

APPLICATION NO.	P12/V2112/FUL
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION
REGISTERED	18 October 2012
PARISH	STEVENTON
WARD MEMBER(S)	Bill Jones, Mike Murray
APPLICANT	Ikaros Solar Ltd
SITE	Goose Willow Farm Hanney Road Steventon OX13 6AP
PROPOSAL	Solar PV development consisting of mounted solar panels comprising of 39440 modules, power inverter systems, transformer stations, sub-stations, security fencing and associated access gates.
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	444604/193209
OFFICER	Robert Mason

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site is located north of Hanney Road about halfway between East Hanney and Steventon. The western boundary of the site follows the line of the former Wilts and Berks Canal. The site lies in the Lowland Vale, and the North Wessex Downs AONB lies just over 3.5km to the south.
- 1.2 The site measures 25.82ha. in area and consists of flat low lying agricultural land set in large fields divided up by mature hedgerows and an occasional tree belt. There are a number of overhead power lines crossing the site as well as drainage ditches, and there are bridleways around the north-west and north-east boundaries. The nearest dwelling to the site is Bramble Grange, which is just over 250m to the south of the site boundary. A site plan is **attached** at appendix 1.
- 1.3 The application comes to committee because Steventon Parish Council objects.

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposed solar photovoltaic park would be laid out in rows on metal frames with a maximum height of 2.5 metres resting on the ground and fixed only by long pins, with a gap of 5.1m between rows to allow for potential grazing by sheep/goats or environmental planting. The solar panels would face south at a 25 degree angle. There would be a 2m high security fence around the development, inside which there would be a series of sub-stations, with security cameras mounted on 3m high poles. The proposed sub-stations measure 5.5m x 5.5m x 3.5m high. The proposed solar panels would cover approximately 28% of the site area. The construction phase would last approximately two to three months. The existing trees and hedgerows would be retained and there would additional planting in the gaps, together with a 20m wide buffer along the boundary with the line of the former Wilts and Berks Canal.
- 2.2 The site access would be in the western corner of the site, from the existing concrete track to Willowbrook Farm.
- 2.3 The development would be required for a 25 year period, and could generate up to 11.5 MW.

3.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 Steventon Parish Council objects:
“No apparent benefit to the village and a further loss of productive agricultural land. A

solar park has already been approved adjacent and this would be overkill.”

3.2 Drayton Parish Council approves:

“On balance, Drayton Parish Council supports this planning application. Suggest that VWHDC prepare SPD on renewable energy to assist in consideration of these applications. This could deal with the question of why farmland is being used instead of or before most of the roofs available in the area. It could also ask for a farm plan to see what farming regime could be practically and viably be carried out in conjunction with these structures instead of relying on the possibility of agricultural activity resuming in 25 years.”

3.3 County highways - No objections, subject to conditions.

3.4 County archaeologist:

“Extensive archaeological investigation including geophysical survey and trial trenching for a major infrastructure development to the north-west revealed extensive evidence of later prehistoric and Romano British settlement and agricultural activity across the area. Whilst there is no visible evidence of these activities within the application area the evidence suggests that this level of activity was consistent across this eastern part of the Vale. The archaeological desk-based assessment submitted by the applicant highlights the potential presence and significance of archaeological features within the application area. In accordance with the NPPF, we would therefore recommend that, prior to the determination of this application the applicant should be responsible for the implementation of an archaeological field evaluation. This must be carried out by a professionally qualified archaeological organisation and should aim to define the character and extent of the archaeological remains within the application area, and thus indicate the weight which should be attached to their preservation. This information can be used for identifying potential options for minimising or avoiding damage to the archaeology and on this basis, an informed and reasonable decision can be taken.”

3.5 Drainage engineer - Holding objection

3.6 Council’s ecologist raises no objections:

“The proposal will not affect any protected or priority habitats and the likelihood of impacts on protected species is very low.”

3.7 Council’s landscape architect – No significant landscape impact

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P12/V1571/FUL](#) - Approved (17/10/2012)

Construction of a solar park on adjoining land to the south to include the installation of solar panels to generate up to 10MW of electricity, with transformer housings, security fencing and cameras, landscaping and other associated works.

4.2 [P12/V1705/SCR](#) - (14/08/2012)

Screening opinion request

4.3 [P08/V2558/SCO](#) - (03/02/2009)

Scoping report for proposed Upper Thames Reservoir

4.4 [P06/V1039/COU](#) - Approved (15/08/2006)

Change of use from agricultural land to equestrian land

4.5 [P02/V0340](#) - Refused (18/04/2002) - dismissed on appeal (14/02/2003)

Change of use of redundant agricultural building to B1 and/or recycling of refrigerators

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular, states:

- Local planning authorities have a role in supporting the transition to a low carbon future
- All communities have a responsibility to contribute to energy generation
- There is no requirement for applicants to demonstrate the need for electricity
- There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development unless there are significant objections

5.2 Para.112 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer agricultural quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

5.3 Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 policies:

CF10 - Production of renewable energy on a commercial basis
DC5 - Access
DC6 - Landscaping
DC9 - The impact of development on neighbouring uses
GS2 - Development in the countryside
L14 - The Wilts and Berks Canal
NE9 - The Lowland Vale
HE9 and HE11 - Archaeology

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

Development in the countryside

6.1 To be viable solar developments need to be located on large sites and, therefore, they are more likely to be in the countryside. It is considered there is an overriding need for sustainable sources of energy which justifies this development in the countryside, and therefore the proposal is considered to comply with local plan policy GS2.

Landscape impact

6.2 Within the site the applicant states that the layout allows for generous spaces between hedgerows and the solar panels themselves – 10m generally from hedge to the edge of the closest solar panel. Around the boundaries the hedges would be maintained at 3m in height, and the existing and proposed trees would grow unrestricted (except near the existing overhead lines should that become an issue).

6.3 The western boundary of the application site consists of a mature hedge and adjoins the route of the former Wilts and Berks Canal. Local plan policy L14 protects this route, and the proposal would cause no harm to the long-term project of the proposed restoration of the canal.

6.4 There is likely to be some landscape impact at the local level in terms of the view from the bridleways adjoining the site and more distant views from Hanney Road. However, this local impact will diminish as the additional proposed planting matures along the boundaries of this site and the site of the adjoining previously approved scheme. The council's landscape architect does not object.

6.5 The North Wessex Downs AONB lies 3.5km to the south, and it is considered that that the site is sufficiently far away that it would not result in any material harm to the views

from the AONB or its setting.

- 6.6 Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed development would not have a harmful landscape impact and, therefore, the proposal complies with local plan policies DC6, NE6 and NE9.

Access

- 6.7 Vehicular access to Hanney Road will be from the existing private road which is already used by heavy lorries going to a commercial facility at Willowbrook Farm. Whilst the county highway officer has requested a condition requiring the reconstruction of the entrance to the private road, this is considered excessive bearing in mind that intensive use of the access will be confined only to the short construction period, there is already significant use of the access by HGVs, and the cost of reconstructing the access to adoptable standards would not be proportionate to the scale of its increased use. Hence it is proposed to impose a condition only requiring the junction area to be swept to avoid loose material spreading on to the highway. It is considered that the proposal complies with local plan policy DC5.

Residential amenity

- 6.8 The nearest house to the south is Bramble Grange. However, that property is considered to be sufficiently far away to avoid the likelihood of any problems of noise or glare. No objections have been received from local residents. It is considered, therefore, that the proposal complies with local plan policy DC9.

Loss of agricultural land

- 6.9 The application site is part of 2,400 acre estate so that there would a land loss of less than 5% of the total. The land is used for arable rotation crops of rape seed and wheat field beans, with goat dairying. A 1983 survey says that the site consists of mainly grade 4 agricultural land, with some grade 3. The NPPF says that the best agricultural land (i.e. grades 1, 2 and 3a) needs to be protected.
- 6.10 The proposed development is reversible, it will not prevent use of the land for grazing livestock, it will not impact on the agricultural production of adjacent fields, and it will have a minimal impact on soil condition. In addition, the proposal is a sustainable form of development and an acceptable form of farm diversification. Accordingly, it is considered that the proposal complies with the relevant guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Archaeology

- 6.11 The County Archaeologist has requested an archaeological field evaluation. The applicant has offered a watching brief during construction. It is considered that the applicant's offer should be accepted since it would be more effective and hence it is proposed to impose a condition to this effect. Accordingly, it is considered that the proposal complies with local plan policies HE9 and HE11.

Drainage/Flood risk

- 6.12 The council's drainage engineer has requested additional information to clarify the submitted flood risk assessment and, in the meantime, has made a "holding objection." However, it is likely this issue can be resolved prior to the committee meeting – an update will be provided at the meeting.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 It is considered that the proposed solar farm (including when considered cumulatively with the similar development permitted on adjoining land to the south) would not

adversely affect local agriculture, the surrounding landscape, the amenity of neighbours, flood risk, highways or ecological issues. Accordingly, it is considered that the application complies with local plan policies GS2, DC5, DC6, DC9, DC14 and L14 and NE9.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that, subject to the surface water drainage issue being satisfactorily addressed, planning permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. Time limit - full
2. Planning condition listing the approved drawings
3. Ecology mitigation
4. Landscaping scheme (trees and shrubs only)
5. Landscape management plan
6. Traffic management plan
7. Submission of detailed drawings
8. Landscaping scheme (implement)
9. Watching brief for archaeology
10. Retention of existing drainage ditches
11. Detailed drainage scheme
12. Road cleaning at entrance

Author: Robert Mason
Telephone: 01235 540349
Email: robert.mason@southandvale.gov.uk