

10/14/0028

DR M MENDOZA

INSTALLATION OF 500 GROUND MOUNTED PV SOLAR PANELS PRODUCING 125.50kWp WITH ANCILLARY CUT OUT/METERING HOUSING AND TRANSFORMER/SUB STATION IN THE PADDOCK ADJACENT TO HEATHER COTTAGE, CHURCHSTANTON (RE-SUBMISSION OF 10/13/0015)

Location: HEATHER COTTAGE, OATENS FARM LANE, CHURCHSTANTON,
TAUNTON, TA3 7PU

Grid Reference: 319062.111913

Full Planning Permission

RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)

Recommended Decision: Conditional Approval

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:

(A3) DrNo S/S 16/03A Section and Elevations
(A3) Cable Entry Requirements/Cut-out building
(A2) DrNo S/S 16/01B Site and Location Plans

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

3. No development shall take place until samples or details of the colour to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the structures hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out and thereafter retained as such, in accordance with the approved details as above, unless otherwise agreed 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, and as agreed by the agent.

4. Within 25 years and 6 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.

5. 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.

6. (i) The landscaping/planting scheme shown on the submitted plan shall be completely carried out within the first available planting season from the date of commencement of the development.

(ii) For a period of five years after the completion of the 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 other 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. (i) Before any part of the permitted development is commenced, a wildflower enhancement scheme including details of suitable wildflower plug species, siting and numbers to be planted, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall be accompanied by a management plan that ensures the future maintenance of the wildflowers.

(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 wildflower enhancement scheme, the wildflowers shall be protected and maintained and any plants that cease to grow shall be replaced by wildflower plugs of similar size and species, or the appropriate species as may be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To enhance the site for biodiversity

8. There shall be no stockpiling of material or ground-raising (temporary or permanent) on any part of the site.

Reason: To ensure that the general slope which is a character of this area is not compromised in accordance with the NPPF and Taunton Deane Adopted Core Strategy Policy CP8.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. Prior to the commencement of development a construction traffic management plan providing details on the delivery of the photovoltaic panels and equipment to the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (and Local Highway Authority) and fully implemented in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

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.

12. All services and cable connections shall be placed underground unless otherwise agreed 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.

Notes to Applicant

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

The application is for an array of solar panels in the central part of a paddock, the area is approx. 32m by 47m, sited approx. 30m from the gate and hedge. The panels would be 1m by 1.6m at an angle of 40 degrees to the horizontal, on a ground slope of around 10 degrees, facing south-west, with a max. height above ground of 0.5m. A new screen hedge of Beech is shown to the north east of the panels. Structures are shown close to the existing hedge/trees alongside the lane; these are a housing for cut-out and CT metering panel, and measuring 1.2m by 1.8m by 2.3m in height, this will be in the easterly corner of the site, away from the boundary trees. The transformer unit/substation which is 2.2m by 2.5m by 1.8m in height with a galvanized steel security fence around the immediate compound. New hedgerow planting will supplement the north-western boundary hedge. In addition a short section of new hedge will be planted to the south-east of the transformer. The submission states there is existing hardstanding, which has been allowed to grass over, for 2 vehicles inside the existing gate; this will be used for use for maintenance. The agent has also stated that the applicants are prepared to compensate for the reduction in bio-diversity as indicated in the survey, by planting/sowing selected species.

The applicant has submitted a Design and Access Statement, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and a County Wildlife Site Impact Assessment, which incorporates a 2014 botanical survey. The latter survey assesses that the grassland diversity has degraded since the original in 1987 and it is more than possible that the included species were located in the further grasslands to the south. The natural vegetation will be encouraged, cut for hay, as at present, and there is no intention to cultivate or fertilise any of the developed or remaining paddock areas. The current flora identified is already below what would be typical for designation as a Local Wildlife Site, and is unlikely to deteriorate further given the existing and ongoing seasonal management of occasional grazing and mowing for hay, which will not change significantly other than a likely reduction in grazing.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The site is within the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in open countryside as defined in the Taunton Deane Core Strategy. The field is within a Local Wildlife Site - Southey Moor. There are mature trees on the roadside verge as part of the hedgerow. The site slopes down away from the road, towards an area of trees/hedge. There is an existing access just to its north west (within the site).

The field lies to the north-west of the dwelling, known as Heather Cottage, which is a detached property on a rural road. Oaklands/Buttles Farm and Cleve Farm/Oaten Farm are the nearest properties. Other than linking these and a few other isolated properties, this road appears to be for local use only and is not a significant through route.

Relevant Planning History

10/13/0025, installation of 500 ground mounted PV solar panels in middle of the paddock, adjacent to Heather Cottage, refused, 25/10/13, as the application was not accompanied by a current species list and/or ecological survey and so the potential

impacts of the arrays have not been investigated.

10/13/0015, installation of 500 ground mounted PV solar panels in paddock adjacent to Heather Cottage, withdrawn 31/07/13. (Site being the nearest to the adjacent road.)

CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES

Consultees

CHURCHSTANTON PARISH COUNCIL - This further amended application is still opposed since it continues to be against the NPPF AONB protective policies and the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan for such isolated and remote locations, close to a traditional Blackdowns rural landscape in the Bolham Valley. Even though the site has been moved down the hill to reduce its impact, some parts of the development will still be seen from the roads and from longer views. This conflicts with the policies to allow smaller applications that do not have such an impact in this sensitive area. The number of panels and their close proximity may even affect the low biodiversity of the chosen site by being unable to implement any landscape management and the council would want to see more positive conditions being applied if they are minded to approve this application.

SCC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP - This proposal is the re-submission of planning application 10/13/0015 and having studied the previous plans they appear similar as such the Highway Authority's previous comments would apply and are set out below for your information.

The proposed development is situated on land within the farm site. Having made a site visit and studied the documentation supporting the application is clear that the proposal is in an adequate location for this type of development. Access to the site is gained off Oaten Farm Lane a designated unclassified highway, to which the National Speed Limit applies. However, given the narrow and sinuous nature of Oaten Farm Lane, vehicle speeds are likely to be less than the posted speed limit.

With regards to the vehicles movements it is presumed that there will be an increase in vehicle movements along Oaten Farm Lane during the construction period for this site. However this will only be for a limited period during the construction phase of this development.

Once the site is operation it is unlikely that the site will generate a significant level of vehicle movements as the only vehicles which would access the site would be those associated with the sites on-going maintenance. As a result, the Highway Authority has no objections to this proposal.

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB SERVICE - Thank you for requesting comments from the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership on this application, and I apologise for this delayed response. Although described as a resubmission of application 10/13/0015, it seems that it is more accurately a re-submission of 10/13/0025, now with an additional ecological survey included.

The Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is primarily an agricultural landscape that has retained a sense of remoteness and remains largely unspoilt by modern development. This delicate balance is severely threatened by large scale or inappropriate development in open countryside. Consequently, the AONB Partnership is keen to limit the introduction of unnecessary and incongruous developments in isolated and remote locations, and such proposals should be given very careful consideration as to their potential impact on the natural beauty of the area, and people's enjoyment of its associated special qualities. The Bolham valley, location of this application, is a particularly sensitive, characteristic area within the AONB retaining a strong sense of the English pastoral landscape that is central to the Blackdown Hills being a nationally important landscape.

Key to the area's designation are that it is an isolated, unspoilt rural area, largely undisturbed by modern development, and the diversity of landscape patterns and pictures, including long views over field patterned landscapes. The special qualities of the AONB are described further in the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-2019, and of particular relevance here are the following aspects:

- Unspoilt, panoramic views across flat-topped plateau and straight undisturbed ridge tops and over hidden valleys
- A well wooded pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of hedges and hedgerow trees
- Rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected semi-natural habitats
- A sense of remoteness enhanced by the ... extensive woodland of the upper slopes and hidden valleys
- Area of high tranquillity spared many of the intrusions of modern life

The Bolham Valley is a prime example of these special qualities; a quiet, out of the way part of the AONB, unaffected by commercial development or man-made structures. The area's extensive woodland cover may provide a screening and filtering function to limit visual impact, but the lightly settled character, the absence of modern development, sense of tranquillity and expansive views across the upper slopes indicate the sensitivity of this landscape to solar PV development. In this respect I am concerned about the potential for this development to affect local landscape character and adversely impact on the AONB's special qualities.

I do accept that the specific siting of the array proposed in this application, along with proposed hedge planting and management, would reduce the prominence and visibility of the panels in the wider landscape compared to the original position at the top of the field. However, given the sensitivity of the setting, I question whether it is robust enough to suggest in the landscape and visual impact assessment that 'if any long distance glimpses occur... the revised position... should adequately address this'.

The AONB Management Plan also includes the following management objectives, considered relevant to this application:

Objective PD 1 - All development in the AONB is of the highest quality, is in keeping with the landscape and conserves its wildlife, historic character and other special qualities.

Policy PD 1/A - Seek to ensure that all local plan documents and decision making

has regard to the AONB purpose, the management plan and other AONB statements and guidance, and ensure that the importance of conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB is fully reflected in the land-use planning framework.

Policy PD 1/B - Seek to ensure that any necessary new developments or conversions within the AONB or affecting its setting conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities, particularly by respecting the area's landscape character and the local character of the built environment, reinforce local distinctiveness and seek to enhance biodiversity.

Objective PD 2 - Emissions of carbon and other greenhouse gases are reduced within the AONB through reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures and utilising appropriate renewable energy technologies.

Policy PD 2/B - Support and encourage appropriate, small-scale renewable energy schemes to help achieve carbon reduction and energy security that do not conflict with the special qualities of the AONB or the conservation of natural beauty.

Objective LC 3 - The Blackdown Hills landscape is valued as a place where a sense of tranquillity can be enjoyed free from man-made noise and visual intrusion.

Objective BG 1 - Habitats in the AONB are well managed, restored and extended forming a coherent ecological network that can support more species and facilitate movement of wildlife within the landscape.

With regard to the local wildlife site (LWS) status and ecological survey, looking at the shape and extent of the LWS area, I would have thought it unlikely that this field was included if there were no notable species present (but have no evidence to support this). In any event, rather than accepting the degraded, 'below par' condition, if the planning authority is minded to approve this application then the AONB Partnership would welcome conditions seeking positive management of the paddock. The appearance of the panels themselves will also be an important consideration in minimising their impact, such as using dark recessive colours and non-reflective materials for the panels, frames and associated structures. The cut out/metering housing and transformer/substation, with associated security fencing, are very close to the highway and are in themselves incongruous features in this setting, and so should be considered carefully.

LANDSCAPE – comments on previous application for the revised siting - the relocated scheme with the northern boundary Beech hedgerow addresses my earlier concerns.

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL - no observations.

SCC - RIGHTS OF WAY - no response received

MID DEVON - No observations.

BIODIVERSITY - Further to comments made in connection with 10/13/0015, the

original County wildlife impact assessment was revised in July 2014 and a further wildlife survey by Bluebell Ecology Ltd dated June 2014 has been submitted in support of this application.

The site forms part of the Bolham Brook LWS and was designated as a Local wildlife site in 1992. The latest botanical survey found that the field has deteriorated botanically since designation, there now being an absence of notable species such as bog pimpernel, common spotted orchid, lousewort and lesser spearwort.

I agree with the report that the notable species previously present were likely to be located in the southern lower section of the field.

The field is classed as semi improved with a medium level of species diversity. It now includes a sward dominated by Yorkshire fog, crested dogs tail, cocks foot, sweet vernal grass and red clover with at least an additional twenty species present in the sward.

My initial concerns were that notable species may be shaded by the panels but this no longer appears to be the case. I therefore consider that I am unable to object to the proposal on wildlife grounds, although I think that, on principle Local Wildlife Sites should remain undeveloped.

SOMERSET WILDLIFE TRUST - we have noted that this is a resubmission of a previous planning application (10/13/0015). As far as we are concerned this planning application does not differ significantly from the previous application as far as the possible impact on the Local Wildlife Site is concerned. We completely agree with the comments of the Authority's Biodiversity Officer in her email of 29/07/14, this is the wrong site for this development. The PV farm will occupy a significant part of the LWS and the amount of shading may impact on the flora of the field. It is not possible to assess the likely long term effects. We cannot support development of any sort on Local Wildlife Sites. We therefore object to this development which should be refused.

Representations

4 letters of OBJECTION:

Landscape/AONB

The proposal will be seen from various points in spite of the siting further down the slope;

The panels are unnatural, visible and an un-aesthetic distraction from the unspoilt countryside of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

There is concern about the taller substation and the galvanised security fencing;

No need for the car parking spaces;

There will be a clear view of these panels in winter;

Loss of views;

Local lanes used by walkers and horse riders who would be able to see the panels clearly;

This is a substantial commercial development out of character with the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

The panels will be seen from the adjacent road;
The primary purpose of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and a secondary purpose is to promote forms of social and economic development;
The proposal is about 30 times that required for domestic use;

Wildlife

The site is a Local Wildlife Site;
The area beneath the panels would be shaded, and have a detrimental impact on the flora and fauna;
The grass will have to be kept short so as not to overshadow the panels;
Disruption of animals, invertebrates and insects during construction leading to less biodiversity;

Other

Any schemes should be based on roofs only;
This is a commercial scheme/venture and thus contrary to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
Effect on property prices;
Inappropriate use of residential land;
The long term impact of extensive ground based solar panels is unknown due to the contemporary nature of the technology; site is overshadowed by large trees;
The applicants are not resident in this country and have no appreciation of the character of the area;
There is no provision for connections to the grid;
Connections will have to go over others' land;
Residents have been living in this area for many decades, these applicants are not resident and are attempting to destroy the landscape;
Nobody has lived at the site for over 3 years;
The only benefit is for the applicants to receive the feed in tariff;
Precedent.

PLANNING POLICIES

CP1 - TD CORE STRAT. CLIMATE CHANGE,
CP8 - CP 8 ENVIRONMENT,
DM1 - TD CORE STRATEGY - GENERAL REQUIREMENTS,
DM2 - TD CORE STRATEGY - DEV,
EN3 - TDBCLP - Local Wildlife and Geological Interests (HISTORIC),
EN12 - TDBCLP - Landscape Character Areas,

LOCAL FINANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The main issues are policy, the potential impact on landscape and ecology.

Policy/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”. As in previous planning policy, the NPPF indicates that the ‘need’ for the development should not be considered by the Local Planning Authority.

DCLG has also published “Planning practice guidance for renewable and low carbon energy”, which is a series of guidelines, the main points are that the effective use of previously developed land is encouraged, that if a proposal involves greenfield land, that it allows for continued agricultural use and /or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

Taunton Deane Core Strategy states at Strategic Objective 1 (Climate Change) that “Taunton Deane will be a leader in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change and adapting to its effects”.

In terms of Taunton Deane Core Strategy, the proposal is located on land designated as open countryside. In general terms, development in these areas is restricted, unless they are for agricultural purpose or accord with other specific development plan policies. The site is and within Flood Zone 1. Policy CP1 relates to Climate Change, Policy CP8 relates to Environment including the SSSI designation and DM2 relates to Development in the Countryside.

Policy CP1 (Climate Change) 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....their scale, form, design, materials and cumulative impacts 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’. Policy DM2 Development in the Countryside gives the types of development which would be supported in the countryside, subject to specified criteria.

Policy CP8, Environment - “The Borough Council will conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment, and will not permit development proposals that would harm these interests or the settings of towns and rural centres unless other material factors are sufficient to override their importance.....Unallocated greenfield land outside settlement boundaries will be protected and where possible enhanced. Development within such areas will be strictly controlled in order to

conserve the environmental assets and open character of the area. Development outside settlement boundaries will be permitted where it will:

Be in accordance with national, regional and local policies for development within rural areas.....

Be appropriate in terms of scale, siting and design; and

Protect, conserve or enhance landscape and townscape character whilst maintaining green wedges and open breaks between settlements.....”

Landscape/character _

The panels are now shown to be in the middle part of the field with landscaping between the arrays and the adjacent road. This landscaping is such that in due course, the arrays will not be visible from this adjacent road. The site is not adjacent to any other road or public footpath and any other views to the arrays will be across fields and between trees/woodland. Such views will therefore be intermittent from vehicles passing at some distance, on the other side of the valley. Some properties may have views at times when the trees are not in leaf. The Landscape Officer did not object to the previous application on this site but did have concerns about the earlier application. (This proposal is an amendment to an earlier application which sought to erect the panels on the upper slope of the field.)

The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership has concerns as the proposal does have an impact on two of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's special qualities. The area is primarily an agricultural landscape that has retained a sense of remoteness and remains largely unspoilt by modern development. The partnership is keen to limit the introduction of unnecessary and incongruous developments in isolated and remote locations. The Bolham Valley is a particularly sensitive, characteristics area within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Partnership's Officer has concerns, but also comments that the specific siting along with proposed hedge planting and management would reduce the prominence and visibility in the wider landscape. It is suggested that there should be positive management of the paddock, the panels should be dark recessive colours with non-reflective materials for the panels, frames and associated structures.

Thus whilst the site may be sited in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, such designation does not result in no development being approved at any time. Modest schemes are considered on their merits and on the visual impact on residents and/or users of public footpaths and/or highways.

This is a quiet part of the borough, which is generally unaffected by artificial structures, other than the occasional farm buildings, an isolated house and gates/fences. The panels are likely to be visible at times of the year when there are no leaves on trees and hedges from some surrounding areas, but not to the extent as if the site is crossed by footpaths and/or roads. Such glimpses and views of this relatively small area of panels is not considered to be such as would be considered to be visually intrusive.

Wildlife/ecology

It is not considered that there will be a significant effect on the ecology of the immediate area due to overshadowing, although about more than half the field will not have the panels, this includes approx. 25 m to the south-west of the new post and mesh fence, adjacent to the woodland. The area which probably contained the species identified in the LWS appears to have more likely to be the wooded areas. There are currently no species of particular note in the area of the proposed panels. The absence of upto date information on plant species was the factor upon which the previous application was refused. The updated County Wildlife Site Impact Assessment found no species of note within the application site, and thus the potential impact is not likely to be significant. The agent has agreed to reintroduce specially selected 'varieties' of plants into the south-western part of the paddock, which will overtime bring back the biodiversity and plant interest in this area.

Other

In respect to the other issues raised, the agent advises that the applicants are due to return to the property in due course. The absence of the applicants is not a reason to refuse the scheme. Whilst the application seems to be show there will be more than sufficient to serve the domestic property, and therefore some power will go to grid, this 'commercialism' is not considered to be necessarily detrimental to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty due to the relatively small scale of this proposal. A person's 'need' for energy/profit motive is not a planning issue. The long term effects may be unknown in terms of effect on the site however this is not grounds to refuse. Solar arrays have generally been granted for a period of 25 years, after which time the sites should revert to agriculture.

The agent has stated that the CT metering panel will connect by underground cables. If the scheme is approved it is considered that this should be conditioned. Whilst there may be areas more suited to solar arrays, Local Planning Authorities have to determine the application sites submitted

Conclusion

Central Government is generally in support of renewable energy, whilst also requiring proposals to minimise impacts on biodiversity, and conserve and enhance biodiversity including mitigation. This results in the determination being a careful balance between the Central Government aims to promote renewable energy, and the requirements to conserve and enhance biodiversity, whilst appreciating the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the potential visual impact from limited local points. Given the concerns of the Partnership Officer, it is considered that a positive management scheme for site be required, and care taken over the materials for the panels and equipment. There will be landscaping which should screen the site from the adjacent road, and the associated buildings are considered to be small and acceptable in this location. There will be a short section of hedge alongside the transformer unit, which will in time screen that structure and security fencing.

Thus given the relatively small scale of the proposal, its location away from public footpaths/bridleways and all but one road, from which it will be landscaped, and the generally well screened site, the potential visual impact of this scheme is not

considered to be detrimental to the overall landscape character of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Given the lack of significant ecology on the site, it is not considered to detrimentally effect the Local Wildlife Site. The scheme, subject to conditions, is considered to be acceptable.

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

CONTACT OFFICER: Ms K Marlow Tel: 01823 356460