

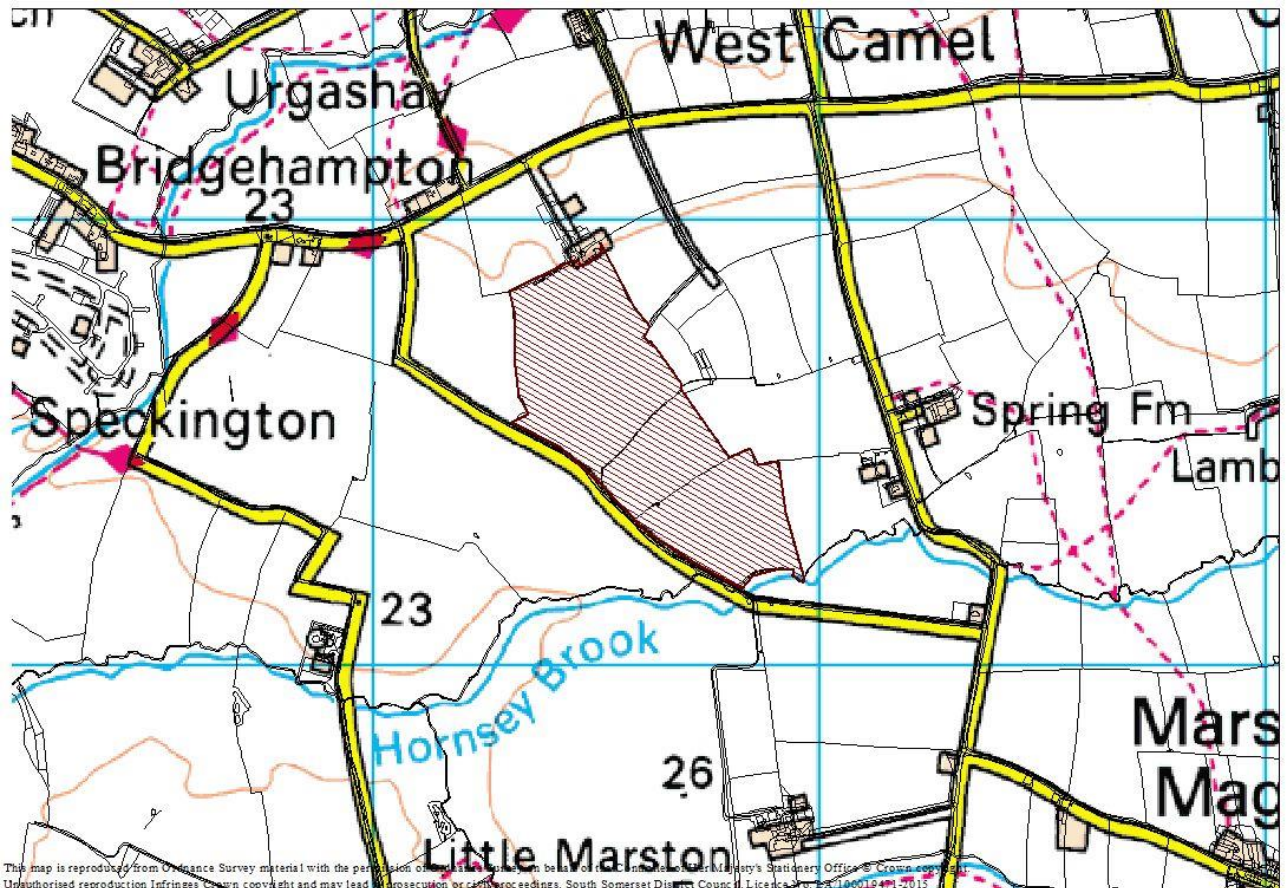
Officer Report on Planning Application: 14/00215/FUL

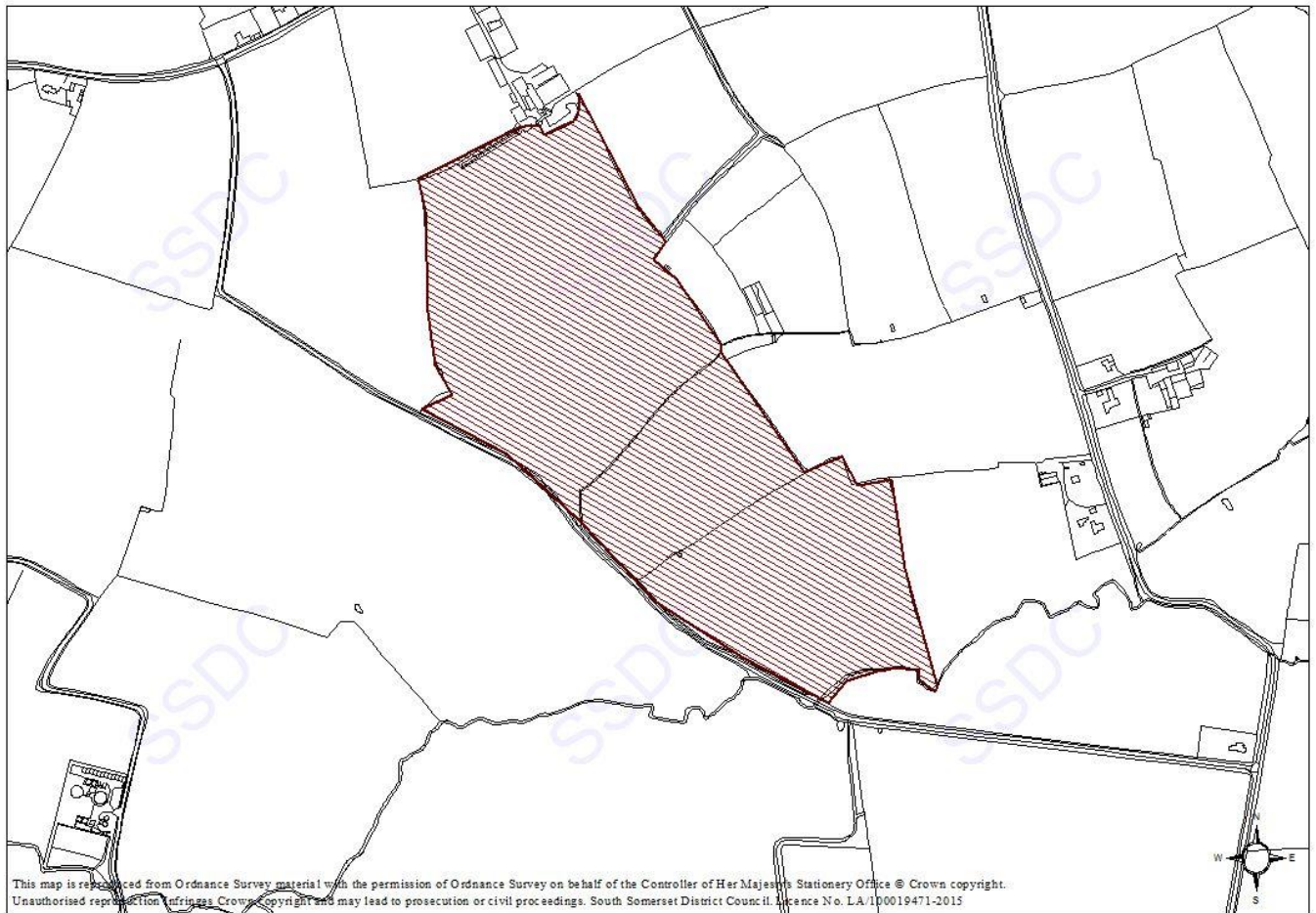
Proposal :	Proposed solar park comprising the erection of solar arrays, inverters, transformers, equipment housing, security fencing, internal tracks and ancillary equipment (Revised Scheme) GR:357405/124030
Site Address:	Land At Southfield Farm Smithy Lane Yeovilton
Parish:	West Camel
CAMELOT Ward (SSDC Member)	Cllr M. Lewis
Recommending Case Officer:	Alex Skidmore Tel: 01935 462430 Email: alex.skidmore@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	21st April 2014
Applicant :	Mrs Rachael Humphreys
Agent:	Mr Owen Pike MRTPI Hope Chapel House, Hope Chapel Hill, Hotwells, Bristol, BS8 4ND
Application Type :	Major Other f/space 1,000 sq.m or 1 ha+

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The application is a 'major major' development and recommended for approval and as such is required to be referred to committee under the scheme of delegation.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL





This application is seeking planning permission to erect an 11.47 MW solar farm to generate electricity to feed into the national grid over a 25-year period, after which time the infrastructure will be removed and the land restored.

The scheme seeks to erect photovoltaic panels to be mounted on metal posts driven into the ground with a maximum overall height of 2.133m and arranged into rows aligned in a west to east direction. The ground beneath will be left to grass over to allow the land to be grazed. Other associated infrastructure include 7 inverter stations (approximately 3.4m high), switch housing, access track and 6m high security cameras. The solar park will be enclosed by a 2m high weld mesh security fence, with an earth bund (ranging from 2.4 to 3m high) along the west and north boundaries set behind the existing boundary hedgerows by approximately 5m.

The application site covers three agricultural fields (grades 3) 23 hectares in area and is in an isolated open countryside location away from any built up areas. The site sits low in the landscape within a wide vale and is enclosed by native hedgerows and surrounded by agricultural land with the associated farmstead immediately to the north. Access is via the farm track to the north via Southfields Farm.

The closest residential properties to the site lie approximately 180m to the east and 260m to the north. The site is located approximately 1.6km to the east of the landing runway at RNAS Yeovilton and is within the safeguarding zone for the Yeovilton air base. There is a scheduled ancient monument at Marston Magna (MAMA1 – moated site and earthworks) approximately 1.6km to the southeast. A stream passes along the southern boundary of the application site and a small section of the site that sits alongside the stream is located within

flood zones 2 and 3. The remainder and majority of the site and the area which is proposed to be accommodate the apparatus is within flood zone 1. There are a number of public footpaths in the area but none that either cross or abut the site. A regional footpath, the Leland Trail, passes east to west approximately 550m to the north.

RELEVANT HISTORY:

13/01192/FUL: Proposed solar park comprising solar arrays, inverters, transformers, equipment housing, security fencing, internal tracks and ancillary equipment. Refused for the following reason:

- *The benefits of the proposed solar park in terms of its contribution to renewable energy generation would not outweigh the substantial harm that it is likely to have upon aviation safety. It has not been demonstrated that the adverse impacts could be mitigated and as such the proposal is contrary to the aims and objectives of the NPPF.*

12/04714/EIASS: Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening request. EIA not required.

12/04244/EIASS: EIA screening request. EIA not required.

821058: Erection of a farmhouse. Permitted subject to an agricultural tie and non-fragmentation legal agreement.

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), and Paragraphs 2, 11, 12, and 14 of the NPPF states that applications are to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of determining current applications the local planning authority considers that the adopted development plan comprises the policies of the South Somerset Local Plan 2006 2028 (adopted March 2015).

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

SD1 - Sustainable Development

TA5 - Transport Impact of New Development

TA6 - Parking Standards

EQ1 - Addressing Climate Change in South Somerset

EQ2 - General Development

EQ3 - Historic Environment

EQ4 – Biodiversity

EQ7 – Pollution Control

International and European Policy Context

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

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

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

National Policy Context

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

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

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

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

- encouraging the effective use of land by focusing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value;
- where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.
- that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;
- the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;
- the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;
- the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;

- the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;
- the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.

National Planning Policy Framework

Part 1 - Building a strong, competitive economy

Part 4 – Promoting sustainable transport

Chapter 7 - Requiring good design

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

Chapter 11 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Chapter 12 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework - Flood Risk

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

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

Other Relevant Guidance:

The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (July 2009)

Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (DCLG, July 2013)

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

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

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

- not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
- approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local

planning authorities should also expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.

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

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

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

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

Other Material Considerations

South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy:

Goal 1 - Safe and Inclusive

Goal 3 - Healthy Environments

Goal 4 - Quality Public Services

Goal 5 - High Performance Local Economy

Goal 7 - Distinctiveness

Goal 8 - Quality Development

Goal 10 - Energy

Goal 11 - Environment

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

CONSULTATIONS

West Camel Parish Council: Whilst not wanting to object to the amended proposal (to include the bund) the Council have the following strong concerns and would like to see these issues form conditions should the application be approved:

- The bund – sight of a Transport Plan prior to the development commencing and strict adherence to the planned route.
- Potential for increased surface water runoff – the existing ditch is we believe being piped to allow the bund to be built closer to the hedge. British Renewables were unable to advise the planned pipe diameter at this time. This must meet the specifications requirement in the event of very wet winters otherwise surface ater

flooding will occur. The plans do not specify how water running off the fields flows through the bund into the piped ditch.

Queen Camel Parish Council (adjacent parish): No comments received.

Yeovilton Parish Council (adjacent parish): Any vehicle routes to the above site should not be via Bridgehampton, as it is not the best route into the site and the road is inadequate for a large number of lorries bringing in material for the bund. There are also concerns regarding flooding which may result from the bund and the re-instatement of the site at the end of the permission. They enquired whether drainage improvements could be sought in response to recent flood events.

MOD: No objection.

The site of the proposed development occupies the statutory aerodrome safeguarding zone surrounding Royal Navy Air Station (RNAS) Yeovilton it being approximately 1638m east of the aerodrome directly beneath the approach to runway 27.

The development proposal relates to the erection of an extensive array of ground mounted photovoltaic panels supported on metal frames which will be between 1.317 and 2.133m in height. The scheme also features an earthen bund, security fencing; security cameras mounted on poles as well as inverter and transformer installations.

The MOD has previously commented upon this development proposal and raised safeguarding objections relating to impacts the solar arrays would have upon the effective performance of the Precision Approach Radar (PAR) that surveys the approach to runway 27 which provides navigational guidance to aircraft using this runway.

The applicant has modified the layout of the proposed solar array, reduced the heights of the solar panels and introduced an earthen bund along the western boundary of the application site to screen the solar arrays from the radar. These measures fully address the safeguarding concerns previously identified by the MOD.

I can therefore confirm that the MOD maintains no statutory objections to the proposed development subject to:

1. The revised drawings 1095-0201-01 (issue 12), 2466- 200 (rev. G), 2466 – 201 (rev. e); the associated schedule of the coordinates for the positions of the ends of each row of solar panels and the heights of the panels and the schedule of the coordinates and heights of the bund structure along its entire length being the approved documents designating the layout and dimensions of the scheme.
2. The inclusion of a condition in any permission granted obligating the applicant (and their appointed contractors) to liaise with the MOD prior to the commencement of construction works on the site to verify that the deployment of plant equipment, cranes and temporary structures will not impede the operation of transmitter/receiver installations at RNAS Yeovilton or otherwise obstruct the movement of air traffic to and from the aerodrome and to attach air navigation warning lighting to cranes or other temporary installations as identified as necessary by the aerodrome operator for the purpose of maintaining air traffic safety
3. The inclusion of a condition in any permission granted obligating the applicant to ensure that the dimensions of the earthen bund are maintained (in accordance with the dimensions specified in the approved drawings and schedule detailing its coordinates and heights) for the duration that the solar farm (and associated infra-structure) are deployed on the

application site to maintain effective screening of the solar farm development from the PAR at RNAS Yeovilton for the purpose of maintaining air traffic safety.

4. The inclusion of a condition in any permission granted obligating the operator of the solar farm to obtain prior approval from the planning authority before undertaking any variation of the approved design or layout of the solar farm (as detailed in the approved drawings and supporting schedules) including the earthen bund.

Environmental Protection: No comments

County Highways: No objection. Access to the public highway for construction, maintenance and decommissioning will be via the access to Southfield Farm off West Camel Road. West Camel Road is a classified highway to which the national speed limit applies and the farm is less than 3km from the A303. In terms of maintenance the PV park requires minimal attention therefore traffic associated with the development once completed will be negligible.

Recommends conditions requiring a Construction Traffic Management Plan, a condition survey of the highway and details for the installation and use of equipment, in particular for wheel cleaning, to ensure all vehicles leaving the site are in such a condition so as not to emit dust, mud, slurry or other debris on the highway.

Environment Agency: No objection subject to a condition seeking the implementation of the submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and details of an ownership and management plan for the surface water run-off limitation scheme for the site, as shown in the FRA.

Climate Change Officer: No objections. The proposed array will be one of several installed in the region recently making a significant impact on CO2 emissions and the regions renewable electricity generation. If approved, this installation will generate 11 MW of electricity equivalent to that used by around 2200 homes or 1.36% of South Somerset's total annual electrical requirement. The development is well designed and close to the consumers of Yeovilton and Ilchester which will minimise grid losses.

Archaeology: There are potential prehistoric remains on site. I recommend a condition requiring the developer to carry out a programme of archaeological works.

English Heritage: We do not wish to offer any comments on this occasion. The application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.

Conservation Officer: (Comments from previous application) I have considered this application in the light of the listed buildings and conservation areas in the surrounding area and concluded that it will not adversely affect the setting of any of these designated assets.

Ecology: No objections subject to a condition relating to badgers and the carrying out of a survey for badger sets prior to commencement of any works.

Natural England: Referred to their comments made in reference to the previous application - It does not appear that the application falls within the scope of the consultations that Natural England would routinely comment on. It is for the local authority to determine whether or not this application is consistent with national or local policies on biodiversity and landscape.

Somerset Wildlife Trust: We fully support the recommendations contained within the submitted Ecological Assessment and particularly those within Section 7. On the basis that

these recommendations are incorporated within the planning conditions we have no objection.

Landscape Officer: The Landscape Officer's initial comments are provided in full in Appendix A at the end of this report. His latest comments in response to the latest plans are as follows:

I have previously given a full landscape consultation response 07 February 2014, which – with provisos – suggested that this is a site capable of accommodating a PV array. These amended plans follow the applicant's extensive discussions with the MOD, which have resulted in the extent of the array being reduced, which is a positive element of this revised design. The amended proposal now includes an earth bund that runs along the site's west boundary, provided to meet MOD concerns. The bund has been designed as a reinforced structure to thus restrict its footprint.

It is the presence of the earth bund that has been the cause of some landscape concern. Consequently, the proposal has come forward placing the bund within a plantation belt of native trees and shrubs, of a minimum width of 5 metres to both sides of the bund, with densities specifically tightened to the side of the bund's external face, to achieve denser cover. I view this to be an acceptable method of countering the bund's form, and thus in relation to the bund, I now have no further issues.

However, I am not convinced by the abrupt termination of the planting provision at the transformer station, which is not a credible landscape 'anchor'. I would advise either;

- (a) The planting belt is extended through to the Horsey Brook, to provide a consistent treatment to the site's west boundary, or;
- (b) A new hedge is planted southeast of the array's extent, to link the end of the bund; contain both the transformer station and the array; and to run northeastward across the field to link with the east boundary.

Once this amendment is made, then landscape concerns will have been met.

REPRESENTATIONS

Written representations have been received from two local residents objecting to the application for the following reasons:

- We object to the solar park but also to the bund which will simply ensure that the park is even more of an eyesore and blot on the landscape.
- The inverter transformer stations at 3.5m high will have an overbearing visual impact on the surrounding landscape.
- Increased noise from military aircraft due to loss of ground absorption resulting from the solar panels which have hard surfaces.
- Light pollution – glare from night time approach runway lights will be unacceptable as will the day time glare and glint when working within the adjoining land.
- Increased runoff resulting in increased flood risk to adjacent landowners. The highway already suffers during heavy rainstorms.
- Loss of prime agricultural land.
- Erosion of the countryside, harm to landscape character.
- Harm to wildlife – buzzards, kestrels, owls.
- The bund will be an incongruous feature within the local landscape and cause problems with water runoff.
- Traffic impact of construction vehicles.

- Noise impact resulting from heavy plant machinery.
- The connection cable will be routed for miles along the local roads causing more disruption to local traffic.
- Proximity of the solar farm to RNAS Yeovilton will be harmful to aviation safety.

CONSIDERATIONS

This application is seeking planning permission to erect a 11.47MW solar farm on a 23 hectare site comprising three agricultural fields in the open countryside. The solar farm comprises the erection of solar arrays, inverter stations, switch housing, access track, security fencing and cameras and is sought for a 25-year period.

The main considerations for this application are considered to relate to airfield safeguarding for nearby RNAS Yeovilton, landscape character and visual amenity, impact upon ecology, residential amenity of nearby residential properties, impact upon archaeology, flooding and drainage and highway safety.

Principle:

Part 10 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local authorities should “have a positive strategy to promote energy for renewable and low carbon sources” and “design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts”.

The application site is greenfield, agricultural land (grade 3b) located in the open countryside. The solar park is sought for a 25 year period after which time the site will be restored to its former status and it is noted that the applicant intends to allow the ground around the solar arrays to become pasture for sheep to graze. On this basis it is accepted that the proposal will not result in the significant loss of best and most versatile agricultural land and is broadly in compliance with the Renewable and Low Carbon Planning Practice Guidance paragraph 013 (Reference ID: 5-013-20150327). As such the proposal is considered to be acceptable in principle.

Airfield Safeguarding:

The application site is located approximately 1.6km to the east of the landing runway at RNAS Yeovilton and is within the safeguarding zone for the RNAS Yeovilton airbase. The current proposal follows a previous application for a very similar scheme, which was refused in 2013 following objections from the MOD relating to aviation safety concerns with regard to the airbase.

The solar array and associated structures are constructed from metallic and other highly reflective materials and the MOD’s technical assessments indicated that the presence of such an extensive area of reflective surfaces in this location would reflect radar transmissions. Such interference would degrade the performance of the Precision Approach Radar (PAR), a navigational aid for aircraft using runway 27 at the Yeovil, and adversely affect the safe management of air traffic completing landing procedures.

On the submission of the current application the MOD upheld their previous objection to the scheme. Since this time there have been extensive negotiations with the applicant to try and address this concern. The solution is in the form of an earth bund along the west and northwest perimeter of the site to act as a solid physical barrier that would effectively block any direct line of site of the solar array and associated apparatus from the PAR thereby ensuring that any potential interference to the PAR does not occur. The proposed bund is a narrow grassed bank measuring between 2.4m to 3.0m high and will be constructed with an internal mesh system to ensure the bund’s height and shape is maintained. The MOD have

accepted that these mitigation measures fully address their earlier concerns.

A Glint and Glare Report was provided as part of this submission and the MOD has raised no concern with regard to issues of glint and glare on aviation safety. On this basis the MOD has now dropped their previous safeguarding objection and subject to the imposition of a number of conditions it is accepted that this revised proposal should not be prejudicial to aviation safety.

Landscape character and visual amenity:

The site is approximately 1km from a solar installation at Chilton Cantelo (13 hectares in area) and approximately 2.7km from another solar park (13 hectares in area) near Queen Camel to the east. The context of these sites is in a wide lowland vale where the field sizes include large areas of single crops and where the dominant feature is the substantial scale of nearby RNAS Yeovilton. Within this context the Landscape Officer is of the opinion that the various PV installations will only have a visual significance in their immediate vicinity and that there will be few locations where the three sites will be viewed in the same sightline. For this reason the cumulative impact resulting from this proposal and the existing nearby installations is not considered to be significant.

The application site comprises three agricultural fields primarily bounded by native hedgerows that offer a reasonable level of enclosure and visual containment. Its location within a wide, fairly flat valley floor also enables the site to assimilate reasonably well into the wider landscape. Public views of the site are mainly low-level views which should be broken by intervening hedge planting. The inclusion of the bund has raised some landscape concerns, however, its design and position set 5m in from the roadside hedgerow with dense planting within the intervening gap follows the advice of the Landscape Officer and should ensure that once the planting has matured has a very discrete presence both from close to and any more far reaching views.

Connection to the grid will be by underground cable to the Chilton Cantelo substation and is being dealt with under a separate on-going application.

For the above reasons the proposed development is considered to raise no substantial landscape or visual amenity concerns.

Residential amenity:

The closest residential properties to the site lie approximately 180m to the east and 260m to the north. Given the relatively low profile of the proposed development and inanimate nature it is not anticipated that the proposal will cause any demonstrable harm to nearby residents.

Access and highway safety:

Whilst traffic generation in association with the solar park will be very limited once it is operational it is anticipated that the initial construction phase of the park and associated bund will result in significant levels of traffic.

Access to the site will be via the existing farm track serving Southfield Farm which leads on to West Camel Road, a classified highway, to the north. During construction the applicant has confirmed that the volume of earth required to form the bund is approximately 5,655 cubic metres and that based on a 20 tonne lorry delivering the soil this would result in 220 two-way trips, potentially between 20 – 50 deliveries per day during the construction period of the bund. Deliveries associated with the solar equipment is between 6-8 lorry trips per week for the 16 week period it is anticipated to take to construct. There will be additional vehicle movements for staff cars.

Whilst the level of construction traffic is relatively high the highway authority is satisfied that

the local road network can accommodate this level of traffic without resulting in significant highway safety concerns. Bearing in mind it is only for the brief construction phase with little traffic arising once operational it is considered that the impact it will have upon the rural amenities of the local area will be limited and that this element of the proposal is acceptable.

Ecology:

The council's Ecologist is satisfied with the findings and conclusions of the submitted ecological appraisal and recommends conditions requiring a survey for badger setts prior to the commencement of the development and the implementation of the ecological enhancements set out in paragraph 8.2 of the Ecological Appraisal. Subject to the imposition of these conditions forming part of any consent the proposal raises no significant ecological concerns.

Archaeology:

A geophysical survey of the site has identified potential prehistoric remains. In view of this the County Archaeologist has requested that a condition requiring further archaeological assessment of the site be carried out before the development is commenced.

There is a scheduled ancient monument at Marston Magna (MAMA1 – moated site and earthworks) approximately 1.6km to the southeast. Neither County Archaeology or English Heritage have raised any concerns in respect of this heritage asset.

Drainage and Flooding:

A small section of the site that runs alongside the stream at its southern end is located within flood zones 2 and 3, however this area is to remain undeveloped as part of the proposal. The remainder of the site is not within an area that is known to be at risk of flooding. Some local concerns have been raised with regard to increased surface water run-off as a result of the solar park and the accompanying bund however the Environment Agency is satisfied with the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and that the proposal will not result in any increased run-off to that currently experienced. Therefore there is no evidence to support the view that the proposal will lead to any new substantive drainage or flood risk issues.

Other matters:

Other concerns raised by local residents include increased noise from military aircraft due to loss of ground absorption as a result of the introduction of the solar panels and also increased light position due to glint and glare from the panels. There is no evidence however to support these suggestions and the Environmental Protection Officer has raised no concerns in this regard. A final matter raised relates to noise from the heavy plant machinery used during the construction phase. Whilst there is likely to be some additional noise generated from the construction activities, given the distance of the site from the nearest properties and the short term nature of the works the level of disturbance it is not considered to be so severe an issue as to cause a demonstrable loss of amenity to local residents or to be unduly harmful to the rural amenities of the area.

Conclusion:

In summary, the solar farm accords with the government objective to encourage the provision of renewable energy sources and raises no substantive amenity concerns. The previous aviation safety concerns have now been fully addressed to the satisfaction of the MOD through the provision of the earth bund and with the accompanying landscaping scheme it is accepted that the presence of the bund can be adequately mitigated without resulting in any substantive harm to landscape character or visual amenity. In all other respects the proposal is considered to be acceptable and as such is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION:

Grant consent for the following reason:

Notwithstanding local concerns it is considered that the benefits in terms of the provision of a renewable source of energy, which will make a valuable contribution towards cutting greenhouse gas emissions, outweigh the limited impact the proposal will have on the local landscape character. As such the proposal accords with the aims and objectives of Policies SD1, TA5, TA6, EQ1, EQ2, EQ3, EQ4 and EQ7 of the South Somerset Local Plan and the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Subject to the following:

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

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

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans drawings numbered:
 - 2466_201_Rev E, 1095-0201-01 (issue 12), 2466_200_Rev G received 11/06/2015; and
 - Site location, block plan, 001 (issue 01), 004 (issue 01), 9999-0208-71, XXXX-0206-00, 34523-01-00 (issue B) and 002 (01) received 20/01/2014.

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

3. The development hereby permitted shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition within 25 years of the date of this permission or within six months of the cessation of the use of the solar farm for the generation of electricity, whichever is the sooner, in accordance with a restoration plan to be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The restoration plan will need to include all the works necessary to revert the site to open agricultural land including the removal of all structures, materials and any associated goods and chattels from the site.

Reason: In the interest of landscape character and visual amenity in accordance with Policy EQ2 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

4. The position and heights of the panels and bund structure (across its entire length) shall accord with the details set out on drawings numbered 1095-0201-01 (issue 12), 2466- 200 (Rev. G) and 2466 – 201 (Rev. E) and the associated schedule of the coordinates received 11 June 2015. The position and height of the bund and panels shall thereafter not be permanently maintained.

Reason: In the interest of aviation safety.

5. The bund structure shall be installed in full accordance with approved drawings numbered 1095-0201-01 (issue 12), 2466- 200 (Rev. G) and 2466 – 201 (Rev. E) and the associated schedule of the coordinates received 11 June 2015 prior to the commencement of any works relating to the solar park element of the permission hereby granted, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of aviation safety.

6. No works shall commence on site unless details of all plant equipment, cranes and other temporary structures as well as details of any air navigation warning lighting have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in full accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: In the interest of aviation safety and to ensure that any plant equipment and temporary structures will not impede the operation of the transmitter / receiver installation at RNAS Yeovilton or otherwise obstruct the movements of air traffic to and from the aerodrome.

7. No works shall commence on site unless details of a scheme of monitoring and maintenance of the earth bund, to ensure that it continues to be an effective screen to solar farm from the PAR at RNAS Yeovilton over the lifetime of the development, has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority. Such approved details shall thereafter be fully implemented for the lifetime of the solar park.

Reason: In the interest of aviation safety.

8. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification) there shall be no alterations to the approved design or layout of the solar park and bund without the prior express grant of planning permission from the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of aviation safety.

9. No development hereby approved shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the local planning authority.

Reason: To safeguard the archaeological interest of the site in accordance with policy EQ3 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

10. The development hereby permitted by this planning application shall only be undertaken in accordance with the approved Flood Risk Assessment (Ref: J-4119.12-FM dated March 2013 and prepared by H20K) specifically including the following measures detailed within the FRA:

1. All access routes to have permeable surfaces constructed of either mown grass or unbound stones.
2. Swale features are installed prior to any other construction works associated with the proposed development.
3. All surface water drainage features are maintained appropriately, over the lifetime of the development.
4. No culverting of the drainage ditch.

Reason: To prevent any increased risk of flooding associated with installation of the solar park development.

11. No development shall commence unless an ownership and management plan for the surface water run-off limitation scheme for the site, as shown in the Flood Risk Assessment (Ref: J-4119.12-FM dated March 2013 and prepared by H20K), has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The

approved scheme shall be implemented and maintained in accordance with the approved programme and details.

Reason: To prevent any increased risk of surface water flooding associated with installation of the solar park development.

12. Prior to the commencement of development a construction traffic management plan providing details on the delivery of the material for the bund, the photovoltaic panels and equipment to the site, details of the parking and storage area; and any alterations to the vehicular access 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: In the interest of highway safety to accord with TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

13. The applicant 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 advance in writing by the Local Planning Authority and fully implemented prior to start of construction, and thereafter maintained for the duration of the construction phase.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety to accord with TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

14. Prior to, and not earlier than 2 months before, commencement of any works, a survey for badger setts will be undertaken, and if any are present within 30 metres (including on adjoining land) of the development site, the works shall not commence until a method statement for the protection of badgers has been produced and any necessary Natural England licences have been obtained. The method statement shall be implemented in full.

Reason: For the conservation and protection of legally protected species in accordance with Policy EQ4 of the South Somerset Local Plan, and to ensure compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and The Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

15. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the ecological enhancements set out within section 8.2 of the Ecological Appraisal dated November 2012, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of conservation and to accord with policy EQ4 of the South Somerset Local Plan and paragraph 188 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

16. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced unless there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping, which shall include indications of all existing trees and hedgerows on the land, and details of any to be retained, together with measures for their protection in the course of the development, as well as details of any changes proposed in existing ground levels; all planting, seeding, turfing or earth moulding comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the occupation of the building or the completion of the development,

whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: In the interest of landscape character and visual amenity in accordance with Policy EQ2 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

17. No works in respect of the solar park hereby permitted unless details of the finished colour of the security fencing and the finished colour and position of the CCTV equipment has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: In the interest of landscape character and visual amenity in accordance with Policy EQ2 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

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

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity and the rural amenities of the area to accord with Policy EQ2 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

19. No means of external illumination / lighting shall be installed without the prior written consent of the local planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity and to safeguard the rural character of the area to accord with Policies EQ2 and EQ7 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

20. The supporting posts to the solar array shall not be concreted into the ground.

Reason: In the interest of sustainable construction and to accord with part 10 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Informatives:

1. The developer is advised to refer to the informatives set out within the EA's letter dated 11/02/2014.
2. The developer is reminded that a condition survey of the existing public highway will need to be carried out agreed with the Highway Authority prior to any works commencing on site, and any damage to the highway occurring as a result of this development is to be remedied by the developer to the satisfaction of the Highway Authority once all works have been completed on site.
3. Under Section 59 of the Highways Act 1980 allows the Highway Authority to recover certain expenses incurred in maintaining highways, where the average cost of maintenance has increased by excessive use. The condition survey will be used as evidence should damage to the highway network occur during the construction phase of the development.