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STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF INFORMAL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2021

Present: Cllrs Robin Cook (Chairman), John Worth (Vice-Chairman), Shane Bartlett, Dave Bolwell, Alex Brenton, Jean Dunseith, Mike Dyer, Sherry Jespersen, Mary Penfold, Belinda Ridout and David Tooke

Apologies: Cllrs Kelvin Clayton

Also present:

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Philip Crowther (Legal Business Partner - Regulatory), Mike Garrity (Head of Planning), Chelsey Golledge (Technical Support Officer), Elaine Tibble (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Peter Walters (Senior Planning Officer)

34. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

35. **Public Participation**

Representations by the public to the Committee on individual planning applications are attached as an appendix to these minutes.

36. **Application No: 6/2020/0595 - Land North of North Fossil Farm, Dorchester Road, East Knighton, Dorchester, DT2 8DB**

This application had been the subject of a site visit by the committee on the Monday prior to the meeting which the following members attended.

Cllrs Robin Cook, John Worth, Shane Bartlett, Dave Bolwell, Alex Brenton, Jean Dunseith, Sherry Jespersen, Mary Penfold, Belinda Ridout and David Tooke.

Cllr Mike Dyer did not attend the site visit, therefore he did not take part in the debate or vote on the application.

The Senior Planning Officer presented the report which proposed the installation of 40MW ground mounted photovoltaic (PV) solar development including a substation & new fencing with associated landscape mitigation & ecological/ecosystem service enhancements. He gave an update on a typing error in paragraphs 13.0 and 15.8 of the report. The contribution towards AONB mitigation was to be collected over 40 years and not 20 as stated in the report

The proposed site was situated midway between Dorchester and Wareham, North West of Winfrith Newburgh and to the west of East Knighton.

The presentation included maps and photographs of the application site which was agricultural and mostly flat in nature, noting the former nuclear power station Winfrith. The proposed location of the sub-station was already screened with well established trees and hedges.

The Access point to the site was via an existing bridleway which would be upgraded to support traffic during construction and would remain open during and after construction. There were no plans to remove any of the trees or hedgerows from the site.

It was noted that some existing watercourses on the site were proposed to be left to ensure surface water drainage. There were a few neighbouring properties – none of which directly abutted the site.

Committee members were advised that there was the potential for surface water flooding on the proposed site layout plan and the number of solar arrays had been reduced to accommodate that and therefore would not exacerbate any existing flood issues on the site. The Lead Local Flood Authority were happy and it was noted that the site was in Environmental Agency Flood Risk Zone 1 but was not considered to be of particular risk of surface water flooding but nevertheless any opportunity of surface water pooling had been removed from the arrays.

A detailed landscaping plan would be conditioned if the application were approved.

The Senior Planning Officer expanded on the information relating to elevations, locations, the solar arrays and advised that the security fencing would be set back from existing hedgerows to provide wildlife corridors. He gave an overview of the proposed landscaping, a more detailed landscaping plan was the subject of a planning condition. Further tree and hedgerow planting would enhance screening and reduce visual impact. The site was close to but not within the Dorset Area of Natural Beauty (AONB)

Following the closing summary members were given the opportunity to ask questions.

In response to committee member questions the Senior Planning Officer advised that the bridleway continued to Winfrith Heath, the first 50m would need to be a hard surface and would adhere to highway safety and the safety of the horses, but the remainder would be of natural material

The proposal was considered acceptable in terms of biodiversity which would ensure protection of any wildlife affected by the proposals

The maximum export capacity of the solar arrays would be 40MW. This would allow the solar park to generate clean renewable energy for the equivalent of

approximately 14,000 homes a year, which would help with the shortage of power in Dorset from the National Grid. This would be sufficient to make a difference to the Dorset wide area

With regard to the preservation of the barrows Historic England had been consulted and had discussions with the applicant and agreed a financial contribution would be provided to facilitate the restoration and improved interpretation of the two bowl barrows currently on the “Heritage at Risk” register.

In relation to the fence surrounding the sub-station, the onus would be on the developer to ensure this was vandal proof and complied with Health and Safety standards, however the Senior Planning Officer advised that a condition could be added to ensure the fencing used must be secure.

In response to the issue of de-commissioning, a plan was detailed in condition 3 of the report to ensure compliance. Condition 8 entailed details of proposed finished levels or contours, the exact location of the substation within the site, hard surfacing materials for the substation including the colour, details of the CCTV cameras and the poles on which they are situated including the height of the pole, materials and colour to be approved by the Local Planning Authority.

Proposed by Cllr Belinda Ridout, seconded by Cllr Bolwell:

Upon being put to the vote the Committee were unanimously minded to grant the application subject to the conditions set out in the report and the completion of a legal agreement under section 106 of the town and country planning act 1990 (as amended) in a form to be agreed by the legal services manager to secure financial mitigation for two barrows on the heritage at risk register and for the AONB, and recommended that the Service Manager for Development Management and Enforcement determined the application accordingly.

Or

Refuse permission if the agreement is not completed by 15th June 2022 or such extended time as agreed by the Head of Planning.

This should include the additional condition for fencing to be approved.

Following the “minded to” vote, the Head of Planning confirmed that he had attended the site visit, listened to the presentation and debate and would take the decision in accordance with the committees minded to decision.

37. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

38. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

**Appendix Public Participation
Appendix Decision List**

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.31 am

Chairman

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REPRESENTATIONS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE Wednesday 15 December 2021

Planning Application Number: 6/2020/0595 Fossil Farm

Support

Sandra Ellis

I am writing to you with my support for the above application for the following reasons, and I would like it noted that I have no affiliation whatsoever to the application or any person making it.

I am a former chairman of the Winfrith Parish council and for the past fifteen years I have been the Chairman of the Winfrith Site Stakeholder Group for the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

During that time I have fought very hard to bring the Winfrith Site back to heathland - all on record - which is now happening. Informed by my experience with the decommissioning work, I think this proposal is a very good one.

Solar Farms have very little impact on the land where they are installed and on the community that they neighbour. We already have one or two around here and provided they are well screened no one takes any notice of them. I also consider that the extensive ecological enhancements that are being proposed will be a great complement to the heathland reinstatement at the Winfrith Atomic Energy site and together they will provide a fantastic boost to the habitat of our local wildlife.

The application if approved would be a continuing asset to the production of electricity without the need for fossil fuels which, at the time of writing is slowly being reduced around the world to try and limit the rise of global temperatures and the impacts in climate change, which is currently being discussed by world leaders at Cop26.

The need for Electricity is going to rise exponentially in the coming years and with Nuclear Power options limited and fossil fuels very much in decline, any land that is a potential viable site for Solar Power should be considered.

I understand that there is support locally for this project and I appreciated that there is some objection too. I would just add that over fifty years ago the objections to an experimental nuclear power station being built on Winfrith Heath, known as Thomas Hardy's Egdon Heath, was so great there was a long debate in Parliament - I still have the Hansard Report. The build went ahead and as we all know the site, as well as experimenting with nine different types of reactors, produced electricity for the national grid.

Our need for power remains and it grows. We must replace our old power stations and we have a duty to our children to build sources of power that safeguard the environment for future generations. Solar Farms are a good and safe way to do it.

Yours sincerely
Sandra I Ellis.

Eric Sealey – MD Fossil Farms

We started farming North Fossil at Winfrith 37 years ago, during that time and to date it has grown a mix of grass, cereals and maize.

Farming has evolved significantly in that time. Diversification has always been important and we are proud of the farming business we have nurtured, providing locally grown and reared produce to our community which also provides jobs to members of our local community. With major changes to farming policy it is becoming more important than ever before to diversify our business to help ensure we can keep farming and providing food.

We recognise that the economic sustainability of the farm goes hand in hand with the environmental sustainability of the farm. In recent weeks the matters of global environmental pressure have been at the top of every agenda. It is clear to see that this will bring more challenges to farming and as a farming family, we can see that a central pillar of our business – raising beef cattle – could be called into question if it is not done in an environmentally less intensive manner.

We have considered the options presented by renewable energy for many years and we believe that using some of our land for a solar farm is an essential piece of the puzzle as we transition to a sustainable farming future.

The land that is being proposed for the solar farm is the poorest areas of land we farm and the least naturally productive. By changing the way we use this land it will help to reduce our overall farm carbon footprint. This land will benefit from being rested and if the solar farm is approved, it will become an area of permanent pasture which will allow the soil to restore, yet it will still be agriculturally productive as sheep can graze amongst the panels and in the margins, but without any artificial fertilisers being applied.

As the stewardship of our farm passes to the next generation our farming activities must evolve once again. Generating clean, renewable energy will safeguard the economic and environmental sustainability of our farm, helping to ensure we can continue to provide locally produced food sustainably for generations to come.

Eric Sealey, Landowner.

Statement from the applicant Hugo House of Spring CHE Ltd in relation to application: 6/2020/0595

Good morning chairman and members of the committee. Your officers have recommended that permission is granted for our solar farm proposal at North Fossil Farm.

Following extensive preapplication discussion and consultation, our clean energy project has received significant community support and has no outstanding objections from Statutory Consultees. I would like to highlight some of the important

factors and benefits of our proposal.

Our vision for North Fossil Farm is to create a pioneering project that delivers new renewable energy, significant ecological benefits and allows for the continuation of agriculture - providing a model of how farming, clean energy and wildlife can thrive side-by-side.

If approved, the proposal can deliver enough locally-generated, clean electricity to supply more than 14,000 homes with over 9,000 tonnes of carbon emissions saved every year.

We wholeheartedly agree with the consultation response of Dorset's landscape officer which states,

'the landscape where this particular installation is proposed is perhaps amongst the most appropriate that there is in the Purbeck area for this type of development' and 'could actually represent an exemplar scheme'.

Winfrith receives some of the highest levels of sunshine in the UK - this maximises the site's potential to produce clean electricity. As the neighbouring Winfrith Nuclear Facility is decommissioned, this presents a rare opportunity to 'plug-in' new generation and make an economically viable connection to the electricity grid.

Solar panels will be installed on around 30% of the total site area, but less than 5% of the land is actually disturbed. This leaves space to boost biodiversity by sowing wildflowers and grasses, restoring existing hedgerows and planting new native woodland, providing a haven for Dorset's unique wildlife. The project will achieve a significant 194% net gain in biodiversity.

The land will be grazed by sheep and rested from intensive agricultural use. This will reduce chemical inputs, restore soil condition and replenish soil carbon. The project is fully reversible and after 40 years the land will be revitalised, ready for harvest and benefit from an improved and resilient ecosystem.

The consensus at the recent COP26 conference was irrefutable: to avoid catastrophic climate change, we have to keep global warming below 2°C and we must act now.

Dorset Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency and announced their goal to become carbon neutral by 2040. Projects such as North Fossil Farm Solar are critical to achieving 'Net-Zero' for Dorset and the UK and avoid the worst effects of climate change.

We have worked diligently with officers to ensure our proposal is robust and delivers meaningful environmental benefits. We therefore respectfully request that permission is granted in accordance with officer recommendation.

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Strategic Planning Committee 15 December 2021 Decisions List

Application Reference: 6/2020/0595

Application Site: Land North of North Fossil Farm, Dorchester Road, East Knighton, Dorchester, DT2 8DB

Proposal: Installation of 40MW ground mounted photovoltaic (PV) solar development including a substation & new fencing with associated landscape mitigation & ecological/ecosystem service enhancements

Recommendation: That the Committee would be minded to grant the application subject to the conditions set out in the report and the completion of a legal agreement under section 106 of the town and country planning act 1990 (as amended) in a form to be agreed by the legal services manager to secure financial mitigation for two barrows on the heritage at risk register and for the AONB, and recommends that the Service Manager for Development Management and Enforcement determines the application accordingly.

Or

Refuse permission if the agreement is not completed by 15th June 2022 or such extended time as agreed by the Head of Planning.

Decision: that the application be granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: This condition is required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: J00739-004 scale 1:7500, SP-IN-D03-PL R03, SP-SCD3-PL R04, SP-ELD3-PL R04, SP-SS-D03-PL 1/2 R04, SP-SS-D03-PL 2/2 R04, J00739-005 scale 1:5000 and SP-SF-D03-PL R03

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

3. Within 40 years following completion of construction of development, or within six months of the cessation of electricity generation by the solar PV facility, or within six months following a permanent cessation of construction works prior to the solar pv facility coming into operational use, whichever is sooner, the solar pv panels, frames, foundations, inverter modules and all associated structures and fencing approved shall be dismantled and removed from the site. The developer shall notify the Local Planning Authority in writing no later than five working days following cessation of power production or permanent cessation of construction works prior to the facility coming into operational use. The site

shall subsequently be decommissioned and restored in accordance with a scheme, the details of which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority no later than three months following the cessation of power production or the permanent cessation of construction works prior to the facility coming into operational use.

Reason: To ensure an acceptable restoration of the site and to protect the setting of the Heritage Assets.

4. The detailed biodiversity mitigation, compensation and enhancement/net gain strategy set out within the approved Biodiversity Plan certified by the Dorset Council Natural Environment Team on 20th October 2021 must be implemented in accordance with the timetable detailed in the approved biodiversity plan and completed in full prior to the substantial completion, or the first bringing into use of the development hereby approved, whichever is the sooner. The development shall subsequently be implemented entirely in accordance with the approved details. Thereafter, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority, the mitigation, compensation and enhancement/net gain measures shall be permanently maintained and retained.

Reason: To mitigate, compensate and enhance/provide net gain for impacts on biodiversity.

5. The development shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved Construction Traffic Management Plan prepared by Transport Planning Associates, dated September 2020 reference 2003-065/CTMP/01.

Reason: In the interests of road safety.

6. Before the commencement of construction of the development, or delivery of materials associated with the development the first 50 metres of the vehicle access, measured from the rear edge of the highway (excluding the vehicle crossing – see the Informative Note below), must be laid out and constructed to a specification submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority including the proposals set out in Drawing SK01-A (Appendix C).

Reason: To ensure that a suitably surfaced and constructed access to the site is provided that prevents loose material being dragged and/or deposited onto the adjacent carriageway causing a safety hazard. This needs to occur prior to construction of the development due to the traffic movements associated with its development.

7. The woodland screening to the south of the site, shown on drawing reference SP-SL1-D03-PL R03 shall be planted prior to the installation of the solar arrays, transformers or the substation. Any tree that becomes diseased or dies within the first five years from the date of planting shall be replaced.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of the area

8. Prior to the commencement of any development hereby approved, above damp course level, full details of hard landscape proposals shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details shall include where appropriate : proposed finished levels or contours, the exact location of the substation within the site, hard surfacing materials for the substation including the colour, details of the CCTV cameras and the poles on which they are situated including the height of the pole, materials and colour. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure the provision of amenity afforded by appropriate landscape design and maintenance of existing and/or new landscape features.

9. Prior to the commencement of any development hereby approved, a soft landscaping and planting scheme shall be submitted to, and approved in writing, by the Local Planning Authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented in full during the planting season November - March following commencement of the development or within a timescale to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include provision for the maintenance and replacement of any of the trees and shrubs that become diseased or die within a period of not less than 5 years.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

10. Prior to the commencement of any development hereby approved, a landscape management plan shall, by reference to site layout drawings of an appropriate scale, be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and shall include long term design objectives, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules for all landscape areas. The landscaping shall be managed in accordance with the approved plan for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To ensure that due regard is paid to the continuing enhancement and maintenance of amenity afforded by the landscape features of nature conservation or historical significance

11. Prior to the commencement of any development hereby approved, an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) prepared by a qualified tree specialist providing comprehensive details of construction works in relation to trees that have the potential to be affected by the development must be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Council. All works must be carried out in accordance with the approved details. In particular, the method statement must provide the following: a) a specification for protective fencing to trees and hedges during construction phases which complies with BS5837 (2012) and a plan indicating the alignment of the protective fencing; b) a schedule of tree work conforming to BS3998; c) details of the area for storage of materials, concrete mixing and any bonfires; d) plans and particulars showing proposed cables, pipes and ducts above and below ground f) details of any no-dig specification for all works within the root protection area for retained trees: g) details of the supervision to be carried out by the developers tree specialist.

Reason: This information is required to be submitted and agreed before any work starts on site to ensure that the trees and hedges deemed worthy of retention on-site will not be damaged prior to, or during the construction works.

12. Prior to the commencement of development a detailed surface water management scheme for the site, based upon the hydrological and hydrogeological context of the development, and providing clarification of how drainage is to be managed during construction shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The surface water scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the submitted details before the development is completed.

Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding and to protect water quality.

13. Prior to the commencement of development details of maintenance and management of the surface water sustainable drainage scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall be implemented and thereafter managed and maintained in accordance with the approved details. These shall include a plan for the lifetime of the development, the arrangements for adoption by any public body or statutory undertaker, or any other arrangements to secure the operation of the surface water drainage scheme throughout its lifetime.

Reason: To ensure the future maintenance of the surface water drainage system, and to prevent the increased risk of flooding.

14. Prior to the commencement of any development hereby approved, including any excavation, a scheme that details a programme of investigative archaeological work to establish whether there is archaeology within the peat deposits shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include the proposed location of the works and methodology. The development shall thereafter accord with the approved scheme, taking account of any findings and making adjustments to foundation structures below ground as necessary.

Reason: To safeguard and/or record the archaeological interest on and around the site. As the foundations are below ground, a revised planning application is not required to make required adjustments to the foundations used.

15. Prior to first use of the development, details of the security fencing to be used on site, including elevations and manufacturers specifications must be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. They must be installed and retained in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure the provision of adequate security for the site, while maintaining a satisfactory visual relationship with the surrounding area.

Informative Notes:

1. Informative: The applicant is advised that the granting of planning permission does not override the need for existing rights of way affected by the development to be kept open and unobstructed unless the statutory procedures authorising closure or diversion have been completed. Developments, in so far as it affects a right of way should not be started until the necessary order for the diversion has come into effect.
2. Informative: This permission is subject to an agreement made pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 dated ## ## relating to mitigation for the Heritage at Risk register monuments and to mitigating the impact of the proposal on the AONB.
3. Informative: The vehicle crossing serving this proposal (that is, the area of highway land between the nearside carriageway edge and the site's road boundary) must be constructed to the specification of the County Highway Authority in order to comply with Section 184 of the Highways Act 1980. The applicant should contact Dorset Highways by telephone at Dorset Direct (01305 221000), by email at dorsetdirect@dorsetcc.gov.uk, or in writing at Dorset Highways, Dorset Council, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ, before the commencement of any works on or adjacent to the public highway
4. Informative: National Planning Policy Framework Statement
In accordance with paragraph 38 of the NPPF the council, as local planning authority, takes a positive approach to development proposals and is focused on providing sustainable development.
The council works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by:
 - offering a pre-application advice service, and
 - as appropriate updating applications/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application and where possible suggesting solutions.

In this case:

- The applicant/agent was updated of any issues and provided with the opportunity to address issues identified by the case officer.
- The applicant was provided with pre-application advice.

