshire Highway Authority specifically in respect of vehicle movements onto the A505 during the construction phase.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 In making decisions on applications submitted under the Town and Country Planning legislation, the Council is required to have regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations. The decision must be in accordance with the plan unless the material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the decision is to refuse or restrictive conditions are attached, the applicant has a right of appeal against the decision.

6.0 Recommendation

- The North Hertfordshire District Council strongly recommends that the determining authority consult Royston Town Council. Additionally, the Council recommends that the Conservators of Therfield Heath are consulted.
- The North Hertfordshire District Council recommends that the determining authority consult the Hertfordshire Highway Authority specifically in respect of vehicle movements onto the A505 during the construction phase.