

TWC/2015/0804

Land West and South West of Muxton Grange Cottages, Off Donnington Wood Roundabout, Muxton, Telford, Shropshire

Installation of a ground based 5mw Photovoltaic Solar Farm, with associated infrastructure and landscaping (vehicular traffic to utilise Muxton Lane and grid connection through Granville Country Park) \*\*\*\*\*AMENDED DESCRIPTION AND PLANS RECIEVED\*\*\*\*\*

**APPLICANT**

Solstice Renewables Ltd, James Davis

**RECEIVED**

27/08/2015

**PARISH**

Donnington and Muxton, Lilleshall

**WARD**

Church Aston and Lilleshall, Donnington, Muxton

**OFFICER** Daniel Owen

OBJECTIONS RECEIVED: Yes.

**This application is before Committee following a request from Councillor Adrian Lawrence.**

**1. PROPOSAL**

- 1.1 The proposal seeks consent for creation of a solar farm with a generating capacity of approximately 5 MWp. This is sufficient to provide electricity from a renewable source to approximately 1,500 households (or equivalent).
- 1.2 The proposal will comprise 44 rows of solar panels. The panels would be a maximum of 2.2m in height above ground level, orientated at approximately 20 degrees from the horizontal to benefit from maximum sun hours. The surface of the solar panels will be treated to reduce the potential for reflective solar glint / glare.
- 1.3 The support framework that the panels would be attached to would be driven into the soil, removing the need for deep foundations, concrete pads or piling. The arrays will be connected to *inverter sub-stations (between 2 and 3m in height) located at appropriate positions across the site*, which in turn will be connected to the local electricity grid via on site substations. All cables will be underground.
- 1.4 The distance between the rows of panels will be around 3.7m, with open sided avenues between the panels, which will be left to grass and/or planted with wildflowers and which could be grazed by sheep. The site will be surrounded by fencing approximately 2.1m in height, which will be equipped with motion sensors and overlooked by CCTV cameras with a maximum height of around 2.5 metres. The application has been supported by a landscape strategy plan and includes the planting of new and infill hedgerows / trees around the site.

- 1.5 A buried high voltage cable (which will connect the site to the national grid) is also required and would run from the south western corner of the site through the Granville Local Nature Reserve to the Donnington Wood Roundabout and then along Donnington Wood Way through to the Clock Tower roundabout in Donnington. This planning application includes details of both the solar farm and the route of the grid connection cable, however when built by the Distribution Network Operator (DNO, Western Power Distribution) the installation of the grid connection cable would constitute permitted development under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development Order) (GPDO).
- 1.6 The applicant has also provided details of the route that construction traffic would take to the site – although this does not form part of the planning application. This was initially proposed along a temporary access road through the Granville Local Nature Reserve which would have mainly followed the line of the existing footpath/bridleway. However following the outcome of the consultation undertaken following the submission of the planning application the applicant now proposes to utilise Muxton Lane.
- 1.7 The application has been accompanied by the following supporting documents: -
- Planning, Design and Access Statement
  - Transport Statement
  - Arboricultural Impact Assessment (and Addendum) and Tree Protection Plan
  - Flood Risk Assessment
  - Ecological Assessment
  - Landscape and Ecology Management Plan
  - Geophysical Survey Report
  - Landscape and Visual Appraisal
  - Statement of Community Involvement
  - Heritage Desk Based Assessment
- 1.8 A Screening Opinion request under Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations was issued on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2015 confirming that the Council considers that the proposal is not an EIA development requiring an Environmental Statement.

## **2. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:**

- 2.1 The site is located to the south eastern edge of Muxton towards the north eastern edge of the built up area of Telford, as defined within the Wrekin Local Plan. The site is within the Green Network and is adjacent to the Granville Local Nature Reserve that is located to the west of the site.
- 2.2 The site is located on Grade 3 land according to the Natural England Agricultural Classification Map. The land level rises slightly from the north east to the south west and is relatively well screened on all sides. There is an existing hedgerow to the eastern and western boundaries of the site.

2.3 The Shropshire Golf Centre is situated to the east of the site and there are four houses (Muxton Grange Cottages) facing towards the north eastern corner of the site. Granville Country Park is located to the west of the site and there is a footpath running from a small car park to the north of the site in a line adjacent to the sites western boundary. Beyond that footpath to the west are houses along Marshbrook Way.

### **3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:**

None.

### **4. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT:**

4.1 National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF) – the NPPF is not the development plan for Telford and Wrekin but it is a material consideration in this case because all of the borough's development plan policies have to be viewed in the light of this more recent national guidance.

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

4.2 Core Strategy policies

- CS12: Natural Environment
- CS13: Environmental Resources
- CS14: Cultural, Historic and Built Environment
- CS15: Urban Design

4.3 Saved Wrekin Local Plan policies

- NR1: Location of Renewable Energy Development
- UD2: Design Criteria
- UD2: Landscape Design
- OL2: Designated Areas
- OL11: Woodland and Trees
- OL12: Open Land and Landscape

### **5. SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES:**

#### **5.1 Ward Member / Parish Council**

5.1.1 Councillor Adrian Lawrence requested that the application was determined by Planning Committee on the grounds that the access would be provided Granville Local Nature Reserve.

5.1.2 Donnington and Muxton Parish Council: No objection to this application. The Parish Council is willing to administer the community benefit fund proposed by the applicant. Payments for this should be made directly to this Parish Council and this should be written into the planning application together with a binding contract stating this with a caveat that Granville Local Nature Reserve receives a percentage of this fund annually. The Parish Council is to work with

Solstice Renewables to ascertain what this percentage should be. (Further information regarding the community benefit fund referred to is set out below).

## **5.2 Standard Consultee Responses**

5.2.1 The Coal Authority: No objection.

5.2.2 Friends of Granville Local Nature Reserve: Object to the proposal on the grounds of the impact of the construction access road (as initially proposed) on the Local Nature Reserve, on the visual impact of the proposal and due to a lack of detail regarding the connection to the national grid.

5.2.3 Historic England: No objection.

5.2.4 Natural England: No objection as the proposal will not damage or destroy the Muxton marsh SSSI.

5.2.5 Shropshire Fire Service: No comment.

5.2.6 Shropshire Council Historic Environment Archaeology Service: No objection subject to a condition requiring the submission of a programme of archaeological work, in the form of a watching brief during ground works.

5.2.7 Shropshire Wildlife Trust: Initially objected on the grounds that the proposed construction access route runs through Granville Local Nature Reserve. Awaiting further comments following the amendment to the proposal.

5.2.8 Telford and Wrekin Local Access Forum: No objection following the amendment to the proposed vehicular access route to utilise Muxton Lane rather than the Granville Local Nature Reserve.

5.2.9 Environmental Services (Arboricultural): No objection subject to conditions.

5.2.10 Environmental Services (Drainage): No comment.

5.2.11 Environmental Services (Highways): At the time of writing the Committee report the local highway authority stated that they required additional time to consider the application and the potential impact on the highway network as a result of the amendment to the scheme to utilise Muxton Lane for construction traffic rather than the Granville Local Nature Reserve. Further information on this will be provided to the Committee in an update.

5.2.12 Ecology: No objection subject to conditions to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the submitted Ecological Assessment and informatives relating to nesting birds and trenches and pipework.

5.2.13 Built Heritage Conservation: No objection.

## **5.3 Neighbour consultation responses**

5.3.1 Notification letters were sent to 96 properties in the vicinity of the site and the application was also advertised within the local press and with a site notice. As a result 156 letters of objection have been received raising a number of issues. The majority of the objections referred to the construction of a temporary access road through the Granville Local Nature Reserve. Other matters raised include:

- The proposal would damage the look and feel of the Nature Reserve;
- Loss of a green field site;
- Impact on wildlife;
- Noise levels during construction;
- Impact on industrial archaeology;
- Loss of property value;
- Light pollution;
- Existing access roads should be used;
- Visual impact on the area;

5.3.2 A number of the letters received stated that there was no objection to the principle of the solar farm and that the objections raised related to the proposed access through the Granville Local Nature Reserve.

5.3.3 In addition 9 letters of support have also been received raising the following points:

- Support the generation of clean energy;
- There are no negative impacts to the proposal;

5.3.4 Following the consultation the applicant amended the proposals and removed the temporary vehicular access through the Granville Local Nature Reserve from the proposal. Revised consultation letters were sent out and in addition the applicant wrote to the occupiers of the properties along Muxton Lane to advise them of the proposal to utilise the road of construction traffic. As a result 2 letters of objection have been received raising the following matters:

- Muxton Lane is not appropriate for lorries;
- Impact on the Granville Local Nature Reserve

5.3.5 In addition 2 letters of support have also been received raising the following points:

- The installation is environmentally friendly and the contributions to will benefit the area;
- There would be a minimum of disruption from traffic.

## **6. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS:**

6.1 Having regard to the development plan policies and other material planning considerations, including comments received during the consultation process, the planning application raises the following main issues:

- The principle of the development;
- Site suitability and Landscape impact;
- Design;

- Built Heritage;
- Access;
- Trees / Ecology
- Financial Considerations;
- Other matters

The principle of the development

- 6.2 Paragraph 14 of the NPPF states that “at the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking”.
- 6.3 The NPPF contains twelve core planning principles, including one that seeks to “support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate...and encourage the reuse of existing resources... and encourage the use of renewable resources”. Section 10 of the NPPF “Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change” contains the most relevant policy guidance relating to low carbon and renewable energy developments.
- 6.4 In determining renewable energy applications the NPPF advises at para 98 that “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.”
- 6.5 Whilst there are no specific solar farm policies in either the Wrekin Local Plan or Core Strategy, the Development Plan does contain policies that support renewable energy projects. Wrekin Local Plan policy NR1 supports proposals that generate power from renewable energy sources. The Core Strategy’s Spatial Development Objectives seek to ensure appropriate and efficient use of natural resources and facilitate the reduction on CO2 emissions. Policy CS13 actively supports the production of energy from renewable sources by promoting small and large scale renewable projects where it is consistent with other policies in the Development Plan. In addition, proposals that offer opportunities to enhance biodiversity as set out in Policy CS12 will also be supported.
- 6.6 The site has an agricultural land classification of grade 3 which is of good to moderate quality. The proposal would not therefore affect the best and most versatile agricultural land as defined by the NPPF.
- 6.7 In addition the height of the panels and the gaps between the rows means that the grazing of sheep could co-exist on the site during autumn and winter. Local native wild grass and a wild flower seed mix will be sown inside the solar farm and between the arrays during the spring and summer months. The development would therefore promote a species-rich grassland, which will lead to a greater diversity and number of plants and animal species, and enable the grazing agricultural use to continue at the site alongside a renewable electricity generating use.

- 6.8 A Landscape and Ecology Management Plan has been submitted which sets out the timings and procedures for grass and wildflower planting together with an outline management regime for 25 years and a condition can be added to any permission ensuring the development is carried out in accordance with the details contained in that plan.
- 6.9 Given that the proposal will not harm the quality of the land and includes provisions to allow a continued agricultural use, it is considered to comply with the requirements of Core Strategy Policy CS13.
- 6.10 The site is located within the Green Network and Saved Wrekin Local Plan Policy OL4 seeks to protect the Green Network resource of Telford. Development will be permitted provided that there are exceptional circumstances, it contributes to or is complementary to the aims of the Green Network or environmental and community benefits are an integral part of the proposal. The supporting text to the policy states that exceptions should be restricted to predominantly open land uses and would include solar panels and other renewable forms of energy production. As such it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in terms of its impact on the Green Network.
- 6.11 It is considered that the principle of the proposed solar farm development is in general accordance with natural resources and renewable energy policies in the NPPF, Wrekin Local Plan and Core Strategy subject to the application being assessed against the remainder of the Development Plan.

Site suitability and Landscape impact:

- 6.12 Wrekin Local Plan Saved Policy OL2 does not permit any development which would have an adverse impact upon designated areas such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Areas of Special Landscape Character or Wildlife Sites. Policy OL11 requires the Council to retain and enhance the contributions trees and woodlands make to landscape character. HE24 requires the Council to ensure that historic parks and gardens are not adversely affected by the development. More generally, Policies CS12 and CS13 of the Core Strategy seek to protect and enhance the natural environment and environmental resources within the borough.
- 6.13 Whilst the site is located within the built up boundary of Telford it is relatively rural in character which reflects the land uses to the north of Muxton Lane. The site is a relatively self-contained field that is enclosed by an access road and The Shropshire Golf Club to the east and by the Granville Local Nature Reserve to the west, with housing beyond. The site is relatively well screened by existing boundary treatments that include hedgerows and trees.
- 6.14 Various factors serve to govern the suitability of a site and these can include proximity to national grid connection, the site needing to be of a size to be cost effective, the level of vegetation on and surrounding the site (as this can cause shadowing) and the topography of the site. This site is of sufficient size (12.5 ha) to make the proposal effective and whilst the land level does rise towards the south it is relatively flat.

- 6.15 The application site is not located within any designated area however there are sensitive receptors around the site. The Granville Local Nature Reserve is next to the site, the Muxton Marsh Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is approximately 400m to the north west of the site, there is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (the Muxton colliery pumping station) to the north of the site and Lilleshall Abbey is located to the north east of the site.
- 6.16 The impact on the Muxton Marsh SSSI has been considered with Natural England being consulted as part of the application process. They have advised that the application has been assessed using the Impact Risk Zones data (IRZs) and that they are satisfied that the proposed development will not damage or destroy the interest features for which the Muxton Marsh SSSI has been notified. They have confirmed that the SSSI does not represent a constraint in determining this application.

### Design

- 6.17 The design of the individual panels is relatively standard, and set out on a horizontal line facing southwards. The site also ensures the buffer zones for various constraints with the panels set in from the site boundaries by approximately 15 metres.
- 6.18 There would be a small number of other structures erected as part of the proposal including a substation, switchgear housing, a parts store and an inverter station. All of the buildings would be relatively small scale with the substation being the tallest structure at 3 metres in height. The design and location of the buildings is acceptable and will not significantly detract from the rural setting of the site.
- 6.19 With regards glint and glare, solar panels are designed to absorb light, not reflect it away. Solar panels are also designed to operate in day light, not necessarily sunlight, so can generate electricity even on over cast days.
- 6.20 Due to the site's location away from roads and the orientation of the panels in relation to the nearest road and the three residential properties closest, officers do not consider that glint and glare will be of significant concern.

### Built Heritage / Archaeology

- 6.21 The site is within an area of known occupation and activity from the prehistoric through to the post-medieval periods. This has been acknowledged by the Heritage Desk-Based Assessment submitted as part of this application. The development site is therefore considered to have a low to moderate potential for buried archaeological remains of some or all of these periods. The proposed development also lies within 20m distance of one Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) "Site of pumping engine at Muxton Bridge colliery" National List Entry No. [NLE] 1018468), and within 1.3km of a second Scheduled Ancient Monument ("Lilleshall Abbey" National List Entry No. [NLE] 1015286).

- 6.22 Due to the dense natural screening, the site of the pumping engine (associated with Muxton Bridge Colliery) does not have an expansive, open setting and is therefore not compromised directly from the development. There is also the 'safety' of a buffer of open space between the wooded area where the SAM is located and where the solar panels begin which helps to reduce any potential impact on its setting.
- 6.23 Given the separation distance, the undulations in the landscape and the level of screening between them there is no intervisibility between the site and Lilleshall Abbey. As such there would be no visual impact on the setting of that building as a result of the proposal.
- 6.24 Shropshire Council Historic Environment Archaeology Service requested that an archaeological field evaluation of the application be undertaken prior to the planning application being determined. Following that advice the applicant provided a written scheme of investigation for an archaeological watching brief and proposed mitigation report. This has been sent to Shropshire Council Archaeology Service and they have confirmed that the document is acceptable and that it would provide adequate archaeological mitigation and recording for the proposed development.
- 6.25 Subject to the development being carried out in accordance with the submitted watching brief and mitigation report, which can be controlled by condition, then the development is acceptable in terms of any archaeological impact in accordance with Paragraphs 128 to 135 of the NPPF.

#### Access

- 6.26 The application initially proposed to construct a temporary vehicular access from the Donnington Wood Roundabout to the west of the site, through the Granville Local Nature Reserve, mainly along the route of the existing footpath / bridleway. A significant amount of objection was received to the proposal from local residents and from some consultees due to the potential impact that the temporary access could have had on the Granville Local Nature Reserve. The applicant has reconsidered this element of the proposal and now proposes to utilise Muxton Lane at the northern edge of the site.
- 6.27 The application is supported by a Transport Statement that provides information on the construction programme of the site. Deliveries of the various solar farm elements would take place over approximately 10 weeks and would involve 60 deliveries over that period giving an average of 6 vehicles per week although the amount of deliveries would range between 1 and 10 per week.
- 6.28 It is proposed to widen the existing access into the site which will involve the removal of the existing gate, fencing and a small section of the existing some hedgerow in order to widen the access so that the construction vehicles can enter the site. Decommissioning will be in approximately 25 years and this will be similar to the construction period averaging a similar number of vehicular movements per day.

- 6.29 A construction management plan has also accompanied the application. A temporary construction compound would be created for the duration of the construction works at the northern end of the site for parking of delivery vehicles, storage and staff facilities. Once built the site will continue to be accessed through this existing field gate.
- 6.30 Given the limited construction period and number of delivery vehicles expected to visit the site the proposal is unlikely to cause any significant detrimental impact on the road network. Once the solar farm is operational the site would require occasional maintenance and inspection and vehicles used are likely to be small vans. Muxton Lane is an unclassified road which is narrow in places close to the application site with restricted forward visibility and has limited passing places. The condition of the carriageway past the golf course entrance is only maintained to a standard that is suitable for the number of dwellings it serves (the 4 houses known as Muxton Cottages).
- 6.31 The Council's Highways Officers have considered the proposal and advised that the temporary construction route initially proposed through the Granville Park would be a more appropriate access to the site. Following the change to the proposal they have advised that they need additional time to consider the implications of the development and their comments will be presented to the Committee through a pre-committee note.
- 6.32 The applicant has proposed conditions to overcome any potential concerns including a road condition survey of the stretch of road between the golf club entrance and the site to ensure that any damage to the road is mitigated. They have also proposed the use of temporary ground protection mats to protect highway verges and the use of banksmen to be present along the construction route when the largest delivery vehicles are accessing the site.

#### Trees / Ecology

- 6.33 The site comprises a single field of improved grassland with associated boundary habitats including fences to the west and north west and species poor hedgerows to the south, east and north. The habitats which would be directly impacted by the proposed development are common and are not habitats of principal importance for nature conservation. The hedgerows have value for nesting birds and foraging bats but will be retained and enhanced as part of the proposals. A small 10m section of hedgerow removal will be required to facilitate access from Muxton Lane and will be reinstated at the end of the construction period.
- 6.34 The proposed construction access route from Muxton Lane is preferable to the initial proposal as it minimises potential impacts on biodiversity and on the designated site at Granville Local Nature Reserve.
- 6.35 It is proposed that the cabling route will cross a small section of broadleaved woodland with open ground flora on the Local Nature Reserve using directional drilling and will then be laid in a trench following the existing track and bridleway through the Granville Local Nature Reserve to the highway.

The cabling route will have a minor impact upon the Granville Local Nature Reserve but the work should require only a short period to complete and the developer has confirmed that any of the bridleway furniture damaged or removed during the operation would be replaced upon completion of the cable trench.

- 6.36 The cabling works will need to be publicised using on site posters in advance so that users of the Granville Local Nature Reserve can be aware of the works and timescales, the working party will need to include additional contractors to act as banksmen to make machine operators aware of approaching pedestrians and horse riders so that they can be allowed to pass safely.
- 6.37 Given that the construction access route is to use Muxton Lane and therefore to avoid the LNR altogether and provided that the cabling route works are appropriately controlled (as above) then the impacts on the Granville Local Nature Reserve should be short term and minor.
- 6.38 The habitats on the site have potential to support nesting wild birds and any hedgerow removal should occur outside of the bird nesting season which runs from March to September inclusive. There are no suitable bat roosting trees within the development site or within the small area of broadleaved woodland through which the cable route will pass. The site boundaries have potential value for foraging and commuting bats. The applicant has confirmed that there will be no site lighting in connection with the proposed scheme and that the hedgerow boundaries will be retained and enhanced. There was no evidence of badger setts on the site.
- 6.39 The hedgerows on the site and the small band of woodland across which the cabling route passes have potential for Dormouse to be present. The section of hedgerow to be removed on Muxton Lane should be inspected by an ecologist prior to removal and the cable route under the woodland section will be directionally drilled to minimise impacts. The habitats on the site are of low value for reptiles and amphibians and the site is over 150m from the nearest water body.
- 6.40 The proposed Landscape Strategy plan and the Landscape and Ecology Masterplan document submitted with the application set out the proposed ecological enhancements which would be provided including:
- 560m of new native species hedgerow planting on the north and west boundaries of the site with appropriate planting, establishment and hedge cutting maintenance over the lifetime of the solar farm,
  - 260m of gapping up and enhancement of the species poor hedgerows on the south and east boundaries of the site with appropriate planting, establishment and hedge cutting maintenance over the lifetime of the solar farm,
  - Species rich grassland establishment to replace the current improved grassland and appropriate management over the lifetimes of the solar farm,
  - Belts of rough grassland and scrub at the site boundaries,

- Provision of 2 barn owl boxes on trees and 2 kestrel boxes on poles on the site.
- 6.41 The biodiversity enhancements will comprise a biodiversity gain for the lifetime of the solar farm.
- 6.42 Given the biodiversity enhancements on offer as part of the proposed scheme and its lifetime of 25 years the site has potential to be significantly more biodiversity rich by the time decommissioning is considered than its current state. Decommissioning must, therefore, be preceded by a repeated detailed ecological assessment and be carried out following the outcomes of that assessment and using any mitigation measures and ecological supervision deemed to be necessary.
- 6.43 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan was submitted with the application and was amended following the decision utilise Muxton Lane rather than the Granville Local Nature Reserve to provide vehicular access to the site. This concludes that no trees would need to be removed in order to facilitate the development.
- 6.44 Concerns have been raised regarding the level of detail that has been submitted regarding the construction of the cable connection route. In order to ensure that further details are provided, without compromising the deliverability of the development, it is proposed to attach a suitably worded condition that prevents any work to be undertaken until further details relating to the cable route construction method and any necessary mitigation works are submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority, in consultation with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and other relevant consultees. This would enable the construction of the solar farm to commence while ensuring that there would be no detrimental impact on the Granville Local Nature Reserve.

#### Financial Considerations

- 6.45 The representation from the Donnington and Muxton Parish Council makes reference to a community benefit fund that has been proposed by the applicant. The community benefit fund would comprise £1,000 per MW installed capacity, index-linked to RPI, payable annually for 25 years from the date of commissioning the solar farm. This is likely to amount to £5,000 a year, depending on the final installed capacity. The community benefit fund would be allocated to Donnington and Muxton Parish Council to be spent on local projects which will bring economic, social and/or environmental benefits to the area. The community benefits fund (and separate educational fund) is a voluntary commitment from the applicant. It would be a legally binding document between them and the Parish Council who would be responsible for allocating funds to local projects, which will bring economic, social and/or environmental benefits to the area.
- 6.46 It should be noted that this is a voluntary commitment from the applicant and the contributions would not comply with the relevant policy and legislative

tests set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations, and therefore do not form a material consideration and should not be taken into account in the determination of the application.

### Other matters

- 6.47 The wider area falls within the defined coal mining Development High Risk Area. The Coal Authority has been consulted on the application and has confirmed that whilst there are recorded mining features within the application site, the specific part of the site where new development is proposed actually falls outside the defined Development High Risk Area. Therefore a Coal Mining Risk Assessment is not necessary for this proposal and there are no objections to the proposal on these grounds.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

- 7.1 The site is not located on any land designated for its natural beauty or recognised for having any specific ecological importance. The use of the site as arable will cease for a period, furthermore the site can be still be used for sheep grazing and thus the proposed use is considered acceptable in principle. The proposed ground mounted solar panels are a reversible form of development and after the 20-25 year life of the application the land could be returned to agriculture. In addition, biodiversity of the site will be enhanced by landscaping and ecological mitigation measures.
- 7.2 The development has been sited to maximise the site's topography and is conveniently located adjacent to a substation to allow easy and cost effective transfer of energy to the national grid. There will be some visual impact and this has been appropriately assessed. The implications of this significance have not deemed that consent should not be given, but can be mitigated to reduce the effects. In addition, this has to be balanced against the provision of a renewable energy generating scheme and additional landscape planting that will help mitigates the development's impact.
- 7.3 Planning policy and in particular the NPPF, encourages large and small scale renewable energy development, provided there are no significant other material considerations or adverse environmental effects. In addition, the NPPF has at its heart the presumption in favour of sustainable development and where the proposal accords with the development plan development should be approved without delay.
- 7.4 It is therefore consider that the proposed development represents sustainable development with wider environmental and social benefits. The proposal accords with national and local policies and that there are no significant material considerations or environmental impacts that outweighs this.

## **8. RECOMMENDATION**

- 8.1 Based on the conclusions above, the recommendation to the Planning Committee on this application is that PLANNING PERMISSION IS GRANTED subject to the following conditions and informatives (with authority to finalise conditions and reasons for approval to be delegated to Development Management Service Delivery Manager):

Conditions:

1. Commence within 3 years
2. Temporary 25 year permission
3. Implement in accordance with approved plans.
4. Prior to the commencement of any works associated with the provision of the network cable full details of the cable route, including construction methods and reinstatement, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The details shall also include the location of any temporary site compounds, materials dumps and associated facilities. The methods chosen and reinstatement must ensure that disruption is minimised and a positive result is secured for the Country Park. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved works.
5. Environmental Management Plan for site construction.
6. Landscaping
7. Works to be carried out in accordance with the submitted Written Scheme of Investigation (archaeological work).
8. Retain all hedges/trees shown.
9. Landscaping in accordance with submitted plan
10. Arboricultural supervision is required for the cable laying
11. Development to be carried out in accordance with the Ecological Assessment, the Landscape Strategy Revision A and the Landscape and Ecology Masterplan.
12. Hours of construction Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm, Saturday 8am - 1pm.
13. If solar farm ceases to operate for continuous period of 6 months, then submit decommissioning plan and site. And submit Decommissioning Method Statement.
14. Detailed ecological assessment to be carried out and submitted within the 6 months prior to decommissioning with implementation of recommendations.
15. Drainage
16. Highways related conditions – to be updated following receipt of the comments from the local highway authority.

Informatives:

1. I40 Conditions
2. I41 Reason for grant of permission
3. Ecology: Nesting Wild Birds
4. Ecology: Trenches and pipework
5. RANPPF1 Approval – National Planning Policy Framework
6. The planning permission does not authorise the applicant to construct any means of access over the publicly maintained highway (footway or verge). The applicant must apply to the Telford and Wrekin Highway department on 01952 384000 for a section 184 (Highways Act 1980) licence to construct a

new access. Your planning reference should be included. Alternatively further information and application forms can be found by searching for 'dropped kerbs' on [www.telford.gov.uk](http://www.telford.gov.uk). There is a fee involved for a S184 licence which is dependent on whether this is a residential or commercial application. There is also a 30 day approval period plus a 15 day notice period required.