

Date of Meeting	26 February 2015
Application Number	14/10548/FUL
Site Address	Land to the west of Bake Farm Buildings, Salisbury Road, Coombe Bissett, Salisbury, SP5 4JT
Proposal	The erection of solar photovoltaic panels and associated works and infrastructure, including switchgear, inverter stations, access tracks, security fencing, security cameras, grid connection, together with temporary construction access, compound and unloading area and continued agricultural use
Applicant	Coombe Bissett PV Park Ltd
Town/Parish Council	Britford
Ward	Downton and Ebble Valley
Grid Ref	411789 127820
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Andrew Guest

Reason for application being considered by Committee

The Committee considered an application for a 'solar farm' at this site in October 2014. It is appropriate that the Committee now considers this revised submission.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the recommendation of the Area Development Manager (South) to **APPROVE the application, subject to conditions.**

2. Report Summary

The main issues in this case are, firstly, the principle of the proposal; and then, assuming the principle is accepted, the following matters of detail –

- Visual impact – including the impact on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- Impact on agricultural land;
- Highway Safety;
- Archaeology;
- Ecology;
- Flood risk;
- Residential amenity.

The proposal has been subjected to an Environmental Impact Assessment and the application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

The application has generated objections from Coombe Bissett and Homington Parish Council and Netherhampton Parish Council. It has also generated 32 objections from other interested parties and 17 representations of support from other parties.

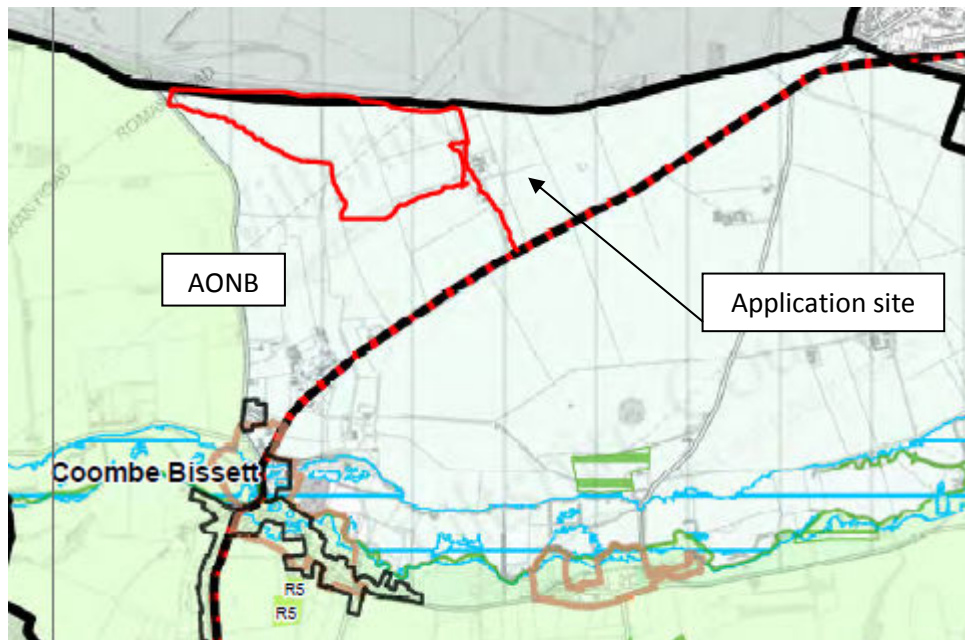
3. Site Description

The 19 ha application site lies approximately 0.7 km to the north-east of the village of Coombe Bissett and 3km to the south of Salisbury. It is set back some 800m from the north side of the A354 with access from this, and is immediately south of the Old Shaftsbury Drove.

The site supports open fields currently used for arable farming. To all sides is further open land, including Salisbury Race Course beyond the Drove. Close by to the east side are a handful of dwellings – Bake Farm, Bake Farm Cottage, and Bake Farm Bungalows. The access to the site from the A354 also serves these dwellings, and is a definitive right of way. Passing over the site is a power line.

Ground level rises gently away from the A354 to a point roughly at the centre of the site before then falling gently away to the north.

In policy terms the site lies in open countryside. Beyond the site to the west is the Cranbourne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Extract from Wiltshire Core Strategy map

4. Relevant Planning History

13/06336/FUL - Erection of solar photovoltaic panels and associated works and infrastructure, including switchgear, inverter stations, access tracks, security fencing, security cameras and grid connection – withdrawn 16/07/14

14/06864/FUL - Erection of solar photovoltaic panels and associated works and infrastructure, including switchgear, inverter stations, access tracks, security fencing, security cameras, grid connection, together with temporary construction access, compound and unloading area – refused 16/10/14

Reason for refusal –

The site lies in open countryside within the setting of, and visible from, the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposal, by reason of its siting, scale and resulting prominence in views both from, and to, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, would not achieve the fundamental aim of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which is to conserve its landscape and natural beauty.

Although the proposal includes mitigation in the form of new hedge planting, this is considered insufficient to reduce the adverse impacts on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Those adverse impacts are, in particular, the visual impact of the closely arranged ranks of solar arrays which spread across a significant area of farmland on higher ground, and which would 'read' as a man-made, almost industrial intrusion in the otherwise natural landscape from which the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty can be experienced and which can be experienced from the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This is contrary to Core Policy 51 of the emerging Wiltshire Core Strategy which specifically refers to the relevance of the setting of Area's of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the spirit of 'saved' Policy C4 of the Salisbury District Local Plan, and Central Government planning policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 115).

The layout and extent of this previous proposal is shown in the following drawing –

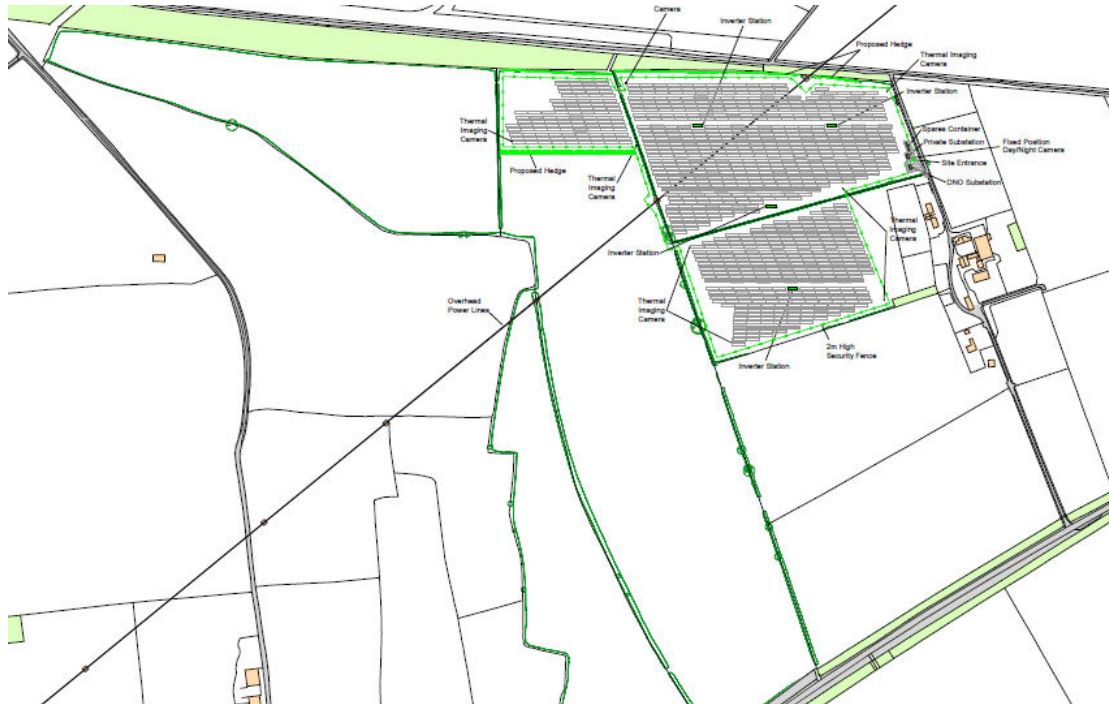


14/06864/FUL – refused application

5. Proposal

The proposal is to erect solar photovoltaic panels and associated works and infrastructure, including switchgear, inverter stations, access tracks, security fencing, security cameras, and grid connection, and temporary construction access, compound and unloading area.

The layout and extent of this proposal is shown in the following layout drawing –



14/10548/FUL – Current application

This 'solar farm' would generate up to 9.9 MW of electricity. Although the application site covers 19 ha, the area covered by 'built' development is only 10 ha. This is in view of the solar farm being reduced in size during the processing of the application to address objections relating to visual impact and the AONB in particular.

The solar panels would be mounted on framework tables at an angle of 22 degrees. Maximum height would be 2.4m. The tables would be arranged in rows with the panels facing south. They would be anchored to the ground by steel posts.

The four inverter stations (for converting DC to AC) would be sited amongst the tables. They are effectively large green coloured 'boxes' measuring 11.98m x 2.92m by 2.98m high.

The other buildings would be sited in a group on the east side of the site. Again, they would be green coloured boxes (comparable to lorry containers) with the biggest being 3.28m high.

The site would be surrounded by 2m high fencing, and there would be 8 thermal imaging security cameras on 6m high poles around the edge.

No new overhead cabling is proposed. All cabling between the solar panels and equipment buildings, and to provide the connection with the grid, would be underground.

A temporary access track and compound would be constructed between the A354 access and to Bake Farm and the south side of the solar farm.

The solar farm would be operational for 25 years after which it could be dismantled and the land returned to full agricultural use.

Construction would take approximately 14 weeks. A maximum of 120 construction workers would be required at any one time. A maximum of 120 lorries would deliver the farm components (4 lorries / day). Once operational, only occasional maintenance visits would be required. The dismantling process would involve a similar timeframe and numbers of workers / vehicles.

6. Planning Policy

Wiltshire Core Strategy –

Core Policy CP42 – Standalone renewable energy installations

Core Policy CP50 – Biodiversity and geodiversity

Core Policy CP51 – Landscape

Core Policy CP61 – Transport and development

Salisbury District Local Plan ('saved' policies) –

Policy C21 – Agriculture diversification

NPPF –

Paragraphs 17, 18, 93-99

The NPPF sets out 'core planning principles' which include that planning should *support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy).*

Specifically in relation to climate change the NPPF states that *to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, 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;*

- *support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy, including developments outside such areas being taken forward through neighbourhood planning; and*
- *identify opportunities where development can draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers.*

And -

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.*

National PPG

The PPG states the following –

Increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses. Planning has an important role in the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure in locations where the local environmental impact is acceptable.

And with particular regard to large scale ground-mounted solar farms the PPG states the following –

The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.

Particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider include:

- *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.*

The approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large scale solar farms is likely to be the same as assessing the impact of wind turbines. However, in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero.

7. Consultations

Coombe Bissett PC: Objects

First letter dated 26 January 2015:

Following an open meeting with parishioners on 13th January 2015, at which the balance of their opinion expressed was overwhelmingly against the solar park, the parish council is now in a position to respond.

There are many suitable places for solar farms but they do not include beautiful countryside and good arable land. There can be no doubt that the countryside around Coombe Bissett and the Chalke Valley is outstanding. The applicants have reduced the impact of the proposed development when viewed from the vantage points around Coombe Bissett, including those from within the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Beauty, but there will still be significant visual intrusion into the landscape from the junction of the Rockbourne Road and the A354 and the nearby high points.

The red outline on the plans showing the area covered by the planning application remains the same as the previous application. The parish council understands that this is because the applicants do not wish to change the red line to just the perimeter of the proposed panels because that would require another

application. The applicants have stated that they do not intend to infill the unused area with more panels at a later date. The parish council cannot see why the applicants cannot re-apply with the smaller perimeter, but should this application be passed, the parish council would expect that stringent conditions be applied to prevent infill of panels.

The land on which the solar farm is proposed is grade 3 land. This means that it is "good to moderate". The applicants have said they are having the land surveyed to assess whether it is grade 3A land or grade 3B. To date the applicants have not made public the grade of this land following their survey. One can only assume that if this information is not forthcoming that the applicants either have not surveyed the land as they said they would, or that they do not wish to reveal the grade of that land because perhaps it is grade 3A land.

Grade 3A land is described as follows: Good quality agricultural land. Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.

Reference:

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/land-use/documents/alc-guidelines-1988.pdf>

Bake Farm have grown cereals and oilseed rape on this land, together with soft fruit, for many years. This can be seen by reference to Google Maps. In the absence of any survey results, it would seem by description to be Grade 3A land. The advice from BRE, the Building Research Establishment, initially set up by the Government, is not to use Grade 3A land for solar parks.

They say that "Ground Mounted Solar PV projects, over 50kWp, should ideally utilise previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land, industrial land or agricultural/and preferably of classification 3b, 4, and 5.

Reference:

http://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdf/other_pdfs/KN5524_Planning_Guidance_reduced.pdf

To take this land out of production for 20 to 25 years would seem unwise. A Cambridge University Report estimates a likely shortage of two million hectares of arable land by 2030.

Reference:

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/two-million-hectare-shortfall-in-uk-land-possible-by-2030-study-finds>

Reported in the Sunday Telegraph, 28/12/2014, Liz Truss, the Environment Secretary stated that Britain's farmland should be dedicated to growing food

to ensure it fulfils its productive potential. The need to reduce imports of food is surely sensible as our population grows and Government struggles to reduce our national debt. Liz Truss is scrapping farm subsidies for solar fields.

It is clear that current Government policy is not to support large scale developments. The Parish Council supports the comments of the Right Honourable Greg Barker, Minister of State in the Department of Energy and Climate Change, who in April 2014 emphasised that the government's focus is on using space on top of factories, supermarkets, warehouses, car parks and other commercial and industrial buildings, making use of empty industrial spaces, rather than these large scale schemes which can have significant impacts on the local landscapes and visual amenity.

Reference:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/302049/uk_solar_pv_strategy_part_2.pdf

Current Government policy is also to favour rural developments which are no more than 5 Megawatt. This application is for nearly 10 Megawatt.

References:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2014-10-10/209292/>

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/360280/Government_response_RO-FIT_changes_to_Solar_PV_-_FINAL_2014-10-02.pdfThe Parish Council asks that Wiltshire Council support government policy and rejects this application. Should this application be granted, we would ask that a condition be put on the permission that at no time in the life of the solar farm can any extension be made to it.

In conclusion, Coombe Bissett and Homington Parish Council objects to this application.

Second letter dated 4 February 2015 (following receipt of Agricultural Land Quality and Site Selection Update report from applicant):

Following our comments dated 26th January 2015, Coombe Bissett and Homington Parish Council write again following the survey report now being available on the planning web site, which states that the site on which the solar farm is proposed is Grade 3A land. This application should be refused on these grounds alone, let alone the others mentioned in our previous letter.

The advice from BRE, the Building Research Establishment, a body initially set up by the Government is not to use Grade 3A land for solar parks. They say that "Ground Mounted

Solar PV projects, over 5kWp, should ideally utilise previously, developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land, industrial land or agricultural land preferably of classification 3b, 4, and 5.

Reference:

http://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdflother_pdfs/KN5524_Planning_Guidance_reduced.pdf

Grade 3A land is described as follows : Good quality agricultural land.

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.

Reference:

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/land-use/documents/alcguidelines-1988.pdf>

By their own admission Bake Farm have grown good crops of cereals and oilseed rape on this land, together with soft fruit, for many years. Indeed the growing of soft fruit is generally associated with Grade 1 land (see reference above.)

To take this land out of production for 20 to 25 years would seem unwise. A Cambridge University Report estimates a likely shortage of two million hectares of arable land by 2030.

Reference :

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/two-million-hectare-shortfall-in-uk-land-possible-by-2030-study-finds>

The applicants state that sheep will be grazed around and underneath the solar panels. Members of the parish council have seen solar farms in Dorset and note that little grass grows beneath the panels where sunlight cannot fall. In addition, it is well known that at least 8 times the amount of food can be grown on arable land than using the same land to graze animals. Animals are poor converters of vegetable protein to animal protein. To feed a hungry world more cereals will need to be grown, and animal protein eaten rarely.

Reported in the Sunday Telegraph, 28/12/2014, Liz Truss, the Environment Secretary stated that Britain's farmland should be dedicated to growing food to ensure it fulfils its productive potential. The need to reduce imports of food is surely sensible as our population grows and our Government struggles to reduce our national debt. Liz Truss is scrapping farm subsidies for solar fields.

It is regrettable that, even though the land grade survey was carried out on 13th and 14th

November 2014, the report was not written until 16th January 2015, and it did not appear on the planning website until 2nd February 2015, two working days after the deadline for consultation comments, thus making it impossible for comments regarding the land grade to be made by the public in time for this deadline.

In conclusion, Coombe Bissett and Homington Parish Council asks the planning committee to refuse this application.

Netherhampton PC: Object.

- Adverse impact on area of great landscape value;
- Land should be used for food;
- Poor efficiency of PV – estimated by experts to deliver c.10% of assessed hypothetical MW capacity;
- Delivery inefficient due to lack of energy storage solution.

WC Highways: No objection subject to condition.

I note the alterations to the proposal compared to the previous submission and I am satisfied that my highway recommendation remains unchanged. Access is gained directly from the A354 which is a suitable road within the highway network to accommodate the volume and size of vehicles accessing the site during the 18 week construction period. Nevertheless, to ensure that all aspects concerning the impact on the highway during construction have been considered a construction management plan / method statement condition is recommended.

WC Public Protection: No objection subject to conditions.

Noise - Based on the evidence that the applicant has supplied it is unlikely that noise will have an adverse impact on nearby sensitive receptors, providing the noise controls set out in section 7 of the noise report (appendix 3) are implemented. Therefore, we would recommend that a condition is attached to any planning permission granted to ensure the controls in the above mentioned section are applied to protect amenity and prevent potential disturbance to nearby residents.

There are 5 properties located within 500m of the site entrance. Access to the site will be along the track road that passes all 5 properties. Therefore, we would recommend that conditions are imposed limiting hours for deliveries and hours for construction, and requiring a construction management plan.

Glint and glare - Although the applicant has not submitted a glint and glare report we have considered the potential impact of glint and glare from the proposed site. Based on previous experience, the topography of the land and the location of residential properties we believe it is unlikely that there will be an adverse impact on nearby residents.

WC Archaeology: No objection subject to condition.

The application was accompanied by an EIA which included a chapter on Cultural Heritage and Archaeology (Chapter 8). I consider that this chapter has provided a

proportionate assessment of the archaeological remains which are known to be present within the site and the impact of the proposed development upon them. I also concur with the proposal that the majority of the mitigation will be by design, with a watching brief being undertaken if the potential archaeological features identified cannot be avoided in the cable runs. The watching brief should also consider any landscaping, access routes, compounds and other infrastructure which may have an impact on archaeological remains. I would also expect any mitigation options to take into consideration the ground conditions when the works are carried out.

National Planning Policy Framework policy 128 states that 'Where a site on which development is proposed includes or has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.' This site does have the potential to contain heritage assets and I consider that the chapter submitted with this application, along with the geophysical survey, fulfils this requirement. I do not consider that further field evaluation is necessary at this stage, for the reasons outlined in the chapter.

The NPPF also says: 141. Local planning authorities should make information about the significance of the historic environment gathered as part of plan-making or development management publicly accessible. They should also require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible. However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted.'

In order to ensure that the mitigation is undertaken, an archaeological condition is recommended.

WC Ecology: No objection subject to conditions to control construction works and to manage/monitor site.

I provided detailed comments on previous applications for solar panels at this site (13/06336 and 14/06864). The ecological implications of the revised scheme while broadly similar to the previous one are reduced in scale. My comments in relation to hedgerows, bats, reptiles, badgers, brown hares and specialist farmland birds remain as for 14/06864 and I consider that mitigation that can be secured by condition under the LEMP could potentially lead to an overall neutral impact from the scheme. It is important that the perimeter fence is located at least 4-5m from the hedgerows (as stated in the EIA) to allow sufficient area for species rich grassland to establish to support birds and other species.

WC Rights of Way: No objection.

The site would be accessed along footpath BRIT14 – this appears to be well-surfaced so is not an issue.

Environment Agency: No objection.

Whilst the principle is accepted that volumes of surface water will not be significantly increased by the development, there is the potential for drainage patterns and concentrations to be adversely impacted especially during the construction phase. For this reason, conditions to limit surface water flows are recommended.

Natural England: No objection. Standing advice.

English Heritage: The application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of local specialist conservation advice.

Representations

The application has been publicised by site notice and press advert. Letters have been sent to near neighbours.

The application has generated representations from 32 interested third parties/households raising objections (including from the CPRE and the Chalke Valley Preservation Society) and 17 representations from third parties/households in support and/or raising no objections (including from the Cranbourne Chase AONB group).

The representations are summarised as follows:

Support –

- Good way of generating sustainable energy instead of continuing to use fossil fuels;
- Proposal aids farm diversification and is removable in the future in any event. British agriculture is under huge pressure with many farms disappearing – this development would secure the future of a marginal, family run farm which provides local employment;
- Secondary benefits for biodiversity/ecology;
- Good proportion of objections are from Coombe Bissett residents – site is not visible from there;
- Proposal is now much scaled down so hard to see from AONB, particularly in view of proposed landscaping;
- ‘Energy’ crops (oilseed rape) have been grown on the site since the 1990’s, so no food production. Proposal will generate energy and food ‘crop’ at the same time, so doubly productive;
- Energy from site would go straight into grid. Reduction in lorries going to the farm;
- Ground cover would improve percolation and so reduce risk of water run-off;
- Site would not generate noise when operational;
- Objections are ill-informed;
- Benefits outweigh any limited intrusion, which is questionable anyway.

Objections –

- This third application not substantially different to earlier applications. Application does not address earlier objections;

- Scale of development is too great – industrial scale. Green field will become brown field – potential then for other development;
- Proposal contrary to Dept of Energy and Climate Change advice. Articles advise that there are now enough approved renewable energy projects to meet UK green targets. LPA's instructed to stop approving this form of development. Contrary to recent Environment Secretary statement. Changes to Renewable Obligation Scheme to be made in April 2015 – reducing allowable outputs;
- Contrary to NPPF and PPG – adverse impacts not satisfactorily addressed, Council's obliged to refuse if impacts are unacceptable, where it is necessary to develop agricultural land poorer quality land is preferred over best and most versatile land.
- Contrary to WCS – supports rights of rural communities and underlines need to uphold quality of rural landscapes;
- Large solar farms are crude and poorly judged responses to renewable issue, out of scale and context, and an inexcusable use of productive agricultural land. Solar technology should be applied to brownfield land and rooftops. Technology is moving closer to smarter small scale solutions;
- All other British Solar Renewables developments are lower outputs and are built on poor quality land with zero visual impact;
- Cost of feed in tariffs will ultimately be met by consumers in any event. This would be uneconomic without subsidies;
- WC has no obligation to approve solar farms;
- No jobs will be created locally. No economic benefit locally. Less employment at Bake Farm;
- Coombe Bissett will be less attractive as a consequence. Acres of dark glass and security fencing, light pollution from security lights, etc.;
- There will remain inter-visibility issues with the AONB and other landscapes of quality. Proposal will seriously interfere with the natural beauty of the area. Proposal will be highly intrusive. Proposed landscaping will block views;
- Land is Grade 3a. There will be a shortage of agricultural land by 2030. This site, being higher grade agricultural land (among the “the best and most versatile”), should be used for the production of food; it is not ‘necessary’ to develop this site. Grazing by animals under the arrays is unlikely to be productive – the shade will reduce grass growth. Proposed farm plan to upgrade land elsewhere is irrelevant. Lack of consideration of other sites in Wiltshire which may be lower grade;
- Too close to historic Salisbury and will effect distant views of the Cathedral;
- Flooding – run-off from farm towards A354 and Coombe Bissett – insufficient consideration of this;
- Manufacturing and decommissioning process for solar panels needs to be considered – toxic chemicals involved. Who is responsible for ensuring decommissioning takes place?;
- Criminal activity – high value solar farm equipment would be monitored from far away only. Criminal activity will increase in area where there are already problems;
- Glint and glare will cause nuisance;
- No waste management plan;
- In the event of permission being granted condition required preventing extension to solar farm;

- Seven of the letters in support are from Bake Farm operators.

The response from the Cranbourne Chase AONB group follows in full –

The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB has been established under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act to conserve and enhance the outstanding natural beauty of this area which straddles three County, one Unitary and five District councils. It is clear from the Act, subsequent government sponsored reports, and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 that natural beauty includes wildlife, scientific, and cultural heritage. It is also recognised that in relation to their landscape characteristics and quality, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are equally important aspects of the nation's heritage and environmental capital. The AONB Management Plan is a statutory document that is approved by the Secretary of State and is adopted by the constituent councils. The national Planning Practice Guidance [Natural Environment paragraph 004] confirms that the AONB and its Management Plan are material considerations in planning.

The National Planning Policy Framework states (paragraph 109) that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. Furthermore it should be recognised that the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' does not automatically apply within AONBs, as confirmed by paragraph 14 footnote 9, due to other policies relating to AONBs elsewhere within the Framework. It also states (paragraph 115) that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in these areas.

The site is high on the valley side and adjoins the Ebbles Chalk River Valley landscape character area. Greater details of the landscape, buildings and settlement characteristics can be found in the Landscape Character Assessment 2003. That document should be available in your office, and it can be viewed in FULL on our web site www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk. It is within the Ebbles Broad Chalk River Valley Slopes Landscape Character Area of the Salisbury District Landscape Character Assessment 2008.

The western end of the 'red line' area abuts the AONB boundary. The landscape of the ridge on the southern side of Salisbury Race Course stretches from deep within the AONB towards Salisbury. There is no sharp or clear change in landscape character or quality at the AONB boundary. The designation locally of the adjacent landscape as a Special Landscape Area demonstrates this landscape has long been recognised as significant.

The AONB Management Plan is sympathetic towards renewable energy generation so long as it is appropriate to the location and siting, of a nature and scale that integrates with the landscape character, is neither visually intrusive to the AONB or its setting, nor impairs significant views to or from it, and is not harmful to wildlife. You will, I am confident, recall that the AONB was particularly concerned that the earlier proposal to install panels in the higher, ridgeline, fields would create an

unacceptable visual intrusion in this sensitive landscape of the AONB and its setting. An extended line of panels stretching across [from the west] fields 4, 3, and 1 would be perceived, face on, as solid and constant glassy masses extending across some 900 metres of the view. The main viewpoints in the AONB are likely to be from the roads and Rights of Way south and south-west of the site. On behalf of the AONB I observed that relocating panels from fields 4 and 3 to the south or east of Bake Farm would have a less detrimental impact on the AONB and its setting.

The revised plan [issue 16] removes panels from field 4 completely and removes them from all but the top corner of field 3. This has two effects; it reduces the previous line of visible panels by 50%, and it also withdraws panels from the middle section of field 3 which would be particularly visible due to the slope. These changes are set out in paragraph 2.12 of the ES and in the Addendum.

You explained at our meeting that any permission would relate solely to the development identified in the amended documentation, and there would be no presumption that the remainder of the area within the red line would be appropriate or acceptable for installing PV panels.

*The amended Mitigation Plan shows the modified proposals and planting to improve the screening of the proposed development. However some of the planting proposals are a little vague and open to interpretation. For the avoidance of doubt I **strongly advise** that the planting specifications and schedules should be added to that plan. Doing that could avoid the extra steps, and time, of imposing a planting condition and then approving that separately.*

I see that some planting details are provided in ES paragraphs 3.4 and 6.252, and 6.255. However, the helpful process of 'track changes' updating of the ES also shows there has been a bit of confusion between the percentages of the different sizes of plants and the percentages of the different species. Whilst the species add up to 100% the sizes do not! That can be simply corrected by putting the percentage of 'feathered, 1.25 – 1.5m' size plants back to 20% from 10%.

*In addition to your usual condition about replacing planting that fails or is damaged in the immediate planting season following the failure or damage, I **strongly advise** that a long term management condition should be applied. As the ES and Mitigation Plan demonstrate additional screening is necessary to make the proposal acceptable, it is important that that screening is established and maintained for the life of the development. That could be along the lines of: 'All the existing and proposed planting on the Mitigation Plan shall be managed at least annually to achieve and maintain the necessary screening identified in the Environmental Statement [paragraphs XXX] for the life of the development.' You may wish to consider an extra condition if, after 5 years, the screening is not as successful as predicted in the ES and hence extra planting should be undertaken.*

*The previous application failed to include the landscape work within the construction programme. Clearly there is time for the landscape work to be done this planting season so I would also **strongly advise** that a condition to that effect should be imposed.*

The importance of the hedgerow trees and hedges is emphasised in the LVIA and Mitigation Plan. These features should be protected by root protection zones as set out in BS5837 (2012) if they are to be adequately protected.

Regarding advice on issues such as colour to aid integration of features of the proposal here are my comments from the previous proposal which still appear to be relevant.

The benefit of the green fence and the green post and green ends to the buildings contrasts with the shiny frames and shiny supports of the PV panels. The white barge board to the building shows how incongruous white is in the landscape and the white barge board and the edges and posts of the panels should also be treated with a shade of green to aid integration if the proposal is to be considered for approval.

*The ES has been modified, particularly the LVIA section, to take account of the revised layout and planting proposals. I am not commenting on the revised LVIA as a critique of that would serve no useful purpose as the modifications substantially meet the identified concerns of the AONB. I can, therefore, confirm that the AONB is **not objecting** to the amended proposal. The AONB does, however, offer the advice set out above to help ensure the proposals have minimal visual impact for the life of the development and are rapidly integrated into the scene.*

The response from CPRE follows in full:

This application provides further reduction to the size of the array, but this cannot alter the fact that the array remains an industrial style construct within a valuable and attractive rural landscape.

As before, while accepting the need for the development and implementation of some forms of “alternative” energy, but considering the distinct possibility that construction costs, de-commissioning costs and government green subsidies could shed a doubt over the wider issue of whether photovoltaic technology really does provide cheap, effective and sustainable energy, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) South Wiltshire has a number of concerns about the current Bake Farm application.

1 Visual intrusion – the site will be a visual intrusion when viewed from the A354 and a number of surrounding areas including the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Special Landscape Area, as well as diminishing the impact of the view which includes the upper parts of Salisbury cathedral spire. And one should mention here also the local Site of Special Scientific Interest and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve.

The large number of 2.6 meter high panels with industrial shaped support buildings, security fencing and camera poles covering 10 hectares will be intrusive. Their very geometry is at odds with the flowing rural landscape that will surround them, providing contrast and conflict rather than integration.

2 Agriculture – with the growing world population and the increasing wealth of some of the 3rd world countries, there will be a food crisis and the UK would do well to reduce its reliance on imported food. We remove productive agricultural land from production at our peril and. And even if this land has been used for the production of crops for bio-fuel, we have an ever more pressing need for home-generated fuel to mitigate our dependence on the vagaries of foreign fuel suppliers. Either way we need this land to produce crops not electricity.

3 Sustainable – this is the catch-phrase of the moment (read the Wiltshire Core Strategy – it's full of this word) but rarely does it get defined. It is used frequently by supporters to justify the value of a project, including this one. But there are many arguments to show that a solar array is not a very sustainable project.

1 Research has estimated that solar photovoltaic may deliver only 10% of its hypothetical maximum megawatt capacity

2 Very little is mentioned of the expense and environmental impact of actually making the product (and transporting it from China if that's where it comes from)

3 The array and therefore the site will only operate for 25 years after which it should be dismantled and the land returned to its original use. But after 25 years of "brownfield" will the pressure be on to keep it that way? Or if it is to be dismantled, what if British Solar Renewables (or is that Coombe Bissett PV Park Ltd?) should no longer be in existence?

4 It delivers less in winter and none at night when extra electricity is often required. And never forget that where the delivery of power is unreliable (PV solar, wind) a continuous back-up power supply is essential, which brings us back to coal, oil or perhaps nuclear.

5 It brings no jobs or economic benefit to the area

6 The current plethora of solar farms (and domestic installations) are being developed at the expense of the British taxpayer through government subsidies. So successful has this been that "there is sufficient electricity generation capacity currently pending in the UK's planning system to overshoot the 2020 target by approximately 50%." The money set aside to subsidise solar PV is about to run out and the overheating of this sector and potential oversupply of capacity will harm investors, consumers and taxpayers alike. The country does not need or want more of these large scale solar farms so why are Wiltshire planning department, despite all the guidance from above, the refusal of earlier versions of this application and the weight of local feeling against, insisting on trying to push it through?

4 Flooding – I don't know whether the site will add to Coombe Bissett's flood problems but we certainly need a full and proper assessment of this possibility (just saying that the site itself won't flood is not good enough)

5 Keeping up – the Bake Farm application relies a lot on the fact that it is following guidelines/rules pronounced at Kyoto, promulgated by Europe, published by the British government - but most of these are out-of-date.

Europe for example, having set, through its 2009 Renewable Energy Directive, a target for the UK to achieve 15% of its total energy consumption, including transport, from renewable sources by 2020, has now decided that it will set targets for carbon emissions but leave it to individual countries as to how these targets are achieved. There will be no required figure for renewable energy generation.

In Britain, the Department of Energy and Climate Change stated some time ago that it was “keen for the focus of (solar PV) growth to be firmly on domestic and commercial roof space and previously-used land” and “very aware of concerns raised by the public about the potential growth of large-scale solar farms, particularly where approval does not appear to take full account of the latest planning guidance. Such inappropriately sited solar PV is something that I take extremely seriously and am determined to crack down on.”.

And this guidance is very pertinent to the current PV solar application. The guidance states, among other things:

- it is important that the planning concerns of local communities are properly heard in matters that directly affect them
- the need for renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of planning proposals on views important to their setting
- protecting local amenity is an important consideration which should be given proper weight in planning decisions.

Of perhaps even more importance is the fact that Wiltshire county has already reached 320mgw of its target of 367mgw of solar power generation capacity – we don't actually need any more large scale solar arrays so start saying “No” now.

Conclusion – An interesting statistic is that roughly 70% of the Representation Letters were against the Application which should tell us something about the local opinion which has to be listened to by the decision-makers.

Of the 30% who supported the application 54% of them had an address in the Bake Farm area. Of course they have a right to express their opinions, though perhaps there should be some indication of a financial interest. I was also disappointed to read in one letter that “all objections are due to misunderstanding and are all inaccurate suggesting little or no informed evaluation has been done”. The letter writer provides no arguments for the proposal and does not seem to have read the many well-researched letters putting forward well evidenced reasons as to why the application should be rejected. I also note another comment that “most of the opponents will be NIMBYs”, a rather short-sighted view of what is actually a very complicated and wide reaching application deserving of serious consideration and argument from both sides.

CPRE South Wiltshire believes that the concerns raised previously and reiterated here have not been addressed and that we are still unhappy with the imposition of this array in this area and once again, for all these reasons, as well as those of the other objectors who have expressed their opposition over time, CPRE asks that this application be rejected.

We once again express the following concern. Where a Council planning officer has been involved in preplanning discussions with a developer, there arises with the developer a raised expectation that the Council planning department is leaning towards approval of the application. We therefore believe that different Council planning officers should be used to deal with the pre-application and with the application stages for any development application.

Planning Considerations

Principle

Policy CP42 of the WCS states that proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site specific constraints. The policy specifically states that proposals will need to demonstrate how impacts on the landscape (particularly in and around AONB's), biodiversity, the local transport networks, residential amenity (including noise, visual amenity and safety), and the best and most versatile land will be satisfactorily assessed. In line with Central Government policy, Policy CP42 does not require applicants to justify the overall need for renewable energy development in either the national or local context. The supporting text with the policy specifically states that the policy applies to all types of standalone renewable energy developments, including ground mounted solar photovoltaic arrays.

In this case it is considered that the proposal does adequately resolve all site specific constraints, and that this is demonstrated in the supporting application particulars. It follows that the proposal complies with Policy CP42 and is, therefore, acceptable as a matter of principle. The specific constraints are considered further below.

A number of third parties have referred to a letter sent to local authorities in November 2013 by the then Minister of State for Energy & Climate Change. In this letter the minister refers to his keenness for the focus of growth for solar PV to be "on domestic and commercial roof space and previously used land". The letter also refers to the minister's awareness of concerns raised by the public about the potential growth of large scale solar farms, and his desire to "crack down" where they are inappropriately sited. With particular regard to planning policy the letter refers to both the NPPF and PPG policies as being relevant, as set out above. It also states that the DECC is "... encouraging local councils to get up-to-date local plans in place as soon as possible and to use the local plan to set out where renewable energy development should and should not take place".

Wiltshire Council has an up-to-date local plan in the form of the Wiltshire Core Strategy. The Strategy, and more particularly Policy CP42 referred to above, has been drafted with due regard to the NPPF and PPG, and was recently found to be

'sound' by the examining inspector in the context of this 'higher level' planning policy. It follows that the earlier requirements of the minister have, in fact, been satisfied.

Visual impact

The ES is informed by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The ES Non-Technical Summary Addendum concludes that the application site is one of few suitable locations in terms of minimising adverse effects on visual amenity and landscape character for a large ground mounted solar scheme within the area to the west, south and south west of Salisbury. The key factors the summary sets out to inform this conclusion are:

1) The site lies at an elevated position close to a ridge. This means that there are few higher vantage points within the surrounding landscape which afford views down onto the site. The broad valley and ridge topography around Salisbury is such that any large scale array on the valley bottoms or steeper side slopes is likely to be far more prominent.

2) The site comprises gently sloping ground close to the top of the ridge and so appears as a narrow band in the landscape from those areas which do afford a view of the site. Although the array will occupy a large area it will appear as a relatively small feature.

3) The tree cover flanking the Old Shaftesbury Drove, which runs past the site along the top of the ridge, completely screens the site from land immediately to the north and from the far side of the valley to the north.

4) Trees flanking the Salisbury Road to the south restrict views from within the valley.

5) There are only three residential properties which are significantly affected by the proposed development, all associated with Bake Farm. No PRow crosses the site and the array can be shielded from those that run adjacent to it.

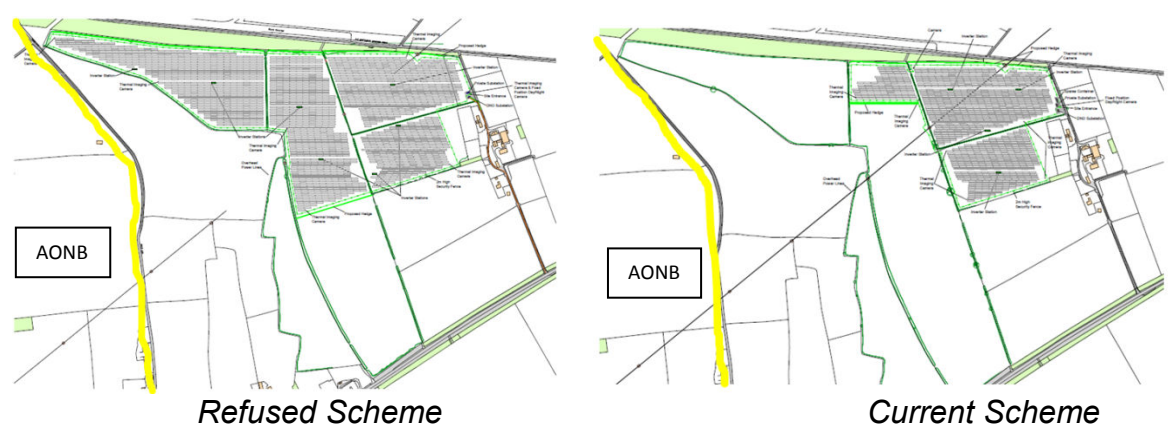
6) The site lies outside the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in an area already adversely affected by a high voltage overhead electricity line.

Points 1 to 5 are accepted. By reason of its planned layout (which includes extensive landscaping to reduce impact) and the underlying topography, it is not considered that the proposal would have an adverse impact on distant views. Equally, by reason of its planned layout, proposed landscaping and the largely inaccessible characteristics of the site, it is not considered that the proposal would have a harmful impact on local views.

Regarding point 6, the application site lies outside the AONB but the previous application was refused planning permission in view of its prominence in views both to and from the AONB, contrary to the then emerging Policy CP51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 states that "a local planning authority whose area consists of or includes the whole or any part of an area of outstanding natural beauty has power to take all such action as appears

to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty or so much of it as is included in their area”; and “in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty”.

The current planning application (which is for an amended / reduced proposal compared with that in the last application, and which has been further amended / reduced during the course of its consideration) differs from the last application in that the ‘footprint’, and so the spread, of the solar arrays has changed. The change mean that the overall impact is now much reduced in distant views, and the western edge of the ‘built’ extent of the proposed development is further away from the actual boundary line of the AONB. This is illustrated in the two extracts below.



Specifically, the arrays on the west side of the site have been pulled back 540m to the east. Additionally, the central arrays have been pulled 330m back, so removing them from the slightly steeper part of the site, and so visible only as a grey slither in distant views from the AONB. In terms of local mitigation, existing hedges would be maintained at heights appropriate to achieve screening, and new hedges and trees would be planted where either none exist at present or there are gaps.

As a consequence of these changes the ES concludes that only the upper sections of the first row of panels would be visible to observers standing at the key viewpoints around Coombe Bissett, and as the viewing distances are typically over 1.5 km the arrays would be perceived as a slight colouration in the landscape only rather than a built-up feature. The ES further concludes that this slight impact would reduce in any event as landscaping establishes. These conclusions are illustrated by way of ‘before’ and ‘after’ photomontages which (as with the last application) are attached as an annex to this report.

Overall these reductions to the proposed development have addressed the reason for refusal of the last planning application. It is considered that the landscape in this area can accommodate this proposal without causing harm to visual amenity and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in particular.

Agricultural Land Classification and Site Selection

The NPPF states that *Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile land. When significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use poorer quality in preference to that of a higher quality.* The PPG requires local planning authorities to consider ... *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.*

The planning application is accompanied by an Agricultural Land Quality and Site Selection Update report dated January 2015. This provides details of the agricultural land classification grade and justification for selecting the site in any event. The report concludes that the agricultural land classification is Grade 3a which means it is amongst the best and most versatile agricultural land within the nation's land resource, but it is at the lower end of the 'best' categories (which cover grades 1, 2 and 3a).

To justify the land's use as a solar farm the site selection element of the report considers a number of factors summarised as follows:

- An analysis of the wider area shows that there is no other suitable lower grade land at grades 4 and 5, and that it would be impractical to survey all grade 3 land to determine 3a or 3b status;
- An analysis of the wider area has revealed no suitable brownfield land within reasonable proximity and no existing buildings of sufficient size / availability to accommodate a solar farm at this scale;
- The proposed solar farm would be temporary (25 years), and the land would revert to purely agricultural use at the end of this period with no detriment to its productivity;
- During the temporary life of the development the land would be used for livestock grazing in any event which is in the interests of the continuing success of Bake Farm and is in accordance with a proposed Farm Strategy Programme;
- The Farm Strategy Programme further includes a commitment by the applicant to invest in other improvements at the farm to ensure that, overall, its productivity is maintained and/or enhanced, with scope to include improvements to land quality (through more effective application of fertilizers, potential de-stoning of other land, state of the art systems for monitoring sheep, etc.). The full Farm Strategy Programme is attached as an annex to this report;

- The proposal 'stacks up' in all other respects (in particular, in terms of its impacts on biodiversity (which will be enhanced), visual amenity, highway safety, residential amenity, etc.).

Although the NPPF and PPG advise local planning authorities to seek to use poorer quality land, in this case it is considered that the applicant has demonstrated that use of Grade 3a land is necessary and appropriate. The necessity stems primarily from the lack of lower grade land in this area in general; and the appropriateness stems from the temporary nature of the development and its continued use for agriculture anyway, and the potential improvements to productivity at Bake Farm which would materialise via the proposed Farm Strategy Programme.

For these material reasons it is not considered that an objection to the proposal based on loss of higher grade agricultural land would be sustainable.

Ecology

The ES accompanying the planning application includes a chapter on ecology. The Non-Technical Summary notes that the application site is dominated by arable fields mainly bound by species-poor hedgerows. Some adjoining woodland was found to be of local level conservation value. Parts of the site are also considered to have potential as suitable locations for bats, small reptiles and breeding birds.

Impacts were considered in terms of the construction phase and the operational phase. The effects during the construction phase were mainly considered to be neutral although disturbance to nesting birds could be an issue. At the operational phase effects were generally considered to result in minor positive enhancement of habitats on site.

A number of mitigation measures have been identified. These are:

- Preparation and implementation of a Construction Environmental Management Plan. The CEMP would set out measures to prevent the spread of dust within the construction site and ensure risks associated with pollution during construction are minimised. It would also define key haul routes.
- Preparation and implementation of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan. The L&EMP would set out management prescriptions for the life of the development, including for meadow mixture planting beneath the solar arrays.

The WC Ecologist supports these proposed measures, subject to conditions. Overall there would be a minor beneficial effect on local ecology.

Archaeology

The ES includes a chapter on cultural heritage. The WC Archaeologist is satisfied that this properly addressed potential impacts on archaeology and recommends a condition accordingly. There are no impacts on other heritage assets.

Highway Safety

Access to the site is required primarily for the purposes of construction and decommissioning, when the majority of vehicle movements would occur.

Construction (and later decommissioning) would be over an approximate 14 week period resulting in an estimated peak of 4 deliveries per day. A maximum of up to 120 construction workers at any one time would be required on site during daylight hours, coming and going in cars, vans, mini-buses, etc. Parking would be provided on site. All vehicles would access the site via the A354.

During the operational phase (which is the majority of the time) movements to and from the site are likely to be limited to maintenance and cleaning vehicles, and equipment inspection vehicles, maybe once or twice per year.

The WC Highways Officer is satisfied that the proposal raises no highway safety issues. Access to the site is adequate, as are the proposed temporary measures for managing construction vehicles on the site during the construction and decommissioning phases.

Residential amenity and other considerations

The site is distant from most residential properties, and consequently the proposal should not raise amenity issues. Those properties nearest are at Bake Farm itself. The outlook from these properties would be safeguarded through adequate separation and proposed landscaping, and any disturbance caused during the construction phase would be insignificant and short term in any event.

Glint and glare has been raised by third parties as a potential issue, and is addressed in the EA. Defining the terms, glint is specular reflection produced as a direct reflection of the sun on the surface of the solar panel. It occurs on smooth surfaces such as glass and steel. Glare is scattered reflection of light and is significantly less intense than glint, and is produced from rougher surfaces such as tarmac.

Solar PV panels are designed to absorb light and thus they have a lower level of reflectivity than conventional window glass. Glint is therefore less than that produced by conventional glass. It also varies depending on the ambient light level and direction to the receptor. In this case, in view of the proposed angle of the panels the ES states that ground based reflections would only occur at certain times of day from the end of March to mid-September, but even then only to the west in the morning and east in the evening, and when prevailing weather conditions allow – glint does not occur when it is cloudy.

The ES further states that glare is unlikely to be an issue as solar panels are designed to maximise absorption of light with surfaces that are anti-reflective and diffusing. As a result localised glare can occur in very close proximity but not from any distance. At distance glare would only be perceived as a lighter area in the landscape.

So, by reason of their design, and short term impact on the receptor standing at a particular point, glint and glare are not considered to be issues in this case. This conclusion is agreed by the WC Environmental Health Officer.

Concern has been expressed by some third parties that the high value equipment kept at the site will attract criminals to the area. The proposal includes security

measures through fencing and surveillance cameras which would act as a deterrent. Crime in general is a matter for the police in any event.

Concern has been expressed about potential flooding – in particular, run off towards the A354. The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment which points out that the site will remain effectively green-field post development with the ground beneath remaining permeable. It follows that there would be no change as far as surface water run-off is concerned with no likelihood of increased flooding elsewhere. Notwithstanding this, the Environment Agency requests a condition requiring submission of a scheme to limit surface water run-off, and this is recommended accordingly.

Conclusion

This planning application is a considered response to the last application which was refused planning permission. It proposes a much reduced solar farm, and it demonstrates that this can be accommodated on the site without harm to interests of acknowledged importance, including the nearby Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

More particularly, it has been demonstrated that the application complies with both current local and national planning policy which are as a matter of principle supportive of proposals for sustainable renewable energy development. For these reasons the application is recommended for approval subject to conditions. The recommendation is made with full regard to the contents and conclusions of the Environmental Statement which accompanies the planning application.

Recommendation

The recommendation is to grant planning permission. However, as the committee meeting will take place before expiry of the current / third public consultation exercise for the application, the recommendation is presented so that the committee should authorise the Area Development Manager (South) to grant planning permission using his 'delegated powers', this subject to no further representations being received raising fundamentally new issues which he considers would require further consideration by the planning committee. The reason for this approach is to ensure that all representations are fully and properly taken into account and to enable the application to be decided within statutory timeframes (the 16 wk determination period for this application expires 6 March 2015).

Recommendation

That on expiry of the current outstanding public consultation exercise the Area Development Manager (South) be authorised to GRANT planning permission subject to conditions, this subject to no further representations being received raising new issues which he considers would require further consideration by the planning committee

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

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory

Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

no. 1020-0200-05 Iss 03 dated 10/07/14
no. 1020-0201-01 Iss16 dated 11/12/14
no. 2658_200_Rev F dated 08/01/15
no. 1020-0208-71 Iss 02 dated 07/04/14
no. 1020-0208-50 Iss 02 dated 07/07/14
no. 1020-0208-10 Iss 01 dated 11/07/14
no. 1020-0207-13 Iss 02 dated 07/07/14
no. 1020-0206-09 Iss 02 dated 07/07/14
no. 1020-0205-01 Iss 02 dated 07/07/14
no. 1020-0204-00 Iss 02 dated 07/07/14
no. 1020-0201-20 Iss 01 dated 09/07/14

- 3 REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

The solar installation and all related on-site built infrastructure (including inverter stations, CCTV cameras and poles, switch gear, access tracks, security fences, etc.) hereby granted shall be removed and the land restored to a condition suitable for agricultural use within 6 months of the PV panels ceasing to be used for the generation of renewable energy, or the expiry of 25 years after the date of first connection of any element of the solar farm to the National Grid, whichever is the sooner.

REASON: In the interests of amenity and the timely restoration of the land.

- 4 An aftercare scheme detailing the steps that are necessary to restore the land following cessation of the solar installation use shall be submitted by the applicant and/or owner to the Local Planning Authority at least 6 months prior to the removal of the PV panels and associated infrastructure.

REASON: To ensure the satisfactory restoration of the site for agriculture.

- 5 No development shall commence within the footprint of the approved development until:

a) A written programme of archaeological investigation, which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and

b) The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.

- 6 Before construction works commence, a Construction Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local planning Authority. The

Plan shall provide the following:

- A plan showing the position of all features which will be protected during the construction phase
- Details of measures to avoid spills of oils and other chemicals
- Details of measures to store and remove construction waste
- Details of measures to protect trees and hedgerows during construction
- Procedures to avoid harm and disturbance to nesting birds
- Procedures to avoid harm and disturbance to badgers
- Procedures to avoid harm to reptiles where risks are considered to be moderate / high

REASON: To prevent pollution and harm to wildlife during construction.

7

No development shall commence on site (including any works of demolition), until a Construction Method Statement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The Statement shall provide details of the following:

- a plan showing areas for the parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors
- a plan showing areas for loading and unloading of plant and materials
- a plan showing areas for storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development
- details of wheel washing facilities
- details of measures to control the emission of dust and dirt during construction
- a scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from demolition and construction works
- details of the programme for construction and removal of the temporary compounds required during construction
- details of the method of pile driving where this is to take place within 200m of any dwellinghouse.

The approved Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period. The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in accordance with the approved Statement unless first further agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To minimise detrimental effects to the neighbouring amenities, the amenities of the area in general, detriment to the natural environment through the risks of pollution and dangers to highway safety, during the construction phase.

8

Before construction works commence a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval in writing. The plan shall cover the first ten year period after construction and then be reviewed and rolled forward until the end of the temporary planning permission period. As a minimum, the Plan will set out:

- Details of the current baseline condition of every 100m length of hedge

in terms of its height, width and position of gaps

- Objectives of grassland, hedgerow and tree management
- Details of proposed hedgerow and tree planting and grassland seeding
- Details of the regime of grassland, hedgerow and tree management to meet the Objectives
- Details of design and locations of 10 bat boxes and 10 bird boxes
- Safeguards that will be taken to avoid soil erosion and compaction

The Plan shall be implemented as approved.

REASON: To safeguard wildlife interests.

- 9 Works involving the removal of hedgerows and/or ground preparation shall be carried out during the period 1st September to 28th February. In the event that it becomes necessary to carry out such works outside of this period, then the works will be preceded by a survey by a professional ecologist, and then only undertaken in accordance with the ecologist's written advice.

REASON: To safeguard wildlife interests.

- 10 All soft landscaping comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the first connection of any solar array to the national grid or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; All shrubs, trees and hedge planting shall be maintained free from weeds and shall be protected from damage by vermin and stock. Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years, die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features.

- 11 With the exception of sensor controlled security lights, there shall be no external lighting/illumination at or on the site unless otherwise approved by the local planning authority following the submission of a separate planning application.

REASON: To ensure the creation/retention of an environment free from intrusive levels of lighting and to protect the open countryside.

- 12 No development shall commence until a scheme to limit surface water flows from the development during the construction and operational phases has been submitted to, and agreed in writing by, the local planning authority. The development shall be implemented and maintained in accordance with the details of the approved scheme.

REASON: To ensure that flood risk is not increased.

- 13 No later than 6 months after the date any part of the solar farm hereby approved first becomes operational the applicant or operator and the

landowner shall implement the 'Proposed Measures' set out in the Farm Strategy Programme accompanying the planning application. A written record of the Programme's implementation shall be kept by the applicant or operator and landowner, and shall be made available to the local planning authority at any reasonable time at its request.

REASON: To maintain and/or enhance the productivity of the farm having regard to its soil quality.

- 14 No construction works or deliveries / collections associated with construction shall take place outside the hours of 7 am to 6 pm Mondays to Fridays and the hours of 8 am to 1 pm on Saturdays. There shall be no construction or deliveries / collections associated with construction carried out at any time on Sundays and Bank or Public Holidays.

REASON: To ensure the creation/retention of an environment free from intrusive levels of noise and activity in the interests of the amenity of the area.