

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

---

**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

5 August 2015

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

---

**Application Number:** S/2944/14/FL

**Parish(es):** Shepreth

**Proposal:** The construction of a Glasshouse, 380kW Biomass Boiler, 150kW Anaerobic Digestion Plant, Covered Feed Stock Storage Clamps, Covered Digestate Loading Area, Covered Vehicle Store, & Associated Plant

**Site address:** Fillcup Field, Meldreth Road, Shepreth, Royston, Cambridgeshire

**Applicant(s):** Mr T Naylor, Nethy AD Ltd

**Recommendation:** Delegated Approval (completion of a legal agreement)

**Key material considerations:** Principle  
Highway Safety  
Residential Amenity  
Impact on Countryside and Visual Amenity  
Impact on Biodiversity  
Drainage, pollution and contamination

**Committee Site Visit:** 4 August 2015

**Departure Application:** No

**Presenting Officer:** Tony Pierce

**Application brought to Committee because:** The recommendation of the Parish Council is contrary to that of officers

**Date by which decision due:** 15 May 2015

### Executive Summary

1. The application as amended proposes a large glasshouse and associated development on an unused agricultural field. The principle of the use is acceptable in policy terms and incorporates proposals to generate energy from renewable sources.
2. The increase and impact of traffic generation on local roads, particularly by HGVs is of concern, but can be mitigated through conditions restricting vehicle numbers and a

lorry routing agreement. The capacity to impact on residential properties by way of noise, odours and air quality can also be mitigated through appropriate conditions. The re-siting of buildings and submission of a detailed landscaping scheme will minimise its visual impact and allow for biodiversity enhancement. Drainage, pollution and contamination concerns can also be overcome through the use of appropriate safeguarding conditions.

3. When viewed in the context of the development plan as a whole and the requirements for sustainable development as set out in the NPPF, the development is considered to be an appropriate use of the site.

### **Site and Surroundings**

4. The application site is a rectangular field on the north side of Meldreth Rd 250m west of the edge of Shepreth Village and 1km East of the edge of Meldreth village. It is some 72m wide and 280m deep, and covers an area of approximately 2 ha. It has no permanent buildings and appears to have been used for small scale informal agriculture in the past, but is now semi-natural in character. The south boundary (front), north (rear) and east boundaries of the site are marked with indigenous hedgerows and beyond that are bounded by ditches. The north east corner contains some mature trees. The western boundary is open apart from a low clump of self-set shrubs on part of the boundary. The ditch along this side of the site is within the site boundary. The site vehicle access is in the centre of the site frontage.
5. The land to the east, north and west is in agricultural use for arable crops. The site on the opposite side of the road to the south is the L-Moor SSSI, which is a combination of dry and wet chalkland habitats. It has a stream and a public footpath running through it.
6. The nearest residential property is 94 Meldreth Road, 240m to the west. There are a few other houses spread along Meldreth Road. The edge of Meldreth Village Development Framework is 1.6km away. The nearest houses to the east are 800m away on the edge of Shepreth Village Development Framework.
7. Meldreth Road is accessed from the A603 by roads through Shepreth, Frog End or Meldreth. Shepreth Station is 1.6km from the site.

### **Proposal**

8. The application has been the subject of amended drawings and a Transport Assessment. The various components that now make up the development are as follows.
9. **Glasshouse** – This would have a footprint of 3,500sqm with two layers of cultivation. The glasshouse building would be 50m wide by 70m deep, 6m high at the eaves and 9m at the ridge. The roof would have four parallel ridges running from front to back. The main walls would be glass covered with insulating 'ivory white' plastic film. The front 12m would house the office and staff area and be clad in 'light beige' panels. The building would be positioned 110m back from the front of the site, 8m in from the SW boundary and 14m in from the NE boundary. Power for heating and lighting the glasshouse would be provided by a small Anaerobic Digester plant and a supplementary Biomass Boiler at the rear of the site (see below). The glasshouse would be lit by LED lights for 18-20 hours a day and would incorporate directed lights and blackout blinds.

10. **Silage Clamps** - Two silage clamps would be positioned 20m behind the glasshouse and be set 8m in from the SW boundary. These would have concrete bases and surrounds together measuring 30m wide and 33m long. They would be 3-4m high when empty. The original proposal to cover the clamps with a 9m high, open fronted barn has been amended to reduce the visual impact. The clamps would be filled with maize and grass silage in late autumn at harvest time and covered with polythene sheeting. The silage would be fed into the Anaerobic Digester Unit until early summer.
11. **Vehicle store** – A vehicle store, 15m wide and 10m deep, would be positioned between the greenhouse and the clamps. It would have an arched, 6m high roof and be set in 20m from the SW boundary.
12. **Anaerobic Digester (AD)**- The AD building would measure 21m wide, 35m deep and 7m high. It would be positioned to the rear of the site in the NW corner but set 5m in from NE boundary and 17m from the rear of the site. The external walls would be clad in green steel and the roof in grey steel. The AD is where silage would be mixed with farmyard manure (FYM) and sealed to decompose and produce biogas (methane and carbon dioxide). The building would contain four sealed AD containers and an open-sided covered area for loading of feed and unloading of spent vegetable matter (digestate). The FYM prior to loading and digestate after use would be stored on the site in the open for up to 24 hours.
13. **Gas Store** - The gas and percolate store would be 10m in diameter and 9m high. It would be dome-shaped and coloured grey. It would be positioned behind the silage clamps in a bunded area near the NW corner of the site. Biogas from the ADs would be stored in the gas membrane and piped to the Combined Heat and Power Unit (CHP) to be burnt to produce electricity and usable heat for the glasshouse and the percolate water (which circulates around the ADs to enable the AD process).
14. The Combined Heat and Power Unit (CHP) would be contained in a 7m wide, 2.5m deep and 3m high steel clad construction. It would have a 7m high exhaust flue. It would be positioned to the rear of the site between the gas dome and the AD building.
15. **Biomass Burner** – There would be a wood store and a biomass boiler 15m from the rear boundary of the site. The buildings would be relatively small: the store 8m x 6m and 4m high and the boiler 5m x 4m and 2.5m high. Both buildings would have shallow pitched roofs and be clad in green-coloured timber. At the rear of the site would be a fenced gas flare in a 20m diameter clear zone.
16. The front 80m of the site would be left open and planted as a wild-flower meadow. It would contain an attenuation pond for rainwater harvested from the greenhouse roof. The initial plans included a log cabin as accommodation for management on the front of the site but this has been removed in the revised scheme.
17. The existing vehicle access in the centre of the site frontage onto Meldreth Road would be closed off. A new access would be created in the South corner of the site onto Meldreth Road with a permeable surfaced driveway. The access road would run along the SW boundary for 70m and lead to the front service yard for the greenhouse. The service yard would provide 12 car parking spaces and a cycle parking facility.
18. The access road would lead past the NE side of the glasshouse to the rear of the site. The area between the clamps, ADs, CHP and wood store would have an impermeable surface. Surface water run-off from this area would be collected and

stored. Proposals to filter it through a swale and discharge it into the rear ditch have been amended in response to Environment Agency comments.

19. The boundaries of the site and the access road would be marked by a security fence except for the 80m deep meadow on the site frontage. The fence would be approximately 2.3m high but details of the materials and style have not been submitted. The existing hedgerows and trees (apart from two trees at the site access) would be retained and enhanced. Further hedgerows and trees would be planted along the SW boundary.
20. Around 12 new on-site jobs would be created.

### **Planning History**

21. None.

### **Planning Policies**

22. **National Planning Policy Framework  
Planning Practice Guidance**
23. **South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2007**  
ST/7 Infill Villages – Shepreth
24. **South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Development Control  
Policies 2007**  
DP/1 Sustainable Development  
DP/2 Design of New Development  
DP/3 Development Criteria  
DP/4 Infrastructure and New Developments  
DP/7 Development Frameworks  
HG/9 Dwelling to Support a Rural-based Enterprise  
NE/2 Renewable Energy  
NE/3 Renewable Energy Technologies in New Development  
NE/4 Landscape Character areas  
NE/6 Biodiversity  
NE/7 Sites of Biodiversity Importance  
NE/8 Water and Flooding  
NE/9 Water and Drainage infrastructure  
NE/10 Foul Drainage  
NE/11 Flood risk  
NE/12 Water Conservation  
NE/14 Lighting Proposals  
NE/15 Noise Pollution  
NE/16 Emissions  
TR/1 Planning for More Sustainable Travel  
TR/2 Car and Cycle Parking Standards  
TR/3 Mitigating Travel Impact  
TR/4 Non-motorised Modes
25. **South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Supplementary Planning  
Documents**  
District Design Guide SPD – March 2010  
Trees and Development Sites SPD – January 2009

**26. Proposed Submission Local Plan**

S/3 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development  
S/7 Development Frameworks  
S/11 Infill Villages  
CC/2 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation  
CC/9 Managing Flood Risk  
HQ/1 Design Principles  
NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character  
NH/4 Biodiversity  
SC/10 Lighting Proposals  
SC/11 Noise Pollution  
SC/13 Air Quality  
SC/15 Odour and other fugitive emissions to air  
TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel  
TI/3 Parking Provision  
TI/8 Infrastructure and New Developments

**Consultations**

27. **Shepreth Parish Council** recommends refusal (based on the amended drawings) stating the Council has rejected the application, a result of a vote at the Planning meeting on 26th May 2015. The refusal is on the grounds of various material facts mainly relating to highways issues as illustrated below in the Transport survey:
28. (Paragraph) 3.20 Glosses over pedestrian access on Meldreth Rd which is important as it is frequently used as a walking route to Shepreth station. 4.31 Includes information about employees walking to site from the station. How would this be possible without a pavement? 4.59 States route to the A10 is 1.25 miles away from the site, this potentially means going through Shepreth or Meldreth. There is no legal reason to deter traffic from the development driving through Shepreth apart from over Mill bridge which has a weight limit. The survey mentions a pledge not to but this is no guarantee to the residents of Shepreth. Therefore the traffic could actually travel via Frog End which has its own problems and has been on the District and County accident cluster list over many years.
29. Other concerns are noise and smell exceeding agreed levels. Noise at unsociable hours from vehicle movements leaving the site and smell extending farther depending on the weather affecting the air quality.
30. If the development is recommended for approval the Parish Council would like the following conditions applied; provide a safe walking route between Meldreth and Shepreth, a guarantee that the traffic would not travel through Shepreth, a reduction in the speed limit on the stretch between Meldreth and Shepreth near the development site, high levels of sound insulation on the generator, controls on radio use and lighting to prevent noise and light pollution, the introduction of traffic calming technology on exit/entry to the development site and traffic measures at Frog End, Shepreth to alleviate the ongoing problems at this junction. However, if this were the case, we would appreciate advance warning of the planning committee date and any recommendations so the Parish Council are able to consult the village and confirm in more detail.
31. **Meldreth Parish Council** recommends refusal (based on the amended plans). If SCDC is minded to approve the application that a condition is applied to only have one vehicle used to bring in the raw materials for the biodigester to avoid dangerous passing on the North End bends.

32. **Bassingbourn cum Kneesworth Parish Council** – It has been brought to the attention of the parish council that the application includes a proposed traffic route through Kneesworth along Chestnut Lane. This road has been a concern, due to its width, for the existing heavy goods vehicles currently using it.
33. Councillors strongly object to the proposed traffic route through Chestnut Lane due to the expected increase in traffic on the narrow road.
34. **The Local Highways Authority** has requested and received a Transport Assessment (dated April 2015). On 29 May 2015, it commented that the applicant had failed to provide a drawing showing the required visibility splays. Its default position for vehicle to vehicle visibility splays is the use of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, which would require splays of 2.4m x 215m in both directions as measured from and along the nearside edge of the carriageway to be provided on both sides of the access. The splays must be within the existing adopted public highway or land under the control of the applicant. If the applicant can provide empirical data in the form of speed and traffic flows and subjective observations these will be considered and the use of lower visibility splays may be acceptable.
35. Otherwise the proposal should have no significant impact on the public highway subject to conditions in respect of:
- (i) Access width to be a minimum of 6m for a distance of 15m back from the highway boundary
  - (ii) Use of 10m radii kerbs
  - (iii) Bound surface near to the access point/ suitable falls and levels
  - (iv) Closure of existing access
  - (v) Construction management plan
36. On 3 July 2015, the local highway authority confirmed that following further investigation of land ownership, the required visibility splays can be provided. Drawing no. DR1 has been provided to confirm this.
37. **The County Council Transport Assessment Team** confirms that as a result of the revised information submitted by the applicant, the Transport Assessment Team can withdraw its holding objection to the above application subject to securing the following conditions (in addition to those requested by the LHA):
- (i) No more than a maximum of 20 2-way HGV movements shall enter and leave the site in any one day (07.00 - 19.00) except for two days each year where no more than 140 2-way HGV movements shall enter and leave the site in any one day. A daily record of all vehicle movements, including details of all internal and external road movements, shall be maintained by the site and made available within one week of a written request.
  - (ii) The applicant shall submit a HGV routing plan which outlines what routes the HGVs shall take to the site and which routes HGVs are restricted from using
38. Following concerns by local members, the Transport Assessment Team has been asked to comment on the likely impact on traffic flows following the recent approval for housing development on the Barrington Cemex site. It has responded as follows.
39. The traffic flows that will be generated by the Barrington CEMEX works heading to/from Shepreth are as follows:

**AM Peak**

Towards Barrington CEMEX From Shepreth	13
Towards Shepreth from Barrington CEMEX	36
Total Vehicles:	49

**PM Peak**

Towards Barrington CEMEX From Shepreth:	34
Towards Shepreth from Barrington CEMEX:	19
Total Vehicles:	53

40. The majority of these vehicles will be likely to travel through Shepreth to access the A10, as such very few would be likely to travel directly past the proposed AD Plant on Meldreth Road – only those vehicles with an origin or destination in Meldreth.
41. HGVs will be required to access the AD plant using roads to the west of the site access which means that no HGV traffic generated by the AD Plant will be allowed to travel through Shepreth. This arrangement will be secured by condition in the event of planning permission.
42. Traffic from the proposed Barrington CEMEX development will therefore have very little interaction with traffic from the AD Plant and is not considered to alter the previous conclusions drawn regarding the proposed AD plant.
43. **The Environment Agency** has commented on the Flood Risk Assessment, Waste Issues, Land and Water Issues. The Agency originally objected to the proposal on the basis of the flood risk assessment. A second FRA was submitted and the EA has withdrawn its objection subject to a condition requiring a sustainable surface water drainage scheme and an assessment of the hydrological and hydro-geological context of the development. Further details of the design of the silage clamp, the underground dirty water storage tank and domestic sewage discharges are required via a condition.
44. **Anglian Water** has not responded.
45. **The County Archaeology Officer** has commented that the area has high archaeological potential. The surrounding area has Bronze Age and Medieval remains. He has requested a condition be placed upon any decision requiring archaeological investigation prior to any development on the site.
46. **Natural England** has no objection subject to implementation in accordance with the submitted details. The development would not adversely impact on water table levels, water quality or air quality. Information regarding Protected Species on the application site should be sought from local wildlife organisations. Consideration should also be given to landscape character and biodiversity habitats and species. The site may provide opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.
47. **The Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust** recommends further surveys for reptile habitat in the Spring. Remedial measures to provide habitat for any species present shall be required. Surveys of dormice are not necessary in this location. An ecological management plan for the wildflower meadow should be sought.
48. **Environmental Health Officer Contaminated Land** – No response received.
49. **Environmental Health Officer**. I have some issues with this proposal and the applicant has not provided sufficient detail or assurances regarding the impacts on

the locality as a result of such a development. (This follows additional information provided in the applicant's email dated 12 June 2015 and forwarded to the EHO for his comments).

50. **Noise assessment.** In order that we can make a more reasoned assessment of the impacts on noise I would recommend the following condition be attached. It would need to demonstrate the plant would not adversely impact residential premises. It would also ensure if the report does identify concerns an appropriate attenuation scheme be added to minimise, or preferably remove, those impacts.

"Before the development/use hereby permitted is commenced, a noise impact assessment of building(s) and associated plant / equipment and a noise insulation scheme to include proposals for noise mitigation as appropriate, in order to minimise the level of noise emanating from the said building(s) and/or plant or equipment shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme as approved shall be fully implemented before the use hereby permitted is commenced and shall thereafter be maintained in strict accordance with the approved details."

51. Methodology to be used is as per the SCDC SPD Appendix 6 for noise.

52. Similarly, I would recommend a condition requiring a post installation assessment be carried out if permission is given, to ensure the levels predicted are in fact being met in the "real world". Below is an example of a previously used condition.

"The plant/equipment and any associated plant enclosures, hereby approved, shall be installed, operated, maintained and serviced in accordance with the submitted details in the (Name of Acoustic Consultancy) acoustic report entitled '(Report name)', dated (date), and the details of the (attenuation suggested). Prior to the commencement of use, a post installation operational noise performance completion report for plant and equipment shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Should the attenuation levels detailed in the report referred to above not be met then the details of further attenuation work, as required, shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for its approval in writing. The noise attenuation/insulation scheme shall be implemented and thereafter maintained in strict accordance with the approved details. (Reason - In order to minimise noise disturbance for adjoining residents in accordance with the aims of Policies DP/3 and NE/15 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)"

53. An informative should also be applied that where a noise / vibration assessment and or noise insulation scheme is required due regard should be given to current government / industry standards, best practice and guidance and South Cambridgeshire District Council's Supplementary Planning Document - "District Design Guide: High Quality and Sustainable Development in South Cambridgeshire", Adopted March 2010: Chapter 10 - Environmental Health & in particular Appendix 6: Noise"

54. **Air Quality.** This was referred to the Growth Team in H&ES (Kenny Abere) to assess. In his absence I do not see why an assessment is required on arable land unless it was to ensure 360° acceptability to account for changes in wind direction that could affect odour dispersion.

55. **Odour.** I have concerns over the loading/unloading and storage of the filling material and digestate in the open air. I would recommend a condition be attached to require



this is carried out in an enclosed/contained manner/space to prevent unnecessary odour release into the environment.

56. The applicant has made reference to odours being dealt with by the Environment Agency. This will only be true if the plant is regulated by the EA, If the plant is exempted from their regulatory regime, odours will be dealt with by South Cambridgeshire District Council.
57. Additionally, depending upon the exact specification of the CHP including the rate of fuel consumption the plant may need to hold a permit under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 (as amended) as a Small Waste Incineration Plant (SWIP).
58. **Landscape Officer.** Has no objections now that the whole development has been moved closer towards the road, thus allowing more landscaping features to be incorporated into the site.

### **Representations**

59. **Cllr Hart (Local Member)** - I have found it hard to reach a decision concerning this application: as the planning department will know, many of my residents in both Meldreth and Shepreth (the majority from the latter) have felt strongly enough to have written to the council and there have been many more objections raised in such correspondence than those writing in in support. People are concerned at the possible effect this development will have on both villages and it has been hard to gauge what a "worse case scenario" might be if the environmental data in support of the application proves incorrect.
60. We are asked to determine this application on material planning grounds and if I restrict myself to those which fall within my remit as district councillor I find I am unable to put together a reasoned argument against this application. Local, strategic and national planning policies support the setting up of new businesses with the economic and employment benefits they bring to the locality in question. I welcome a new business bringing diversification to local agriculture and horticulture and I welcome a progressive use of sustainable energies to support the business.
61. There are no loss of sunlight, nor overlooking nor loss of privacy issues here. If there is a loss of outlook it is to swap a scrubby unused piece of land littered with debris for an admittedly developed site but one that is to be sympathetically screened. The view will change, but not necessarily for the worse, although I appreciate that this is a subjective opinion. I place myself in the capable hands of the statutory consultees in determining whether there will be adverse environmental impact and they have deemed the development not to pose a risk.
62. The applicant has, working with the council, addressed the layout and density of the design of the development, together landscaping issues such that I believe the site will be low impact and sympathetic to its surroundings.
63. This leaves highways issues, smells or fumes and noise or disturbance: these can I believe be successfully dealt with through planning conditions. I believe my county councillor colleague, Susan van de Ven will address the issue of highways in more detail, but suffice it to say that if we are to effect modal change in the way people travel, we have a duty to provide safe and accessible means for people to walk and cycle, instead of needing to get in their car or other motor vehicles.

64. Much of the correspondence sent to the planning department which I have had the fortune to be copied into has been well reasoned, addressing all of the issues above, and in some cases drawing different conclusions from mine. I do not dispute that feelings about this application have run very high, especially in Shepreth within whose village boundaries the site falls. However, I must give more weight to the few houses situated nearby the site than to those situated beyond the railway lines and across the Meldreth village boundary. These are the dwellings undeniably most likely to be affected if this application is passed. There is majority support for the development from the nearest households, provided there is strict observance by the business of planning conditions which they seek to be attached to any permission.
65. It only leaves me to address, for the record, non-material, but nonetheless I believe important considerations. In my view it is unfortunate that the site is situated opposite a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Even though the Environment Agency has approved the application as posing no undue risk, it is nevertheless inevitably the case that if there is a contamination of the land or the water supply, its potential effect on the L Moor could be grave.
66. There does not seem to be a planning consideration which allows me to ask the planning department to take into consideration cumulative impact. Development has begun for 220 new houses in Barrington and appeals have been or are likely to be lodged for 95 houses in Foxton and 199 houses in Melbourn. Inevitably these, if they are all passed, will put a great deal more traffic on our local roads, and while I am sanguine about the relatively low traffic movements generated by this proposed development, they do need to be considered together with the likely increase in traffic movements locally. This goes to the need for modal change and encouragement to people to choose other methods than the car to travel locally.
67. **County Councillor Susan van de Ven (Cambridgeshire County Councillor)** - "I declare an interest in this application given that I live along the proposed traffic route.
68. I have received numerous representations from local residents of Meldreth and Shepreth, attended public meetings, and spoken to nearest neighbours. My comments are confined to the County Council's remit.
69. (i) I support the principle of new small business and new employment opportunities in our villages.  
(ii) I welcome efforts outlined in this application to provide on-site sustainable energy.  
(iii) I support local production of food that will have a local market.  
(iv) In my view there are unavoidable problems related to traffic and the unfortunate site of the proposed development, elaborated below and revolving around a) unsafe conditions for non-motorized users (NMUs) accessing the site and b) the introduction of new traffic including HGVs in this environment. Please note that in conjunction with these concerns, a survey of pedestrians and cyclists has been carried out and is attached.
70. The Cambridge and South Cambs Transport Strategy strongly encourage non-vehicle use for short distances in local areas, given concerns about growing congestion on roads. The less safe a route is perceived to be, the more often people will choose to drive, and the problematic culture of vehicle use for short distances multiplies.
71. The applicant argues that the location of the proposed development is desirable because it sits near Shepreth Station. However, a complete journey to work by sustainable transport lacks a safe route on the final stretch of Meldreth Road. From Shepreth, present conditions require pedestrians to walk on an unlit agricultural verge

punctuated by drainage slits. From Meldreth, present conditions include significant stretches with no pedestrian refuge whatsoever.

72. Cemex and their predecessors at Barrington Cement Plant operated their vehicle traffic according to a route agreed with the Barrington Liaison Group that protected the safety of NMUs and on this basis did not use Meldreth Road at all. Other key problematic stretches within Meldreth that benefitted from that arrangement were College Farm bend and the narrow pinch point at Stone Lane.
73. Shepreth Parish Council has in the past applied for Minor Highways Improvement funding to create an off-road pedestrian route alongside Meldreth Road but available funding was never intended for more than genuinely minor items and therefore the parish council's applications were unsuccessful.
74. The prospect of City Deal funding for the A10 corridor might have addressed this stretch as a key pedestrian/cycle link between villages, but the A10 corridor scheme was not successful in this round. Meldreth and Shepreth Parish Councils are currently preparing a joint application to lower the speed limit between the villages, as one measure to improve safety conditions for NMUs.
75. In summary, while Meldreth Road may hold plenty of spare traffic capacity, the siting of the proposed development on the bend in the stretch of road between Meldreth and Shepreth that has for so many years been the subject of safety concerns is undesirable. Should the application be approved, there should be a condition requiring the creation of an off-road path for NMUs.
76. Traffic beyond Meldreth Road: The revised application proposes to route all traffic through Meldreth, taking HGV traffic out via the Station Road bridge to the A10 or to Fenny Lane and the Whitecroft Rd junction with Kneesworth and Whaddon. Over the past few years, Meldreth Parish Council and I have worked together to discourage HGV traffic on Station Rd and Whitecroft Rd, and with the support of Cambridgeshire County Council, advisory HGV signage has now been erected on the A1198 directing drivers to the A505 so as to avoid the villages of Meldreth and Whaddon.
77. Should any options for routing traffic through Shepreth be revisited, I cannot see where this would be satisfactorily achieved: the Frog End junction is a prominent accident cluster site costing the County Council annual revenue for free bus travel for Shepreth students needing to cross the A10 to Melbourn Village College. Shepreth Mill Bridge is unsuitable for HGVs.”
78. There were 135 responses to the initial consultation exercise in Jan/Feb 2015. These were from residents in Shepreth and Meldreth as well as a number of objectors who did not provide an address.
79. Six letters were in support of the application for the following reasons:
  - employment generation
  - energy efficient agriculture
  - clear up untidy site
  - producing food/saving food miles
  - support as long input materials are limited to plant waste and equine/bovine manure, landscaping scheme is carried out in full and noise mitigation is in place at start
80. The others were objections to the application and, in summary, were as follows:

- dangerous site entrance
- dangerous route with no cycle/foot path
- route for delivery lorries is not suitable; particularly concerns raised re use of Mettle Hill/Chestnut Lane and onto the A1198
- accident spots on A-Road connections
- increase in traffic journeys
- damage to roads from heavy vehicles
- site is poorly served by public transport
- smell from farm yard manure and digestate materials
- noise from the CHP, shredders and vehicles
- an adequate noise assessment has been submitted
- would spoil the separation of Shepreth from Meldreth
- visual impact. Out of character with its surroundings. The proposed landscaping would not conceal the buildings
- residential cabin would erode the countryside (this element has since been removed)
- light pollution and an adverse impact on living environment and wildlife
- air pollution. Unacceptable odours and smells.
- hazardous nature of gas storage
- inadequate assessment of flood risk
- risk of pollution of groundwater
- run off should not be into ditches around the site
- the proposed use may pollute the ground
- there may be asbestos on site
- impact on SSSI L Moor
- ecological surveys are inadequate
- archaeological assessment is inadequate
- borehole would affect wetland at the SSSI
- adverse impact on quiet enjoyment of the SSSI
- explosions from the AD plant
- industrialisation of the area
- too close to dwellings
- devalue property
- adverse impact on wider village

81. In his former capacity as local MP, **Andrew Lansley CBE** raised concerns relating to traffic safety, visual impact and lighting. He asked that the application be considered by the Council's Planning Committee.

82. A number of further responses have been received to the amended proposals. These have not raised any new issues.

### **Planning Comments**

83. The main planning considerations in this case are considered to be:

- The principle of development
- Traffic generation and the impact on highway safety and the local road network
- The impact on residential amenity, particularly with regard to noise and odours
- Impact on the countryside and visual amenity
- Impact on biodiversity and the nearby SSSI
- Drainage, pollution and contamination

## **Principle of development**

84. The application site is outside the Village Development Frameworks of both Shepreth and Meldreth. Policy DP/7 states that outside of village frameworks, only development for agriculture, horticulture and other uses which need to be located in the countryside will be permitted. While the proposal is considered by some to be an industrial use of the land, officers consider that in principle the proposed development comprises a mainly agricultural use. The main part of the development comprises the glasshouse and this is supported by the anaerobic Digester plant and a supplementary Biomass Boiler. The overall use is, in principle, in accordance with Policy DP/7.
85. Policy NE/2 also states that the Council will support proposals to generate energy from renewable sources subject to the end users being identified and provision for removal of the facilities should they cease to operate.
86. The proposal includes generating energy for the site's own consumption from bio fuels. The technologies involved would be two-fold: a bio-mass burner principally to heat the glasshouse and an anaerobic digester to generate methane for burning in a combined heat and power unit and provide light and electric power for the glasshouse. Whilst both energy sources would not be carbon free they would recycle green waste, which would otherwise be landfill or composted. The end user of the energy is clearly identified as being on the site and, subject to a condition requiring their removal in the event of the glasshouse ceasing to operate, the proposal is acceptable in terms of Policy NE/2.

## **Highway safety**

87. There have been ongoing discussions between the applicant and the local highway authority, as well as between local members and the local highway authority.
88. The local highway authority has confirmed it no longer has any technical objection. Its proposed conditions are all considered to meet the relevant tests for conditions in NPPG and should be applied in the event the application is approved. The application site would be served by a new access with appropriate visibility splays and provide parking and turning spaces for staff and delivery/vehicles. This is considered to be a sufficient provision of on-site parking and the proposal is therefore considered acceptable in terms of the access, parking and turning facilities provided.
89. Cllr van de Ven has coordinated a group of volunteers drawn from Meldreth Speedwatch and Shepreth Parish Council, and including the District Councillor and herself to provide data on the number of pedestrians and cyclists travelling past the site. This is fairly limited in its extent, and while the local highway authority has remarked that the data provided has been very useful, it advises it would struggle to request the installation of a footway/cycleway link to either Shepreth or Meldreth.
90. The view of the local highway authority is that the potential conflict between pedestrians or cyclists as a result of this development will be very minimal given the level of pedestrian and cycle usage at present from the data presented. The applicants own data states that the site will produce 20 HGV movements over a 12 hour period which equates to 1.6 HGV per hour.
91. In the circumstances, and despite the real concerns of many of the objectors, it is difficult to justify the requirement for a footway/cycleway link to either nearby village.

92. The Transport Assessment Team has considered the wider and more strategic implications of the development. Members will note that it too supports the application and that the daily number of HGV movements is acceptable subject to a restrictive condition, which includes monitoring. The enforceability of such a condition can prove difficult, but such conditions have been used before. The suggested condition is considered acceptable.
93. A HGV routing plan which outlines what routes the HGVs shall take to the site and which routes HGVs are restricted from using is also required to minimise the impact of large vehicles travelling through nearby villages. Details have been provided along with a draft Unilateral Undertaking to enforce this. The proposed route is for all HGV vehicles to approach the site from the south via Meldreth and to exit the site by turning right and again passing through Meldreth. Thus no HGVs would need to travel through Shepreth.
94. Both Meldreth and Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth parish councils are concerned about the level of traffic through their villages. A further letter solely in respect of the routing plan has been received from Meldreth Parish Council and is reproduced as appendix 1 to this report. Nonetheless, the route has been chosen to minimise the impact on the surrounding road network. In addition, the bridge in Shepreth is a grade 2 listed single span gault brick arch dating from circa 1800 with stone copings. The existing 7.5 tonne weight limit is in place to preserve the fabric of this historic bridge because the carriageway is narrow with limited visibility and the bridge has no separate footways. Allowing larger vehicles to regularly use this bridge would increase the likelihood of damage to the parapets and spandrel walls that may cause expensive repairs.
95. The local highway authority has been provided with a copy of the Parish Council's objection and any comments will be reported at the meeting. However, the proposed routing plan has the support of the local highway authority who consider this is the preferred route from a road safety point of view. There is no evidence to suggest that the increased level of HGV traffic is likely to cause damage to other local roads.
96. It is accepted that the site is poorly served by public transport and that the use will lead to additional car journeys. 12 full-time people are to be employed. Given the nature of the proposed use these are not considered to be compelling reasons why what is otherwise an appropriate countryside use should be resisted. The local highway authority has not sought any additional conditions/restrictions including speed-reducing measures. It also considers that the cumulative impact arising from the redevelopment of the Cemex site will have very little interaction with traffic associated with the AD plant.
97. In the circumstances, officers consider the proposal would not have an unacceptable adverse impact on highway safety subject to agreement of the proposed unilateral undertaking (the precise wording of which is yet to be agreed) and the safeguarding conditions set out at the end of this report.

#### **Residential Amenity**

98. The main considerations under this heading include noise, odour and air quality.
99. **Noise** – Policies DP/3 and NE/15 state that planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the indoor and outdoor acoustic environment of existing development. Appendix 6 (Section 7) of the District Design guide (2010) requires development not to increase the background

noise levels for sensitive uses such as housing by more than 3dB over an hour or 5dB for 5 minutes. The proposed development would give rise to noise from both traffic generation and from the CHP unit.

100. The nearest residential property is some 240m away to the west with the main built-up parts of Meldreth and Shepreth further away. The EHO has considered the noise statement submitted with the application. While there is no objection in principle, a noise impact assessment of building(s) and associated plant/equipment and a noise insulation scheme to include proposals for noise mitigation as appropriate is required. In addition, a condition requiring a post installation assessment should be carried out if permission is given, to ensure the levels predicted are in fact being met. As a matter of fact and degree, the level of traffic noise is unlikely to materially worsen the enjoyment of any residential properties.
101. The suggested conditions and informative at paragraphs 47 - 50 are recommended in the event the application is approved.
102. **Odour** – Policies DP/3 and NE/16 state that planning permission will not be granted for development that would have an adverse impact from odour and that development should be appropriately located to avoid detriment to local amenity. An Odour Assessment was submitted with the application. The two potential sources of odour from the proposed development are the storage of Farmyard manure (FYM) and storage of digestate.
103. Both of these would be stored on the site for 24 hours each in every week: the FYM before feeding into the AD and the other after emptying the AD. The odour assessment identified the proposed AD feeds of maize, grass, FYM and green waste which are allowed under T234 without an Environment Agency Permit. The odour assessment considers these feeds to be relatively low odour producers and to not be inappropriate in an agricultural setting. The digestate is also claimed to have a low odour production.
104. The inclusion of food waste (as used at other larger AD plants at Baldock and Tye Green and which has a stronger odour) would require a permit from the Environment Agency (EA). However, this could occur without the need for planning permission so control of the feeds by condition is considered reasonable and necessary in this case. Although the nearest receptors are 230m away they are on the SW of the site. Properties to the NE are further away. However, the wind direction does alter as the OA shows and for a considerable %age of the time blows towards either Shepreth or Meldreth villages.
105. The EHO has expressed concerns over the loading/unloading and storage of the filling material and digestate in the open air. He has recommended a condition requiring this to be carried out in an enclosed/contained manner/space to prevent unnecessary odour release into the environment. On this basis, the proposals are found to accord with policies DP/3 and NE/16.
106. **Air Quality** – Policies DP/3 and NE/16 also require assessments to be done to control the impact on local air quality to meet national objectives and that development proposals should seek to minimise any emissions, control risks and prevent any detriment to local amenity. An Air Quality Assessment was submitted with the application. The study identified two potential polluting sources in the proposed development: the flue from the CHP and the flue from the Biomass Boiler. These would emit nitrates, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur and lead. The impacts of the proposed development on the air quality at the nearest sensitive receptors

(neighbouring dwellings) and the L Moor SSSI were assessed and found to meet current Environment Quality Standards, which include Air Quality Objectives set by DEFRA in 2007 in line with European Directives and the Environment Act of 1995.

107. An assessment of the impact on arable crops in adjacent fields was not done, although the EHO has found no cogent reason to consider this essential.

### **Countryside and Visual Amenity**

108. The proposal is for agricultural buildings, which are not, by definition, inappropriate in a rural context. Nonetheless, the glasshouse is of substantial size and bulk being 9m high at the ridge. The other buildings and structures will collectively add to the physical presence of development on the site. The buildings will be set back well into the site, but will clearly have a material impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area. Given the design of the proposal and the configuration of the land around the site the buildings would be visually prominent unless properly screened.
109. Following concerns from officers, the site layout was amended and a revised, detailed landscaping scheme submitted. Members will see from the proposed site visit that the site is already reasonably well screened along its boundaries and is otherwise a featureless plot of land. The proposed landscaping scheme reflects the advice of the Council's Landscape Officer and will provide a wildflower meadow at the front of the site and enhance existing hedgerow planting. While it will not hide the development, it will assist in assimilating the development into the wider area and provide a good level of visual screening from the public domain along Meldreth Road in both directions and from Barrington Road to the North East. It will also provide sufficient openness in wider landscape views from the countryside.
110. The glasshouse would be lit by LED lights for most of the day and would incorporate directed lights and blackout blinds to prevent light spillage. There would also be a need for external lighting in an area that is generally unlit. The applicant's lighting assessment recognises the need to minimise light spillage to adjoining properties and it is intended that most external lighting will be turned off outside of normal working hours. A preliminary general external lighting layout has been prepared and in the absence of fully detailed proposal, a condition is required seeking approval of a full lighting scheme.
111. The proposed development is thus considered acceptable in terms of its impact on the rural character of the countryside and the visual amenity of the area. This impact should be further protected through the removal of permitted development rights for change of use of agricultural buildings. On this basis, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact on the countryside and the visual amenity of the area.

### **Biodiversity**

112. Concerns have been expressed by consultees about the potential impact of the proposed development on both the L Moor SSSI and the application site itself.
113. The SSSI covers 5Ha on the south side of Meldreth Road opposite the application site. There is a public footpath through part of the site. The habitats are grassland communities on calcareous alluvium, which are scarce in Cambridgeshire and rare in England. It contains dry areas supporting calcicole herbs, damp grassland supporting wet-loving herbs and a chalk stream with aquatic herbs. Invertebrates, scrub and adjacent hedgerows and trees are also present. Cambridgeshire Wildlife



Trust and Natural England are satisfied that the proposed development (including the borehole and storage of farmyard manure) would not damage or destroy the features for which the site has been noted provided it is implemented in accordance with the submitted details and meets the requirements of the Environment Agency.

114. Natural England has no objection in principle while the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust recommends further surveys for reptile habitat in the Spring. A Biodiversity Statement was submitted with the application in respect of the site itself. This recommended a Phase II Survey for reptiles and the inclusion of a wildlife corridor along the existing hedgerows. The amended layout retains the hedgerows and introduces tree and hedge planting along the south west boundary, which is currently open.
115. The inclusion and effective management of a wildflower meadow at the front of the site and properly controlled external lighting will help provide an improved habitat for numerous species. If the various recommendations of the Biodiversity Statement are followed, the aims and objectives are policy NE/6 will be met. This can be controlled by way of a suitably worded condition.

### **Drainage, Pollution and Contamination**

116. The past uses of the site appear to have been miscellaneous agriculture and associated activities. The Council's Scientific Officer has recommended that a contamination investigation be undertaken on the site and an investigation report and remediation methodology be produced prior to any development being carried out. On that basis, the risk from contamination of the land is considered to be acceptably mitigated.
117. The groundwater resource in this part of Cambridgeshire is an important strategic resource and critical to the public water supply. It is also significant importance to the L Moor SSSI on the south side of Meldreth Road. It is vulnerable to any development which could pollute it or prevent it from re-charging. The proposal includes measures for collecting and harvesting rainwater and for a borehole on the site. The extraction of water without a permit is limited by the Environment Agency, which is satisfied in principle subject to conditions requiring a sustainable surface water drainage scheme (which will also aid biodiversity interests) and an assessment of the hydrological and hydro-geological context of the development. Further details of the design of the silage clamp, the underground dirty water storage tank and domestic sewage discharges are also required.

### **Other Matters**

118. The application has been screened and is not considered to amount to EIA development.
119. The County Archaeology Officer has commented that the area has high archaeological potential and the surrounding area has Bronze Age and Medieval remains. The Archaeology Officer has therefore requested a condition requiring archaeological investigation prior to any development on the site.

### **Conclusion**

120. Paragraph 14 of the NPPF explains that the presumption in favour of sustainable development means granting permission unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, or policies in the NPPF indicate that development should be resisted.

121. There are number of development plan policies that support the proposal which will deliver a number of economic, social and environmental benefits. This will only be possible if a range of conditions are agreed and properly discharged before development proceeds. Notwithstanding the objections received, officers have not been able to identify sufficient harm that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Planning permission should therefore be granted.

### **Recommendation**

122. Approval subject to:

### **S106 requirements**

HGV Routing agreement (wording of agreement to be finalised)

### **Conditions**

- (a) Time limit (SC1)
- (b) Approved plans (SC95)
- (c) Materials (SC13)
- (d) Landscape implementation (SC6)
- (e) Surface Water drainage scheme (SuDS) and hydrological/hydrogeological assessment (as requested by EA)
- (f) Foul water drainage, and pollution prevention measures to protect SSSI (EA)
- (g) Contamination remediation (EA)
- (h) Surface water disposal and Infiltraton (EA)
- (i) Parking, turning, loading (SC15)
- (i) Access width
- (j) Access drainage and construction
- (k) Use of 10m radii kerbs
- (l) Closure of existing access on or before first use of new access
- (m) Visibility splays – drawing DP1 (SC21)
- (n) Construction/traffic management plan (SC92)
- (o) No more than a maximum of 20 2-way HGV movements shall enter and leave the site in any one day (07.00 - 19.00) except for two days each year where no more than 140 2-way HGV movements shall enter and leave the site in any one day. A daily record of all vehicle movements, including details of all internal and external road movements, shall be maintained by the site and made available within one week of a written request
- (p) Details of the installation, operation and maintenance of plant/equipment and a post installation operational noise performance completion report
- (q) Enclosure for the loading/unloading and storage of the open air filling material and digestate.
- (r) Removal of AD plant in the event the glasshouse is no longer required
- (s) Archaeological investigation (SC72)
- (t) Scheme for lighting (SC58)
- (u) Noise impact assessment of building(s) and associated plant / equipment and a noise insulation scheme
- (v) Working hours for use of power operated machinery during construction (SC40)
- (w) Removal of change of use Permitted Development Rights from the site (SC48)
- (x) Biodiversity measures as per recommendations in Biodiversity Statement to include phase II survey for reptiles and invertebrates

- (xi) Wildflower meadow and hedgerow ecological management plan
- (xii) Tree/hedge protection (SC8)

**Informatives (to include)**

- (a) EA Waste issues (Anaerobic digester)
- (b) EA AD Plant, silage Clamp, Underground Silage Effluent Tank, silage effluent, domestic sewage discharges
- (c) Noise impact methodology
- (d) Noise / vibration assessment and or noise insulation scheme - regard should be given to current government / industry standards, best practice and guidance

**Background Papers**

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

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

- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Development Control Policies DPD 2007
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Proposed Submission July 2013
- South Cambridgeshire Supplementary Planning Documents
- National Planning Policy Framework 2012
- Planning File Ref: S/2944/14/FL

**Report Author:** John Koch – Team Leader (West)  
Telephone: (01954) 713268