

LUMICITY LTD

INSTALLATION OF 19,640 NO. GROUND MOUNTED PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR PANELS TO PROVIDE A 5MW INSTALLATION WITH POWER INVERTER SYSTEMS, TRANSFORMER STATIONS, SUB-STATIONS, SECURITY FENCING AND ACCESS GATES IN A FIELD NORTH OF GRANGE FARM, NYNEHEAD

Grid Reference: 314384.124135

Full Planning Permission

RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)

Recommended Decision: Conditional Approval

The proposed development will generate electricity from renewable sources contributing to tackling climate change and meeting renewable energy targets. There will be some slight, localised harm to the visual amenities of the area, however, the benefits are considered to outweigh the limited harm and the proposal is acceptable in accordance with Policies CP1 (Climate Change) and CP8 (Environment) of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy. The development will not cause harm to wildlife interests, the amenities of nearby property nor highway safety, nor will it lead to an increase in off-site flooding.

It is, therefore, considered to be acceptable in accordance with Policy DM1 (General Requirements) and guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework.

RECOMMENDED CONDITION(S) (if applicable)

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun within three years of the date of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the provisions of Section 91 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

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

(A2) DrNo BRS.4133.006 rev A Planting Plan

(A3) DrNo BRS.4133_08-1a Point of Connection Plan

(A0) DrNo BS8120866_01 rev P3 Solar compound site layout

(A0) DrNo BS8120866_02 rev P3 Solar compound site fencing

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

3. Within 25 years and six months following the development hereby permitted

being brought into use, or within six months of the cessation of electricity generation by the solar PV facility hereby permitted, whichever is the sooner, the solar PV panels, frames, ground screws, inverter housings, and all associated structures, foundations and fencing approved shall be dismantled and removed from the site. The site shall subsequently be restored in accordance with a scheme and method statement (that shall include deconstruction traffic management) that shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority no later than three months following the cessation of power production.

Reason: To ensure that the site is adequately restored following the decommissioning of the site in the interests of the visual amenities of the area, in accordance with Policy DM1 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

4. The site operator shall inform the Local Planning Authority within 5 days of being brought into use that the site is operational and producing electricity.

Reason: To allow the Local Planning Authority to keep a firm record of the date of operation, to allow effective future monitoring of the development.

5. Prior to the commencement of the development, details of a strategy to protect wildlife shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The strategy shall be based on the advice of Michael Woods Associates ecological survey dated September 2012 and include:

- Details of protective measures to include method statements to avoid impacts on protected species during all stages of development;
- Details of the timing of works to avoid periods of work when the species could be harmed by disturbance;
- Measures for the retention and replacement and enhancement of places of rest for the species.

Once approved the works shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and timing of the works unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and thereafter the resting places and agreed accesses for wildlife shall be permanently maintained.

Reason: To protect wildlife and their habitats from damage in accordance with Policies DM1 and CP8 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy and guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Statement.

6. (i) Before any part of the permitted development is commenced, a landscaping scheme, which shall include details of the species, siting and numbers to be planted, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- (ii) The scheme shall be completely carried out within the first available planting season from the date of commencement of the development, or as otherwise extended with the agreement in writing of the Local Planning Authority.

- (iii) For a period of five years after the completion of each landscaping scheme, the trees and shrubs shall be protected and maintained in a healthy weed free condition and any trees or shrubs that cease to grow shall be replaced by trees or shrubs of similar size and species, or the appropriate trees or shrubs as may be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the proposed development does not harm the character and appearance of the area in accordance with Policy DM1 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

- 7. Prior to the commencement of development an Environmental, Landscape and Ecological Management Plan and a Construction Environmental Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include how the site will be maintained during the course of the development, including any temporary protection of ecological interests on the access routes. The Environmental Management Plan and Construction Environmental Management Plan shall be implemented as approved for the duration of the approved development including the decommissioning phase.

Reason: To ensure that the site is managed in an acceptable way to protect visual amenity and ecological interests on the site, in accordance with Policies DM1 and CP8 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

- 8. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a condition survey of the existing public highway including the road surface and boundary hedgebanks shall be carried out in accordance with details that shall previously have been agreed with the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the Local Highway Authority. Any damage caused to the highway and boundary hedgebanks shall be remedied by the developer within 6 months of the completion of the construction phase unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the access roads are returned to their former condition in the interests of highway safety and the visual amenities of the area in accordance with Policy DM1 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

- 9. The perimeter fencing hereby permitted shall be erected prior to the commencement of any other works on site unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect boundary trees, hedges and wildlife interests during the construction phase, in accordance with Policies DM1 and CP8 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

- 10. 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 in accordance with NPPF paragraph 103 and Taunton Deane Core Strategy Policy CP8.

11. No development shall take place within 6m of the top of bank of any river or ditch at any time during the development.

Reason: To ensure that flood risk is not increased and to protect the biodiversity value of the watercourses in accordance with NPPF paragraphs 102 and 109 and Taunton Deane Core Strategy Policy CP8.

12. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a Construction Traffic Management Plan shall be submitted to an approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan shall include the size of vehicles to be used for deliveries and the routes to be used. The developer shall ensure that any contract for deliveries to the site shall stipulate the vehicles sizes and routes approved in the management plan.

Reason: To ensure that construction traffic is adequately managed in order to minimise the impact on the local highway network in accordance with Policy DM1 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

13. The developer shall ensure that all vehicles leaving the site are in such condition as not to emit dust or deposit mud, slurry or other debris on the highway. In particular (but without prejudice to the foregoing), efficient means shall be installed, maintained and employed for cleaning the wheels of all lorries leaving the site, details of which shall have been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority beforehand and fully implemented prior to start of construction, and thereafter maintained until the completion of the construction phase.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policy DM1 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

14. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order, 1995 (or any Order amending, replacing or re-enacting that Order), no fixed plant or machinery, buildings, structures and erections, or private ways shall be erected, extended, installed rearranged, replaced, repaired or altered at the site, other than those hereby permitted, without the further grant of planning permission.

Reason: To protect wildlife interests and the visual amenities of the area in accordance with Policies DM1 and CP8 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

15. No external artificial lighting shall be installed on the site.

Reason: To protect wildlife interests and the visual amenities of the area in accordance with Policies DM1 and CP8 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.

Notes for compliance

1. In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework the Council has worked in a positive and pro-active way with the applicant and has negotiated amendments to the application to enable the grant of planning permission.

PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a c.5MW solar photovoltaic installation comprising 19,640 solar panels on agricultural land, contained within a single field. The panels would be surrounded by a 2m high security fence and new hedgerows would be planted between existing public footpaths that cross the site and the security fence.

The application indicates that panels would be arranged two panels high in a portrait orientation, such that the rear (high) edge of the panels was around 2.2m from the ground (although this may vary slightly depending on ground levels. They would be fixed to the ground using screws or stakes. Rows of panels would be 8m apart.

Access to the site would be provided from the south via the existing entrance to Grange Farm on the Nynehead to Milverton Road (Luckham Bridge Road).

SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The site comprises a broadly flat area of agricultural land, within Milverton Parish, but close to Nynehead. Luckham Bridge Road between these two settlements lies to the southeast and east of the site, and is lined with mature hedgerows, such that the site is not readily visible from this public highway. To the north, the land rises before falling to the road between Milverton (Houndsmoor) and Oake.

The site is currently surrounded by mature hedgerows on all boundaries, although two public footpaths pass through the site. One footpath crosses at the northwest corner, before passing out of the site a short distance along the northern site boundary into the adjoining field. A second path runs along most of the eastern side of the site, passing out in the southeast corner. To the north of the site, the land rises, and the footpath reaches a summit. Walking south on this path, the whole expanse of the site is visible from the summit, against a backdrop of the Blackdown Hills.

CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES

Consultees

MILVERTON PARISH COUNCIL – Councillors expressed Support for ‘green energy’. However they also expressed dissatisfaction about the applicants lack of engagement with local people and poor understanding of local roads and transport issues. There was also concern about the potential loss of Grade 2 farmland.

NYNEHEAD PARISH COUNCIL – Object for the following reasons:

1. The roads leading to the site are unsuitable for ht traffic that would be needed for the construction of the facility:
 - a. The roads could not take the heavy loads involved.
 - b. The site is a long way from suitable main road.
 - c. There are restrictions, legal and otherwise on many of the approach roads, such as Poole Railway Bridge, Ash Lane and Bradford-on-Tone.
 - d. The site would have to be reached through the village of Higher Nynehead where the road has no footways but is well used by people on foot.
2. The site is visible from Higher Nynehead and from public footpaths that adjoin the site (WG7/45 and WG7/1) and which are well used by Nynehead residents. The planning application is, therefore, incorrect where it states that the site cannot be seen from a public road, public footpath, public bridleway or other public land.
3. The proposal would lead to the loss of agricultural land. The council is not convinced that the land when developed could be used productively for farming and in the light of world population growth and pressure on world food supplies there is a long term need to protect farmland and not tie-up land for other uses for 25 years.

SCC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP – Formal Comments awaited. The Highway Authority do not currently accept the applicant’s proposed construction traffic routing, although they do consider that an alternative may be acceptable.

LANDSCAPE – My main concerns are:

- Visual impacts from the closest two public footpaths and;
- Surrounding properties
- Impact on the landscape character of the proposed site;
- Impact of barrier/security fencing.

The views from the PROW are classed as being of ‘moderate’ sensitivity but the visual impacts are locally high and therefore the visual impacts are high. These can be overcome to some extent by hedgerow management, but where the public footpaths go through the site this will not be easily mitigated other than by hedgerow planting on the field side of the N/S public footpath and south side of the E/W public footpath.

The proposed mitigation will, subject to details, help reduce visual impacts from

surrounding properties.

I do not agree that the landscape character impacts are moderate. My assessment is that even with retention of existing hedgerows, the agricultural landscape of the site itself will be compromised.

I recommend grey or black fencing rather than green to reduce visual impacts.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – No objection, subject to a condition that drainage works proposed in the submitted Flood Risk Assessment are implemented.

DRAINAGE ENGINEER – Whilst having no major concerns over this application I have requested more information regarding construction of the proposed swales and the results of porosity tests. To date this information has not been forthcoming and therefore at this stage I have to OBJECT to the application.

SCC - FLOOD RISK MANAGER – The Flood Risk Assessment makes no reference to the impact of flooding to the site access. Will there be safe access to and from the site during a flood on the ordinary watercourses that the access crosses.

The applicant should be advised that all new crossings and modifications to existing crossings of ordinary watercourses will require the consent of SCC under the Land Drainage Act.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH - NOISE & POLLUTION – There is another solar farm within the district and Environmental Health has not received any noise complaints relating to transformers on this site.

With this application, the transformers are central to the site and it is unlikely that they will disturb residents. However to provide a more detailed comment a noise assessment would need to be provided by the applicant

SCC - RIGHTS OF WAY – No comments received.

OAKE PARISH COUNCIL – Supports the application, but consideration must be given to the best material regarding the colour to blend into the landscape. Also landscaping should be considered to screen the panels from public view.

Representations

Somerset Gardens Trust – raises the following matters:

- The site is approximately 1.2km to the North of Nynehead Court – a registered Grade II* historic park and garden.
- The highest parts of the site will be visible from parts of Nynehead Park.

When the 2.2m height of the panels is taken into account, we believe an even greater area will be visible.

- The hedge to the south of the site has been allowed to grow to a considerable height. This may need to be cut to increase winter light falling on the panels, reducing the screening effect.
- The agricultural nature of the landscape surrounding the historic park would have been considered when the park was designated. Any part of this wider view would be detrimental to the setting of the park.

Campaign to Protect Rural England – object for the following reasons:

- The proposal will result in the loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land. A detailed appraisal of the agricultural land category would be desirable. The arrays have not been designed so that the site can be grazed as the panels are set too low. The land will be completely out of production for at least 25 years.
- The panels will increase surface water run-off affecting areas downstream at Hillfarrance.
- Footpaths run along the eastern boundary of the site as well as across the northeast corner. Although the latter has been screened, the no attempt has been made to screen the arrays or security fencing from the eastern right of way. The supporting statement is confused as to the location of the footpath and as proposed the development will spoil a pleasant rural path.
- The grade 2* registered park and garden at Nynehead Court is within the visibility zone and no specific mitigation measures are proposed.
- If allowed, a permissive route to the carry the footpath to the eastern side of the hedge should be established and put in place throughout the development; a flood attenuation scheme should be implemented and the southern hedge boundary should be conditioned to be maintained at a minimum height of 3m.

6 letters of OBJECTION have been received raising the following issues:

- The panels will be visible from a distance from several public footpaths and other vantage points and will have a detrimental effect on the landscape character, particularly in winter. The site is at the half way point of a circular public footpath walk from Nynehead at precisely the point where some of the best views towards the Blackdown Hills can be obtained.
- If the trees/hedges to the south are cut to increase light incidence, more panels would be visible.
- The panels would seriously reduce the available good quality agricultural land at the site. The applicant's land at Cullompton should not be considered as part of Grange Farm in order to consider the percentage of farmland covered by panels.
- The access roads are narrow country lanes, with no footways. They pass through the village of Nynehead itself. As such, there would be significant safety issues to local residents from the construction traffic.
- The local roads have been subject to an increase in traffic following the conversion of barns at Blockhouse, Bickley and Houndsmoor farms.
- The view would be changed from rural to industrial.
- The panels would damage business for local bed and breakfasts and spoil the

rural atmosphere for residents.

- It seems possible that our climate and frequent heavy cloud cover might mitigate against this on a commercially viable scale.
- It is stated that the site is close to an existing sub station and a further one may not be required, but the planning application suggests otherwise. It, therefore, seems an invalid argument for using this location.
- Query whether additional power cable connections to the national grid maybe required.
- The FRA asserts that the installation would have no effect on the runoff from the site. This issue has been debated at length regarding a parallel application in Tolland and the same issues apply. The bland assumption that there would be no increase in run-off cannot be support and some increase in run-off has to be accommodated. The hydrological assessment needs revision.
- The need for security fencing is not mentioned in the Pegasus documentation. It suggests a possible risk to the health for any local inhabitants or livestock and argues against the concept of livestock grazing between the panels and for farming to consider.
- The installation would be a significant eyesore compared tot he appearance of the area at present.
- There is no indication of potential noise from the inverter systems and substations.
- If this type of energy development is commercially viable, energy companies etc. should look to establish permanent sites with appropriate access should be considered, rather than the temporary use of a country field.
- The site is in the middle of a large area of unspoilt natural wildlife, traversed regularly by badgers and including a stream to the southern boundary frequented by otters. The only access to the site is via a bridge over this stream.
- The lack of pre-application consultation is concerning.

PLANNING POLICIES

SD1 - SD 1 TDBC Presumption in Favour of Sustain. Dev,
CP1 - TD CORE STRAT. CLIMATE CHANGE,
CP6 - TD CORE STRATEGY - TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY,
CP8 - TD CORE STRATEGY- ENVIRONMENT,
DM1 - TD CORE STRATEGY - GENERAL REQUIREMENTS,
DM2 - TD CORE STRATEGY - DEV,

LOCAL FINANCE CONSIDERATIONS

None.

DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The main issues in the consideration of this application are the principle of the

development, the landscape impact and the impact on the highway network. Ecology and flood risk must also be considered.

Principle

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the purpose of planning is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. This should be with a social, economic and environmental role. In terms of its environmental role, planning should contribute “to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy”. As part of the 12 principles of planning, the NPPF states that in moving to a low carbon economy, Local Planning Authorities should encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy).

Paragraph 97 specifically states: “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”, going on to add that local policies “should maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts”.

At paragraph 93, the NPPF states that “Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure”. It then states that “this is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development”. The subsequent paragraphs refer to the need for a positive approach to renewables and the need to approve applications if its impacts are or can be made acceptable. It is true that much of this relates to the need for LPAs to plan positively and put strategies for renewable energy delivery in place. The Core Strategy does not include or propose such land allocations, rather it details a criteria based policy within which to assess such applications (Policy CP1). Therefore, each application must be considered on its own merits, largely with regard to its impacts and in accordance with Policy CP1.

In terms of local policy, the proposal is located on land designated as open countryside. In general terms, development in these areas is restricted, unless they are for agricultural purposes. Policy DM2 (Development in the Countryside) of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy does not specifically permit renewable energy installations, although it does permit development for essential utilities infrastructure. This could be taken to include power generating infrastructure, especially in the context of the NPPF which, as in previous planning policy, indicates that the ‘need’ for the development should not be considered by the Local Planning Authority.

Strategic Objective 1 (Climate Change) of the Core Strategy states that “Taunton Deane will be a leader in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change and adapting to its effects”. Policy CP1 (Climate Change), referred to above, states that ‘proposals for the development of renewable and low carbon sources of energy, including large-scale freestanding installations will be favourably considered provided that...[they] can be satisfactorily assimilated into the landscape ... and would not

harm the appearance of these areas; [and that their] impact on the local community, economy, nature conservation or historical interests does not outweigh the economic and wider environmental benefits of the proposal”.

Some concern has been raised about the loss of high quality agricultural land. No agricultural land classification survey has been carried out for the site, but the general agricultural land classification maps for the area indicate that the site is likely to be grade 3, or possibly grade 2. Paragraph 112 indicates that the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land should be taken into account and that LPAs should “seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality”. However, much of the vale of Taunton Deane is higher grade (1-3) agricultural land, the application site being a mix of 2 and 3. In this context, if TDBC is to accept renewable energy in principle, it is likely to require the use of higher grade agricultural land. Whilst its removal from production is regrettable, the permission is sought for a 25 year period after which the land could be returned to agriculture. As such, it is not considered that this matter carries sufficient weight to warrant refusal of the application.

With regard to the foregoing, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in principle, provided that it has an acceptable impact on the landscape, ecology, highway network and other surrounding land uses.

Landscape impact

The existing boundary hedgerows and generally flat landscape mean that the site is not particularly visible in the wider landscape. Whilst parts of the site can be seen from some public roads to the south and parts of the gardens at Nynehead Court, this is not to a significant degree in the context of the wide, low lying landscape. It is not considered that these more distant views are so harmful as to warrant refusal of the application.

The most significant impacts in this case, come from the immediate locality and the views of the site from the footpaths. In terms of the short length of footpath along the western part of the northern boundary, it is considered acceptable to screen the site and security fencing through the planting of a new hedgerow. The footpath would be retained in a wide channel between the existing and proposed hedges and, in any case, views out of the site from this location are already truncated by the western site boundary hedge.

The treatment of the path along the eastern edge of the site is of greater concern. Following discussions with the applicant, the arrays have been moved further away from the field boundary to allow the footpath to run in a wider channel (approximately 16m) between the existing hedge to the east and a proposed new hedge to screen the site from the footpath. Although this will take some time to establish, it will in time prevent views of the installation from this length of footpath. The walker's experience on this length of footpath will change: Currently, one enjoys open views towards the Blackdown Hills and this will be restricted through the planting of the new hedge. The amenity of the footpath will, therefore, be reduced, but given the proposed screening, is not considered to be to such an extent that would warrant refusal of the application.

The greatest impact comes from the length of footpath to the north of the site. When

walking south on this path, one reaches a summit a short distance to the north of the site boundary. Whilst the summit is low in terms of the wider landscape, it is sufficiently raised to offer a wide expansive view across the vale towards Wellington and the Blackdown Hills. In the foreground, the application site is clearly visible and, given the elevation above the site, it would not be possible to fully mitigate the visual impact of the development from this area. That said, the Vale is a working landscape, containing towns and the necessary infrastructure to serve large centres of population – it is not an unspoilt landscape and this dilutes its value in terms of landscape character. Proposals to allow the hedge to grow up together with planting some heavy standard fast growing trees (Willow and Alder) will significantly reduce the impact of the development. It must be accepted, however, that there will be some long term harm to this length of footpath should the application be permitted, although it is not considered to be so significant as to warrant refusal of the application.

Highways

Following concerns expressed by Nynehead Parish Council, local residents and the Local Highway Authority, the applicant has been asked to re-examine potential routes for construction traffic.

The applicant submitted a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), which noted that all access routes to the site were constrained and proposed a variety of routes to use for different sized construction vehicles. The Highway Authority is not accepting of the submitted plan, particularly the proposal to route the largest vehicles through Milverton. They have suggested that instead smaller vehicles are used for all construction traffic and that this should be routed via Poole and Nynehead Hollow. At the time of writing, this matter is unresolved although it appears that the applicant will accept the Highway Authority's suggestion. A condition is recommended that a revised CTMP is submitted for prior approval.

It should be noted that, whilst a CTMP can be prepared and agreed, ultimately it is not possible for planning conditions to effectively enforce the use of particular construction patterns, vehicles or routes. The Local Planning Authority can go no further than requiring any contract for deliveries to stipulate the use of approved vehicles and routes, but the physical enforcement on the ground cannot be achieved.

Once operational, the site will only need to be accessed by a light maintenance van on a low frequency. It is not considered that this would have any significant impact upon the local highway network.

Flood Risk

The submitted Flood Risk Assessment details proposals for managing potential changes in the way that the site drains. This includes the provision of swales and scrapes to prevent increased overland flow towards the stream to the south. Having been provided with additional information, the Environment Agency is content with the proposals, provided that the recommended work is carried out. Conditions are, therefore, recommended to ensure that further details are provided and that the works are carried out.

Ecological impact

The Council's Biodiversity Officer has examined the submitted ecological survey. She is content that protected species that may occupy the site would not be adversely affected by the proposals as most wildlife is restricted to the hedges, which are proposed to be retained. There is potential for a bat roost within a mature oak tree in the middle of the site, and this is proposed to be retained as part of the development. It is, therefore, considered that the impact on ecology would be acceptable.

Other Matters

Whilst there is a scattering of isolated dwellings in the immediate vicinity, it is not considered that they would be adversely affected by glint or glare from the panels. In terms of potential for noise disturbance, evidence from other operational sites indicates that it is unlikely that the required inverters would generate sufficient noise to impact unreasonably upon the closest dwellings in this wide open landscape, as suggested in the comments of the Environmental Health Officer.

Conclusions

National and Local planning policy give clear, in principle, support for new renewable energy installations. There are clear, long term, environmental benefits in increasing the amount of electricity produced by renewable sources such as solar. In this case, it has been shown that, whilst most of the landscape impacts can be made acceptable through the planting of new hedgerows, it will not be possible to fully mitigate the impact on views from the public footpath to the north of the site. This visual harm must be weighed against the benefits of increasing electricity production from renewable sources. Whilst the Core Strategy is not silent on renewable energy, it is considered appropriate to make this assessment in accordance with Policy SD1 of the Core Strategy and Paragraph 12 of the NPPF – i.e. whether the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. In this case, given that the surrounding landscape is not covered by any particular landscape designation and the general landscape character of the Vale is already diminished by existing infrastructure, it is your officer's opinion that the benefits outweigh the harm. It is, therefore, recommended that planning permission is granted.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

CONTACT OFFICER: Mr M Bale Tel: 01823 356454