

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

6 August 2014

**AUTHOR/S:** Planning and New Communities Director

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**Application Number:** S/1067/14/FL

**Parish(es):** SHINGAY-CUM-WENDY

**Proposal:** Solar Farm and Associated Equipment

**Site address:** Vine Farm, High Street

**Applicant(s):** Vine Farm Solar

**Recommendation:** Delegated Approval (as amended)

**Key material considerations:** Countryside  
Landscape Character  
Heritage Assets  
Archaeology  
Ecology  
Biodiversity  
Trees and Landscaping  
Flood Risk  
Public Footpaths

**Committee Site Visit:** Yes

**Departure Application:** No

**Presenting Officer:** Julie Ayre

**Application brought to Committee because:** Major Application of Local Interest

**Date by which decision due:** 8 August 2014

### Executive Summary

1. This proposal, as amended, is for a new 37.8 MW solar farm with associated equipment covering an area of approximately 88 hectares located 300 metres to the south west of the village of Wendy and 500 metres to the north east of the hamlet of Shingay. 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 significantly 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,

increase flood risk, be detrimental to highway safety, adversely affect the amenities of neighbours or seriously harm the amenity of public footpaths.

2. Therefore, on balance, the public benefits of the scheme in respect of renewable energy production are considered to outweigh any identified modest harm arising from the development such as the temporary loss of agricultural productivity and impact upon the setting of the Wimpole Hall Historic Park and Garden.

### **Site and Proposal**

3. The site is located outside of any village framework and within the countryside. It is situated 300 metres to the south west of the village of Wendy and 500 metres to the north east of the hamlet of Shingay. The site, as amended, measures approximately 88 hectares in area and comprises flat agricultural land that consists of four fields. The fields to the north and south are separated by an access road. There are trees and hedges along the majority of the south eastern, south western and north western boundaries of the site and within the site itself along the field boundaries. The northern boundary is open. The site has a grade 2/3 (very good/good to moderate) agricultural land classification. It lies within the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands Landscape Character Area. The site lies within flood zones 1, 2 and 3 (low, medium and high risk). The North Ditch runs along the north western and south western boundary of the site with a tributary through the site. There is also a drain along the south eastern boundary and a number of drains within the site. Public rights of way run from the east of the village of Wendy and along the northern boundary of the site and from the west of the village of Wendy and through the central part of the site. The nearest listed buildings are Vine House (grade II) that lies immediately to the north west of the site; The Grove (grade II), Glebe House (grade II\*), Porch Cottage (grade II), a pump (grade II) and Old School (grade II) that are situated within the village of Wendy and Wimpole Hall (grade I) Historic Park and Garden that lies 1km to the north. Bassingbourn Barracks is a County Wildlife Site that lies immediately to the south east of the site.

This full planning application, received on 14 January 2014 and amended on 14 July 2014 and 22 July 2014, proposes the installation of a 38.7MW solar photovoltaic panels along with inverter/transformer buildings houses, a substation, construction compound, access track, security fence and pole mounted CCTV cameras for a temporary period of 25 years. The photovoltaic panels would be mounted on steel frames that are angled at 20 degrees to face south. There would be arrays of panels running east to west across the site that measure up to 600 metres in length. Each panel array would measure approximately 3.69 metres x 19.02 metres. They would have a maximum height of 1.9 metres and be set approximately 5 metres apart. The panels would be composed of modules with a dark blue/grey appearance. The existing access track that runs through the centre of the site would be utilised. A new 4.5 metre wide access would be provided for a short distance from the farm to the substation compound. The substation compound and temporary construction compound would be situated to the north west of field 1. The substation compound would consist of a DNO building and customer switchgear building along with a transformer, disconnector and circuit breaker. It would measure 40.3 metres in length x 20.3 metres in depth and be surrounded by a 5 metre high metal panel fence. The construction compound would consist of portakabins for offices, wc's, a canteen and storage, a material storage area, parking spaces for staff and a turning area for construction vehicles. Within each field, a maximum of 6 groups of transformer/inverter buildings that measure 6 metres in length x 2.4 metres in width x 2.6 metres in height would be erected at regular intervals to serve the panels. A security fence that measures 2 metres in height and consist of timber posts with steel wire in a deer stock design would surround the site. A number of CCTV poles at a height of 2

metres would be erected around the perimeter of the site. Access to the site would be via the existing access to Vine Farm off the High Street in Wendy.

### **Planning History**

4. S/0100/14/E1 - Screening Opinion for Solar Farm - EIA not required.

### **Planning Policy**

5. **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/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  
TR/1 Planning for More Sustainable Travel

6. **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  
SC/11 Noise Pollution  
SC/12 Contaminated Land  
TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel

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

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**

#### ***Original Submission***

8. **Shingay-cum-Wendy Parish Council** – Recommends refusal and makes the following comments: -

## **Scale/Scheme**

*South Cambs Development Control Policies*

Application fails on the following Policy:

Policy DP/2 'Design of New Development'

- a) Preserve or enhance the character of the local area and
- f) Be compatible with its location and appropriate in terms of scale, mass, form, siting, proportion, in relation to the surrounding area
  - 1. The proposed scheme is out of character for the area.
  - 2. The scale of the proposed solar scheme is out of proportion to the village. The village is a small farming village with no amenities. The scale of such a development would completely destroy the rural feel of the village.
  - 3. The Proposed development would completely split Shingay and Wendy which are considered to be one Parish and are currently joined by an unlisted footpath.

## **Location**

*South Cambs Local Plan (Proposed Submission) – Chapter 6. Protecting and Enhancing the Natural and Historic Environment*

Application fails on the following two Policies:

Policy NH/2: 'Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character'

"Development will only be permitted where it respects and retains, or enhances the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape and of the individual National Character Area in which it is located."

Policy NH/13: 'Important Countryside Frontage'

Important Countryside Frontages are defined where land with a strong countryside character (Point 1b) "Provides an important rural break between two nearby but detached parts of a development framework".

6.42 – "In many places land with a strong countryside character penetrates or sweeps into South Cambridgeshire's villages or separates two parts of the built up area. Such land enhances the setting, character and appearance of the village by retaining the sense of connection between the village and its rural origins and surroundings. The frontage where this interface particularly occurs is identified to indicate that the frontage and the open countryside beyond should be kept open and free from development. In most cases it is land which adjoins the village built up area but in some cases it separates two parts of the village and the open intervening land therefore assumes an importance for the character of the village as a whole."

Shingay cum Wendy is a perfect example; building a solar farm in between the two parts of the village would remove the character, therefore the application should be refused based on Point 2 conclusion, which states "Planning permission for development will be refused if it would compromise these purposes".

## **Flood Risk**

- 1. Shingay Cum Wendy (both Wendy and Shingay) lay in defined Flood Risk areas. Wendy already has issues with flooding, surface water drainage and sewerage, all of which have already been communicated previously to SCDC.
- 2. The Wildlife Trust has confirmed their awareness that the "catchment area is prone to flooding". The Applicant seeking planning confirms his awareness that "Wendy has had significant flood damage".
- 3. The flood risk assessment undertaken suggests that solar farms are "essential infrastructure". According to the Technical Guidance of the National Planning Policy Framework only three items are essential infrastructure. Solar Farms are not one of these three; in fact it is advised that they are not sited in flood risk areas.

Application also fails on the following two Policies:

*National Planning Policy Point 100* states “direct inappropriate developments away from flood risk areas”.

*National Planning Policy Point 101* states “Steer developments to areas with lowest probability of flooding. Development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonable available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower probability of flooding”

### **Visual Harm/Preservation and Enjoyment of Setting**

1. There are both Grade I and Grade II listed properties in Wendy. The Wimpole Way is also in the vicinity of the proposed development.
2. Solar Arrays would be visible from Private Residences in both Shingay and Wendy.
3. Solar Arrays could possibly be visible from Private Businesses, such as South Farm and Minstrel Court, where Enjoyment of Setting is key to their continued success.
4. Solar Arrays would be visible from Public areas and would have an adverse impact:

### **PRoW – Footpaths**

- i. The proposed solar site will completely impact upon the access villagers and visitors currently enjoy. The proposed site would result in the paths no longer being open countryside footpaths.
- ii. The public footpaths provide safe access to the countryside for all villagers and visitors.
- iii. Some of the public footpaths and farm tracks have been used by some local villagers for over 40 years.
- iv. Footpaths are used regularly by residents, ramblers and walkers
- v. A footpath where the development plan shows solar panels to both sides is unacceptable. This would create a ‘tunnel’ affect.

### **Public roads**

- i. Solar Arrays would be visible from Public country roads
- ii. 'Royston East Cambs Villages Loop' cycle route uses Flecks Lane

### **Visual Impact and Cumulative Visual Impact**

Application is incomplete on the Visual Impact assessment in our opinion. Application fails to fully address the Cumulative Visual Impact. There are up to 7 Solar Farm applications within 5 miles of the proposed site:

1. Meldreth – Approved (S/2616/13/FL)
2. Croydon (North) – Application submitted (S/1878/13/FL)
3. Bassingbourn – Application submitted (S/0098/14/FL)
4. Thriplow – Application withdrawn but to be re-submitted
5. Wimpole (Hoback Farm) – Pre-planning EIA Screening (S/0155/13/FL)
6. Royston (Muncey Farm) (S/0709/14/FL)
7. Royston A10 By-Pass (Solar Planning Ltd) (S/1517/13/EI)

### **Planners/Engagement with Affected Residents / Community**

*National Planning Policy 155* states “early and meaningful engagement and collaboration with neighbourhoods, local organisations and businesses is essential.” Engagement with the residents and local organisations has been very poor and the statement of Community Involvement could be construed as misleading / inaccurate. Exhibit Emails A-C attached for reference:

4.0 “VFS hand delivered letters”. True – but these letters significantly underplayed the proposed scale of the farm. At subsequent meetings residents stated they felt misled by these letters and this was made clear to UK Solar Provider. (C1)

4.1 “ Discussions were held over the following weeks with the chairman of Shingay-cum-Wendy” – *No verbal discussions*. I provided some email input with sporadic responses from LDA. (Email C)

#### 4.2 Public Exhibition

Poorly advertised, poorly attended, poorly presented and made the same mistakes as the Croydon Farm exhibition, despite advice from the Chairman of SCW Parish Meeting.

4.2.1 Flyers – These were poorly distributed and poorly constructed. Many people did not receive them and some were delivered at very short notice despite warning (Ref: A1, A5)). Feedback was given that any further publicity material should reference acres rather than hectares as this underplays the scale of the farm. This was ignored. (Ref: A4). The Parish Meeting took matters into its own hands and made sure the local community was aware.

“It was agreed to inform the local parish meeting when the application was submitted” ( Ref: A3, B1)– *This was not done*. We only found out 3 weeks after the event of submission despite ongoing email correspondence with VFS. This has since been acknowledged by Sebastian Seyfarth of OSP.

4.2.2 The advert in the paper was small and significantly underplayed the scale and industrial nature of the proposed installation.

4.2.3 A4 Poster on the public footpath. We asked for posters to be placed at various places along the paths used by the public so walkers would be made aware. (Ref: A2) A single small poster was put up and blew away.

4.2.5 Display materials – we had asked for view point images and presentation boards that considered the views of the local residents and did not attempt to play down the impact of the farm, as well as video footage of a similar installation. No video was provided and the photo montages contrived to suggest that the farm would have no visual impact, presented from benign viewpoints and wide angle from far away. Residents found these unconvincing, as we had warned.

#### 4.3 Findings and response

4.3.1. The Parish Meeting had representatives present for the entire consultation and spoke to all attendees and notes taken. The vast majority of attendees had attended only because of the parish meeting publicity. Very few attended because of VFS’s publicity (6 by our count). We did not consider this an effective promotion nor evaluation of local community feelings.

Not all residents were aware that UKSP had provided feedback forms.

#### 4.3.3 Outcomes

“Up until submission, Vine Farm Solar has been in frequent contact with local residents and the chairman of Shingay-cum-Wendy parish meeting”. *Some email contact but no effective dialogue*.

No face to face discussions following the public consultation and prior to submission, despite requests to meet by the chairman of the parish meeting and precise emails explaining the village position. (Ref: D).

LDA Design committed in writing to notify the Parish Meeting of the submission but did not. The application was submitted even though the applicants had been advised of 100% rejection of their original plans and with no review by the community of the revised plans. The Parish Meeting requested for engagement during April a number of times to understand the plans but no meeting or information was offered – despite commitments to the contrary (Ref: B1, A6)

Requests to meet were tabled late April by representatives of OSP but these were during the working day when parish officers were at work.

We are not aware of any personal engagement with residents in either Wendy or Shingay (other than at the public consultation). Commitments at that consultation to follow up with residents were not fulfilled – other than some sporadic email with one resident. This has since been acknowledged by the applicants.

We also note that we have been contacted variously by the Wentzel Family, UK Solar Provider, Velcourt and Ontario Solar Provider. We have never been contacted by anyone in the name of Vine Farm Solar.

Businesses such as South Farm and Minstrel Court, which are distinct Country-side Wedding Venues and where impact on the nature of the business could be extreme, have not been consulted.

Communication from Andrew Lansley's office to the Council Officers from 03/06/2014 confirmed the disappointment from the local community representatives that the application had been submitted and there would be insufficient time for residents to respond. This has not been followed up by the Council and seems to have been overlooked. Internal communication (also on 03/06), pertaining to holding a local meeting with residents, is present on this subject from Joe Mills (Director of Planning and New Communities) and Theresa Roberts, Nigel Blazeby and Karen Pell-Coggins), however no resident meeting has been scheduled."

9. **Croydon Parish Council** – Recommends refusal and makes the following comments: -
  - i) Local concern over the apparent lack of interaction with the local community.
  - ii) The scale of the farm is colossal and by its area, would totally swamp the village.
  - iii) The proposal would adversely affect the character and appearance of the local countryside.
  - iv) This low lying area is susceptible to flooding and may not be suitable for livestock.
  - v) Concern over the potential for glint from the apparatus – there is permission for stunt pilots to practice over this area aswell as military low flying permission; the potential for an accident caused by glint (particularly if the surfaces of the panels are wet) must be a consideration.
  - vi) The proposed solar farm and associated equipment would represent an inappropriate development in an area of open countryside. "
10. **Bassingbourn Parish Council** – Recommends refusal and makes the following comments: -

"The Parish Council are aware that amendments are to be made to this version of the plan. "
11. **Conservation Officer** – Comments are awaited.
12. **Ecology Officer** – Comments are awaited.
13. **Trees and Landscapes Officer** – Comments are awaited.
14. **Landscape Design Officer** – Comments are awaited.
15. **Environmental Health Officer** – Comments are awaited.
16. **Contaminated Land Officer** –Recommends a condition to require the remediation of any contaminated land on the site not previously identified.
17. **Local Highway Authority** – Suggests conditions in relation to the Call System outlined in the Construction Traffic Management Plan, the times of construction delivery vehicles accessing the site, the provision of visibility splays, a condition survey of Flecks Lane/High Street, and a meeting with the Local Highway Authority prior to works commencing.

18. **Environment Agency** – Has no objections subject to conditions regarding easement distances from watercourses. Comments that the Flood Risk Assessment is acceptable for the scale and nature of the development and the risk is considered low with any flooding/waterlogging being shallow and the raising of panels would mitigate the risk. Strongly advises that the surface water drainage check is implemented post completion of the development. Also requests informatives.
19. **English Heritage** – Comments that the development would cause some modest harm to the setting and significance of Wimpole Hall and its associated park but would be unlikely to affect any other designated heritage assets. This modest harm would need to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
20. **Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team** –Comments that the Written Scheme of Investigation is in place and the primary investigation from the geophysics survey and aerial photographs assessment show that there are many archaeological areas within the application site. The applicant has agreed to shoe the areas of definite archaeology and undertake a trenching programme post-consent and if necessary shoe other areas. A condition would be attached to any consent to ensure the protection of any important archaeological remains.
21. **Cambridgeshire County Council Rights of Way Team** – Comments that public footpath No. 7 Shingay-cum-Wendy runs through the site and public footpath No. 8 Shingay-cum-Wendy runs adjacent to the site. Has no objections as the applicants have taken on the advice given pre-application and all solar panels would be located 2 metres from the edges of the footpaths, additional hedges would be planted to screen views from the footpaths and a permissive footpath is planned. However, there is some concern regarding a possible conflict of pedestrian and constriction vehicles at the start of footpath No. 8 at the point where it meets the High Street. Requests informatives in relation to points of law with regards to the footpath.
21. **Natural England** – Comments that the application is unlikely to affect any Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 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.
22. **The Wildlife Trust** – Comments that the proposals are unlikely to have significant negative impacts upon the wildlife interest of the Bassingbourn Barracks, Shingay Lakes and the River Rhee County Wildlife Sites. However, any run-off and pollution from the construction period must be controlled through a construction management plan. Pleased to see the ecological enhancements that include linking habitats through new hedge planting and a landscape and ecological management plan for the site. Suggests enhancements to the watercourse for water vole habitats that have been found in the North Ditch.

#### **Representations by members of the public**

23. Letters of representation have been received from the occupiers of 11 properties: -  
 Old Farm, Lower Road, Croydon  
 Wickham Lodge, New Shingay, Shingay-cum-Wendy  
 Fen Bridge Farm, 27 Fen Road, Bassingbourn  
 South Farm, Shingay-cum-Wendy  
 Church Farm, Wendy



2 Jubilee Bungalows, Wendy  
The Walnuts, Wendy  
Porch Cottage, Wendy  
Glebe House, Wendy  
Rosedene Cottage, Wendy  
Delbridge, Wendy

24. The following concerns have been raised: -
- i) Visual impact - loss of openness, industrial appearance, loss of rural landscape, out of character with landscape, reduced amenity of footpaths, adverse impact upon residents quality of life, loss of link between Wendy and Shingay, planting will need time to mature, important countryside frontage should be retained.
  - ii) Scale - significant and excessive size that dwarfs the village, exceeds government guidance.
  - iii) Proximity to village - close to properties.
  - iv) Loss of high grade agricultural land - lower agricultural quality land but still grade 2 and 3 agricultural land classification, best and most versatile land, no report or soil survey undertaken to establish quality. .
  - v) Financial viability - should not justify the development.
  - vi) Flood risk - historical flooding in village, high risk flood zones not appropriate for development, reduced evaporation, inaccurate Flood Risk Assessment.
  - vii) Ecological impacts - adverse effect upon flora and fauna habitats particularly bats from the nearby Special Area of Conservation for bats, lack of surveys undertaken.
  - viii) Heritage Assets - negative impact upon setting of listed buildings.
  - ix) Construction traffic - increase in traffic on narrow roads, conflict at the access point and safety concerns.
  - x) Noise - from the inverter buildings and during construction, no noise impact assessment submitted.
  - xi) Dust - during construction.
  - xii) Management of waste during construction.
  - xiii) Glint and glare - under flight paths of Cambridge and Stansted airports, need for consultation.
  - xiv) Cumulative impact - the area already has a number of solar farms, loss of countryside, should use brownfield sites, more appropriate locations.
  - xv) Lack of public consultation with community - poorly advertised and lack of meetings.
  - xvi) Conflicts with Solar Trade Association Commitments - visual impact, community engagement, local trade and employment, seek support of local community.

### **Material Planning Considerations**

25. 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, ecology, archaeology, flood risk, highway safety, neighbour amenity and public footpaths.

### **Principle of Development in the Countryside**

26. The proposal represents a major development for the generation of renewable energy and as such receives considerable support from national and local planning policy.

27. 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.
28. 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.
29. 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.
30. The site is located within the countryside. The installation of a solar farm is considered to represent appropriate development within the countryside providing that there are no suitable brownfield sites available in the area of the scale required and the proposal would not result in the permanent loss of high quality agricultural land.

#### **Brownfield or Greenfield Land**

31. Whilst the use of brownfield or previously developed land is considered more appropriate and the preference for the development of solar farms rather than greenfield land as per the application site, it is difficult to find such land available that could accommodate the scale of the development and have low land values to enable the scheme to be commercially viable. A number of large brownfield sites across the district in the countryside such as former airfields are already allocated for housing developments and other sites are likely to have higher land values. Without the use of greenfield land, the district would not be able to contribute towards the renewable energy targets set out by the government.

#### **Loss of Agricultural Land**

32. The site covers 88 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 whole of the district comprises this grade of land so it would be difficult to contribute to renewable energy in the area without the use of some of this land. 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. Whilst it is noted that the land is of high quality, the site has areas of gravel and persistent weeds that make part of the site uncroppable for food other than that for animals. 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 to retain the agricultural use throughout the life of the development.

### **Character and Appearance of the Area**

33. The site currently consists of open arable land. Whilst it is noted that the introduction of a significant scale arrays of solar panels and buildings would substantially change the character and appearance of the landscape from being open and rural in character to being industrialised in character, it is unlikely to have adverse visual impact from the main public viewpoints surrounding the site. This is as a result of the long distance views, low height and new planting that is proposed along the boundaries to screen the development and mitigate its impact upon the landscape. However, comments from the Landscape Officer are awaited to confirm that this would be the case.
34. The site is located within the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands Landscape Character Area. The distinctive features of this area are the broad, gently undulating, lowland plateau dissected by shallow river valleys and predominantly open large scale arable landscape with regular field patterns bounded by ditches and hedgerows. There is also a historic landscape given the proximity to Wimpole Hall. 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 unlikely to have an unacceptable impact upon landscape character. However, comments from the Landscape Officer are awaited to confirm that this would be the case.
35. The nearest approved solar farms to the site where the cumulative impact of the development needs to be taken into consideration are at Bourn, Croydon, Wimpole and Bassingbourn. The visual impact of the solar farms from the same viewpoint are unlikely to be apparent and it is unlikely that there would be a significant impact when travelling through the district due to the distance along the A1198 due to the distance from the road and mitigation measures such as landscaping. However, comments from the Landscape Officer are awaited to confirm that this would be the case.

### **Heritage Assets**

36. The site is located in close proximity to the listed buildings at Vine House and to the south of the High Street in Wendy. It would be located 1km from Wimpole Hall Historic Park and Garden. The development is not considered to damage its setting of the nearby listed buildings within Wendy as the development would be set back an adequate distance to create a buffer zone to protect the setting of the buildings and would be well screened by existing buildings and and landscaping. Whilst it is noted that the development would be visible in views from Wimpole Way that is associated with Wimpole Hall Historic Park and Garden, it is not considered to cause significant harm to the setting of this heritage asset and the public benefits of the scheme in terms of the contribution towards renewable energy and climate change would outweigh any modest harm.
37. The site is located within an area of high archaeological interest and it has the potential to to harm undesignated heritage assets of historic interest through excavation in connection with the development. A written scheme of investigation has been submitted with aerial photographs considered and a geophysical survey carried out that identifies the main archaeological areas on the site. The applicant has agreed

to certain types of foundations within the archeological areas and a condition would be attached to any consent to secure these mitigation measures.

### **Biodiversity**

38. The development is unlikely to result in significant ecological impacts and would provide some biodiversity gain. However, comments from the Ecology Officer are awaited. The impact of the development has been assessed in relation to the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for barbastelle bats at Eversden and Wimpole Woods, the adjacent County Wildlife Site and the site itself. Independent advice has been sought from a bat specialist in relation to the impact of the solar farm upon bats from the SAC and it is not considered to result in the loss of any valuable habitat such as hedgerows, trees, grassland and water bodies and providing there is no increase in illumination at night through artificial lighting. It is also unlikely that any bats would collide with the solar panels providing they are fixed close to the ground at a height of no more than 2.5 metres given that the panels are not flat and water would not collect. However, it is advised that a bat monitoring exercise is completed pre and post development to evaluate bat activity at the site.

### **Landscaping/Trees**

39. The development would be unlikely to 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**

40. The site is located within Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3 (low, medium and high risk). The Environment Agency has no objections and 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. Whilst the concerns of the residents are noted and in particular the surface water drainage at the site, the reference made to the appeal decision on a different site would not determine that the Flood Risk Assessment on this site is not acceptable. Each case needs to be determined upon its merits and the site considered in the appeal was sloping land and not flat land as the application site. The run-off from the would not be likely to be concentrated in one particular area on the site as the bottom of the panel would be straight rather than angled to ensure that the water would not be directed to one point. It should be noted that the majority of the development would be located within the lower risk flood zones.

### **Highway Safety**

41. Access to the site during and after construction would be via the existing farm access track off the High Street. The access would be on a straight section of road where the speed limit drops from 60 miles per hour to 30 miles per hour. However, traffic is likely to be travelling at lower speeds given the width of the road. Visibility from the access is reasonable in both directions. The Construction 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 A1198 and not need to travel through nearby villages. During construction, the traffic generation is estimated at approximately 565 HGV/LGV deliveries and 55 smaller vehicle deliveries over a

period of approximately 25 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 visibility, the route taken, the space for the vehicles to access junctions along the route and the management of the traffic to the site. A condition would be attached to any consent to agree the details set out in the Construction Traffic Management Plan.

42. A temporary compound would be provided on site for vehicles to park off the public highway during the construction period.

### **Residential Amenity**

43. The site is located a significant distance from the nearest residential properties and is not considered to result in a loss of amenity. A condition would be attached to any consent to ensure that any construction deliveries and noisy works are restricted to between 08.00 hours and 18.00 hours on weekdays, between 08.00 hours and 13.00 hours on Saturdays and at no time on Sundays and Bank Holidays in order to protect residents from noise and disturbance.
44. No Noise Impact Assessment is required to be submitted with the application as the low noise levels from the development would not be audible outside the site area.

### **Other Matters**

45. There is no statutory requirement for developers to consult with the local community prior to the submission of the planning application. However, this is encouraged by the Council to ensure that the community are aware of the proposals and any concerns are addressed at an early stage. From the statement of community involvement submitted with the application, the developers have demonstrated how they have approached the village prior to the submission of the application. There was a drop in session for Parish Council's and local members together with a public exhibition. It is also known that the developers have been working with the village throughout the formal application process. It is considered that the developers have adequately liaised with the village throughout the process. The Council has offered to attend a meeting with villagers at the early stage of the application but was not taken up on this offer but have been in correspondence with various parties throughout the process. Mr Lansley's office has been advised of the Council's view.
46. Two public footpaths run along and through the site. The development is considered to affect the amenity of the users of the footpaths as a result of the change from a view of open fields to fields with a solar farm. However, the impact upon the footpaths has been reduced through the setting back of the panels away from the footpath to provide a buffer zone and mitigation planting to reduce the impact of the development upon the users of the public rights of way.
47. The site is not situated within the safeguarding area for either Cambridge or Stansted Airports and is not within close proximity to any airfields. Therefore, no consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority or the airfields themselves is required. The development is not considered to result in glint or glare that would be likely to increase the risk of accidents in the area. The solar panels are designed to absorb the rather than reflect the light and any surface water on them would quickly drain off given the angle of the panels.

48. 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 contamination that is found that has not been previously identified is remediated.

### **Conclusion**

49. 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.
50. 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, significantly damage the setting of heritage assets, destroy important archaeological evidence, result in the loss of important trees and hedges, harm biodiversity interests, increase flood risk, be detrimental to highway safety or adversely affect the amenities of neighbours.
51. Therefore, on balance, the benefits of the scheme in respect of renewable energy production are considered to outweigh any harm from the temporary loss of agricultural productivity and the modest harm to the setting of Wimpole Hall Historic Park and Garden.

### **Recommendation**

52. It is recommended that the Planning Committee grants officers delegated powers to approve the application (as amended) subject to the comments of the Landscape Officer and the following conditions and informatives: -

#### 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 3737\_001 Revision A, 3736\_002 Revision A, 3736\_004, 3737\_005 Revision B, DIS1685-SUB-FENCE, DIS1685-SUB-FENCE-1 Revision A and DIS1685-SUB-FENCE-2.  
(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 25 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 precise details of the transformer/inverter buildings and CCTV poles to be constructed on the site 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 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.)
- vii) 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.)
- viii) 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.)
- ix) 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.)

- x) If, during construction, any contamination is identified that has not been previously identified, then remediation proposals for this contamination should be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.  
(Reason - To prevent the increased risk of pollution to the water environment in accordance with Policy DP/1 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007).
- xi) 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.)
- xii) No development shall take place on the application site until the implementation of a programme of archaeological work has been secured in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.  
(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.)
- xiii) 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.)



- xiv) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the Construction Traffic Management Plan dated May 2014 by Hydrock reference C14078/CTMP.  
(Reason - In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policy DP/3 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- xv) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the Flood Risk Assessment dated May 2014 by Hydrock reference R/C141000.001.4.

#### Informatives

- i) The development shall provide a 9 metre easement between any structure and the designated main river or its vegetation line.
- ii) The development hereby permitted shall provide a 5 metre easement between any structure and any ordinary watercourse/ditch or its vegetation line.
- iii) Appendix C of the FRA contains an example check sheet for surface water drainage of the site post completion. We strongly advise that this is implemented by the operators of the site.
- iv) Appropriate protection (which should allow for inspection of joints) should be afforded to any oil-filled underground cabling and regular leak testing should be carried out.
- v) As part of the decommissioning of this solar farm, all below ground cables should be removed as electrical cables contain insulation oils which, if left to degrade within the ground, could lead to localised contamination of soils and potential leaching to watercourses in the area.
- vi) Only clean, uncontaminated surface water should be discharged to any soakaway, watercourse or surface water sewer.
- vii) All drums and small containers used for oil and other chemicals shall be stored in bunded areas, which do not drain to any watercourse, surface water sewer or soakaway.

**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/1067/14/FL

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