

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

3 December 2014

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

Application Number / type of application: S/1240/14/FL

Parish(es): Meldreth (Melbourn PC also consulted)

Proposal: Installation of solar panels on farm land for the production of electricity

Recommendation: Approval [subject to the Conditions following paragraph 33]

Material considerations: Principle of development, landscape impact, highway safety, impact on public right of way, residential amenity

Site address: Land at 1 Station Road, Meldreth, Royston, SG8 6JP

Applicant(s): Mr P Burlton

Date on which application received: 30/05/2014

Site Visit: Site visit undertaken on 04 November 2014

Conservation Area: No

Departure Application: No

Presenting Officer: David Thompson, Senior Planning Officer

Application brought to Committee because: Officer recommendation is contrary to that of both Meldreth and Melbourn Parish Councils.

Date by which decision due: 08 October 2014

A. Update to the report

No update to the report itself.

B. Further Information received after publication of the agenda report.

Consultation response from Meldreth Parish Council

In response to the Method Statement regarding precautionary measures to be taken to safeguard users of the right of way during the construction process. The recommendation of the Parish Council remains refusal (comments received 21 November 2014)

Representations received from neighbouring residents

One objection letter have been received raising the following concerns:

- Solar arrays should not be in green fields – government guidance states that they should be sited on buildings and industrial land rather than green fields
- Existing solar estates being constructed in the locality – this site is too close to the village boundary
- The proposal would be visible from Meldreth railway station footbridge and the footpath which runs through the field
- The proposal would result in the loss of valuable agricultural land
- The 25 year life span of the development ensures that it cannot be classed as temporary and there is a risk that the land could be classed as brownfield at the end of the 25 year period

Officer comments on the representation received

The document 'Planning Practice Guidance for renewable and low carbon energy' was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2013. The guidance includes a section on the planning considerations that are relevant to large scale ground mounted solar developments.

The guidance states that the re-use of previously developed land should be encouraged, but where proposals are located on greenfield land (as is the case in this application), the development should not hinder the use of the site for agricultural purposes. For the reasons detailed in the report, the proposal is considered to achieve this objective.

The use of landscaping to screen development is suggested as a way of mitigating the impact of development and such a scheme is proposed in this application. The proposed landscaping would add to the existing mature trees on the boundaries of the site with the A10 and the agent farm buildings. The existing trees along the A10 would prevent any harm to drivers on the A10 in terms of glint or glare produced by the panels.

Given the fact that the proposal would be positioned in a corner of the field, would not encroach further into the field than the adjacent farm buildings and could be sensitively screened, it is considered that the proposal would not result in a harmful impact on the character of the landscape, despite being visible from the right of way until the proposed planting matures and from higher views even once the planting has matured. The elevated views from the access to Meldreth Station and the bridge on Station Road are at a distance which would place the proposal within the context of the neighbouring development and the backdrop of the established trees.

Within this context, the development would be seen within the confines of the site and the immediate surroundings and would not result in harm to the character of the landscape in terms of cumulative impact.

A condition requiring the restoration of the land to its current condition is recommended in the report to ensure that, once the operation of the solar development ceases, the land returns to an agricultural use.

Additional Background Papers: the following background papers (additional to those referred to in the agenda report) were used in the preparation of this update:

'Planning Practice Guidance for renewable and low carbon energy'- published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2013

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