

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

3 February 2016

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

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**Application Number:** S/1714/15/FL

**Parish(es):** Dry Drayton

**Proposal:** Solar Farm and Associated Development

**Site address:** Land East and West of Battlegate Road, Childerley Farm

**Applicant(s):** Big60Million Ltd.

**Recommendation:** Delegated Approval

**Key material considerations:** Countryside  
Agricultural Land Classification  
Renewable Energy  
Landscape Character  
Heritage Assets  
Archaeology  
Ecology  
Biodiversity  
Trees and Landscaping  
Flood Risk  
Public Footpaths  
Highway Safety  
Neighbour Amenity

**Committee Site Visit:** 2 February 2016

**Departure Application:** No

**Presenting Officer:** Karen Pell-Coggins, Principal Planning Officer

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

**Date by which decision due:** 2 October 2015 (Extension of Time Agreed)

### Executive Summary

1. This proposal, as amended, is for a 50 MW solar farm with associated equipment covering an area of approximately 106 hectares of grades 2, 3a and 3b agricultural land located to the east of Battlegate Road and north of Childerley Hall, between the villages of Boxworth, Lolworth, Bar Hill, Dry Drayton and Knapewell. 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.

2. 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 result in the permanent loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land, harm landscape character, damage the setting of heritage assets, destroy important archaeological evidence, result in the loss of important trees and hedges, harm biodiversity interest, increase flood risk, be detrimental to highway safety, adversely affect the amenities of neighbours or seriously harm the amenity of public footpaths.
3. 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 limited visual harm and temporary loss of agricultural productivity.

### **Planning History**

4. S/0146/14/E1 - Request for Screening Opinion for Solar Farm - EIA not required

### **National Guidance**

5. National Planning Policy Framework  
Planning Practice Guidance

### **Development Plan Policies**

6. **South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) Development Control Policies DPD, 2007:**
  - DP/1 Sustainable Development
  - DP/2 Design of New Development
  - DP/3 Development Criteria
  - DP/7 Development Frameworks
  - NE/2 Renewable Energy
  - NE/4 Landscape Character Areas
  - NE/6 Biodiversity
  - NE/11 Flood Risk
  - NE/14 Lighting Proposals
  - NE/15 Noise Pollution
  - NE/17 Protecting High Quality Agricultural Land
  - CH/1 Historic Landscapes
  - CH/2 Archaeological Sites
  - CH/4 Development Within the Setting of a Listed Building
  - TR/1 Planning For More Sustainable Travel
  - TR/2 Car and Cycle Parking Standards
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
8. **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Submission - 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/14 Heritage Assets  
CC/2 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation  
CC/9 Managing Flood Risk  
SC/10 Lighting Proposals  
SC/11 Noise Pollution  
TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel  
TI/3 Parking Provision

## Consultation

9. **Dry Drayton Parish Council** - Recommends approval and makes the following comments: -  
“During a wide ranging discussion there was recognition of an ongoing need for clean power generation as opposed to use of fossil fuels and nuclear power. It was also felt that wind turbines would be more obtrusive on the landscape whereas the siting of this solar farm appeared to have been well thought out.  
Concerns:  
i) The sheer size of the farm (larger than Bar Hill); and significantly bigger than first planned was an issue. Worries were expressed about how the latest planned site might intrude on the homes of Childerly residents. Reducing the northern boundary might alleviate this.  
ii) It was not clear how the needs of horse riders, and walkers were to be accommodated, and bridleways and footpaths retained and maintained. This area is quiet and beautiful.  
iii) Reassurance is needed that the construction traffic for this huge site will not come through Dry Drayton.  
iv) Rainwater run-off from the panels will fall on a smaller area of ground (50% less) which may in time create run off channels significantly increasing flow to local watercourses. Has this been considered, and alleviating measures such as balancing ponds planned to prevent flooding downstream?”
10. **Boxworth Parish Council** – Recommends refusal and makes the following comments: -  
“Government Policy  
i) Government policy with regard to solar energy was clearly set out in March 2015 in a written statement to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government and we set this out in full below:  
Solar energy: protecting the local and global environment  
*Last year, the coalition government published a comprehensive solar photovoltaic strategy setting out our ambitions for the technology as an important part of the United Kingdom’s energy mix. In doing so, the strategy underlines the importance of focusing growth on domestic and commercial roof space and previously developed land.*  
*My department supported this by consulting on reforms to permitted development rights which will encourage the take up of much larger scale solar power generation (solar photovoltaic) on non-domestic buildings and complement the existing*

*flexibilities for home owners. These reforms allow for a 20-fold increase in the amount of solar that can go onto the roofs of non-domestic buildings such as warehouses and offices without having to submit a full planning application, subject to strict safeguards to protect local amenity. The proposals have been widely welcomed by the solar industry, and the measure will come into force from 15 April 2015.*

*The National Planning Policy Framework includes strong protections for the natural and historic environment and is quite clear that local councils when considering development proposals should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Yet, some local communities have genuine concerns that when it comes to solar farms insufficient weight has been given to these protections and the benefits of high quality agricultural land. As the solar strategy noted, public acceptability for solar energy is being eroded by the public response to large-scale solar farms which have sometimes been sited insensitively.*

*Meeting our energy goals should not be used to justify the wrong development in the wrong location and this includes the unnecessary use of high quality agricultural land. Protecting the global environment is not an excuse to trash the local environment. When we published our new planning guidance in support of the framework, we set out the particular factors relating to large scale ground mounted solar photovoltaic farms that a local council will need to consider. These include making effective use of previously developed land and, where a proposal involves agricultural land, being quite clear this is necessary and that poorer quality land is to be used in preference to land of a higher quality.*

*We are encouraged by the impact the guidance is having but do appreciate the continuing concerns, not least those raised in this House, about the unjustified use of high quality agricultural land. In light of these concerns we want it to be clear that any proposal for a solar farm involving the best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence. Of course, planning is a quasi-judicial process, and every application needs to be considered on its individual merits, with due process, in the light of the relevant material considerations.*

ii) The new planning guidance mentioned above reinforces this strategy. In detailing the particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider the first two bullet points are:

*\* encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;*

*\* where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.*

iii) The planning guidance also refers specifically to a speech made by the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, the Rt Hon Gregory Barker MP, to the solar PV industry on 25 April 2015. This included these passages:

*Solar is a genuinely exciting energy of the future, it is coming of age and we want to see a lot, lot more. But not at any cost.. not in any place.. not if it rides roughshod over the views of local communities.*

*So our message is very clear. And it is consistent. We have revised our subsidy structure, offering higher levels of support to building-mounted solar PV. And we will*

*do our best to spread examples of best practice, focusing deployment on buildings and brown-field land – not green-field.*

*Where solar farms are not on brownfield land, you must be looking at low grade agricultural land which works with farmers to allow grazing in parallel with generation..*

*.. incorporating well thought out visual screening..*

*.. involving communities in developing projects and bringing them with you..*

iv) Thus Government policy is very clear in stressing that large scale solar PV should be located on buildings and brownfield land as a priority and good quality agricultural land should only be used where it can be justified by the most compelling evidence.

#### Scheme Fit with Government Policy

v) The proposed solar farm is a very large scheme with a 50MW installed capacity covering 91 hectares. To put this into context in the speech by Greg Barker highlighted above he makes reference to:

*.. the 30MW Wymeswold Solar Farm in Leicestershire, the UK's largest, built on a disused World War 2 airfield.*

So this scheme is 66% bigger than the largest solar scheme in the UK as at March 2015. There is no explanation in the application as to why the scheme needs to be so big and presumably it is to maximise commercial profitability. Obviously the larger the scheme the greater the harmful impact it will have on the countryside and local people both during construction and operation.

vi) As we have shown Government policy is very clear that large solar farms should not be built on good quality agricultural land unless there is the most compelling evidence to justify the selection of the site.

vii) The site proposed is 85% comprised of high quality Grade 2 and 3a agricultural land. This is not poorer quality or previously developed land that is the Government's priority and there is no attempt in the application to provide any evidence, let alone compelling evidence, as to why this site should be chosen. The reason for its selection is purely that a willing landowner wishes to make profits from his available landholding not from any serious search of suitable sites. It is interesting to note that there is a spurious attempt to argue that because the land is farmed similarly across the site then, on average, it should be assessed as merely Grade 3. This is clearly ludicrous as a land assessment is a land assessment and you cannot 'fix' the categories to try and aid your arguments. The site is high quality agricultural land and there is no way of avoiding that fact.

viii) The report on alternative sites shows just how desperate the applicant is to try and justify what is clearly an inappropriate site. The search is restricted to a very small area either side of the overhead power line that will be used for connection to the national grid. This is patently ludicrous as a solar farm can be connected to the grid from any location and any search should have been, at the minimum, on a district wide basis. Concentrating on a small area undermines the credibility of any results and conclusions.

ix) The search criteria is then based on a requirement for an area of 100 hectares. Again with no justification of why such a large scheme is needed, such a large area will naturally reduce the apparent availability of alternative sites.

x) Then it appears that the way of identifying potential sites is by using the local development plan to find areas already earmarked for development, such as Northstowe, however these are then discarded due to lack of likely availability as they have been 'earmarked'. The whole lack of an alternative site justification is deeply flawed and can be given no weight in this determination.

xi) Finally the argument is used that because all of South Cambridgeshire has a high proportion of high quality land then the fact that this site is on high quality land does not rule it out. Another completely fallacious argument, an unsuitable site is an unsuitable site, and with solar power available anywhere in the country if South Cambs. has a lower share because of inherent constraints then so be it.

xii) We are aware of another proposed large scale solar farm (37MW) in Rutland (RCC ref: 2014/1004/MAJ) which is on another disused airfield. So there is clearly such previously developed brownfield land available for large solar farms, indeed Bourn Airfield springs to mind.

xiii) It has been claimed that the land beneath the solar panels can be used for agriculture in the form of grazing sheep. This is a fallacious argument as good quality land should be used to its best advantage and in this area that is growing good quality crops not grazing sheep. Sheep farming is normally restricted to poor quality land that is little use for any other form of farming. Where in South Cambs. does one see sheep farming?

xiv) There is no question that this application flies directly in the face of Government policy on the development of large scale solar farms. It is in conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework and planning guidance and must be refused irrespective of the planning balance of harm versus benefit.

#### Access

xv) The application identifies two potential routes for construction traffic:

- From the A14 via Boxworth High Street and Battle Gate Road

- From the A428 via St Neots Road and through Childerley Hall

There would be over 4,100 HGV movements as well as the daily travel of some 50 workers. This is a major increase in the level of traffic on the minor roads leading to the site.

xvi) The Transport Statement indicates<sup>1</sup> that the preferred route is via Battle Gate Road although there is an element of confusion in that the Heritage Statement<sup>2</sup> states that the preferred route will result in construction traffic transiting Childerley Park and on to the solar farm site via the existing metalled track running through the agricultural buildings associated with Childerley Hall.

xvii) If SCDC are minded to approve this application, to which we have strong objections, then we would ask that all construction traffic should be conditioned to use the access route through Childerley Hall and no construction traffic should be allowed to access the site through Boxworth. The very clear reasons for such a condition are:

- the access through Childerley is on land owned and controlled by the applicant. It appears that the reason for preferring the Boxworth alternative is because of potential disruption to the function business at Childerley Hall. This is an untenable stance. It is the applicant's decision to put in this planning application and he will stand to make millions of pounds over the lifetime of the scheme, if approved. To try to justify causing harm to a neighbouring village merely to retain even more profit must carry no weight. In addition a lot of the function business will be weddings at the weekend

which will minimise the disruption caused by the construction traffic. Also, given that the construction will be planned years in advance it will be perfectly possible to organise both elements to minimise any harm.

- the access through Childerley will be entirely on private land, owned by the applicant, and will pass through no villages and impact a minimal number of people. Whereas the access through Boxworth will pass through virtually the whole of the village as well as causing considerable problems to the residents of Battle Gate Road and the business at ADAS.

- Battle Gate Road is a single track road, in poor condition, with passing places only just suitable for cars. There is no way that HGVs moving in opposite directions would be able to pass without significant works to the verges and possibly hedges. In contrast the road to Childerley will require minimal work being already in good condition and used by HGV traffic travelling to and from the agricultural and commercial operations at Childerley Hall.

- the road through Boxworth is subject to a 7.5tonne vehicle restriction put in place specifically to protect the village from HGVs using it as a 'ratrun' to and from the A14. The parish is in the process of applying for Conservation Area status and the assessment has identified the level of through traffic as the main detractor to the special characteristics of the village that we wish to preserve. The significant increase in heavy traffic resulting from using this access route will cause major harm both to the character of the village and the ability of the residents to go about their day to day lives in safety.

- the right angle bends at the entrance to the village from the A14 are a major hazard particularly for HGVs which take up the whole roadway whilst turning the corners, a very dangerous manoeuvre. There have been accidents and many near misses at these bends and an additional 4,100 HGV movements will increase the risk significantly.

- the turn into Battle Gate Road by the Golden Ball pub is equally on a very sharp bend which will increase the level of risk of road traffic accidents.

xviii) Access through Boxworth and Battle Gate Road is totally unsuitable for such a high level of construction traffic. Access through Childerley using land controlled by the applicant is a much preferred option, causing significantly less harm. Any approval must condition the Childerley access as the only access route for all construction and maintenance traffic.

#### Public Rights of Way

xix) The site is right in the middle of an extensive network of public rights of way with footpaths and bridleways passing through the solar panels themselves. The area between Boxworth and the A428 is particularly attractive to many people enjoying the countryside largely because of the lack of any through roads giving the area its particular sense of tranquillity. If you travel up Battle Gate Road you will often find walkers, horse riders, including the local hunt, cyclists, dog walkers and joggers using the road and the surrounding PRowWs to relax and enjoy their particular reason for being in the countryside.

xx) The circular route from Boxworth to Loworth, Childerley and then back via Battle Gate Road is particularly popular and the massive solar farm will sit right in the middle of this walk.

xxi) The enjoyment of the countryside is a key amenity for local people particularly in a densely populated part of the country as this. This key area of green space is a benefit not just to local residents but also for Cambridge and the rapidly growing village of Cambourne.

#### Conclusion

xxii) This proposed solar farm runs directly counter to all current Government policy. It is located on prime agricultural land and there is no credible explanation as to why the site has been selected. It is not as though it is a small scheme. This will be the biggest solar farm in the country taking 91 hectares of high quality agricultural land out of production. There can be no doubt that within the district there will be alternative sites on brownfield or low quality land if a proper search was made. This site has been put forward purely because there is a willing landowner.

xxiii) As the scheme is conflict with national planning policy it must be refused.

xxiv) If SCDC are minded to approve the application then we ask that any permission is conditioned to ban any construction or maintenance traffic from using Boxworth as an access route.”

11. **Bar Hill Parish Council** – No objections.

12. **Lolworth Parish Council** - Recommends refusal and makes the following comments:

“i) It fails to comply with Government Policy

*Government policy regarding large scale ground mounted solar photovoltaic farms demands effective use of previously developed land. Where a proposal involves agricultural land, poorer quality land should be used in preference to land of a higher quality. Further, brownfield sites should be used as a priority and large solar farms should not be built on good quality agricultural land unless there is the most compelling evidence to justify the selection of the site.*

- It would appear that 85% of this exceptionally large scheme involves the use of high quality Grade 2 and 3a agricultural land. There is no explanation as to why the scheme needs to be so big, nor why high grade agricultural land should be used.
- The search for alternative sites is very limited suggesting a bias to the proposed location.
- Further, the suggestion that the land beneath the solar panels can be used for the grazing of sheep is frankly nonsensical. This type of land is best used for growing crops not grazing sheep. Sheep farming in East Anglia is not practised since the soil type is inappropriate.

ii) Public Rights of Way

The site encompasses an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways passing through the proposed solar panels themselves. In particular, the solar farm will straddle the green lane from Lolworth to Childerley. This is part of the popular circular walk which includes Battle Gate Road and Boxworth. It is also popular with cyclists since the only road into and out of Lolworth is the A14.

iii) Access



Should this application be approved, a major consideration is vehicular access for heavy goods lorries (HGVs). We firmly believe all construction traffic should use the access route through Childerley Hall and no HGVs should be allowed to access the site through Boxworth since:-

a) the access through Childerley is on land owned by the applicant. The potential disruption to the business at Childerley Hall should carry no weight since it is the applicant's decision to apply for this planning permission.

b) the alternative access through Boxworth will disrupt traffic movement through the village as well as creating significant problems to the residents of Battle Gate Road and the business at ADAS.

c) Battle Gate Road is totally unsuitable for HGVs, being a single track road with passing places. In contrast the road to Childerley is in good condition and regularly used by HGV traffic travelling to and from Childerley Hall."

iv) Conclusion

We believe this application should be refused on the grounds the scheme is in conflict with national planning policy and will have an adverse effect on the general public's enjoyment of the public rights of way.

If SCDC decide to approve the application, we firmly believe HGVs should only use the road to Childerley Hall."

13. **Landscape Design Officer** - Comments that the site is situated to the west of Dry Drayton and east of Knapwell. The site is used for agricultural purposes consisting of 3 large fields which are bounded by trees and hedgerows. It is surrounded by arable fields to the north, east and west. To the south of the site is Childerley Farm which is a Grade II Listed Park and Garden. There are a number of Public Right of Ways running through and around the boundaries with a section of a Pathfinder Long Distance Walk to the south.

At national level the site is situated within the national character area of 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands as assessed by Natural England. Landscape Characteristics of the site and the surrounding area include:

- Predominantly an arable and commercially farmed landscape.
- A wide diversity of seminatural habitats.
- A rural landscape.
- A gentle undulating topography that is divided by broad, shallow river valleys that gradually widen as they approach The Fens NCA in the east.
- Views of large-scale arable farmland across the lowland plateau in most directions and particularly from the elevated ground of the Yardley Whittlewood Ridge, Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge, East Anglian Chalk and Chilterns NCAs. Equally, the lower-lying claylands provide reciprocating views.
- Predominantly open, arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed, often species-poor hedgerows which contrast with those fields that are irregular and piecemeal.
- Smaller towns, villages and linear settlements widely dispersed throughout, giving a more rural feel. Small villages are usually nucleated around a church or village green.

- Woodland cover is generally scattered and sparse.

At regional level the site is situated within the Wooded Village Farmland as assessed by Landscape East and supported by Natural England.

- A gently rolling, elevated arable landscape with ancient woodland blocks and small, nuclear villages. Often an open landscape with long distance views, although woodland contains views particularly around settlements.
- Elevated, gently rolling landscape typically associated with broad glacial plateaux.
- Tranquility: Peaceful and rural character.
- Views: Elevation and openness means this landscape offers some long ranging views across lower lying areas. Woodland screens views in places creating more intimate feel particularly around settlements.

The site is visible from the following receptors:

Footpath 27/7 on the southern boundary from Knapwell to Childerley Farm

Bridleway 48/1 and ByWay 150/2 running north to south and through the site

Footpath 150/3 running along the northern boundary

Footpath 150/4 a continuation of 150/3 to the east of the site

Bridleway 48/4, 27/14 and Pathfinder Long Distance Walk running east – west to the south of the site

Further to a site visit with the applicant and the subsequent revised drawings, the landscape changes are welcomed and no objections are raised to the development. A number of the original landscape concerns have been addressed as follows:

- The applicant has included a mixed native woodland belt between two adjoining fields. This will strengthen a wildlife corridor from an existing copse and will reduce views of the panels particularly on the tops of slopes. The woodland belt will also filter views along the pedestrian footpath 27/7
- The solar panels are to be set back from the line of the PROW by approx.. 14m min. and screened by a new unmanaged hedge line.
- Additional tree planting and unmanaged hedgerow works are to be incorporated on the northern boundary filtering views from the Byway 150/2 (Lolworth)
- The introduction of deer fencing – a rural approach than steel security fencing

Long distance views will still be obscured by the panels particularly in the northern field. However, due to the landscape concessions made by the applicant this will be limited.

14. **Ecology Officer** - Comments that the application is supported by an ecological appraisal of the site which has assessed the farmland habitat for its value to badgers, breeding birds, reptile, amphibians and other key species associated with open farmland. No biodiversity constraints have been identified to this development commencing.

The applicant has now provided full details of the lengths of hedgerow that require removal, no objection is raised on this issue now.

The commitment to extend the copse in a southerly direction through the solar farm is very much welcomed and will make an important contribution in terms of enhancing wildlife corridors across the site.

The Biodiversity Assessment states that repeat surveys would be required for badgers prior to construction. There is no need to use a condition as the applicant has already proposed their means of monitoring for the presence of badgers.

The provision of the pollen seed mixes and specialist wild bird seed mixes is welcomed. The use of some non-native species in the pollen mix is acceptable in this context given that an objective of the site is to maximise nectar production for the bees it is supported. The use the bird seed mix is similarly welcomed.

Details of a number of animal access points beneath the fence have now been provided.

Greater consideration has now been given to the establishment phase of the site's different seed mixes which is welcomed. The cutting regimes are not exactly as suggested. However, willing to see how the establishment phase works out and adjustments to future cutting regimes can then be considered.

The site's ecological monitoring should last for the duration of the development (ie up to 25 years) the current ecology documents only commit to monitoring for the first 5 years, with the need for future monitoring "to be reviewed". *This statement is rather vague and does not commit to monitoring in the long term.* Previously requested, "The development of the biodiversity interest of the site will be monitored over time by a suitably competent ecologist; in Years 1, 2, 3, 6, 10, 15, 20 and 25 of operation. This will involve an inspection of the planted hedgerows, trees, grassland and any other ecological enhancement features to ensure that they are being managed in a manner suitable for the enhancement of wildlife interest. Bird and bat boxes will also be checked." Wishes to know what greater level of commitment can be given to monitoring the site and its evolving habitats.

The provision of a greater number of bird and bat boxes has been secured and is welcomed.

Commitment has now been given to the monitoring of farmland birds (both summer and winter) to establish baseline data on the site's current value, and that is welcomed.

Greater provision is now provided with regard to reptile and amphibian shelter across the site.

The following enhancement measures are being provided across the site:

- Conversion of arable to species-rich grasslands;
- Creation of flower seed mixes in strips to provide food resource for invertebrates;
- Enhancement of existing poor semi-improved grassland set-aside areas to increase botanically diversity to provide increased value for invertebrate and mammals;
- Installation of bird (including owl) boxes;
- Installation of hedgehog homes;
- Manage sections of hedgerow that have become tall and of poor structure;
- Planting up any gaps within hedgerows and tree planting is also recommended; and,
- Creation of woodpiles at woodland edges and in wide grassland set-aside strips for reptiles and invertebrates.

With the construction mitigation incorporated into the development all significant effects during the construction phase would be reduced to an insignificant level or removed completely.

Subject to implementation of the mitigation measures and enhancement proposals discussed in Section 7, the proposed development is capable of being accommodated without significant negative impacts on ecologically sensitive receptors within the survey area, and go further to provide biodiversity gain to the local landscape.

15. **Local Highways Authority** - Comments that the revised transport statement is acceptable subject to conditions to agree a final construction traffic management plan and a road condition survey prior to the commencement of any development.
16. **Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team** – Comments that The area has significant heritage assets. Within the proposal area are ridge and furrow remains of the medieval open fields, and a dam and fishponds at Fishponds Plantation or The Osiers. The parish boundary with Lolworth borders the site to the north) and a relict part of the northwestern Childerley parish boundary, noted as an "Intrenchment" on first edition OS mapping further south, is also within the proposal area.

Outside the application area lies Childerley Hall, a mid-16th century grand house built adjacent to an earlier moated site and between the two deserted villages of Little Childerley) and Great Childerley, at the site of the former St Mary's Church and Childerley Hall chapel. These and groups of fishponds (some infilled) are set in a Registered Park and Garden largely outlining the Deer Parks of the 16th century hall. Closer to the proposed substation lies the scheduled moated site of Overhall Grove and non-designated earthworks believed to be associated with the medieval manor.

Iron Age remains and Roman settlement evidence of previously unknown sites were found in the evaluation preceding the construction of the recent A428 widening and new road scheme. The evidence from the subsequent excavations has been published.

Comments that all pre-determination archaeological matters have now been addressed. There will be a lot of work to be covered by the recommended archaeological condition for which the mitigation statement and WSI is now in place.

17. **Natural England** - Comments that the development would not damage or destroy the interest features for which Madingley Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest has been notified.

The development would be unlikely to lead to a significant and irreversible loss of best and most versatile agricultural land as a resource for future generations. The solar panels would be secured to the ground with steel piles with limited soil disturbance and could be removed in the future with no permanent loss of agricultural land quality likely to occur provided the development is undertaken to high standards. Although some components of the development, such as the construction of a substation, may permanently affect the agricultural land quality, this would be limited to small areas. In the short term, it is recognised that it is likely there will be a loss of potential agricultural production over the whole development area. States that the District Council needs to consider whether the proposals would result

in a small scale or temporary loss of the best and most versatile land with reference to paragraph 112 of the NPPF and the NPPG.

Suggests conditions to secure appropriate agricultural land management and/or biodiversity enhancement.

Solar farms provide opportunities for the creation of new habitats such as grassland, hedges, ponds together with the incorporation of features into the design that are beneficial to wildlife such as bird nest and bat boxes. These measures would enhance biodiversity on the site. The application may also provide opportunities to enhance the character and local distinctiveness of the surrounding natural and built environment, use natural resources more sustainably and bring benefits for the local community in terms of access to nature.

18. **Conservation Officer** - Comments that Childerley Hall, Upper Farm, Lower Farm and the Chapel are all listed located in a registered park and garden, with the exception of Lower Farm. The proposed solar farm site is located to the north of these buildings and the boundary of the registered park and garden. Between the proposed site and the listed buildings, there are some large grain stores/sheds of modern construction. The main impact on the designated heritage assets is to the registered park and garden. Historically this field has been agricultural land that adjoins 'Black Park'. However the character of this part of the registered park and garden has changed due to the use of the area for large modern agricultural buildings. Due to these modern agricultural buildings and small woodland, the heritage assets are not visible from the proposed site. Therefore the impact on these heritage assets is limited.
19. **Historic England** - Comments that although there are a no highly graded historic buildings or monuments on the development site there are a number within two kilometres of it. Childerley Hall is the remnant of a large 16th century house remodelled in the 19th century; associated with it is a 17th century chapel. The churches of Boxworth, Dry Drayton, Knapwell and Lolworth are medieval buildings remodelled in various degrees, largely in the 19th century. All these buildings are listed at grade II\*. Childerley Hall sits within its gardens and park which are now registered at grade II on account of their special historic interest. At Boxworth the Overhall Grove Moated Site, in origin thought to be a castle dating from the 12th century Anarchy, is protected as a scheduled monument.

Having considered the supporting information submitted with the current application, Historic England are satisfied that whilst there are a number of highly grade historic assets within a 2km radius of the site, their significance would not be harmed as a result of the level of impact of the solar farm on their setting. The proposals are therefore in accordance with guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework and we would have no objections should your Council be minded to approve the application for a time-limited planning permission.

20. **Cambridgeshire County Council Rights of Way Team** - Comments that there are a number of public Rights of Way adjoining or crossing the site as detailed below:
- Public footpath No.7 Boxworth adjoining Battle Gate Road (width of 20ft)
  - Public footpath No.2 Childerley (width of 5ft)
  - Public Bridleway No.1 Childerley crossing the site
  - Public footpath No.4 Lolworth
  - Public footpath No.3 Lolworth

Requests that only the access to the site is from St Neots Road (formally A428)

lowering the impact on the rights of way in the area.

Welcomes the shielding landscaping and requests that all fencing is planted at the very least 2 metres away from the edge of all Public Rights of Way to reduce any "boxed in" feelings for any users of these routes. Requests that temporary screening is included in the proposals to reduce glare and lower the sight impact.

Advises that appropriate controlled crossing points are used to ensure the safety of all users over rights of way, whilst still retaining access to the public. Where there is dual usage between members of the public and plant machinery, requests that traffic regulation orders are put in place, with a forewarning to drivers to give way to members of the public, and on site signs specifying the same.

Has concerns in particular with the management of vegetation growing either side of the public rights of way and how this will be managed to keep the surface clear and safe for public use.

Requests informatives in relation to permits for the temporary closure of a public right of way, consent for changes to the surfacing of a public right of way as proposed in the application and points of law with regards to rights of way.

21. **Cambridge Ramblers** - Has concerns regarding the scale of the proposal and comments that the bridleway would be fenced from the surrounding land. Requests that there is a safe width between the fences as horses and walkers do not mix well and walkers need a good escape route if horses get out of control. Also comments that the construction traffic is to use tracks on the line of two public footpaths and this would be potentially dangerous to footpath users. Requests temporary deviations for the footpaths during construction.
22. **British Horse Society** - Comments are awaited.
23. **Cambridgeshire County Council Flood & Water Team** - Comments that the development is acceptable subject to conditions to agree a detailed surface water drainage scheme in accordance with the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and details of the implementation, management and maintenance of the approved detailed surface water drainage scheme.
24. **Environment Agency** - Comments that the submitted Flood Risk Assessment has been reviewed with reference to designated main river and tidal flood risk. The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and the main risk of flooding is from surface water which falls under the jurisdiction of the Lead Flood Authority. Has no objections on flood risk grounds. Recommends that adequate space is left between panels to ensure access to the drainage ditches for maintenance and that the panels are securely fitted to their standings.  
  
Requires a condition for the submission of a scheme for the provision and implementation of pollution control to water environment that includes surface water and foul drainage and any contamination found during development. Also requests informatives.
25. **Environmental Health Officer** - Comments are awaited.
26. **Contaminated Land Officer** - Comments that the site is being redeveloped into a low-sensitivity commercial end use (in terms of contamination) with no obvious potentially contaminative former land uses and it is not considered necessary to

require any further assessment or remediation of contamination. However, suggests a condition if any contamination is found on site during the development.

## Representations

27. The **MP for South Cambridgeshire** objects to the application on the following grounds: -

“The proposal is contrary to paragraphs 98 and 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The effect on the visual amenity of the area will in my opinion cause significant harm which cannot be made acceptable during the substantial period that landscaping proposals will require to mature. Indeed the landscaping mitigation may take up to 10 years to fully mature which is a third of the lifetime of the development. Even after this period the array will still be visible from a variety of points but most importantly it will destroy the rural landscape on the approach and at the point that a national long distance walk and other recreation trails directly meet the installation. An alien, overtly utilitarian and industrial landscape will be created by the imposition of the solar array within this tranquil rural environment. The impact on visual amenity travelling adjacent to and through the array cannot be mitigated and will have a lasting negative effect for the lifetime of the development.

The NPPF paragraph 17 sets out 12 core planning principles which should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The sixth core planning principle supports *‘the transition to a low carbon future...and encouraging the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources..’* The fifth principle, however, also requires that decision-takers should *‘take account of the different roles and character of different areas ... recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside..’*

In respect of renewable energy the NPPF states at paragraph 98 that local planning authorities should *‘approve the application (unless material considerations indicate otherwise) if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.’* It is my view that the proposal cannot be made acceptable in terms of Paragraph 109 of the NPPF which affirms that the planning system *‘should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

*‘Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;’*

The Government’s policy on solar energy is set out in its published strategy; UK Solar PV Strategy Part 2: Delivering a Brighter Future (April 2014). This acknowledges the significant contribution that solar energy can make in meeting the UK’s target of 15% renewable energy of gross final consumption by 2020 and in supporting the decarbonisation of the economy in the longer term. However, it also recognises in the third of four guiding principles that *‘Support for solar PV should ensure proposals are appropriately sited, give proper weight to environmental considerations such as landscape and visual impact ... local amenity, and provide opportunities for local communities to influence decisions that affect them’.*

Government policy is clearly focused on directing large scale solar renewable energy installations towards brownfield or non-agricultural land. This is in accordance with NPPF paragraph 111 which requires that planning decisions should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land which has previously been developed. The solar farm proposal at land East of Battle Gate Road, Childerley, self-evidently constitutes a large scale solar installation which is proposed to be located predominantly on high grade agricultural land creating a loss of approximately 100 ha of land for production

of arable crops

The harm generated by the development to the landscape character of the area, caused by the alien and utilitarian design and structure of the array, will be significant especially as this location is in the open countryside but in close proximity to three rural villages. Although significant benefits in the generation of renewable energy are delivered by the proposal, adverse impacts to both landscape character and visual amenity cannot be made acceptable within a reasonable timeframe and therefore outweighs the benefits the scheme provides and so I urge members to refuse this application.”

28. The **Local Member** objects to the application on the same grounds as Boxworth Parish Council.
29. Approximately 30 letters of representations have been received from **local residents** in relation to the application. They raise the following concerns: -
- i) Solar energy should be focussed upon roofs of existing buildings or previously developed land and if on greenfield land, avoiding the best and most versatile agricultural land and using poorer quality land. The majority of the site is the best and most versatile agricultural land.
  - ii) Search for alternative sites limited to those of similar size.
  - iii) Limited community involvement.
  - iv) Adverse effect on the landscape and on the visual impact to walkers, cyclists, joggers, dog walkers and horse riders because of the high number of footpaths and bridleways surrounding and bisecting the site including loss of long distance panoramic views across the fens towards Ely.
  - v) Loss of amenity of countryside.
  - vi) Limited consideration of views from properties on Battlegate Road.
  - vii) Impact upon highway safety as a result of access through Boxworth due to bendy roads and Battlegate Road due to narrow width and poor state of repair.
  - viii) Impact of traffic upon listed buildings in Boxworth and the safety of school children due to narrow pavements.
  - ix) Proximity of substation to Site of Special Scientific Interest.
  - x) Scale of development.
  - xi) Impact upon byway used by horses in terms of noise, access materials and traffic may affect business.
  - xii) Noise from panels.
  - xiii) Ground heat generation.
  - xiv) Overdevelopment in area due to Cambourne, Northstowe, Bourn Airfield proposal and changes to the A14.
  - xv) Loss of value to residential properties.

### **Site and Surroundings**

30. The site is located outside of any village framework and in the countryside. It measures approximately 106 hectares in area and consists of three fields of arable land and a track. The majority of the fields are separated and surrounded by hedges. There are two small woodlands immediately to the east and south of the site. The nearest settlements are Boxworth 1.1 to the north west, Lolworth 1.3km to the north east, Bar Hill 0.8km to the north east, Dry Drayton 1.3km to the east and Knapwell 1.5km to the west.
31. The site is situated within the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands Landscape Character Area on grade 2 (very good), grade 3a (very good to moderate) and grade



3b (moderate) agricultural land belonging to Childerley Farm, Dry Drayton.

32. It lies to the north of Childerley Hall Registered Grade II\* Historic Park and Garden that comprises a number of listed buildings including the grade II\* Childerley Hall, grade II\* chapel, grade II Upper Farm and grade II Lower Farm. It is also situated 1km to the south east of the Overhall Grove Moated Site Scheduled Ancient Monument.
33. The site is situated 900 metres to the east of the Overhaul Grove Site of Special Scientific Interest, 1.7 km to the east of the Knapwell Road Side Verges County Wildlife Site and 2.2 km to the north east of the Knapwell Wood County Wildlife Site.
34. A number of public rights of way cross and run along the boundaries of the site. It lies within Flood Zone 1 (low risk). Electricity pylons run across the site east to west. It is situated within close proximity to Bourn Airfield.

### **Proposal**

35. This full planning application, received on 3 July 2015 as amended, proposes the installation of 50MW of solar photovoltaic farm for a temporary period of 30 years. The development would include the erection of the arrays of photovoltaic panels along with 26 power conditioning units, 5 collecting stations, 6 energy storage containers, 2 general storage containers, wind and irradiation sensors, monitoring system, access tracks, underground cabling, security fencing and pole mounted CCTV cameras. A new substation would be located adjacent to the grid connection point. Three construction compounds would be provided for a period of approximately 24 weeks during the installation of the farm. Access would be from the A428 via Childerley Hall.
36. The photovoltaic panels would be mounted on steel frames that are angled at 15 degrees to face south. There would be arrays of panels running east to west across the site. They would have a maximum height of approximately 2.7 metres and be set 3.7 to 6 metres apart. The wind and irradiation sensors would be mounted on the arrays.
37. The power conditioning units would be located within the arrays and measure 11.23 metres in length, 1.98 metres in width and 3 metres in height (double x 25) and 6.4 metres in length, 1.98 metres in width and 3 metres in height (single x 1).
38. The collecting stations would be sited close to the overhead power line and measure 8.3 metres in length, 3.1 metres in width and 2.9 metres in height. The buildings would also have a basement 0.8 metres below ground level.
39. Communication boxes that house the monitoring system and antennae would be located with each collecting station. A 3 metre high monitoring camera would be located within the solar arrays.
40. The energy storage containers and general storage containers would measure 12.2 metres in length, 2.4 metres in width and 2.6 metres in height. The energy storage containers would each have a capacity of 1MW.
41. The operations and maintenance access track within the site that would lead from Battlegate Road to the A428 would measure 6 metres in width.
42. The underground cables would be encased in a trench to a depth of 1.2 metres.
43. A security fence that measures 2 metres in height and consists of timber posts with

steel deer fencing would surround each field. A number of CCTV poles at a height of 3.5 metres would be erected around the perimeter of the site.

44. The substation would be located 800 metres to the west of the solar farm. It would comprise a switchroom (6.8 metres in length, 4.5 metres in width and 3.5 metres in height), outbuilding (2.4 metres in length, 3 metres in width and 2.4 metres in height), power plants (5.7 metres in height) and a gantry (9.1 metres in height). It would be surrounded by a 2.4 metre high steel palisade fence. An access track measuring 4 metres in width would lead to the substation from Battlegate Road.
45. Two temporary construction compounds would be provided to the south and one would be provided at the substation to the west. Each would accommodate storage for equipment and staff facilities.

### **Planning Assessment**

46. 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 best and most versatile agricultural land, 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**

47. The proposal represents a major development for the generation of renewable energy and as such receives considerable support from national and local planning policy.
48. 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.
49. 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.
50. 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.
51. The installation of a solar farm is considered to represent appropriate development within the countryside providing that there are no suitable sites available on previously developed land or lower grade agricultural land in the area of the scale required and the proposal would not result in the permanent loss of high quality agricultural land

## **Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land**

52. The site covers approximately 106 hectares of arable land. An Agricultural Land Classification Report has been submitted following soil sampling that states the site has an agricultural land classification of grades 2 (very good), 3a (good to moderate) and 3b (moderate).
53. The has site has 37% grade 2 (very good), 48% grade 3a (good to moderate), 13% grade 3b (moderate) and 2% grade 4 (poor) agricultural land classification. 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. The whole of the district comprises predominantly grade 2 and 3a agricultural land so it would be difficult to contribute to renewable energy in the area without the use of some of this land. Brownfield and previously developed land sites of the scale required within the distance required from the grid connection to ensure that the development is commercially viable have been ruled out for reasons such as allocations for new development, existing mineral uses, proximity to residential properties, unknown availability and greater distance from the point of connection. These sites have covered the district and the adjoining districts.
54. Furthermore, the proposal is not considered to result in the irreversible loss of this land given that it could be returned to its original agricultural use when there is no further need for the development. The 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 and/or biodiversity gain to retain the agricultural use throughout the life of the development.

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

55. 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 low height of the development and new planting that is proposed to screen the development and mitigate its impact upon the landscape from long distance views and close views from the public rights of way that cross and surround the site.
56. The site is located within the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands Landscape Character Area. The distinctive features of this area are a predominantly arable and commercially farmed landscape, a wide diversity of semi-natural habitats, a rural landscape, a gently undulating topography with broad, shallow river valleys, views of large scale arable farmland across the lowland plateau, an open arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed open species poor hedgerows that contrast with fields that are irregular and piecemeal, and woodland cover is scattered and sparse. 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 characteristic features and provide additional planting that would be designed to ensure it is in keeping with the visual qualities of the area. The development is not therefore considered to have an unacceptable impact upon landscape character.
57. The nearest solar farm to the site where the cumulative impact of the development needs to be taken into consideration is at Bourn at a distance of 4.5 km away. The

existing solar farm at Bourn and the proposed solar farm would not be visible from the same viewpoints or sequentially along the same public rights of way or roads within close proximity of each other.

### **Heritage Assets**

58. The site is located adjacent to the Childerley Hall Registered Grade II\* Historic Park and Garden that comprises a number of listed buildings including the grade II\* Childerley Hall, grade II\* chapel, grade II Upper Farm and grade II Lower Farm. It is also situated 1km to the south east of the Overhall Grove Moated Site Scheduled Ancient Monument.
59. Although the development would cause some degree of harm to the setting of the nearby heritage assets, the harm would not affect their significance given that they would be separated by woodland and their settings are already compromised by modern farm buildings.
60. The site is located within an area of high archaeological potential due to the number of heritage assets in the area and the development may destroy important archaeological features. A written scheme of investigation and mitigation statement has been submitted and agreed by the Historic Environment Team. A condition would be attached to any consent to ensure that the proposal would be carried out in accordance with these documents to ensure that the development would not damage or destroy any important features of archaeological interest.

### **Biodiversity**

61. The habitats on the site and immediately adjacent the site comprise a mixture of arable land, trees, hedgerows, grassland, a pond and dry ditches. It is located 900 metres to the east of the Overhaul Grove Site of Special Scientific Interest, 1.7 km to the east of the Knapwell Road Side Verges County Wildlife Site and 2.2 km to the north east of the Knapwell Wood County Wildlife Site.
62. The habitats on the site are considered of low ecological value. The development would result in the loss of two small gaps of hedgerow. The woodlands and hedgerows have the potential to support dormice although there are limited local records of such species. These would be retained and protected as part of the development.
63. The trees within and adjacent to the site may provide suitable cavities to support roosting bats. These would be retained and protected within the development.
64. The hedgerows, semi-improved grassland and woodlands within an adjoining the site provide a suitable habitat for reptiles, hedgehogs and birds such as woodpeckers. No reptiles were seen during the survey but birds were found nesting in the trees and hedgehogs are likely to be present. These habitats would be retained and protected within the development. Grass strips for reptiles and hedgehog houses would be provided to mitigate the impact.
65. The small pond and dry ditches adjacent to the site would provide a suitable Great Crested Newt and water vole habitat. The nearest recorded Great Crested Newts were 1.8km from the site. The nearest water voles recorded were 1.5km from the site. These habitats would be retained.
66. An outlier badger sett was identified on the site and the woodland and hedgerows

adjacent and within the site provide opportunities for badger setts and foraging. A condition would be attached to any consent to secure a further survey to be carried out prior to the commencement of development to assess the site for setts and determine whether any mitigation measures are necessary.

67. Breeding birds such as skylark were found nesting in the arable fields. These would be lost as part of the development. However, mitigation measures such as the provision of bird boxes would be a condition of any consent.
68. The development would also result in habitat enhancement through the conversion of arable land to species rich grassland, the enhancement of the semi-improved grassland, creation of flower seed mixes in strips, gapping up existing hedges, management of hedges and new tree planting.
69. The development would not adversely affect the interest features of the nearby Site of Special Scientific Interest or County Wildlife Sites due to the distance from the site.

### **Landscaping/Trees**

70. 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.

### **Highway Safety**

71. Access to the site during construction and decommissioning (as amended) would be via the existing access to the south of Childerly Hall off St Neots Road (former A428). This is a through road leading from Hardwick to Bourn and Cambourne and has a speed limit of 60 miles per hour.
72. The Construction Traffic Management Plan (as amended) shows the access route to the site during construction and demonstrates that vehicles would access the site via St Neots Road (former A428) and not need to travel through nearby villages to access the wider highway network. During the 24 week construction period, the traffic generation is estimated at a maximum of 35 HGV/LGV deliveries per day. There would also be movements from site personnel that would be a maximum of 50 trips per day.
73. Decommissioning would have a lesser scale of movements than construction. 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. Conditions would be attached to any consent to agree a final construction traffic management plan to agree details such as warning signs and condition survey of Battlegate Road to ensure that it is reinstated to the condition prior to the development.
74. Access to the site for the maintenance of the site after construction and prior to decommissioning (as amended) would be via Battlegate Road in Boxworth. This is a long narrow no through road with a speed limit of 60 miles per hour.

75. Although this access route would be through the village of Boxworth, it would result in a maximum of 20 trips per year and consist of a transit van or 4 x4 vehicle. This is considered acceptable for these purposes.

### **Flood Risk**

76. The site is located approximately 200 metres to the west of the nearest main watercourse and there are drains running through the site. It lies within Flood Zone 1 (low risk).
77. The Flood Risk Assessment submitted with the application sets out the surface water drainage strategy for the site that includes panels with gaps at regular intervals to allow a more even distribution to the ground beneath the panels and surface water run-off follow the natural topography of the land and collect in existing drainage ditches on the site. The buildings would be surrounded by gravel drains and the accesses would be constructed from permeable materials. The development is therefore unlikely to increase the risk of flooding to the site and surrounding area.

### **Residential Amenity**

78. The nearest residential properties to the site are located approximately 200 metres away at Childerley Hall Cottages. The development would not result in a significant increase in noise and disturbance from the development as the inverters would consist of a low level hum at a level of 37.82 decibels at a distance of 100 metres. This is clearly below the BS standard of 65 decibels that is the maximum ambient threshold level normally experienced by residents. It would also not lead to an unduly overbearing mass to these properties given the distance and that woodland would screen the development from view.
79. The construction and decommissioning access would run past Childerley Hall and Mill Yard. The development would not result in an unacceptable increase in the level of noise and disturbance to these properties given that the construction period would be for a limited time only and delivery times would be between 07.00 hours and 19.00 on weekdays and 07.00 hours and 14.00 hours on Saturdays.
80. The only emissions from the development would be from vehicles that would be for a temporary period during construction and decommissioning and limited during the operation of the installation.

### **Other Matters**

81. The development is not considered to have an unacceptable impact upon the public rights of way through the site as the fence appears to be sited at least 2 metres from the edge of the public rights of way surrounding and crossing the site. This would be attached as an informative to any consent. Temporary screening is not considered reasonable as the solar panels would cause limited glare and would not have an unacceptable impact upon the users of the public rights of way for significant periods of time given the existing screening on the site. An informative would be attached to any consent to ensure that pedestrians are given priority where an access crosses the public rights of way.
82. The applicants have carried out community engagement in the form of 2300 information leaflets to local residents in the area and key stakeholders, a public exhibition at Dry Drayton Village Hall that was advertised on the information leaflets and in the local newspaper and meetings with Parish Councils and key stakeholders.

This level of engagement is considered satisfactory.

83. The loss of views from residential properties and the potential effect upon the value of the property are not planning considerations that can be taken into account in the determination of the application.
84. The panels would generate the electricity from the solar panels to the grid via underground cables. The heat would not be generated
85. The development would be located a significant distance away from the developments of Bourn Airfield, Northstowe and the A14 and would not have an unacceptable cumulative impact upon the area.

### **Recommendation**

86. Officers recommend that the Committee approves the application subject to the following conditions:-

### **Conditions**

- (a) 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.)
- (b) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Plan numbers to be confirmed.  
(Reason - To facilitate any future application to the Local Planning Authority under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.)
- (c) The development, hereby permitted, shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition or to a condition to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority on or before 30 years of the date of the first operational use of the development 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.)
- (d) 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.)
- (e) 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.)

- (f) 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.)
- (g) 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.)
- (h) No development shall take place within the area indicated until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with the approved written scheme of investigation (to be confirmed) which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

The programme of archaeological works will commence with a field evaluation of the application area. The significance of the archaeological evidence will be determined by the Local Authority's Archaeological Advisor using field observations made during a monitoring visit(s) and the reports of results of



any non-intrusive surveys.

With regard to photovoltaic panels: PV panels will be either surface mounted (eg use of concrete shoes) in any area in which significant archaeological remains are present, or removed from the grid to enable a total avoidance strategy in sensitive archaeological areas. In areas found not to contain archaeological remains, or where they are of low significance, the PV panels may be mounted on standard piles (eg H-shaped, round or screw).

With regard to cable trenches and substations/associated groundworks: These areas will be subject to excavation in areas where archaeological remains of moderate significant are established through the trench-based evaluation. Cable trenches will not be permitted to be cut through areas of archaeological remains of high significance: re-routing will be required.

Note: In the event of archaeological evidence of national importance being found, or where human cemetery evidence is present, construction impacts of any kind (including temporary works) will not be permitted.

(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.)

- i) No development shall commence until a final construction traffic management plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.  
(Reason - In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policy DP/3 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- j) No development shall be carried out until a Condition Survey of Battlegate Road has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Within three months of the completion of the construction of the development and within three months of the decommissioning of the development, Battlegate Road shall be reinstated to its former condition as set out in the approved Condition Survey.  
(Reason - In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policy DP/3 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- (k) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the Landscape and Biodiversity Management Plan reference (to be confirmed).  
(Reason - To achieve biodiversity enhancement on the site in accordance with adopted Policies DP/1, DP/3 and NE/6 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)
- (l) Development shall not begin until a detailed surface water drainage scheme for the site, based on the agreed Flood Risk Assessment Ref: REP/100/14 dated July 2015 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall subsequently be implemented in accordance with the approved details before the development is completed.  
(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.)
- (m) No development shall take place until details of the implementation;

maintenance and management of the surface water drainage scheme have been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented and thereafter managed and maintained in accordance with the approved details.

(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.)

- (n) 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.)
- (o) No site or plant machinery shall be operated, no noisy works shall be carried out and no construction related deliveries taken or dispatched from the site except between 0800 hours and 1800 hours Mondays to Fridays and between 0800 hours and 1300 hours on Saturdays, and not at any time on Sundays and Bank Holidays.  
(Reason - To minimise noise disturbance for adjoining residents in accordance with Policy NE/15 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007.)

#### **Informative**

- (a) Public rights of way

#### **Background Papers:**

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 Development Framework Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's)
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Submission 2014
- Planning File References: S/1714/15/FL

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