

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

3 December 2014

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

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**Application Number:** S/2409/14/FL

**Parish(es):** Sawston

**Proposal:** Solar Farm and Associated Development

**Site address:** Land to the North of Dales Manor  
Business Park, West Way

**Applicant(s):** Sawston Solar Farm Ltd.

**Recommendation:** Delegated Approval

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

**Committee Site Visit:** None.

**Departure Application:** Yes.

**Presenting Officer:** Karen Pell-Coggins

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

**Date by which decision due:** 13 January 201

### **Update to report**

#### **Paragraphs 13 and 16 - Consultation by South Cambridgeshire District Council as Local Planning Authority**

1. **Landscape Design Officer** - Comments as follows: -

#### **The Wider Landscape**

The site is in the 'East Anglian Chalk' National Landscape Character Area. The East Anglian Chalk lies south of Cambridge running in a wide band south west to north

east - part of an area of chalkland stretching from The Chilterns to the Wash. It is a wide, open landscape with gentle, rolling hills, occasional steeper scarp slopes - including a well-defined scarp slope facing north west immediately to the north east of the site.

There is relatively little tree cover, although shelter belts avenues and small hill top woodlands (hangers) are distinctive features of the area. Areas of woodland also often follow the numerous small river and stream valleys in the area.

On the slopes and higher ground, the field pattern is of large or very large regular agricultural fields separated by low clipped hedges. A more detailed irregular intimate landscape is often evident around the edges of the villages, and along the river and stream valley bottoms.

The underlying chalk geology produces a distinctive south-west-north east and south east –north west grid. Rivers, streams and transport routes, from the motorway to farm tracks often follow this grid orientation. The tracks and roads are often given emphasis by the tree planting or shelterbelts.

### **The Site**

The site lies approximately 400 metres to the north of Sawston, separated from the village by the property at North Farm. The Dales Manor Business Park and scrub and woodland which will shortly become partly developed as the new Cambridge City football stadium.

The site is fairly level at between approximately 20 and 24m AOD. There is a general fall towards the north and north west towards the River Granta which flows parallel to the northern boundary to its confluence with the River Rhee 2km to the west of the site.

2Km to the north the land rises up a spur of the chalk scarp slope to Fox Hill, Wandlebury Hill (an ancient hill fort, now a country park at approximately 70m AOD) Coply Hill and Meggs Hill.

Boundary treatments to the site are a mix of native (and some ornamental) hedges of varying quality, and occasional tree planting.

To the south a fairly solid native hedge separates the site from the gardens of North Farm. This hedge includes a short section of beech hedge and the remnants of an orchard at the eastern end. Visually this hedge is backed by the woodland and scrub around the proposed football ground and the business park.

The west boundary is also a native hedge, but more gappy and follows a more sinuous path towards the river to the north.

The northern boundary is a native hedge in a poor condition, although it does contain a few good mature Oak trees. To the north of this hedge, between the site and the river, are a series of small rough fields featuring drainage ditches with occasional Willow and Hawthorn marking the drains and the course of the river. A bridleway runs from Babraham to Stapleford passing approximately 200m from the north boundary.

The eastern boundary of the proposed site is currently open. The site area essentially divides a very large L shaped field in two, and a gappy native hedge, but also

containing a good number of mature and maturing trees, runs along the 'base' of the L approximately 300m to the east of the site. A public footpath runs north south immediately to the east of the hedge. This joins with the Babraham-Stapleford bridleway 300m north east of the site, heading north west to a ford at the river and then on to Stapleford.

## **Landscape Assessment**

### ***Landscape***

The landscape character close to the site is varied. The area most susceptible to change is probably immediately north of the site.

Here the small scale patchwork of rough pasture and woodland by the river swiftly change to agricultural fields running up the chalk scarp to the distinctive East Anglian Chalk landscape of character of Wandlebury and its adjacent hills. Hill top woodlands and avenue planting marking the grid of tracks and roads are significant features.

To the east and north-east the landscape is dominated by large open fields adjacent to the site and by the significant hedge and woodland planting associated with Babraham Hall and the Babraham Campus.

The northern section of this area is the most susceptible to landscape change, with some fine trees – nearly all Oak- featuring in the hedgerows. Much of the more recent woodland has been planted in response to the large buildings on the Babraham Campus, and does contain some inappropriate species.

The south of the site is less susceptible – industrial units and modern housing dominate the northern edge of Sawston, and are also partly screened by planting along an abandoned railway track.

To the west landscape is also susceptible to change. The landscape here is of a series of agricultural fields split by the river and its drains and side streams, and areas of pasture and woodland which separate Sawston from Stapleford, 1500m to the north east.

### ***Visual***

The site is currently fairly open, and there are a variety of long and short views possible both to and from the site.

To the north and east clear close views of the site are available from both the public footpaths and bridleway. The site rises away from these routes, and the panels will be visible above the proposed fence line. The proposed development will have a significant impact on views from these areas and will occupy a large proportion of the view.

Clear longer views are available from the chalk scarp to the north and east, including from Fox Hill, Magog Down, the properties at Middlefield, and from Wandlebury Country Park. These views are typically 1700-2000m distant, and so are tempered by distance intervening vegetation along the river and a backdrop of woodland and scrub at the edge of Sawston. However the proposed development will be a noticeable feature within the landscape, and may visually extend the edge of Sawston towards these viewpoints.

To the east there will be clear views through the gappy hedge from the footpath to the proposed site approximately 300m away, and the development will be an obvious feature in the landscape. Longer, filtered views will also be possible from the Sawston road for travellers heading west.

Views of the proposed development from the south are (and will be) limited by the Business Park buildings, and the hedge, scrub and tree belt around the proposed football stadium. However the views from North Farm will be significantly affected, with clear, close views of large areas of the development. At this point adverse visual effects will be difficult to mitigate, especially in the early years of the development.

From the west, there may be glimpsed views from the bridleway east of Stapleford there are a number of layers of thin or sparse vegetation between viewpoints and the proposed development, but any visual impact is likely to be small.

### **Mitigation**

The proposed development will represent a major new landscape feature, and will affect the local landscape by introducing a semi industrial feature into an area which is still largely rural in character.

The villages of Sawston Stapleford and Babraham are close together, and the proposed development could visually extend northern boundary of Sawston and introduce a significant area of development mid-way between Babraham to the east and Stapleford to the west, so reducing separation between the villages. This effect is likely to be visible from long views to the north, and by travellers on the east-west bridle-way between the villages. I feel that this is the most detrimental aspect of the proposal.

Close to the site, adverse visual effects of the proposals will be most evident from the buildings and land at North Farm.

For the development to successfully reduce landscape and visual impacts, it will require a well-designed and robust landscape scheme. This will respect the local landscape character and use plant species and layouts which represent the best of local landscape character.

The object of the landscape scheme should be to integrate the development into the landscape structure as far as possible, rather than to attempt to hide it, which will not be possible.

Eventually it should form an area of enhanced landscape between the three villages.

I suggest that some changes are needed to the submitted planting scheme to allow the scheme to fit better into the local landscape.

### ***North Boundary***

There are far too many trees suggested, and they are planted much too close together. Planting on the north side should aim to replicate the mix of rides, avenues and flood meadow planting in the immediate area.

Planting should be into existing ground rather than on a bank. Creating a bank will not add much to the screening properties of the vegetation, and establishment will probably be more difficult and growth slower.

To the north of the hedge, to add some quick filtering vegetation, small groups of 3 - 15 plants replicating those along the river and drains.

***Eastern Boundary***

Add a native hedge along the eastern boundary to match northern boundary

***Southern Boundary***

Hedge and buffer zone planting as per the drawing. However omit the Beech and Wayfaring Trees – Keep tree planting simple as for other boundaries

2. **Local Highway Authority** – Comments that the access width, visibility splays, swept path and the route contained with the Traffic Management Plan is acceptable.

**Paragraph 65 - Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that the Planning Committee grants officers delegated powers to approve the application (as amended) subject to the submission of revised plans to address the comments of the Landscape Design Officer.

**Case Officer:** Karen Pell-Coggins- Senior Planning Officer  
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