

## **Item No. 10**

<b>APPLICATION NUMBER</b>	<b>CB/15/01484/OAC</b>
<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>Land at Lawrence End Park and to the East of Birch Spring Dane Street Luton</b>
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	<b>OAC: Installation and operation of solar farm, associated infrastructure including photovoltaic panels, mounting frames, inverters, transformers, sub stations, communications building, access tracks, pole mounted CCTV cameras and fence</b>
<b>PARISH</b>	<b>Hyde</b>
<b>WARD</b>	<b>Caddington</b>
<b>WARD COUNCILLORS</b>	<b>Cllrs Collins &amp; Stay</b>
<b>CASE OFFICER</b>	<b>Abel Bunu</b>
<b>DATE REGISTERED</b>	<b>20 April 2015</b>
<b>EXPIRY DATE</b>	<b>07 May 2015</b>
<b>APPLICANT</b>	
<b>AGENT</b>	<b>North Hertfordshire District Council</b>
<b>REASON FOR COMMITTEE TO DETERMINE</b>	<b>Major application which is a departure from the Development Plan</b>
<b>RECOMMENDED DECISION</b>	<b>Other Authority Consultation - No Objection</b>

### **Site Location:**

The application site which falls within the Hyde Parish area, is part of a larger site that straddles two Local Planning Authority boundaries, viz CBC and North Hertfordshire (North Herts). It comprises two fields (identified in this report as Fields 1 & 2 for ease of reference), with a total area of 13.1 hectares. Field 1 extends over an area of 6 hectares of which only about 5 hectares of the site falls within Central Bedfordshire and is classed as lower grade agricultural land (Grade 3b). Field 2 falls wholly within North Herts and measures approximately 7 hectares. The part of the application which falls within CBC is bounded by Chiltern Green and on its western boundary, and the remainder of Field 1 which extends towards the east and is itself separated from Field 2 by a dense woodland which stretches towards the south east. Field 1 opens out into the countryside in the north and south. The site is washed over by the Green Belt and is classed as an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV).

### **The Application:**

CBC has been consulted by North Herts District Council as an adjoining local planning authority in respect of an application for the construction of a Solar Farm, reference, **15/00845/1**. Most of the infrastructure required to support the development would be located within North Herts.

An officers' holding response confirming no objection to the application has been sent to North Herts pending a Members' decision. Details of the application are summarised below:

### Installation of Photovoltaic panels

The panels and associated infrastructure would occupy about 22.5% of the total site (Fields 1 & 2) in order to leave sufficient gaps between the rows of panels to avoid one row shading another and to make sure that there is adequate separation distances with the boundary vegetation to avoid further shading. The panels would be fixed onto mounting frames in fixed rows running in an east-westerly direction at an angle of 25 degrees so that they would face a southerly direction. The mounting frames would be pile driven into the ground to a depth of 1.5 metres and no concrete or foundations would be required. The mounted solar panels would be spaced at 3.5 metre distance apart, have a maximum height of 2.1 metres above ground level and 0.8 metres at the lower end to allow for sheep to graze underneath. The total estimated output from both fields is **5MW** which would provide approximately 1,424 households with their total electricity needs and avoid approximately 2,430 tonnes of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions per year. Of this generating capacity, approximately 1.9MW would be generated within the Central Bedfordshire District area, enough energy to power approximately 544 typical homes and save approximately 927 tonnes in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per annum.

### Installation of Inverter Stations

3no. inverter cabins mounted on concrete bases would be installed measuring about 3 metres high, 4.5 metres long and 1.6 metres wide. The electricity generated by the panels which would be Direct Current (DC), would be transmitted via cables to the inverters where it would be converted to Alternating Current (AC) before being connected to the national grid.

### Transformers

3no. transformers measuring approximately 2.2 metres high by 2.3 metres long and 1.8 metres wide.

### Substation

This would measure approximately 6.1 metres long, 2.4 metres wide and 2.6 metres high and would be situated close to the Chiltern Green access.

### Erection of boundary fencing

A 2 metre high agricultural timber and wire fence would be erected around the perimeter of the site. A 5 metre wide clear zone would be provided between the hedgerow and the fence and the same clearance would be maintained between the fence and the solar panels.

### CCTV cameras

CCTV cameras would be mounted on steel poles not exceeding 2.4 metres in height.

### Communications Building

The structure would measure approximately 3 metres long, 3.7metres wide and 2.6 metres high. An aerial or satellite dish would be affixed to the cabinet if reception issues render it necessary to do so. This equipment is required to enable 24 hour remote monitoring of performance and security of the site.

### Storage Shed

The shed would measure approximately 2.5 metres long, 3 metres wide and 2.6 metres at its highest point.

#### Composting Toilet

This would measure approximately 2.5 metres long, 1.1 metres wide and 3 metres high for use by operations and maintenance staff and members of the public touring the site.

#### Access

Field 1 would be accessed from an existing access on Chiltern Green Road within CBC and Field 2 would be accessed from Dane Street within North Herts via an existing agricultural access. Both accesses would be upgraded.

#### Landscaping

This is detailed in the Planting Plan and would include new hedgerows grown to a height of 3 metres.

The application is supported by the following documents:

- Planning, Design and Access Statement - 23 March 2015
- Statement of Community Involvement - 25 March 2015
- Agricultural Land Classification Assessment - March 2015
- Biodiversity Management Plan - March 2015
- Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Assessment - February 2015
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - February 2015
- Planting and Maintenance Specification - February 2015
- Flood Risk Assessment - March 2015
- Construction, Decommissioning and Traffic Management Method Statement - 25 March 2015
- Transport Assessment - March 2015
- Glint Assessment - February 2015
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal - April 2015
- Plans

The application was the subject of pre-application discussions with North Herts and the officer's advice which was positive, is included as part of the application documents. A screening opinion was also sought and the officer confirmed that the proposal would not constitute EIA development. No similar consultations were carried out with CBC.

#### **RELEVANT POLICIES:**

As summarised in the CBC full planning application report, reference, **CB/15/01204**.

#### **Planning History**

CB/15/01204	Pending. Installation and operation of solar farm, associated infrastructure including photovoltaic panels, mounting frames, inverters, transformers, sub stations, communications building, access tracks, pole mounted CCTV cameras and fence.
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#### **Representations:**

## **(Parish & Neighbours)**

As summarised in the full planning application report, reference, **CB/15/01204**.

## **Consultations/Publicity responses**

As summarised in the full planning application report, reference, **CB/15/01204**.

## **Determining Issues**

The main considerations of the application are:

1. Principle of the development - Green Belt considerations
2. Agricultural Land Quality and Use
3. Impact on the character and appearance of the open countryside including biodiversity
4. Impact on residential amenity
5. Impact on highway safety

## **Considerations**

Subject to North Herts finding the very special circumstances case acceptable, CBC considers that the principle of the development is acceptable. This view has been taken having regard to the following:

- There is general support for renewable energy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and wider environmental benefits are capable of being very special circumstances. The information submitted with the application details these environmental benefits.
- The application is accompanied by an Agricultural Land Classification Assessment which details the justification required for solar farm development on agricultural land including the fact that this would result in farm diversification.
- Whilst there would be harm to the character and visual appearance of the open countryside, the applicant has sufficiently demonstrated how this harm could be mitigated through additional planting which can be secured by planning conditions. In addition, Field 2 is separated from Field 1 by a woodland such that no cumulative harm would be experienced from the proposed development which would straddle the local authority boundary. Measures outlined in the Biodiversity Management Plan would ensure that the development promotes biodiversity.
- Given the separation distances from residential properties and the existing and proposed planting, it is considered that the development would not cause detrimental harm to residential amenity.
- With regards highway safety, the Construction, Decommissioning and Traffic Management Method Statement submitted with the application details measures which would ensure that the development does not result in highway safety hazard.

## **Recommendation**

That a response be sent to North Herts District Council confirming that this Local Planning Authority has no objections to the proposed development.

**DECISION**

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