

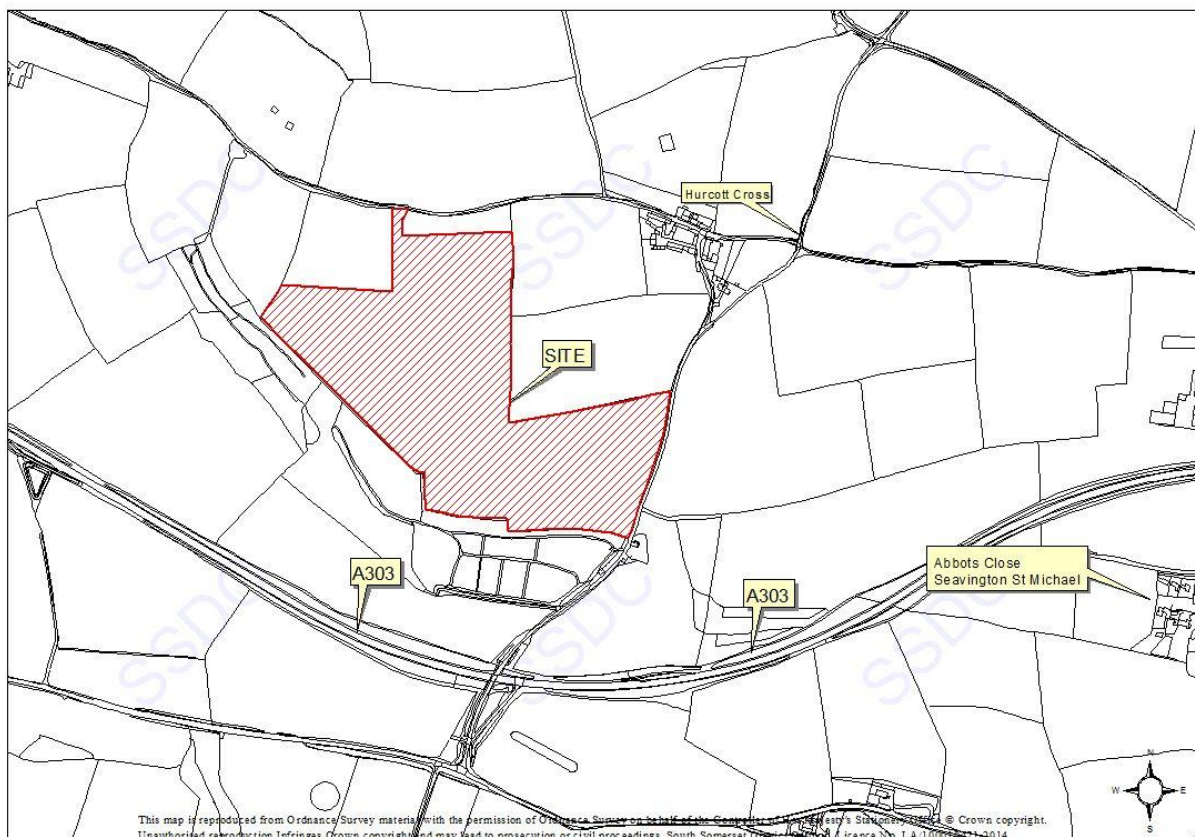
Officer Report On Planning Application: 14/02977/FUL

Proposal :	Installation of up to 10MW ground mounted photovoltaic solar energy generating system (GR 339249/115679)
Site Address:	Land To North Of Hurcott Copse Boxstone Hill Hurcott
Parish:	Whitelackington
ILMINSTER TOWN Ward (SSDC Member)	Cllr C Goodall Cllr K T Turner
Recommending Case Officer:	Linda Hayden Tel: 01935 462534 Email: linda.hayden@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	9th October 2014
Applicant :	Mr Chris Wilson
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Mr Andrew Troup Milegate 64 Ltd 22 South Audley Street London W1K 2NY
Application Type :	Major Other f/space 1,000 sq.m or 1 ha+

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The size of the proposed development is such that under the Scheme of Delegation the application must be determined by Committee. The Committee is advised that the site sits mostly within Area West but part is within Area North; all of the Area North members have been advised of the application and given the opportunity to comment.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL



This application is seeking planning permission to erect a 10MW solar farm on an 18.5 hectare site to generate electricity to feed into the national grid over a 30-year period, after which time the infrastructure will be removed and the land restored.

The site is located immediately to the north of Hurcott Copse, which forms part of the Dillington Estate located 2km to the north-east of the main estate. The application site covers three agricultural fields (grades 2, 3a and 3b) covering 18.5 hectares in area and is in an isolated open countryside location remote from any defined development areas with access currently derived via an existing farm entrance to the north of the central field. The site lies on relatively level land at the head of a plateau with a dense wooded copse to the south and mature hedging running along the north of the fields and to the east and west. There are no public footpaths within or near to the site.

The scheme seeks to erect photovoltaic panels to be mounted on metal posts driven into the ground with a maximum overall height of 2.3m, orientated to face south and arranged into rows aligned in a west to east direction. The ground beneath will be left to grass over to allow the land to be grazed. Other associated infrastructure includes inverter housing, transformer, switchgear buildings, security fencing, security cameras, access track and new hedges and landscaping.

This application is supported by the following documents:

- Design and Access Statement
- Landscape and Visual Assessment
- Ecological Assessment
- Construction Environmental Management Plan
- Site Selection Process

RELEVANT HISTORY

14/02465/EIASS: Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening request in relation to a proposed solar farm. EIA not required.

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decision must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of determining current applications the Local Planning Authority considers that the relevant development plan primarily comprises the saved policies of the adopted South Somerset Local Plan (2006). However, the emerging Local Plan which will replace the adopted Local Plan is in an advanced stage of adoption. The proposed 'Submission South Somerset Local Plan (2006 - 2028)' was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Independent Examination in January 2013. A series of Examination Hearing Sessions were held during May and June 2013, which resulted in the Inspector issuing a Preliminary Findings Letter to the Council outlining some issues of concern. The Examination resumed in June 2014 following additional work being undertaken by the Council to address the Inspector's concerns. It is anticipated that the emerging Local Plan will be ready for adoption early in 2015. Having regard to the advanced stage in the adoption of the emerging Local Plan, emerging policies can be afforded some weight in determining the application.

Saved Policies of the Local Plan 2006:

ST3 - Development Areas
ST5 - General Principles of Development
ST6 - The Quality of Development
EC1 - Protecting the Best Agricultural Land
EC3 - Landscape Character
EC8 - Protected Species
EH1 - Development Proposals Affecting the Setting of Listed Buildings

Policies of Submission South Somerset Local Plan (2006 - 2028)

EQ1 - Addressing Climate Change in South Somerset
EQ2 - Design
EQ3 - Biodiversity

International and European Policy Context

There are a range of International and European policy drivers that are relevant to the consideration of renewable energy developments. Under the Kyoto Protocol 1997, the UK has agreed to reduce emissions of the 'basket' of six greenhouse gases by 12.5% below 1990 levels by the period 2008-12.

Under the Copenhagen Accord (2010), the UK, as part of the EU, has since agreed to make further emissions cuts of between 20% and 30% by 2020 on 1990 levels (the higher figure being subject to certain caveats). This agreement is based on achieving a reduction in global emissions to limit average increases in global temperature to no more than 2°C.

The draft European Renewable Energy Directive 2008 states that, in 2007, the European Union (EU) leaders had agreed to adopt a binding target requiring 20% of the EU's energy (electricity, heat and transport) to come from renewable energy sources by 2020. This Directive is also intended to promote the use of renewable energy across the European Union. In particular, this Directive commits the UK to a target of generating 15% of its total energy from renewable sources by 2020.

National Policy Context

At the national level, there are a range of statutory and non-statutory policy drivers and initiatives which are relevant to the consideration of this planning application. The 2008 UK Climate Change Bill increases the 60% target in greenhouse gas emissions to an 80% reduction by 2050 (based on 1990 levels). The UK Committee on Climate Change 2008, entitled 'Building a Low Carbon Economy', provides guidance in the form of recommendations in terms of meeting the 80% target set out in the Climate Change Bill, and also sets out five-year carbon budgets for the UK. The 2009 UK Renewable Energy Strategy (RES) provides a series of measures to meet the legally-binding target set in the aforementioned Renewable Energy Directive. The RES envisages that more than 30% of UK electricity should be generated from renewable sources.

The 2003 Energy White Paper provides a target of generating 40% of national electricity from renewable sources by 2050, with interim targets of 10% by 2010 and 20% by 2020. The 2007 Energy White Paper contains a range of proposals which address the climate change and energy challenge, for example by securing a mix of clean, low carbon energy sources and by streamlining the planning process for energy projects. The Planning and Energy Act 2008 is also relevant in that it enables local planning authorities (LPAs) to set requirements for energy use and energy efficiency in local plans.

UK Solar Strategy Part 2: Delivering a Brighter Future (April 2014)

Sets out advice in relation to large scale ground-mounted solar PV farms and suggests that LPAs will need to consider:-

- encouraging the effective use of land by focusing 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.
- that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;
- the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;
- the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;
- the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;
- the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;
- the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.

National Planning Policy Framework

Part 1 - Building a strong, competitive economy

Part 3 - Supporting a prosperous rural economy

Part 7 - Requiring good design

Part 10 - Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Part 11 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Part 12 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The NPPF outlines that local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources. They should:

- have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources;
- design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts;
- consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure the development of such sources; and
- identify opportunities where development can draw its energy supply from

decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for collocating potential heat customers and suppliers.

The NPPF further advises that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should:

- not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
- approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should also expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.

The NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should aim to:

- avoid noise from giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life as a result of new development;
- mitigate and reduce to a minimum other adverse impacts on health and quality of life arising from noise from new development, including through the use of conditions; and
- identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason.

In determining applications, the NPPF states that local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

It is considered that the main thrust of the NPPF is to positively support sustainable development, and there is positive encouragement for renewable energy projects. However the NPPF reiterates the importance of protecting important landscapes, especially Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as well as heritage and ecology assets.

Other Material Considerations

South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy:

Goal 1 - Safe and Inclusive

Goal 3 - Healthy Environments

Goal 4 - Quality Public Services

Goal 5 - High Performance Local Economy

Goal 7 - Distinctiveness

Goal 8 - Quality Development

Goal 10 - Energy

Goal 11 - Environment

South Somerset Carbon Reduction and Climate Change Adaption Strategy 2010- 2014

CONSULTATIONS

Whitelackington Parish Meeting: (majority of site is within this parish):

No response received.

Seavington St Michael and St Mary Parish Council: (Parish with remainder of site):

No objections.

Shepton Beauchamp Parish Council: (adjacent Parish):

' express real concern about good quality agricultural land being used for this purpose and it is of the opinion of some that it will be an eyesore and blight the landscape. Dillington Estates have already installed a huge number of these panels near Stocklinch and we wonder how much more of the estate is to be turned over for this purpose. We live in an area of exceptional quality land and once this is used it won't be handed back for agricultural purposes. The field in question has just produced wheat this year - it appears to be a healthy crop - so why?'

County Highway Authority:

No objections subject to conditions relating to construction traffic management plan, condition survey and road cleaning during construction.

Landscape Officer:

'I have read through the material submitted in support of the above application, which seeks consent for a 10MW solar array to the north of Hurcott Copse, predominantly in the parish of Whitelackington, but extending east into Seavington. I am also familiar with the site and its wider landscape context.

National planning policy supports the development of renewable energy projects, providing there is no unacceptable adverse impact upon the landscape. Recent appeal decisions relating to PV array within the district have placed an emphasis upon containment of the visual profile of solar sites when positively determining the appeals. Consequently I consider that the prime landscape concerns will be;

- 1) the impact upon landscape character, particularly relative to the scale and pattern of the local landscape;
- 2) the potential visibility of the proposal, especially as viewed from sensitive receptors;
- 3) the potential for cumulative impacts to arise, and;
- 4) achieving a site layout and design that is landscape-sympathetic.

This application includes a detailed landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) which considers the extent of likely impacts upon the surrounding landscape that may arise from the installation of this proposal. Looking at the proposal before us, with that evaluation to hand, I would comment;

(1) The application site lays over relatively level ground at the head of a local plateau, and is proposed to extend across 3 arable fields, which are typical of the scale and open-ness of the fields that lay over the heads and upper shoulders of these local low hills. They are typically defined by low-managed hedgerows that correspond in most part to a rectilinear field pattern, but are also bounded to the southwest and south by escarpment woodland. Both the woodland and hedges offer a substantive degree of enclosure, and this is noted by the L&VIA as usefully providing screening of the site.

It is apparent that the proposal disrupts neither the fabric nor the pattern of the landscape, and landscape components within and defining the site will remain in evidence. Also to advantage is the correspondence of the array arrangement with the uniformity of the immediate field pattern; the east-west emphasis of the site; and the relatively flat topography, which enables the array to nestle on the head of the plateau without encroachment into a more varied topography or different landscape type. I also note that an array is a passive element in the landscape, generating neither sound nor movement. I view these elements of the proposal as positive.

Conversely, it is acknowledged that PV panel forms within security fencing can be viewed as being 'industrial' in character. Such character is at variance with this landscape setting, which has a clear sense of rural character as expressed by the pattern and strength of the hedgerow network; its enclosed farmland; and a low-level of development presence. The few development features that are found within the locality are of agricultural scale, hence there is some incongruity of scale when considered alongside this 18.5ha proposal. Whilst this element of character-impact is of concern, balancing the above positive factors, in tandem with the scheme of landscape mitigation that is submitted as part of the proposal, incline me to view the overall landscape impact as acceptable.

(2) Turning to visual impact, whilst no zone of visual influence (ZVI) is offered, it is apparent that local viewpoints onto the site are primarily restricted to the raised ground above (east of) Stocklinch, and rising land to the west and south of Seavington St Mary. The site is otherwise visually contained, by its enclosing vegetation, and intervening shoulders of ground that restrict prospect of the site.

The LVIA offers a visual appraisal utilising 15 representative vantage points (appendix 1 part 2) with the visual impact upon each receptor evaluated fully in para 7.7. It concludes that visibility is limited to the immediate roadsides only where gaps/openings in the hedge occur; from the higher ground above Stocklinch - from the head of the Lynchetts, and the right of way adj. the covered reservoir - where part of Field 1 can be glimpsed; and from the west end of Seavington St Mary and its adjacent footpaths, which have a prospect of the southeast corner of Field 3. Where potential visual impact is noted, mitigation is proposed by (a) limiting the extent of the array to avoid the visible areas of fields 1 and 3; (b) allowing the hedges to draw up; (c) planting two new hedgerows, to intervene in the views from the north toward field 1, and; (d) woodland planting linking with Hurcott Copse, to close views toward field 3 from Seavington. With such mitigation in place, then the LVIA states that no significant visual impact is identified for any receptor.

I have reviewed the findings of the visual assessment, with which I broadly concur. It is clear that the extent of visibility is limited, contained by the local hedgerow pattern and escarpment woodlands. The proposed placement of the array, and landscape mitigation, will further reduce visual impact, to an extent that I am satisfied that the array proposal will not create a lasting adverse visual impact upon the local landscape. I am also satisfied that there will be no adverse impacts upon the settings of local listed buildings, due to the extent of visual and physical separation between them and the site - most notably the closest, Hurcott Farm, 250 m min distance to the NE.

(3) Relative to potential cumulative impact, there is an existing solar array circa 1.2km to the west, laying in the vale base by Parsonage Barn. Whilst in close proximity, the sites are separated by the rise of the ground over Atherstone Hill, and are located within in separate landscape types, to thus avoid additional footprint within a shared landscape. A potential view of both sites from the Stocklinch Lynchetts is minimal only, and intended mitigation will reduce visibility of this proposal to nil. Consequently I consider that a sense of array proliferation within the locality is not at a point where it is adversely impacting upon local character, and

given the topographic and visual separation of the sites, it is not anticipated that cumulative impact will be an issue with this application.

(4) Turning to site detail, I note that the array will stand between 1.9 and 2.3 metres above ground level, which is a factor assisting its low visual profile. It appears that no site levelling works are intended, and PV mounting is limited to a fixed racking system with its toes driven into the ground without need for concrete. A 1.8 metre tall fence of reinforced wire mesh on wooden poles, along with CCTV cameras (but no lighting) provides site security. Inverter structures are located within the array layout, and are to be finished in suitable dull tones to thus minimise visual impact. The field surface will be seeded as grassland, to be managed either by a hay-cut or grazing. I view these details as positive factors toward ensuring the PV installation can be accommodated without undue site impact.

Looking at the application overall, whilst the location selected is not related to existing development form, and projects some incongruity of character within this agricultural landscape, I would acknowledge that the scale of the proposal has the potential to be accommodated within the context of the hilltop fields without undue impact, and the site's visual profile is low in most part. Its limited visibility can be further played down by landscape mitigation. Mindful that national government guidance is heavily weighted in favour of renewables, and that LPAs are urged to approve renewable energy schemes providing impacts can be made acceptable, then I do not consider the extent of landscape and visual impact to be sufficiently adverse to enable an over-riding landscape objection to be raised.

From a landscape standpoint the only detailed information still required is;

- (a) Grid connection detail, which to be satisfactory, should be confirmed to be local and underground, and;
- (b) The finished details of CCTV installations - to be matt, and of subdued tone.

If you are minded to approve the application, could you please condition;

- 1) a detailed landscape mitigation plan to be submitted pre-commencement, based upon the fig 5 masterplan within the LVIA, and the mitigation proposals of para 8 of the LVIA.
- 2) The detailed planting scheme to be implemented in the forthcoming planting season, November 2012 - mid March 2013.
- 3) A site restoration proposal to be submitted for approval, detailing the works necessary to revert the site to open agricultural land on completion of the lifetime of the array, along with the retention of the new landscape features arising from this application.'

(Officer note: The agent has confirmed that the array will feed into the overhead lines that cross the site and a condition regarding CCTV is acceptable.)

Conservation Officer:

Defers to the comments of the Landscape Officer.

Natural England:

Raised no objection and have referred to their standing advice and Technical Information Note with regard to Solar Parks. In terms of the agricultural land classification, they note that the proposal has the potential to impact upon a significant amount of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land. However, they note that the proposals would not lead to the long term loss of such land and the panels will not cause significant disturbance to the soil and could be removed when planning permission expires with no likely loss of agricultural land quality.

Ecologist (SSDC):

'I'm satisfied and in broad agreement with the Ecological Assessment and Survey Report (Fieldwork Ecological Services Ltd. Sep 2013). This didn't identify any significant issues. I have no further comments.'

RSPB:

Advises that the RSPB are satisfied that the proposal will not damage existing important biodiversity but suggests that there are opportunities to enhance wildlife on the site (they set out recommendations for such enhancement).

Senior Historic Environment Officer:

No response received.

Environmental Protection:

Requested additional information regarding noise from inverters and following confirmation from the agent regarding noise levels the Environmental Protection Officer has confirmed he is happy with the proposal.

Environment Agency:

No objection but recommends imposition of informatives.

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE):

Object on the following grounds:

- 72% of the land is categorised as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) and should be protected from development in accordance with para 112 of the NPPF and CPRE national policy.
- Should SSDC consider permitting the development it is urged to check whether there are any Roman remains under or adjacent to the site. The area is mentioned in Pevsner and Ralph Whitlock's Somerset.
- Although the Government continues to encourage PV solar arrays there remain grave doubts about their efficacy in reducing carbon emissions.

Climate Change Officer:

No objections.

NATS:

No safeguarding objection.

MOD:

No safeguarding objections.

Area Engineer:

No drainage issues with the proposal.

REPRESENTATIONS

A letter of representation has been received from a local resident making the following comments:

- Do not think that these systems are particularly aesthetically pleasing.
- Having read all the documentation provided with the application can see some benefits to be gained; it would be a bonus to see wildlife increase on this intensively farmed land.
- Question what assurances there are that the landscaping will be carried out and maintained.
- As the electricity goes into the central grid it presumably makes money for the landowner but doesn't do much for the local community.

CONSIDERATIONS

This application is seeking planning permission to erect a 10MW solar farm on an 18.5 hectare site comprising three agricultural fields in the open countryside, remote from any development areas. The solar farm comprises the erection of solar arrays (arranged in rows from west to east and orientated to face south), inverter housing, transformer, communications and switchgear buildings, security fencing, security cameras (infrared motion sensor) and access track. The development is sought for a 30 year period, after which time the infrastructure will be removed and the land restored.

The main considerations for this application are considered to relate to the principle of the development, landscape character and visual amenity, impact on ecology and setting of listed buildings, residential amenity of nearby residential properties, and impact on highway safety.

Principle:

Part 10 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local authorities should "have a positive strategy to promote energy for renewable and low carbon sources" and "design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts". Additional supplementary guidance National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), published in March, accompanies the NPPF and is referred to in the policy section above.

Whilst the land is greenfield and includes grade 2 and 3a agricultural land (both of which are included with the definition of 'best and most versatile land' (BMV)) it is not considered that the proposed development would result in the permanent loss of such agricultural land. These type of installations are temporary, between 25 and 30 years, and with appropriate conditions the land can easily be restored to agricultural use once the panels are dismantled. In addition, the land between the panels can be used for grazing throughout the life of the installation. Additional landscape planting is proposed and in this regard the development is considered to comply with the aims and objects of the NPPF and its accompanying practice guidance and to be acceptable in principle.

Landscape character and visual amenity:

The Landscape Officer notes that the application site lies over relatively level ground at the head of a local plateau, and the panels will extend across 3 arable fields, which are typical of the scale and openness of the fields that lay over the heads and upper shoulders of these local low hills. The fields are typically defined by low-managed hedgerows that correspond in most part to a rectilinear field pattern, but are also bounded to the southwest and south by escarpment woodland. Both the woodland and hedges offer a substantive degree of

enclosure, and this is noted as providing good screening of the site.

The Landscape Architect has carried out a thorough assessment of the proposal and assessed the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (as detailed above) and, in his view, with the proposed landscape mitigation the proposal will not result in such a significant adverse impact as to justify a refusal on landscape grounds. Whilst noting that the predominant character of the array can be viewed as industrial in nature and therefore at variance with the rural context, he notes that the well enclosed nature of the site and the proposed mitigation will ensure that the development has very limited impact upon the wider landscape.

It is recognised that Dillington Estate already have a large solar array on land adjacent to A303 Ilminster Bypass and as such it is necessary to consider the cumulative impact that would result from two such installations. The Landscape Officer has considered this issue and whilst recognising that the sites are in close proximity they are separated by the rise of the ground over Atherstone Hill and are located within separate landscape types. The Landscape Officer considers that with the proposed mitigation the visibility from the Stocklinch Lynchetts would be nil and as such he considers that there is no issue with regard to cumulative impact.

Subject to the imposition of conditions to secure appropriate landscape proposals and secure restoration of the site the proposal is not considered to raise any substantive landscape or visual amenity concerns.

Residential amenity:

In terms of the immediate area, there are no houses directly adjacent to the site. There are a group of dwellings to the north-east (Hurcott Farm (Grade 11 listed) and cottages) and two dwellings to the south-west. Given the lay of the land, the distances to these properties and the existing dense woodland and mature hedging it is not considered that the proposal will adversely impact upon the amenities of these dwellings.

Setting of listed buildings:

The group of listed buildings to the north-east include the farmhouse and older stone barns. In terms of the setting of these buildings, the array will be over 200m from the closest point and given the mature hedgerows and orchard, and the way in which the land slopes, it is not considered that there will be any adverse impact upon the setting of the listed buildings.

Access and highway safety:

Access to the site will be via an existing farm access leading from Atherstone Lane and a new access track will be formed to allow construction and maintenance vehicles to develop and maintain the site. During the construction phase of the development it is anticipated that there will be significant levels of construction traffic accessing the site however once the site is operational traffic levels will be very limited and are unlikely to be any greater than that for the on-going agricultural use of the land. On this basis the proposal is not considered to raise any substantive highway safety concerns.

It is noted that the highway authority has raised no objection to the application but has suggested conditions relating to the provision of a Construction Management Plan (CMP) and a condition survey of the public highway. A CMP accompanies the application and a condition is considered to be reasonable to ensure the construction phase of the development is carried out in an appropriate manner, the condition survey condition however falls under the highway authority's own controls and an informative is more appropriate to address this point.

Ecology:

The Ecologist has advised that the Ecological Assessment didn't identify any significant issues with regard to ecology on the site and as such does not suggest any conditions with regard to this issue.

Drainage and Flooding:

The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 and the Environment Agency (EA) has confirmed that they have no objection to the proposal. The EA have further confirmed that volumes of surface water are unlikely to significantly increase as a result of the development. They suggest that comments be sought from the Local Drainage Engineer who has confirmed that he has no drainage issues with the proposal.

Other matters:

Environmental Impact Assessment - The proposal falls within the scope of Schedule 2, sub-section 3a of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 requiring that a formal screening decision be carried out. This was carried out prior to the submission of this current application when it was concluded that an Environmental Impact Assessment was not required.

CONCLUSION

Government advice is clear. Planning Authorities should approve applications for renewable energy projects where impacts are (or can be made) acceptable (NPPF Para 98). A thorough assessment of the potential impacts of the development indicates that, for the most part, they are acceptable - or can be made acceptable by appropriate mitigation measures - in the context of Government advice and the clear need for renewable energy sources. Where impacts can be overcome by way of pre-commencement or other conditions (i.e. ecology, landscaping) appropriate conditions are recommended. Subject to the appropriate controls set out in conditions, it is considered that the proposal represents sustainable development the impacts of which can be considered 'acceptable' as set out in Government guidance.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve

Justification: It is considered that the benefits in terms of the provision of a renewable source of energy, which will make a valuable contribution towards cutting greenhouse gas emissions, outweigh the limited impact of the proposed PV panels on the local landscape character. As such the proposal accords with the Government's objective to encourage the provision of renewable energy sources and the aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, the National Planning Practice Guidance and Policies ST3, ST5, ST6, EC1, EC3 and EC8 of the South Somerset Local Plan 2006.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To accord with the provisions of section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

02. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans drawings numbered 05 PA RL (Application Area) received 3 July 2014; SL106/02 (Master Plan), 05 PA D3 (Fencing Detail), 05 PS D2 (Inverter housing/transformer detail), 05 PA D1 (panel and framing detail) received 7 July 2014.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

03. The development hereby permitted shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition before 31/12/2044 or within six months of the cessation of the use of the solar farm for the generation of electricity whichever is the sooner in accordance with a restoration plan to be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The restoration plan will need to include all the works necessary to revert the site to open agricultural land including the removal of all structures, materials and any associated goods and chattels from the site.

Reason: In the interests of landscape character and visual amenity in accordance with Policies ST3, ST5, ST6 and EC3 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

04. The supporting posts to the solar array shall be anchored into the ground as described on Drawing No. 05 PA D1 received 7 July 2014 and shall not be concreted into the ground.

Reason: In the interests of sustainable construction and to accord with Part 10 of the NPPF.

05. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping, which 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 the development, as well as details of any changes proposed in existing ground levels; all planting, seeding, turfing or earth moulding comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the occupation of the building or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation. Planting must be carried out during this coming planting season (November 2014 - mid March 2015) if commencement is to take place in 2015.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and landscape character in accordance with policies ST5, ST6 and EC3 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

06. No means of external illumination/lighting shall be installed without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity and to safeguard the rural character of the area to accord with Policies EC3, ST6 and EP3 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

07. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced unless the location, external finish, including the colour, of the CCTV equipment and security fencing has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity and to safeguard the rural character of the area to accord with Policies EC3, ST6 and EP3 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

08. No form of audible alarm shall be installed on the site without the prior written consent of the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity and the rural amenities of the area to accord with Policy ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

09. The development hereby permitted shall take place in accordance with the Construction Environmental Management Plan received 3 July 2014 unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason in the interest of highway safety and the rural amenities of the area to accord with Policies ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

Informatives:

01. You are reminded that the highway authority has requested that a condition survey of the existing public highway will need to be carried out and agreed with the highway authority prior to any works commencing on site, and that any damage to the highway occurring as a result of this development will have to be remedied by the developer to the satisfaction of the highway authority once all works have been completed on site.
02. Please be aware of the comments set out within the Environment Agency's letter dated 01/08/2014.
03. Please be aware of the recommendations set out in the RSPB's letter dated 11/08/2014.