

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

2 July 2014

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

Application Number:	S/2763/13/FL
Parish(es):	GREAT WILBRAHAM
Proposal:	Solar Farm and Associated Equipment
Site address:	Mill Road
Applicant(s):	Great Wilbraham Solar Park Ltd.
Recommendation:	Delegated Approval
Key material considerations:	Countryside Landscape Character Heritage Assets Area of Archaeological Interest Biodiversity Trees and Landscaping Flood Risk
Committee Site Visit:	Yes
Departure Application:	No
Presenting Officer:	Karen Pell-Coggins
Application brought to Committee because:	Major Application of Local Interest
Date by which decision due:	15 April 2014

Executive Summary

1. This proposal is for a new 30 MW solar farm with associated equipment covering an area of 63 hectares to the east of the A11 and village of Great Wilbraham. The development is of a kind that receives very considerable support in national and local planning policy and that, following the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework there must be a strong presumption in favour of it. The proposal would have an impact on the countryside but this is not considered to be unacceptable adverse visual impact that would harm the character and appearance of the area as the development would be satisfactorily mitigated by additional landscaping. The development is also not considered to harm landscape character, damage the setting of heritage assets, destroy important archaeological evidence, result in the loss of important trees and hedges, harm biodiversity interests, cause a flood risk, be detrimental to highway safety or adversely affect the amenities of neighbours. Therefore, on balance, the benefits of the scheme in respect of renewable energy production are considered to outweigh the harm over the temporary loss of agricultural productivity.

Site and Proposal

2. The site is located outside of any village framework and within the countryside. It is situated immediately to the south east of the A11, 2.5 km to the south east of the village of Great Wilbraham, 1km to the south west of the village of Six Mile Bottom and 4.5km to the north west of the villages of West Wratting and Weston Colville. The site measures approximately 63 hectares in area and comprises undulating agricultural land that consists of two fields. The fields are separated by a tree belt. There are hedges along the north eastern and north western boundaries of the site, a row of trees along the south eastern boundary and a tree belt along the south western boundary. The site has a grade 2/3 (very good/good to moderate) agricultural land classification. It lies within the East Anglian Landscape Character Area. The site lies within flood zone 1 (low risk). The land falls gently to the south east. The nearest public right of way is situated 200 metres to the south of the site. The nearest listed building is Great Wilbraham Hall Farmhouse (grade II) that lies 1.1km to the south west of the site. The Old Cambridge Road verges and West Wratting Valley Farm County Wildlife Sites lie to the south east and south west of the site.
3. The site lies adjacent Green Belt land to the north west of the A11. The Wadlow Wind Farm and Camgrain storage facilities are situated 1km to the south.
4. This full planning application, received on 14 January 2014, proposes the installation of a 30MW solar photovoltaic farm along with inverter houses and ancillary equipment, a security fence and CCTV cameras for a temporary period of 30 years. The photovoltaic panels would be mounted on steel frames that are angled to face south. There would be arrays of panels running east to west across the site that measure up to 500 metres in length. Each panel would measure approximately 3.0 metres x 3.0 metres. They would have a maximum height of 2.3 metres and be set between 4 and 7 metres apart. The panels would be composed of modules with a dark blue/grey appearance. A 3 metre wide access track would run along the north western boundary and into the fields at various intervals. Adjacent to the access track, 11 groups of one field transformer (6.1 metres length x 2.5 metres depth x 2.6 metres height) and one inverter station (5.9 metres length x 2.4 metres depth x 2.8 metres height) would be erected at regular intervals to serve the panels. In the northern corner of the southern field, a DNO Housing Building (3.2 metres length x 2.3 metres depth x 2.8 metres height) and Customer Switchgear and Inverter Room (11.6 metres length x 2.4 metres depth x 2.8 metres height) along with hardstanding would be erected. This would also comprise the temporary construction compound. The security fence would surround the site. It would measure 2 metres in height, be constructed from galvanized steel and have a mesh design. Approximately 50 CCTV poles would be erected around the perimeter of the site that have a height of 3 metres. An underground route for the cable that connects the panels to the National Grid power line would run through the villages of Great Wilbraham and Fulbourn to a substation in Teversham. Access to the site would be via the existing access on to Six Mile Bottom Road at the junction with A11.

Planning History

5. S/1042/13/E1 - Screening Opinion for Solar Farm - EIA not required.

Planning Policy

6. **South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) Development Control Policies DPD, adopted January 2007**
DP/1 Sustainable Development
DP/2 Design of New Development

DP/3 Development Criteria
 DP/7 Development Frameworks
 NE/2 Renewable Energy
 NE/4 Landscape Character Areas
 NE/6 Biodiversity
 NE/11 Flood Risk
 NE/14 Lighting Proposals
 NE/15 Noise Pollution
 NE/16 Emissions
 NE/17 Protecting High Quality Agricultural Land
 CH/2 Archaeological Sites
 CH/4 Development Within the Setting of a Listed Building
 CH/5 Conservation Areas
 TR/1 Planning for More Sustainable Travel

7. **Submission Local Plan (March 2014)**

S/7 Development Frameworks
 HQ/1 Design Principles
 NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character
 NH/3 Protecting Agricultural Land
 NH/4 Biodiversity
 NH/8 Mitigating the Impact of Development in and adjoining the Green Belt
 NH/14 Heritage Assets
 CC/2 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation
 CC/6 Construction Methods
 CC/9 Managing Flood Risk
 TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel

8. **South Cambridgeshire LDF Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):**

Development Affecting Conservation Areas SPD - Adopted January 2009
 Listed Buildings SPD - Adopted July 2009
 Trees & Development Sites SPD - Adopted January 2009
 Landscape in New Developments SPD - Adopted March 2010
 Biodiversity SPD - Adopted July 2009
 District Design Guide SPD - Adopted March 2010

Consultation by South Cambridgeshire District Council as Local Planning Authority

9. **Great Wilbraham Parish Council** – Recommends approval and makes the following comments: -

“The Parish Council are aware of the governments targets regarding renewable energy. After a lengthy discussion it was decided to recommend approval but concerns were raised regarding the inevitable disruption to the highway during the cable laying period. Should this application be approve, we expect SCDC to negotiate conditions to minimise disruption.”

10. **Little Wilbraham and Six Mile Bottom Parish Council** – Recommends refusal and makes the following comments: -

“The above Planning Application refers variously to ‘solar farm’ or ‘solar park’ in the documents. In fact, the application is for an installation of solar energy on an industrial scale. The site area of the proposed installation (63.13 hectares) would encompass the residential areas of the villages of Great Wilbraham, Little Wilbraham and Six Mile Bottom, possibly with some area to spare. The site is adjacent to the

Cam Grain Store Facility and the Wadlow Wind Turbines, existing developments clearly visible, which are accepted as significant by the applicant (paragraph 4.3): 'The wind farm development to the south on Cambridge Hill is also a significant feature in the landscape together with the adjacent Chalk Quarry complex.'

The addition of the proposed solar farm would create an industrial area.

The meaning of paragraph on page 5 of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is not entirely clear:

'Once suitable areas for renewable or low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.'

What are the implications of this statement? Further industrial developments on arable land?

The support buildings included in the application are described as 'metal construction', without any further definition. The detail drawings show the substantial buildings are metal storage containers approximately 2.5 m high, and 7 or 14 metres long. The numbers and siting of these buildings are not clearly shown. Similarly, other minor buildings, shown on detail drawings, are not clearly identified on the overall plan. It is certain that an individual application to permanently site even a single metal storage container in the area would be refused.

LAND USE

The land is defined as grade 3A agricultural, and is currently used for crops. There is concern with the potential loss from the change of use. The anticipated yields from 63.14 hectares of land would be in the order of 3,500 tons of sugar beet or 400 tons of cereal, giving an approximate income of £60,000. In order to replace this loss of production, an equivalent area of arable land would have to be created, but more likely, the food would have to be imported. Importing food has an energy cost! There is mention of a possible use of the site for grazing, which is now generally accepted to increase the discharge of methane into the atmosphere. This may be a minor consideration on an individual scale, but with the large number of proposed large solar collector installations in the South Cambridgeshire District, it is valid to consider this aspect.

Existing installations on arable land should not be used as a precedent, and previous decisions need to be reviewed and viability assessed.

VISUAL IMPACT

The visual impact has been considered and assessed from some 14 locations and opinions expressed. All the statements submitted acknowledge some degree of visual impact, but these are generally dismissive, with the opinion that the impact is 'low change'. Where there is an acceptance of visual impact being 'medium', the proposal is for 'mitigation'. The mitigation usually suggested is for the use of hedgerows. There is no indication as to how the mitigation is to be evaluated or measured. The whole of the assessment appears to be based on superficial opinions with little or no supporting information. The frames and panels in the installation are described as 2.5m high in some areas, and the proposed buildings are 2.5m high. It could take quite a long time for new hedgerows to achieve this height. Even then, the hedgerows will only screen the development from close views. The main visual impact is the scale of the proposals when viewed from the surrounding areas and in association with the nearby wind turbines.

CABLE ROUTE

In order to deliver the electricity generated by the scheme, the site needs to connect to the National Grid. The application proposes to install a cable to the sub-station located between Fulbourn and Cherry Hinton, 11 km (7 miles) away. The proposed route follows roads from the A11 to Great Wilbraham, through part of Great

Wilbraham, through Fulbourn, along Cambridge Road and then crossing the railway line to the sub-station. These roads often experience traffic congestion during normal usage and alternative routes are very limited. The Wilbraham Road and Station Road are used occasionally by farm vehicles, and more consistently by large grain lorries operating from the Grain Store in Fulbourn. All these vehicles are wide and can cause some disruption to other traffic, even when the road is in normal use. From the scale of the cabling proposals, it is likely that the work would take at least 3 months. Long term disruption reducing the available road width is untenable. Cambridge Road is one of the main roads into Cambridge and is extremely busy, especially at peak times. The disruption to these roads will severely impact on local businesses, particularly those on Station Road and the shops in the centre of Fulbourn. There is a bus service connecting the Wilbrahams to Fulbourn, which would also suffer from this proposed work. It is assumed that the costs of this proposed cable would be borne by the developer, but individuals will be left to cover their own costs in petrol costs for waiting/longer alternative routes, together with the time lost in extended travel times.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The application includes 6 completed questionnaires (1 completed by a child, judging from the handwriting and spelling) in favour of the proposals. This is an insignificant indication of local opinion. It would seem reasonable that the applicant should submit at least a summary of all the questionnaires, in order to present a balanced view.

CONCLUSION

The Parish Council would wish to support sensible renewable energy schemes, but this scheme appears to consist of packing as many panels on a rural site, without regard to the countryside or infrastructure requirements. The applicant dismisses the use of 'brown field' sites as too expensive, but the extra costs associated with these sites applies to any form of development on such land. The scale of subsidies would allow for the redevelopment of brown field sites, albeit perhaps with a slightly less profit margin for the developer.

A more imaginative approach is required from government, planners and developers, such as: A planning requirement to require all commercial and industrial applications to now include energy generation integral with each application would be very effective. This would drastically reduce the infrastructure requirements, placing energy generation at points of use. If necessary, the subsidies could be directed to overcome possible increased building costs in the short/medium term.

Requirements for insulation standards in buildings were greatly increased several years ago, but now they are accepted as routine, and associated costs absorbed. There would be the incentive to businesses to save on energy costs. Nationally, this would provide large scale generation but environmentally more acceptable."

11. **West Wrattling Parish Council** – Recommends refusal and makes the following comments: -

"1. It is not an optimum location nor is it without significant environmental impact

· Potential major disruption and environmental impact caused by underground cabling unless they mean to make use of something that is already there (they do not say that they intend to make use of pre-existing infrastructure). Hidden away on page 10 of Planning Design and Access statement there is the very brief statement: "*By means of an underground cable which will be run under the public highway as shown on plan*". It is over 10km to the substation which will result in significant environmental impact of cabling, and/or major traffic disruption. This is one of the major commuter routes into Cambridge (between Fulbourn and Cambridge "Cambridge Road") . Significant traffic congestion will result in further environmental impact to the

surrounding area, increased CO2 emissions and major inconvenience. Have Fulbourn been consulted on this application as they may incur the greatest short term impact?

- It is on a north facing slope which is suboptimal
- There are far better locations closer to the substation where if landowners are made aware of the significant incentives, they may consent to more efficient and more sustainable developments, with much lower environmental impact and greater efficiency. Would SCD approach local landowners close to the substation?
- These developments have been known to cause damage to older substations by the variability of their voltages. How old is the substation, and what would be put in place to ensure damage and disruption to local electricity supply is not likely to happen?
- The distance to the substation will also result in transmission losses
- SCD would, in our opinion, be better advised to reach its green obligations by smaller scale localised supply that is more efficient, more sustainable and has much less environmental impact than this proposal

2. Loss of productive agricultural land

- The applicant attempts to give the impression this is poor land of insignificant value. This is misleading. Large parts of East Anglia are grade 3 and yet highly productive. Quote from DEFRA: "*grading of (agricultural land) does not necessarily reflect the land use, range of crops, suitability for specific crops or level of yield*". It is recommended that a proper assessment is taken of the site to properly inform planners of what the real loss of food production over a 30 year period would be if this site is given over to this development.
- The cumulative effect of this and other sites like it given over to an inefficient form of energy production need to be weighed against the loss of food production when any general assessments of sustainability are made
- The applicant argues that policy NE/17 does not apply as they are uncertain whether the land is grade 3a, and secondly, that this development is not irreversible. Firstly it would be advisable for independent assessors to determine whether the more modern classification of grade 3a does apply. Secondly it seems risible to suggest a 30 year lifetime project with substantial infrastructure investment and 10km of cabling can seriously be classified as genuinely "reversible".

3. Local democracy and the industrialisation of a rural landscape

- By reference to the quarry and the windfarm, the applicant appears to seek to make the case that this is already an industrialised landscape that has little value and that therefore can absorb more such development. This is clearly not the case as local residents and their democratically elected representatives were highly vocal in their opposition to such industrialisation. It was one of the main fears of many who opposed the windfarm development that it would lead to a degrading of the area and encourage developers to apply for further such developments. If consent is given to this application reassurances must be given to locals that it is not the first of many in the immediate area

4. Potentially misleading and/or unsubstantiated claims in the application

- Is statement about 30MW of output accurate or hyperbole? We have no way of knowing as there is no reference given to how the claim is verified. Is this the maximum assuming full sunlight 365 days a year with zero transmission loss or have variables been factored in? How would numerous smaller facilities with localised transmission compare? How would a scheme such as this be better than more numerous smaller schemes?
- How constant is the output, or do fossil fuels have to "kick-in" when there is a wet dull day, resulting in surges of CO2 emissions that outweigh the reductions? Item 2.6 on p4 of "Planning design and Access Statement" suggests that it is not constant and provides a misleading and scientifically illiterate claim that it can be a significant element of base demand. As it is not predictable it cannot do such a thing.

Further points

If this application is approved we would recommend that a very sizeable decommissioning bond is put in place to ensure that decommissioning takes place. We would also request a community fund for the two villages affected (WW and Great Wilbraham) be put in place similar to the Wind Farm fund. This could be commensurate with the wind farm fund, but only benefit the immediate two villages. We would also wish to see substantial planting of woodland (not hedgerow) to screen from all angles. A full environmental impact assessment is needed to assess any damage caused not just to the site but also to verges on the 10km of cabling."

12. **Weston Colville Parish Council** – Recommends approval and makes the following comments: -

"Needs to include a clause that the site is cleared and returned to original agricultural fields at end of solar farm life."
13. **Fulbourn Parish Council** – Recommends refusal and makes the following comments: -

"Having looked at the website of Inazin Power (the developer) their site finding policy is given, which states that they seek to use low grade agricultural land, within 1km of a substation.

This application meets neither of those criteria. The accompanying documentation states that the land is grade 3 agricultural land, though they are unsure whether grade 3A or 3B. Enquiries locally state that this is grade 2 and therefore certainly not low grade. It is also stated that at the time of the survey the land was under intense cultivation. To take this land out of cultivation for a 30 year period would mean the loss of approximately 13000 tonnes of grain, which would be unacceptable. Secondly, the development is certainly not within 1km of a substation and the proposed routing to the substation in Yarrow Road, Fulbourn following village roads would lead to large scale disruption. If using this substation the obvious route would be to follow the railway line which passes this substation. There are also substations at the Fleam Dyke Pumping Station and very nearby at the Wadlow Wind Farm. Presumably either of these could be upgraded to meet the needs of the development, should it be passed. Alternatively, like the Wadlow Wind Farm application some years ago, building a dedicated substation could be made a condition of acceptance.
14. **Teversham Parish Council** – No reply received (out of time).
15. **Conservation Officer** – Comments that the development would not adversely affect the setting of listed buildings or conservation areas within the vicinity of the site due to the distance and screening.
16. **Ecology Officer** – Comments that no significant ecological impact would occur as a result of the development but appropriate biodiversity gain is important to secure. Improvements sought are an increase in the number of gaps to facilitate the movement of small animals on the site, a more appropriate wildflower mix and a correction to the management plan.
17. **Trees and Landscapes Officer** – Comments that the site is not affected by Conservation Area status or Tree Preservation Orders. A felling license would be required for any substantial tree felling. The tree survey notes a number of aboricultural features on the site and the layout show that these would be retained. However, there are some issues that remain to be addressed, for example, trenches for cables/services, CCTV poles/ cameras (sight lines and possible lopping), fencing (crown lifting), access tracks and tree protection measures. Requests an aboricultural

impact assessment and tree protection plan to determine the acceptability of the proposal.

18. **Landscape Design Officer** – Comments that no objections are raised in principle and the landscape mitigation works are acceptable but requests additional tree planting to screen the site from the A11, Upper Heath Farm and Mill Road. Suggests conditions in relation to hard and soft landscaping, tree and hedgerow protection measures, maintenance and management of landscape scheme and the provision of bat boxes, bird nest boxes and logpiles, hedgehog and inset houses.
19. **Environmental Health Officer** – Requests conditions in relation to power driven plant or equipment and hours of noisy works during construction.
20. **Contaminated Land Officer** – Comments that the proposal may lead to the incorporation of soil on to the site. Recommends a condition to ensure that the soil is suitable and not contaminated.
21. **Local Highway Authority** –Comments are awaited.
22. **Highways Agency** – Comments that the application will not adversely affect the A11 trunk road.
23. **Environment Agency** – Comments that there are no objections in principle on flood risk grounds but there are some reservations in relation to surface water drainage as the Flood Risk assessment didoes not consider surface water drainage from the panels and overland flows may be possible during intense rainfall due to the the site levels that drop 20 metres towards the A11. Recommends a surface water drainage condition to ensure that there is a strategy to ensure that this would not result in any flood risk issues. .Also requests informatives in with regards to flood risk, pollution control and areas of conservation value on the site.
24. **Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team** – Comments that the Historic Environment Record entries for known archaeological evidence in the area include an area of clustered ring ditches at the eastern end of the site and this has been assessed in the submitted desk based study. It is welcome that the development would be excluded from these areas. However, there may be unknown archaeological evidence present on the site as the wider area is known to contain evidence. Further investigations are required in the form of an archaeological evaluation of the site that identifies, characterises and maps the extent of archaeological remains in the area and ranks the heritage assets in terms of their significance. This is required to ensure that the development would not harm heritage assets that may be of regional or national importance.
25. **Natural England** – Comments that the site is not within any nationally designated landscape and development would not result in the permanent loss of agricultural land as the panels would be removed when the planning permission expires with no likely loss in agricultural land quality in the long term. The application provides opportunities to incorporate features into the design which would be beneficial to wildlife such as the provision of roosting sites for bats, bird nest boxes, wildflower planting and hedgerow enhancement and management.

Representations by members of the public

26. The **Local Member** has concerns that too little information is provided on the proposal to route the cable connecting the solar farm to the substation at Fulbourn Old Drift. No alternative routing is considered and no information is provided on the

construction impacts of laying the cable. I am led to believe that the road works could take at least 3 months and involve road closures which would be unacceptable. Does not object to the solar farm but does not consider that adequate thought has been given to its connection to the National Grid.

27. **A Local Landscape Consultant** has set out possible parameters for solar farms in the district as follows: -

The Solar Trade Association has a 10 Commitments mission statement. This is referred to in underlined notes. The National Policy Framework also looks at use of Agricultural Land.

- i) Applications for Grade 3 land and above should not be considered. S.T.A Commitment 1. and SCDC Report 13.1.14 10.2.2*
- ii) SCDC should seek to determine the percentage of Grade 4 and below in South Cambridgeshire that it would be reasonable to take out of agricultural production for use of solar energy production. A figure of 3% should be considered.
- iii) The presumption of return to farmland after the 25 year permitted period should be strengthened. For instance, no change of use application would be considered until 10 years after the removal of the Solar Farm, during which time the land should be committed to agriculture. S.T.A Commitment 10.
- iv) Applications of over 35 hectares should not be considered. If exceptional circumstances can be shown, for instance a field pattern which would leave an area inaccessible, up to 40 hectares could be considered. See National Policy Framework*
- v) A Community Woodland Compensation scheme should be set up for each photovoltaic site. This would be intended to compensate local people for loss of landscape amenity. It would also be intended to provide a carbon offset. An area of not less than 100m x 50m would be planted as part commercial coniferous woodland, and part British Native hardwood. (The core of the woodland commercial, the perimeter native hardwood.) This woodland should have public access. The size should be on a sliding scale determined by the size of the solar farm. This could be one of the various screens designed to prevent the solar farm being seen from housing, footpaths, roads, etc. Ideally there should be space between the woodland and the solar farm of agricultural land, with the woodland being near to the area of damaged view. (The nearer the screen is to the viewer, the higher it appears, and the greater the height it covers.) Woodland taken out of agriculture in this way, might attract installation grants, and annual subsidy for the landowner, under the new EU scheme to be implemented in 2015. S.T.A. Commitments 2 and 5.
- vi) Applications should be considered as part of a South Cambridgeshire wide directive, and take into account the impact on the District as a whole, and not as "one off" applications. S.T.A. Commitment 8.

*SCDC Report 13.1.14, 10.2.2. "National Policy Framework requires planners to take account of economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality in preference to that of a higher quality"

Material Planning Considerations

28. The key issues to consider in the determination of this application are whether the principle of development is acceptable in the countryside and impact of the development upon the character and appearance of the area, the setting of heritage assets, biodiversity, flood risk, highway safety or other matters; and, whether any very special circumstances have been demonstrated that would outweigh any harm to the Green Belt through inappropriateness or other harm identified.

Principle of Development in the Countryside

29. The proposal represents a major development for the generation of renewable energy and as such receives considerable support from national and local planning policy.
30. Nationally the NPPF has as one of its 12 core principles the requirement to support renewable resources. Reference is made throughout the NPPF to the support of sustainable development and renewable energy whilst paragraph 98 clarifies that applications for energy development ought not to be required to demonstrate the need for renewable energy.
31. The Government's commitment to electricity generation by renewable sources is set out in the Renewable Energy Strategy, and in particular the target that 15% of national electricity production should be derived from renewable sources by 2020. This target has been maintained under the Coalition Government.
32. Locally the development plan comprises the adopted Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD. The Core Strategy has as two of its four objectives the effective protection and enhancement of the environment, and the prudent use of natural resources. Policy DP/7 of the Development Control Policies DPD states that outside village frameworks, only development for agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses that need to be located in the countryside will be permitted. Policy NE/2 relates to renewable energy and advises the district council will support proposals to generate energy from renewable sources subject to compliance with general sustainable development principles and additionally be able to connect efficiently to existing infrastructure and for provision to be made for the removal of facilities from site should the facility cease to be operational.
33. The site is located within the countryside. The installation of a solar farm is considered to represent appropriate development within the countryside providing given that there are no suitable brownfield sites available in the area of the scale required and the proposal would allow the land to continue to be used for agricultural purposes through grazing.

Character and Appearance of the Area

34. The site currently consists of open undulating arable land. Whilst it is noted that the introduction of large arrays of solar panels and buildings would significantly change the character and appearance of the landscape from being open and rural in character to being industrialised in character, it is not considered to have adverse visual impact from the main public viewpoints surrounding the site on the A11, Six Mile Bottom Road, Mill Road and the public footpath to the south east. This is as a result of the long distance views, low height and new planting is proposed along the boundaries to screen the development and mitigate its impact upon the landscape. It should also be noted that the surrounding land already has an industrialised character as a result of the Wadlow Wind Farm and Camgrain facility to the south east that are already highly visible within the landscape. The cumulative impact of all developments would result in a concentration in the area but this is considered preferable due to the isolation of the site rather than dispersal of the developments across different sites that may have a greater impact.
31. The site is located within the East Anglian Chalk Landscape Character Area. The distinctive features of this area are the gently undulating arable landscape with large fields bounded by hedges and occasional small groups of woodland. Although the development is not necessarily compatible with the existing landscape qualities of the

area as the open arable landscape would be lost, the development would retain some of the the characteristic features and provide additional planting that would be designed to ensure it is in keeping with the visual qualities of the area. The development is not therefore considered to have an unacceptable impact upon landscape character.

Loss of Agricultural Land

32. The site covers 63 hectares of arable land. Natural England states that the site has an agricultural land classification of grade 2/3 (good/ good to moderate quality). The proposal is not considered to result in the irreversible loss of this land given that it could be returned to its original agricultural use when there is no further need for the development. The arable land is farmed as part of a current crop rotation that which has grown a crop of Spring Barley and Winter wheat this year. The site forms part of the commercial agricultural business but the land is lower quality when compared to the rest of the farm. The development would result in the loss of 11.5% of the total farm holding of 538 hectares and the farm would remain viable without this land. The land would be laid to grass on the site and although it is noted that it would not be cropped, there will be the opportunity to use the land for sheep grazing or biodiversity gain.

Heritage Assets

33. The site is located a significant distance from the nearest listed building at Great Wilbraham Hall Farm. The development is not considered to damage its setting due to the distance from the site. It would also not adversely affect the setting of listed buildings and conservation areas within nearby villages.
34. The site is located within an area of high archaeological potential and it has the potential to to harm undesignated heritage assets of historic interest through excavation in connection with the development. Due to evidence of ringed ditches on the site and evidence in the area of Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation, there may be archaeological remains of equal importance also in this area and further investigation needs to be carried out to determine whether the proposal is acceptable. A written scheme of investigation has been submitted direct to the Historic Environment Team at Cambridgeshire County Council and trial trenching will be carried out to try and resolve this issue.

Biodiversity

35. The development is not considered to result in significant ecological impacts and would provide biodiversity gain. However, improvements in the form of access gaps for small animals under the fence, an appropriate wildflower mix and management of a newly established meadow habitat would be conditions of any consent.

Landscaping/Trees

36. The development would not result in the loss of any important trees or hedges that contribute to the visual amenity of the area providing a condition is attached to any consent for protection purposes. A significant landscaping scheme would also be attached as a condition of any consent in order to mitigate the impact of the development upon its surroundings.

Flood Risk

37. The site is located within Flood Zone 1 (low risk). The submitted Flood Risk Assessment demonstrates that the development would be unlikely to increase the risk of flooding to the site and the surrounding area. However, a surface water drainage condition should be attached to any consent to ensure that there is an adequate surface water strategy at the site to deal with any issues during intense rainfall.

Highway Safety

38. Access to the site during and after construction would be via the existing field access track off Six Mile Bottom Road at the junction with the A11. The access would be at the bend in the road where visibility is good in both directions. The Traffic Management Plan submitted with the application shows the access route to the site during construction and demonstrates that vehicles would access the site via the A11 and not need to travel through nearby villages. During construction, the traffic generation is estimated at approximately 30 HGV/LGV deliveries per working day over a period of approximately 12 to 16 weeks. There would also be movements from site personnel. When construction is complete, the traffic generation to maintain the development is estimated at one or two visits every quarter. Whilst it is acknowledged that there would be a significant number of traffic movements during the construction period, the development is not considered to result in a level of traffic generation to and from the site that would be detrimental to highway safety given the position of the access and the route taken. A condition would be attached to any consent to agree a traffic management plan for access to the site for delivery of the panels and servicing the development.
39. A temporary compound would be provided on site for vehicles to park off the public highway during the construction period.
40. The works required to the public highway for the cable connection to enable the solar farm to connect to the National Grid are noted. Comments from the Local Highways Authority are awaited as to the impact of these works upon the satisfactory functioning of the public highway. The connection is required to run to this substation due to the lack of capacity at substations closer to the site. An alternative route across fields would result in permission being sought from a number of different landowners and is not practical.

Residential Amenity

41. The site is located a significant distance from the nearest residential properties and is not considered to result in a loss of amenity. The conditions suggested by the Environmental Health officer in relation to power operated plant and machinery and noisy works are not considered necessary given the distance of the site from residential properties.

Other Matters

42. The site is not situated on land that is subject to contamination and the development is not considered to lead to land or water contamination that would cause a risk to the health of nearby receptors. A condition would be attached to any consent to ensure that any material brought onto the site is not contaminated.

43. Solar farms contribute towards economic growth due employment opportunities during the planning and installation stages.
44. The possible parameters for solar farms as set out by a local landscape consultant reflect the commitments of members of the Solar Trade Association. However, this is not national policy that can be taken into consideration in the determination of the application.

Conclusion

45. The development is of a kind that receives very considerable support in national and local planning policy and that, following the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework there must be a strong presumption in favour of it.
46. The proposal would have an impact on the countryside but this is not considered to be unacceptable adverse visual impact that would harm the character and appearance of the area as the development would be satisfactorily mitigated by additional landscaping. The development is also not considered to harm landscape character, damage the setting of heritage assets, destroy important archaeological evidence, result in the loss of important trees and hedges, harm biodiversity interests, cause a flood risk, be detrimental to highway safety or adversely affect the amenities of neighbours.
47. Therefore, on balance, the benefits of the scheme in respect of renewable energy production are considered to outweigh the harm over the temporary loss of agricultural productivity.

Recommendation

48. It is recommended that the Planning Committee grants officers delegated powers to approve the application upon the removal of the objection from the County Council Historic Environment Team subject to the following conditions: -
- i) 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.)
 - ii) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Drawing numbers PL-01 Revision 03, PL-02 Revision), PL-05-22 Revision 01, PL-07 Revision 01, PL-08 Revision 01, PL-09 Revision 03, PL-09 Revision 01, PL-10-AB1-A Revision 02, PL-10-AB2 Revision 01, PL-11 Revision 01 and 020 Revision 00.
(Reason - To facilitate any future application to the Local Planning Authority under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.)
 - iii) The development, hereby permitted, shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition or to a condition to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority on or before 30 years of the date of this permission in accordance with a scheme of work submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
(Reason - Approval of the proposal on a permanent basis would be contrary to Policy NE/2 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007 and the land should be reinstated to facilitate future beneficial use.)

- iv) All development must be removed from site within 6 months of the solar farm ceasing to be operational.
(Reason - The application site lies in the open countryside and it is important that once the development has ceased the site is brought back into a full agricultural use in accordance with the provisions of the NPPF and policy NE/2 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- v) No development shall take place until details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the buildings hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
(Reason - To ensure the appearance of the development is satisfactory in accordance with Policy DP/2 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- vi) No development shall take place until full details of both hard and soft landscape works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details shall include indications of all existing trees and hedgerows on the land and details of any to be retained, together with measures for their protection in the course of development. The details shall also include specification of all proposed trees, hedges and shrub planting, which shall include details of species, density and size of stock.
(Reason - To ensure the development is satisfactorily assimilated into the area and enhances biodiversity in accordance with Policies DP/2 and NE/6 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- vi) All hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. The works 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. If within a period of five years from the date of the planting, or replacement planting, any tree or plant is removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies, another tree or plant of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted at the same place, unless the Local Planning Authority gives its written consent to any variation.
(Reason - To ensure the development is satisfactorily assimilated into the area and enhances biodiversity in accordance with Policies DP/2 and NE/6 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- vii) In this condition "retained tree" means an existing tree which is to be retained in accordance with the approved plans and particulars; and paragraphs (a) and (b) below shall have effect until the expiration of 5 years from [the date of the first occupation of the dwellings hereby approved].
 - (a) No retained tree shall be cut down, uprooted or destroyed, nor shall any retained tree be topped or lopped other than in accordance with the approved plans and particulars, without the written approval of the Local Planning Authority. Any topping or lopping approved shall be carried out in accordance with the relevant British Standard.
 - (b) If any retained tree is removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies, another tree shall be planted at the same place and that tree shall be of such size and species, and shall be planted at such time, as may be specified in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

- (c) The erection of fencing for the protection of any retained tree shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved plans and particulars before any equipment, machinery or materials are brought on to the site for the purposes of the development, and shall be maintained until all equipment, machinery and surplus materials have been removed from the site. Nothing shall be stored or placed in any area fenced in accordance with this condition and the ground levels within those areas shall not be altered, nor shall any excavation be made, without the written consent of 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 DP/1 and NE/6 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

- viii) Prior to the commencement of any development, a scheme for the provision and implementation of surface water drainage including monitoring arrangements shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall be constructed and completed in accordance with the approved plans prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with the implementation programme agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

(Reason - To ensure a satisfactory method of surface water drainage and to prevent the increased risk of flooding in accordance with Policies DP/1 and NE/11 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

- ix) No development shall commence until a detailed scheme for the importation of soil onto the site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Plan shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

(Reason – To ensure the development is satisfactorily assimilated into the area and enhances biodiversity in accordance with Policies DP/2 and NE/6 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

- x) No external lighting shall be provided or installed within the site other than in accordance with a scheme which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

(Reason -To minimise the effects of light pollution on the surrounding area in accordance with Policy NE/14 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

- xi) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the MWA Ecological Survey dated (to be confirmed) and MWA Landscape and Biodiversity Management Plan dated (to be confirmed).

(Reason - To enhance ecological and biodiversity interests in accordance with Policies DP/1, DP/3 and NE/6 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

- xii) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the Inazin Construction and Traffic Management Plan dated July 2013.

(Reason - In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policy DP/3 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

- xiii) No development shall commence until archaeological investigation works have been carried out in accordance with the Cotswold Archaeology Written Scheme of Investigation dated (to be confirmed).

(Reason - To secure the provision of archaeological excavation and the subsequent recording of the remains in accordance with Policy CH/2 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Development Control Policies DPD 2007
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Submission March 2014
- South Cambridgeshire Supplementary Planning Documents
- National Planning Policy Framework 2012
- Planning File Reference S/2763/13/FL

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