

9 September 2020

Report to: South Cambridgeshire District
Council Planning Committee

Lead Officer: Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development

20/02195/FUL – South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne Business Park, Cambourne

Proposal: Provision of carbon reduction emission measures including a borehole array across the existing car park, ground source heat pump system within the existing building and provision of photovoltaic solar car ports.

Applicant: South Cambridgeshire District Council

Key material considerations: Principle of development
Visual amenity
Climate change mitigation
Parking Provision
Impact on Biodiversity

Date of Member site visit: None

Is it a Departure Application?: No

Decision due by: 11 May 2020

Application brought to Committee because: The applicant is South Cambridgeshire District Council

Presenting officer: Luke Simpson, Consultant Planning Officer

Executive Summary

1. The proposal is for the provision of carbon reduction emission measures for South Cambs Hall.
2. The proposed works have been re-considered since the originally refused scheme submitted under planning reference S/0325/15/FL and the reason for refusal overcome by retention of the existing landscaping and more carefully considered location of the solar canopy as part of this scheme.

3. It is considered that the proposed development would improve the Council's move towards being zero carbon by 2050 and is in accordance with policies listed below of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018.
4. The proposed development complies with all relevant development plan policies and there are no material considerations which indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with those policies. Planning officers therefore recommend approval subject to conditions.

Relevant planning history

5. S/0549/18/FL - Construct a storage area between the cycle shed and waste store – Approved
6. S/0548/18/FL - Enclose two external fire escape stairways on the north elevation – Approved
7. S/0320/15/FL - The provision of new solar photovoltaic (PV) canopy system, amendments to car park layout to accommodate the system and 10 additional parking spaces. Upgrade to existing cycle storage facilities and provision of roof mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) systems to existing cycle and refuse ancillary buildings – Refused.
8. S/0951/08/F - Reconstruction of existing and construction of additional staff parking and associated landscaping works – South Cambridgeshire. Hall - Approved.
9. S/6147/02/RM - Council Offices, associated works and civic square – Approved
10. S/6136/01/O - Erection of three-storey building for offices (B1 Use) or Council Offices for South Cambridgeshire District Council (Sui Generis Use)

Planning policies

National Guidance

11. National Planning Policy Framework 2019
National Planning Practice Guidance 2018
National Design Guide 2019

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018

12. S/1 – Vision
S/2 – Objectives of the Local Plan
S/3 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
S/7 – Development Frameworks
HQ/1 – Design Principles
NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character

NH/4 Biodiversity
NH/5 Sites of Biodiversity or Geological Importance
CC/1: Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change
CC/2 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation
CC/6: Construction Methods
SC/9 Lighting Proposals
SC/10 Noise Pollution
SC/11 Contaminated Land
TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel

South Cambridgeshire Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):

13. Sustainable Design and Construction SPD – Adopted January 2020
District Design Guide SPD - Adopted March 2010

Consultation

14. **Cambourne Parish Council** – no comments received.
15. **Local Highway Authority** – No significant adverse effect upon the Public Highway should result from this proposal, should it gain benefit of Planning Permission.
16. **Environmental Health Officer** – No objections
17. **Environmental Health (Noise)** – No objections following receipt of a noise assessment. Confirmed that the impacts from the operation of the GSHP will not be significant within the building based on their contribution to existing background levels. Potentially detectable noise in the reception area of the building at an insignificant level.
18. **Environmental Health (Contaminated Land)** - This site does not have a significant historical use prior to the existing offices and the proposals are fairly insensitive to contamination. As such, it does not warrant attaching a condition to the application with regards contamination.
19. **Drainage Officer** – No objections given no foul drainage proposed and no increase in surface water drainage. No condition proposed.
20. **Ecology** – The applicant has submitted an Extended Phase 1 Survey which includes a detailed mitigation strategy for great crested newts, and it has been further confirmed via email that no lighting will be installed within the temporary car park and that no bird breeding habitat will be removed to provide access thus removing remaining concerns. Recommend conditions requiring a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEcMP) prior to development commencing and a scheme of biodiversity enhancement that includes restoration of the temporary carpark once no longer required.

21. **Landscape Officer** – Initial response – supports the proposal, including the temporary works, as it would have negligible effects upon the landscape character. Further details of car port mounting details, car park surface treatment, carport led lighting, and landscaping/boundary treatments to temporary car park required. Following receipt of these details (other than carport lighting which the applicants have advised would be provided prior to installation), no objections to the proposal.
22. **Sustainability Officer** – The proposals for a ground source heat pump array to meet heating and hot water requirements and for a photovoltaic car park canopy alongside a package of wider energy efficiency measures are supported from a sustainable design and construction perspective. This project will reduce the building's annual carbon footprint from over 350,000 kgs of CO2 per year to approximately 182,000 kgs, in keeping with the Council's commitment to support the transition to net zero carbon.
23. **Tree Officer** – Expresses concern regarding the Borehole Array installation – trenching for the pipework connecting the boreholes would be likely to sever the roots of adjacent trees. Further detail required.

Representations from members of the public

24. One letter of support received commending the Council's commitment towards addressing climate emergency.

The site and its surroundings

25. The site edged red includes the existing car park, ancillary buildings and cycle shelters to the west of South Cambridgeshire Hall, which is a three-storey office building on the westernmost plot of Cambourne Business Park. It also includes an area to the east of the building, which is currently open and undeveloped land, for the siting of a temporary car park which forms part of this application. To the west of the existing car park the boundary is well screened by semi-mature landscaping that was planted some twenty years ago. The other side of the landscaping there is the access road that leads to the secondary school and then open agricultural land. To the north and south the landscaping is less dense and less mature as it was planted at approximately the time South Cambs. Hall was built.
26. The site is not within a conservation area, nor within the designated Green Belt and located in Flood Zone 1.

The proposal

27. The site is located within Cambourne's Established Employment Area (E15 2a) and in addition to the perimeter landscaping there is a strip of semi-mature landscaping between rows of parking spaces within the car park, and a further area of landscaping between the ancillary buildings and the cycle shelters. The two cycle shelters are located to the north and south of the ancillary buildings,

which have a covered walkway separating the reserved parking spaces nearest to the office from the main car park.

28. To supplement the PV roof arrays on the existing building, a photovoltaic car park canopy is proposed across two rows of existing parking provision. The proposal seeks consent for the erection of a series of canopies that would extend over most of the central parking spaces in order to accommodate photovoltaic (PV) panels. The solar car ports would have mono-pitched roofs with a maximum roof height of approximately 4 metres and a minimum of around 2.5 metres. The proposal aims to retain the number of parking spaces, bar one, which would be used for the siting of the charging boxes. It would also result in temporary parking provision required elsewhere whilst the works are completed, and this area is included in the application site on land to the south east of the building (140 spaces).
29. The form and structure of the canopy is to be monopitched to achieve the most efficient angle for solar gain. Car park surface materials are proposed to remain the same as the existing.
30. The construction of the solar car ports would result in a large number of spaces being out of use during this period. To compensate for this, a temporary car park is proposed on the building site adjacent to South Cambs Hall. This would accommodate up to 140 spaces and be accessed via the existing access road to the overflow parking. This area would be restored to its previous use once works are complete.
31. A ground source heat pump is proposed to replace most of the use of gas within the building, the existing rooftop gas boilers will be retained for back up purposes only. The heat pumps will be located internally on the ground floor of the existing building within the old server room, which is now redundant. This will allow the plant room to be visible internally to show a low carbon system in action.
32. The heat pumps will be supplied by a Borehole array within the existing park allowing space around the boundary and landscaping around the car park. The Borehole design is supported by BA Hydro Solutions Thermological assessment and closed loop Borehole design interim design report. The Borehole Array will be entirely below ground, the only visible evidence of them will be a series of access covers at the head of each borehole within the car park.
33. The application follows a pre-application advice where officers were generally supportive subject to further consultation and no additional issues being raised. The temporary car park was not included as part of the pre-application submission, but Officers encouraged this to be provided as part of any application in order to minimise disruption to staff and visitors during the construction period.

Planning assessment

34. The key issues to consider in the determination of this planning application are the principle of development, impacts of the proposal on the visual amenity of the area and climate change mitigation.

Principle of Development

35. The site is located outside of any development framework and in the countryside.

36. Policy S/7 of the Local Plan states that outside development frameworks, only allocations within Neighbourhood Plans that have come into force and development for agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses which need to be located in the countryside or where supported by other policies in this plan will be permitted.

37. Policy CC/2 of the Local Plan supports proposals to generate energy from renewable and low carbon sources, providing: a. The development, and any associated infrastructure, either individually or cumulatively with other developments, does not have unacceptable adverse impacts on heritage assets (including their settings), natural assets, high quality agricultural land, the landscape, or the amenity of nearby residents (visual impact, noise, shadow flicker, odour, fumes, traffic); b. The development can be connected efficiently to existing national energy infrastructure, or by direct connection to an associated development or community project, or the energy generated would be used for on-site needs only; c. Provision is made for decommissioning once the operation has ceased, including the removal of the facilities and the restoration of the site; and d. Developers have engaged effectively with the local community and local authority.

38. Paragraph 154 of the NPPF states that when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should: (a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and (b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

39. The Climate Change Act 2008 establishes a legally binding target to reduce the UK's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% in 2050 from 1990 levels. This included a target that the annual equivalent of the carbon budget for the period including 2020 is at least 34% lower than 1990.

40. The installation of the proposed measures on the site would provide renewable energy to the Council offices. It would reduce the use of fossil fuels and subsequently carbon dioxide emissions to contribute towards slowing down climate change.

41. The development is not considered to have unacceptable adverse impacts on heritage assets (including their settings), natural assets, high quality agricultural land, the landscape, or the amenity of nearby residents (visual impact, noise,

shadow flicker, odour, fumes, traffic). These matters are discussed in detail below.

42. A condition is recommended requiring the temporary car park land to be returned to its former condition once works are complete.

Visual amenity

43. Whilst the building and the surrounding area are in the countryside the car park is barely visible from the surrounding countryside, particularly now that the landscaping surrounding the site is so well established. The proposed car ports would cover an area covering approximately 70m in length and the width of just over two car lengths, end to end. The solar canopy will sit on T framed mountings (robust enough to take any parking mishaps) and positioned to avoid compromising parking provision. The canopy would be approximately 4m high and slightly tilted to benefit from the required solar gain.
44. As referred to in paragraph 7 of this report, a previous application for solar panels within the car park was refused in 2015. This was due to the fact that the loss of semi-mature landscaping, particularly on the northern and southern boundaries of the site, required to accommodate the canopies, was considered to have an unacceptable visual impact upon the setting of this part of the Business Park. In addition, the earlier refused scheme proposed canopies over all the parking spaces with a variation of roof types depending on location and orientation for the best solar gain. This more modest scheme proposes the car ports solely within the central part of the car park, well away from any boundary planting. It therefore has a lower visual impact and takes into consideration the existing and now well-established landscaping that surrounds the car park.
45. The Landscape Officer has raised no objections to the application, advising that the proposals would not have a significant impact on the landscape setting of the site. The Tree Officer has raised some concerns regarding the impact that trenching/pipework associated with the borehole array would have upon the roots of trees within the car park area. An amended Design and Access Statement and site plan has been submitted showing the provision of tree protection fences a minimum of 2.5m from any planting areas and designed to accord with the relevant British Standard. No further response has been received from the Tree Officer so Officers have recommended a condition requiring the tree/hedges to be protected in accordance with the details provided.
46. The proposal is not considered to result in a visually prominent and intrusive development that would be out of keeping with the surrounding area and adversely affect the landscape character and visual appearance of the countryside. The proposal would therefore comply with Policies NH/2 and HQ/1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018.

Climate change mitigation

47. Policy HQ/1 of the Local Plan requires proposals to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change on development, as appropriate to the scale of the development. This is re-affirmed by Policy CC/1 of the Local Plan which states that planning permission will only be granted for proposals that demonstrate and embed the principles of climate change mitigation and adaptation into the development.
48. 'Being Green to Our Core' has been identified as a key priority within the council's 2020-25 Business Plan. As part of this priority South Cambridgeshire District Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to reaching zero carbon by 2050.
49. South Cambridgeshire Hall is the main base from which the Council operates. It is the landmark from which SCDC want to show how the Council is responding to zero carbon agenda. As such, the greening of South Cambridgeshire Hall forms a central part of the 'Green to our Core' programme.
50. The application proposes the installation of a range of measures to reduce the emissions from the South Cambridgeshire Hall office building, achieving savings on energy bills and revenue from generation of heat and electricity.
51. The proposal would be contributing to the mitigation of climate change in accordance with policies HQ/1 and CC/1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018.

Parking Provision

52. The proposal does not result in a significant loss of parking spaces as a result of the application. In total 1 space is lost in the existing car park to the siting of the PV charging point which is connected to and feeds back into the building.
53. Temporary parking provision has been proposed in order to mitigate for the temporary loss of part of the main car park whilst construction works are ongoing. Whilst originally based on holiday peak season and an estimated 15% less staff likely to be present around this time of year, this has been changed somewhat by the current global situation. Whilst measures are in progress to re-introduce office working it is likely to adapt and change accordingly. 90 spaces will remain unaffected by the work; therefore 140 spaces are considered as an acceptable number for temporary parking provision whilst work takes place.
54. Options have been looked at within the existing business park with the proposed solution being the provision of 140 spaces on the building site adjacent South Cambridgeshire Hall. There is already an access off the site access road/overflow parking, and this will be utilised as access to the temporary parking area. No landscaping removal or additional planting is proposed as part of this proposal.
55. Provision will be made for temporary roadway matting to be laid from the access to all parking bays (grass parking mats) and Reptile fencing will be erected around the boundary of the temporary parking area to the entrance. A Construction Management Plan has been submitted as part of the application and

advises on the processes and working timetable of the proposed work regarding access, deliveries, hours of operation and materials. This accompanying document should be approved alongside any plans as part of an approval.

Impact on Biodiversity

56. The applicant has submitted an updated Extended Phase 1 survey (Hillier Ecology, May 2020) that demonstrates the report has included a detailed and thorough non-licensable mitigation strategy for great crested newts and ecologists have communicated via email as to why they do not believe a Natural England licence will be required, which has been welcomed. It is noted that no surveys have been included of any of the nearby ponds and no sections regarding GCN appear in either of the methodologies or results section of the report. Concerns raised by the Ecology officer with regard to lighting in the temporary car park and the removal of breeding bird habitat has been addressed, however two conditions have been included as part of the formal response specifically with regard to the area where the temporary parking has been located. These include the requirement of a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEcMP) and a scheme of Ecological Enhancement.

57. In summary, there are limited ecological constraints on site and the development is not considered to adversely affect protected species subject to safeguarding conditions. A condition would also be attached to ensure that any vegetation removed is outside the bird breeding season. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy NH/4 of the Local Plan.

Planning balance and conclusion

58. Having regard to applicable national and local planning policies, and having taken all relevant material considerations into account, it is considered that planning permission should be granted in this instance.

Recommendation

59. Officers recommend that the Planning Committee APPROVES the application subject to the following recommended conditions:

Conditions

- a) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.
(Reason - To ensure that consideration of any future application for development in the area will not be prejudiced by permissions for development, which have not been acted upon).
- b) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans as listed on this decision notice.

Reason: In the interests of good planning, for the avoidance of doubt and to facilitate any future application to the Local Planning Authority under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

- c) No development shall take place (including demolition, ground works, vegetation clearance) until a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEcMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The CEcMP shall include the following:
- i) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities.
 - ii) Identification of "biodiversity protection zones".
 - iii) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction (may be provided as a set of method statements).
 - iv) The location and timings of sensitive works to avoid harm to biodiversity features.
 - v) The times during which construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.
 - vi) Responsible persons and lines of communication.
 - vii) The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) or similarly competent person.
 - viii) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs if applicable.

The approved CEcMP shall be implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

(Reason - To protect existing habitats and protected species on site and to enhance biodiversity in accordance with the NPPF, the NERC Act 2006 and Policy NH/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018.)

- d) No development above slab level shall take place until a scheme of biodiversity enhancement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details of the restoration of the area used as a temporary car park and the features to be enhanced, recreated and managed for species of local importance both in the course of development and in the future. The scheme shall be carried out prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a programme agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. (Reason - To enhance ecological interests in accordance with Policies S/3, HQ/1 and NH/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018)
- e) The temporary car park, hereby permitted, shall be discontinued and the land restored to its former condition or to a condition to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority within 28 days of the completion of the works, hereby permitted, within the existing car park. (Reason - Approval of the proposal on a permanent basis would be contrary to Policies S/3 and CC/1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 and the land should be reinstated to facilitate future beneficial use.)

- f) No external lighting shall be installed other than in accordance with details that shall previously have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
(Reason - To avoid harm to ecological interests and minimise the effects of light pollution on the area in accordance with Policies S/3, HQ/1 and NH/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018)
- g) No site clearance or building operations shall commence until tree protection comprising weldmesh secured to standard scaffold poles driven into the ground to a height not less than 2.3 metres shall have been erected around trees and hedges to be retained on site in accordance with the details shown within the approved plans. Such fencing shall be maintained to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority during the course of development operations. Any tree(s) removed without consent or dying or being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased during the period of development operations shall be replaced in the next planting season with tree(s) of such size and species as shall have been previously agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. (Reason - To protect trees which are to be retained in order to enhance the development, biodiversity and the visual amenities of the area in accordance with Policies S/3 and NH/4 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018).

Background Papers

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website and / or an indication as to where hard copies can be inspected.

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's)
- Being Green to Our Core' 2020-25 Business Plan.
- Application Reference 20/02195/FUL

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