

Dear Members

Special Planning Committee (Large Scale Major Application)

A special meeting of the Planning Committee will be held in the **Craddock Room, Civic Suite, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford** on **31 July 2024** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

The Committee will meet at the rear of the Civic Centre and depart at **09:30** to visit the site(s) as set out in the agenda and re-convene at the Civic Centre at approximately **11:00** to determine the application(s).

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown in each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.



Head of Law and Governance

**SPECIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE
(LARGE SCALE MAJOR APPLICATION)
31 JULY 2024**

**Chairman - Councillor B McKeown
Vice-Chairman - Councillor A Nixon**

AGENDA

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3	Planning Applications	Page Nos 3 - 48

MEMBERSHIP

Chairman - Councillor B McKeown

B M Cross	A R McNaughton
I D Fordham	A Nixon
A D Hobbs	M Phillips
E G R Jones	A J Sandiford
P W Jones	S N Spencer
B McKeown	

SPECIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE - 31 JULY 2024

Ward Interest - Milwich

Planning Applications

Report of Head of Economic Development and Planning

Purpose of Report

To consider the following planning applications, the reports for which are set out in the attached **APPENDIX**:-

		Page Nos
23/36938/FUL	Lower Farm Drointon Lane, Grindley, Stafford Staffordshire, ST18 0LX	4 - 48
	This application has been referred to the Planning Committee because the development is a large scale major application	
	Officer Contact - Richard Wood, Development Lead Telephone 01785 619324	

Previous Consideration

Nil

Background Papers

Planning application files are available for Members to inspect, by prior arrangement, in the Development Management Section. The applications including the background papers, information and correspondence received during the consideration of the application, consultation replies, neighbour representations are scanned and are available to view on the Council website.

Application:	23/36938/FUL
Case Officer:	Vanessa Blake
Date Registered:	16 June 2023
Target Decision Date:	3 January 2023
Extended To:	2 August 2024
Address:	Lower Farm, Drointon Lane, Grindley, Stafford, Staffordshire, ST18 0LX
Ward:	Milwich
Parish:	Stowe By Chartley
Proposal:	Installation and operation of solar farm and energy storage system with associated landscaping, underground cabling, works, equipment and infrastructure
Applicant:	Novus Renewable Services Ltd
Recommendation:	Approve, subject to conditions

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

Application 23/37238/FUL is a large scale major application which is exempt from the Council's scheme of delegation and as such needs to be determined by the Planning Committee.

The application has also been called-in by Councillor F Beatty (Ward Member for Milwich) for the following reason(s):

"For members to consider: location, impact on the local topography, visual impact in the landscape; planning concerns of the local community, traffic movements. Whether (i) the proposed use of the agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and confirm that poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) that the proposal allows for continued agricultural use and encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays."

1.0 Context

Site and surroundings

1.1 The site is located within Stowe-by-Chartley Parish, adjacent to the hamlet of Drointon. The eastern boundary of the site lies on the Stafford Borough Boundary, beyond which is East Staffordshire Borough. The site is within Flood Zone 1 as an area of low risk flooding.

- 1.2 The application site comprises two areas of land. The 'main site' is approximately 63ha in size alongside a smaller parcel of land the 'substation site' about 0.74ha located 480m to the west of the main site. A proposed 'cable route' would connect both sites as shown on the site location plan.
- 1.3 The main site is located immediately to the east of Lower Farm and consists of eleven parcels of land comprising several small and medium sized fields separated by hedgerow / trees and which are currently used for grazing. Bourne Brook enters the main site to the north west.
- 1.4 The north eastern boundary of the main site is adjacent to the Black Hough Plantation, and the majority of the eastern boundary abuts the Newton Gorse Plantation. The north western boundary lies adjacent to Plough Farm and to the west of the site is the Hamlet of Drointon. Drointon is characterised principally of farmsteads and a number of dwellings. To the south, extends agricultural land with a small number of dwellings and several farms with assorted outbuildings.
- 1.5 The substation site is located approximately 480m to the south west of the main site and contains an existing 15m high pylon with a 132KV overhead powerline which forms part of the National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) network (providing the connection point). The substation site is adjacent to the junction of Stowe Lane, Drointon Lane and Drointon Road. Stowe Lane forms the north boundary of the site. The substation site is surrounded by agricultural land.
- 1.6 The sites are accessed from Drointon Lane and Grindley Lane via the A518 (Uttoxeter Road) to the north. The main site utilises an existing field gate whilst a new access would be created into the substation site.
- 1.7 Public Rights of Way (PRoW) intersect the main site. PRoW Stowe by Chartley 27 runs through the northern area whilst the southern section is intersected by PRoW Stowe by Chartley 0.1620. PRoW Stowe by Chartley 18 runs adjacent to the south eastern boundary of the substation site.
- 1.8 The application sites do not contain any designated or non-designated heritage assets, although the Grade II Listed Old Hall Farmhouse is located approximately 200m from the site boundary within Drointon. There are other Grade II listed buildings located approximately 720m to the east of the site, outside of the Borough boundary, which include Higher Booth Farmhouse and Lower Booth Farmhouse. Further east of the site (approximately 770m) includes a scheduled ancient monument; Lower Booth moated site and deserted medieval village.
- 1.9 There are a number of European nature conservation sites within proximity of the application sites. The West Midlands Meres and Mosses RAMSAR and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is approximately 0.4km to the north. The Pasturefields Salt Marsh SAC is also 3.5km to the southwest of the site and the Cannock Chase SAC is approximately 6km further to the southwest.
- 1.10 In terms of national statutory nature conservation sites, the West Midlands Meres and Mosses designation also includes the Chartley Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and within which is a National Nature Reserve. The Blithfield Reservoir SSSI is approximately 1.4km to the southeast of the site.

The proposal

- 1.11 Full planning permission is sought for a period of up to 40 years for the installation of a ground mounted photovoltaic (PV) solar farm development, generating up to 49.9MW of electricity. The development of this site will provide a connection point to the National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) network.
- 1.12 The main site would accommodate the solar panel arrays with transformers spread throughout. A small parcel of land forming the northern spur of the main site adjacent the Black Hough woodland would contain the MV skids and battery energy storage system (BESS).
- 1.13 The main site would accommodate the following elements:
- Solar panel arrays
 - Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)
 - Transformers / inverters
 - Spares containers
 - Internal access tracks

1.14 Solar panel arrays

The ground mounted solar arrays would be arranged in rows on an east to west alignment with an anti-reflective design to reduce glint and glare. The panels would be static, have a width of 4.85m and be tilted between an angle of 15 to 30 degrees with a maximum height of 3.10m. The lowest point being 0.8m to 1.10m in height from ground level.

1.15 Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)

The BESS is proposed to be located in the north east portion of the site adjacent to the Black Hough Plantation. The BESS comprises a bank of twenty containerised batteries with ten Medium Voltage (MV) skids with an overall capacity of 30MW which would discharge at times of high demand. The batteries would measure 2.43m (W) x 12.7m (L) with a height of 3.5m whilst the MV skids would have dimensions of 14.8m (L) x 3.7m (W) x 3m (H).

1.16 Transformers / inverters

A total of eighteen transformer / inverters units with a small cabinet are proposed near to each parcel of solar panels and adjacent to the proposed internal access tracks. The transformers would measure 3m (H) x 6m(L) x 3.5m(W). The overall length of the equipment configuration would be 10.5m with each being surrounded by a bund and outer drainage swale.

- 1.17 The function of the transformers / inverters is to step the generation voltage up to the connection voltage of the local distribution network.

1.18 Spares containers

Two spares' containers for housing spare transformers and inverters would be located in the most north western corner of the site near to the main access. The containers would measure 6.1m (L) x 2.4m (W) x 2.6m (H).

1.19 Internal access tracks

Existing agricultural vehicle tracks and field entrances would be utilised, and where new or upgraded tracks are required, these would take the appearance of farm tracks with a crushed-stone surface. The crushed stone would be placed over a sub-surface which itself would be constructed on a geotextile membrane. The tracks would be 4m wide.

1.20 Distribution Network Operator (DNO) substation

The substation site would contain a DNO substation and a customer substation. The DNO substation compound would measure 52m x 25m in area and be enclosed with 2.4m high palisade fencing. The compound would have an outer perimeter of 1.2m high stock fencing which would also enclose the adjacent 132Kv pylon to which the DNO substation would be connected to the National Grid.

1.21 The DNO substation compound would contain the following electrical apparatus:

- Switch room
- Isolation and metering equipment - surge arrestors, circuit breaker/ transformer/ disconnecter
- Relay/control room
- 15m high communication tower
- Four 9m high floodlight columns.

1.22 Customer substation

The customer substation building would be located to the north west of the DNO compound and measures 6.1m (L) x 2.4m (W) x 2.6m (H).

1.23 Other elements

A network of 1.9m high stockproof fencing would surround the blocks of solar arrays, together with the perimeter of the main site and which would also have 3m high CCTV mounted poles at various locations. The CCTV system would be monitored remotely during the operational phase.

1.24 The proposal includes a drainage strategy comprising a combination of existing drainage ditches, new swales and filter drains, together with ecological and biodiversity landscaping enhancements.

1.25 Reports

The application is supported with the following technical reports which are referred to in the relevant subsections of the report:

- Outline decommissioning plan
- Landscape design / public right of way
- Landscape Visual Impact Assessment
- Archaeology and heritage statement
- Transport Statement
- Route assessment technical note
- Noise impact assessment

- Glint / glare assessment
- Ecological impact assessment
- Wintering bird survey report
- Biodiversity metric
- Agricultural land classification
- Arboricultural impact assessment
- Flood risk assessment and management plan
- Geophysical survey report

Officer Assessment – KEY CONSIDERATIONS

2.0 Planning policy framework

- 2.1 The proposal would generate up to 49.9MW of electricity and therefore falls under the threshold of 50MW for the development to be determined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.
- 2.2 The proposal also falls within the threshold under Schedule 2, 3 (a) Energy Industry of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017 as the site exceeds 0.5 hectares. Whilst a screening opinion was requested by the applicant (22/36707/ESS) prior to the submission of this application a subsequent assessment has been undertaken following its validation. On the basis of the application details submitted, it is concluded that the proposal is not likely to have significant effects on the environment having regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the Regulations and the proposal is therefore not considered to represent EIA development.
- 2.3 The Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended) sets a legally binding target to reduce net green house gas emissions from their 1990 level by 100% by 2050 which is known as the 'net zero target'. During 2023 the Government made a commitment to reduce emissions by 78% compared with 1990 levels by 2035.
- 2.4 Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended, require decisions to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 2.5 The Development Plan is influenced at national level by:
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023
 - Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) 2021
 - National Design Guide (NDG) 2019.
- 2.6 The Development Plan for the purposes of this application comprises The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 Parts 1 and 2 (TPSB).
- 2.7 Other guidance relevant to the proposal include the following:
- Overarching National Policy Statement for energy (EN-1)
 - National Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure (EN-3)
 - BRE Planning guidance for the development of large scale ground mounted solar PV systems

- BRE Agricultural Good Practice Guidance for Solar Farms
- BRE National Solar Centre Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments
- House of Commons Library: Planning and Solar Farms (July 2023)
- House of Commons Library: Planning for Solar Farms (February 2024)

3.0 Principle of Development

- 3.1 The government in its Energy White Paper (December 2020) has set the aim of a fully decarbonised, reliable and low-cost power system by 2035. The government noted that a net-zero consistent electricity system is most likely to be composed predominantly of wind and solar power, although these renewable sources would need to be supplemented with other technologies such as nuclear, gas with carbon capture usage and storage and batteries.
- 3.2 According to the House of Commons Library: Planning and solar farms (July 2023), 'The British Energy Security Strategy' (April 2022) provided further detail on the government's proposals for reducing its reliance on imported fossil fuels and accelerating its deployment of domestic sources of energy. One of its aims set out in the Strategy was to "*ramp up*" the deployment of both rooftop and ground-mounted solar systems. The government said it intended to achieve a fivefold increase in solar power by 2035 (from a capacity of 14GW to 70GW).
- 3.3 Paragraph 157 of the NPPF states that:
- "The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure".
- 3.4 Paragraph 163(a) of the NPPF then explains that local planning authorities should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy developments when determining planning applications.
- 3.5 Battery energy storage systems (BESS) are used to support renewable energy developments by reducing supply issues caused by intermittency, by enabling the storage of surplus electricity generation and allowing it to be available when demand is high or supply from the renewable source is low. The Government confirmed in 2023 that:
- "Until 2020, BESS were treated as a form of generating stations in the planning system. Like other major energy projects, BESS above a threshold of 50MW were classed as NSIP'S and require development consent. The government removed BESS from the NSIP procedure in 2020 following consultation. Except pumped hydro, all BESS now require planning permission from the LPA. Exceptions may apply where a BESS is deployed alongside another major energy projects (such as a solar farm) that requires development consent."

(House of Commons Library: Planning and solar farms - July 2023, page 10).

- 3.6 TPSB contains overarching policies and principles, all of which are set under the umbrella of the purpose of the planning system being able to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development as set within Spatial Principle (SP) 1 and section 2 of the Framework.
- 3.7 SP6 (v) of TPSB gives support to rural sustainability through protecting and enhancing the environmental assets and character of the Borough whilst sustaining the social and economic fabric of its communities that can be achieved by promoting use of sources for renewable energy.
- 3.8 Furthermore, Policy E2 (ix) of TPSB explains that support will be given to rural sustainability by encouraging provision for renewable energy generation in rural areas outside of settlements identified in SP3 and outside the Green Belt, in accordance with Policy N3 of TPSB. However, Policy E2 seeks the protection of the Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMVAL) by using areas of poorer quality land in preference to higher quality land for new development as stipulated under clause (xi).
- 3.9 TPSB Policy N3 then explains that the development of schemes for the generation of renewable energy will be supported where there is no harm to residential amenity, limited adverse impacts on townscape, landscape and heritage assets, no harmful environmental impacts such as emissions, noise, water environment and has been accompanied by decommissioning conditions to allow the site to be restored following cessation of energy production.

3.10 Land use

The NPPF defines the Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMVAL) as being in grades 1, 2 and 3a. Poorer agricultural land is defined within grades 3b, 4 or 5. The National Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure (EN-3) advises that poorer quality of land should be preferred to higher quality land and that BMVAL should be avoided where possible.

- 3.11 The application is supported by an Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey which identifies the following grades within the site:
- 2.3 Ha of Grade 2 (equating to 3.6% of the site),
 - 2.7 Ha of Grade 3a (4.2%) and
 - 59.5 Ha of Grade 3b (92.2%).

- 3.12 Paragraph 2.5.6 of the 'Planning Support and Design and Access Statement' further states that:

"It is clear that the significant majority of the site is not BMV quality land, while the limited areas of BMV are entirely surrounded by grade 3b land. It would therefore be impractical to farm these areas differently to the rest of the site, meaning there would be no benefit gained from the BMV areas in farming terms".

- 3.13 The Local Planning Authority concur with this statement. Natural England have advised that the development is unlikely to lead to significant permanent loss of BMV agricultural land as a resource for future generations due to its temporary nature and proposed construction method. The development is therefore considered to be acceptable with regards to the use of BMVAL.
- 3.14 The Parish and neighbours' concerns regarding land use are noted. The applicants covering letter (dated 26.01.2024) explains that Lower Farm is currently used for grazing cattle and that post development sheep grazing would be carried out alongside energy generation from the solar panels. This would maintain the pastoral use of the site.
- 3.15 BRE guidance states that:
- “Hardy livestock breeds are better suited to such autumn and winter grazing, when the forage is less nutritious and the principal aim is to prevent vegetation from overshadowing the leading (lower) edges of the PV modules (typically about 800-900mm high)”.
- 3.16 The lowest part of the panels would be 0.8m above ground which would provide sufficient clearance for animal grazing in accordance with the BRE guidance. It is also acknowledged the proposed operation of the solar farm is intended to last no longer than 40 years and after the land is expected to be returned to full agricultural use. In light of this, the proposal is judged to be generally consistent with the aims and objectives of policy E2(xi) of TPSB.
- 3.17 In accordance with Policy N3 the application is supported with an ‘Outline Decommissioning Plant’. It is therefore recommended that conditions are applied to any grant of permission to require the development to be appropriately decommissioned in the future. Natural England have also recommended that a condition be attached to safeguard soil resources and agricultural land which is considered to be reasonable and necessary.
- 3.18 For the reasons outlined above, it is considered that the principle of the development accords with the overarching policies and principles of TPSB and NPPF, subject to the impact of the proposed development upon the character of the site and surrounding area, heritage assets, residential amenity, highway safety and natural environmental factors (biodiversity, flooding and drainage) being acceptable.

Policies and guidance:-

National Planning Policy Framework:

Sections 2, 11, 14

The Plan for Stafford Borough:

SP1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable development

SP6 Achieving Rural Sustainability

E2 Sustainable Rural Development

N3 Low Carbon Sources and Renewable Energy

Overarching National Policy Statement for energy (EN-1)

National Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure (EN-3)

BRE (2014) Agricultural Good Practice Guidance for Solar Farms

House of Commons Library: Planning and solar farms - July 2023

Solar and protecting our Food Security and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land - Statement made on 15 May 2024

4.0 Impact on character and surroundings

4.1 Section 12 of the NPPF seeks to achieve well-designed and beautiful places. The principles of the NPPF are also supported by the National Design Guide (NDG). TPSB Policies N1 and N8 seek to secure enhancements in design quality by meeting principles concerning 'use', 'form', 'space' and 'movement', as well as expectations for new developments to reinforce and respect the character of the settlement and the landscape setting, through the design and layout that includes use of sustainable building materials and techniques that are sympathetic to the landscape.

4.2 Substation site

The 'substation site' has an existing 132KV overhead powerline and tower structure (15m in height) situated at the southern section of the site. The northern boundary of the site is visible from a road junction leading off in three directions; northeast towards Drinton Hamlet, northwest towards Stowe-by-Chartley and southeast towards the borough boundary and Lea Heath. The northern section of the site is partially screened by a low hedgerow and an overgrown area of vegetation by the site entrance.

4.3 A series of electrical apparatus including surge arrestors, circuit breaker, disconnectors alongside a 132KV substation building are proposed immediately to the north of the existing tower structure, which would be enclosed by 2.4m high palisade fencing and 1.2m high stock fencing. Adjacent to the substation would be a DNO relay/control room and customer switch room. The development of this site would provide a connection point to the National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) network.

4.4 Whilst it is noted that palisade fencing is not a design that is generally supported in rural locations, it must be acknowledged that this type of fencing is required in order to comply with safety regulations. The landscape strategy indicates proposed rows of trees would be planted along the substation site boundary for screening. It is noted that there is an existing 15m high tower structure at the site. Furthermore, whilst the substation site would not retain the agrarian character of the site the siting of a substation within the rural area is not uncommon. The proposal also includes landscaping in order to soften the appearance of the development. On balance, the proposed appearance of the substation site is considered to be acceptable and the proposed screen planting can be secured by condition.

4.5 Impact on Public Rights of Way

Paragraph 104 of the NPPF states that:

“Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails”.

4.6 PRow Stowe by Chartley 27 runs through the northern area of the main site. The southern section of the main site is also intersected by PRow Stowe by Chartley 0.1620 and 0.1621. PRow Stowe by Chartley 18 runs adjacent to the substation site.

4.7 Design Midlands were commissioned by the Council to provide advice on the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development. The Landscape Officer representing Design Midlands advised that the key impact of this development is on both PRowS intersecting the main site and that:

“This solar farm is an extensive intervention in the landscape resulting in an inevitable degree of change at a local level. Visible from the road to various degrees and beyond the greatest impact is on the public rights of way (PRow).”

Design Midlands recommended that a Landscape Strategy be required as a supporting strategic document which should take into consideration all factors within the landscape and clarify the rationale for the design.

4.8 Concerns regarding the impact of the proposal on the PRowS intersecting the main site were also expressed by the Council’s Design Advisor. Following these concerns, amendments were negotiated and submitted in response to the concerns identified. The amendments are supported by a revised ‘Landscape Strategy Plan’ and supplemented by a ‘Landscape Design - Public Right of Way’ document which includes a Landscape Masterplan.

4.9 Amendments include the removal of a ‘triangular’ section of proposed solar panels which extended towards the western edge of the site boundary, directly to the south of ‘Plough Farm’, which is now replaced with a recreational area consisting of grassland with tree logs alongside further mitigation/screening.

- 4.10 Design Midlands advised that the originally proposed layout of the solar panels at the above section of the site would be clearly visible from PRow Stowe by Chartley 27 and *“there is no screening here allowing for a return to the open nature of the field long term”*. The removal of the ‘triangular’ section of the originally proposed solar panels would significantly improve the open nature and experience of the users of PRow Stowe by Chartley 27 when exiting the site (if the direction of travel is towards the west). In addition, a hedgerow is proposed immediately to the east of the proposed tree logs, which provides mitigation/screening when entering the site along by PRow Stowe by Chartley 27 travelling eastwards.
- 4.11 Moving further east along PRow Stowe by Chartley 27, the footpath runs parallel to the northern parcel of solar panels, this section of the PRow also runs closely alongside part of the site boundary and which is framed by an existing hedgerow. Amendments include slightly widening of the PRow corridor by providing a buffer of approximately 18m between the solar panels to the north and the adjacent PRow. This area will also include proposed native hedgerow broken up by sections of wildflower meadow.
- 4.12 Officers recognise that the views towards ‘Black Hough Plantation’ and also ‘Newton Gorge Plantation’ from the PRow routes within the site, as identified by Design Midlands, would continue to be lost due to the siting of the proposed solar panels. However, it is recognised that due to the nature of the proposal and its inevitable large scale, it is difficult to avoid the obstruction of such views from many parts of the public footpaths.
- 4.13 The amendments also involved the removal of panels immediately to the south of PRow Stowe by Chartley 27, at the northern section of the main site, near the eastern boundary. The changes show the removed panels replaced with landscaping treatment consisting of wildflower meadow, amenity grassland and hedgerows, creating a 22.5m wide corridor when measured from the proposed fencing to the north and south of the PRow and as shown on sketches within the ‘Landscape Design - Public Right of Way’ document.
- 4.14 Officers consider the changes to be a welcomed improvement for users of the PRow when entering the site from the east. It is noted Design Midlands advised that views towards ‘Black Hough Plantation’ (to the north of the site) would be lost due to the siting of the proposed solar panels. It is also acknowledged that the amendments would continue to restrict views towards ‘Black Hough Plantation’ to the north from PRow Stowe by Chartley 27. However, it should also be noted that the direction of travel along this public footpath is mainly towards the east or west.

4.15 With regards to PRow Stowe by Chartley 0.1620 and 0.1621, which intersect the southern section of the main site, it is noted that the advice from Design Midlands discusses the loss of open character to walkers due to proposed hedgerows at both sides of the public footpath (the proposed hedgerows are mitigation measures to screen the solar panels to the north and south of the public footpath). In response to Design Midlands advice, amendments have been submitted to set back the proposed fencing and solar panels further away from both sides of the public footpath. The 'Landscape Design - Public Right of Way' document shows a section providing a corridor of over 20m between the proposed solar panels from the north and south of the public footpath, including a 10m landscape buffer between the solar panels and the PRow. The amendments provide a landscaped corridor with amenity grassland, wildflower meadow, hedgerows and trees. It is also recognised that the direction of travel along the public footpath is either towards the east or west with the solar panels located to the north and south of the public footpath. The Council's Design Advisor considers the changes to be a very notable improvement to the initial proposals.

4.16 Landscape Visual Impact Assessment

The application is supported with a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) produced by 'Wardell Armstrong' which includes a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). The ZTV has been modelled with each point 3.1m above ground for solar panels and 3-15m for substations. The LVIA provides an assessment of the following viewpoints (VP):

VP1 (Grindley Lane near Plough Farm)

VP2 (PRow Blithfield 12)

VP3 (PRow Stowe-by-Chartley 0.1620 at Upper Farm)

VP4 (PRow Blithfield 8)

VP5 (Settlement of Lea Heath)

VP6 (Stowe Lane, East of Drointon)

VP7 (PRow Hixon 8)

VP8 (PRow Stowe-by-Chartley 0.1612)

4.17 The LVIA methodology seeks to examine 'Landscape Value', 'Landscape Sensitivity', 'Magnitude of Landscape Effects', 'Overall Level of the Landscape Effects', 'Assessment of Visual Effects', 'Visual Susceptibility', 'Visual Value', 'Visual Sensitivity', 'Magnitude of Visual Effects' and 'Overall Level of Visual Effects'. The above viewpoints are summarised below in terms of their sensitivity/susceptibility, magnitude of change and effects during year 1 and year 15 of operation.

- 4.18 VP1 was taken from a Grindley Lane near 'Plough Farm' at a distance of 7m from the main site boundary. VP1 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing a southeast direction towards the main site. A photomontage showing winter season in year 1 and summer season in year 15 is also included. The LVIA considers the value of the view to be 'medium' as the landscape offers no notable characteristic or special qualities, but the sensitivity and susceptibility is considered to be 'high' as the views are likely to be valued by residents of the property. The 'magnitude of change' is considered to be 'low' during year 1 of operation with 'minor adverse' effects. However, year 15 of operation is expected to have a 'very low' magnitude of change with 'negligible adverse' effects. It should also be noted that revisions were submitted to remove a section of solar panels which extended towards the western edge of the site boundary directly to the south of 'Plough Farm'. This section of panels has been removed and replaced with a recreational area consisting of grassland with tree logs, thus the amendments are considered to reduce the impact of the proposed development upon VP1.
- 4.19 VP2 was taken from PRoW Blithfield 12 at a distance of 205m from the main site boundary. This is within East Staffordshire Borough. VP2 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing a west direction towards the main site. The sensitivity is considered to be 'high' from this public footpath as it is experienced by recreational receptors. However, during year 1 of operation the 'magnitude of change' is 'low' with 'minor adverse' effects. In terms of year 15 of operation, the 'magnitude of change' is 'very low' with 'negligible adverse' effects.
- 4.20 VP3 was taken from PRoW Stowe-by-Chartley 0.1620 at Upper Farm at a distance of 59m from the main site boundary. VP3 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing a southeast direction towards the main site. The LVIA considers the sensitivity to be 'high' as the views are received by recreational users and are focused on the enjoyment of the landscape. However, during year 1 of operation the 'magnitude of change' is 'medium' with 'moderate adverse' effects. In terms of year 15 of operation, the 'magnitude of change' is 'low' with 'minor adverse' effects.
- 4.21 VP4 was taken from PRoW Blithfield 8 at a distance of 422m from the main site boundary. This is within East Staffordshire Borough. VP4 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing a north direction towards the main site. The sensitivity is considered to be 'high' from this public footpath as it is experienced by recreational receptors. However, during year 1 of operation the 'magnitude of change' is 'medium' with 'moderate adverse' effects. In terms of year 15 of operation, the 'magnitude of change' is 'low' with 'minor adverse' effects.
- 4.22 VP5 was taken from the settlement of Lea Heath at a distance of 208m from the main site boundary. VP5 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing a north direction towards the main site. This viewpoint is also supplemented with photomontages showing the proposed view on completion and also 15 years after completion. The LVIA notes the residential receptors with views focused on the surrounding landscape and the overall the sensitivity is considered to be 'high'. However, during year 1 of operation the 'magnitude of change' is 'medium' with 'moderate adverse' effects. In terms of year 15 of operation, the 'magnitude of change' is 'low' with 'minor adverse' effects.

- 4.23 VP6 was taken from a Stowe Lane, east of Drointon at a distance of 238m from the main site boundary and 9.7m from the substation site. VP6 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing an eastward direction towards the main site. The LVIA considers the sensitivity of views to be 'low' due to the susceptibility of road users having a limited extent on the views available. However, during year 1 of operation the 'magnitude of change' is 'low' with 'minor adverse' effects. In terms of year 15 of operation, the 'magnitude of change' is 'very low' with 'negligible adverse' effects.
- 4.24 VP7 was taken from PRow Hixon 8 at a distance of 1.5km from the main site boundary and 1.3km from the substation site. VP7 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing a northeast direction towards the main site. The LVIA notes the views focused on surrounding landscape are likely to be valued by residential receptors and overall considers the sensitivity of views to be 'high'. However, during year 1 of operation the 'magnitude of change' is 'low' with 'minor adverse' effects. In terms of year 15 of operation, the 'magnitude of change' is 'very low' with 'negligible adverse' effects.
- 4.25 VP8 was taken from PRow Stowe-by-Chartley 0.1612 at a distance of 3.5km from the main site boundary. VP8 consists of a photo viewpoint taken facing a south direction towards the main site. The LVIA recognises the susceptibility of recreational receptors and views of the rural landscape likely to be valued by residents, thus overall considers the sensitivity of views to be 'high'. However, during year 1 and year 15 of operation, the LVIA considers the 'magnitude of change' to be of 'no change' and also 'no change' in terms of effects.
- 4.26 It is acknowledged that the LVIA also examines viewpoints during construction, however, given that the construction phase is expected to last approximately 6 months, the impact on views during construction would be short-term.
- 4.27 The LVIA identifies the highest level of impact in terms 'magnitude of change' to be 'medium' (VP3, VP4 and VP5 during year 1 of operation). The LVIA provides the following typical description of this level (medium) as:
- Partial loss of or alteration to key features or perceptual aspects of the baseline and/or the addition of new features that may be prominent but may not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. The effects would be at the scale of the landscape character type/area within which the proposal lies. The effects would be medium-term and/or partially reversible. (Table 1.7)"
- 4.28 However, the level of 'magnitude of change' for VP3, VP4 and VP5 during year 15 of operation will be reduced to 'Low', which is typically described in table 1.7 of the LVIA as:
- "Minor loss of or alteration to views and/or the addition of new features that would not be prominent, and/or would not contrast with the existing view. Glimpsed views, experienced for a small part of a journey or activity. The views would be distant, oblique and/or only a small part of the view would be occupied by the proposed development. The effects would be short term and/or reversible."

- 4.29 With regards to landscape effects, the LVIA identifies the highest level of impact as 'moderate adverse' during year 1 of operation and 'minor adverse' during year 15 of operation. Table 1.8 of the LVIA provides the following typical description of landscape effects in terms of 'moderate adverse':

"The proposed development would be at variance with the existing character and would detract from, diminish or remove valued characteristic features, elements and/or their setting".

'Minor adverse' is typically described as follows:

"The Proposed Development would be slightly at variance with the existing character. The Proposed Development would likely partially remove some valued characteristic features or introduce some features that will not be entirely compatible with the receiving landscape."

- 4.30 In summary, the LVIA considers the highest level of impact from the development of the main site to be a 'medium' (magnitude of change) and 'moderate adverse' (landscape effects) during year 1 of operation. The mitigation measures are considered to reduce the level of impact to 'Low' (magnitude of change) and 'minor adverse' (landscape effects) from year 15 of operation.
- 4.31 The established methodology contained within the LVIA is accepted. The viewpoints chosen within the LVIA are also considered to form a fair representation of the location and extent of views of the site and have been verified following the Case Officer's site visit.
- 4.32 Overall, it is considered that submitted Planning Statement provides an adequate summary of the above impacts in stating:

"...any notable effects on landscape character as a result of the proposed development would be confined to surrounding local area, with potential visual effects reduced by the proposed mitigation planting in both local and more distant views. Overall, the total extent of the landscape and visual effects would be localised and limited in nature."

The impacts upon receptors forming heritage assets are considered under Section 5 of this report.

- 4.33 Reversibility of development

BRE guidance explains that:

"Solar PV installations which are developed on agricultural ground should be 'reversible', allowing the site to be easily restored to a more intensive agricultural use. Intrusive development, such as trenching and foundations, should therefore be minimised and the use of mass concrete should be avoided. Where possible Solar PV arrays should be installed using 'pile' driven or screw foundations, or pre-moulded concrete blocks (shoes), and capable of easy removal".

- 4.34 The Parish and neighbours' concerns regarding the reversibility of the development are noted. Whilst concrete foundations are required for structures/buildings and fencing at the substation site, and also for the BESS, transformers, CCTV posts and gate at the main site, the solar panel tables and associated fencing which covers the majority of the development site would be 'driven' directly into the ground without the use of concrete foundations.
- 4.35 Overall, the use of concrete is considered to be minimal for a development of this scale. The minimal use of concrete, together with continued agricultural use and ecological enhancements, as well as appropriate management of the land and decommissioning scheme, would potentially allow the land to be restored back to full agricultural use after the expected 40 year operational phase of the development.
- 4.36 Conclusion
- The Parish and neighbours' concerns regarding the visual impact of the development are noted. The proposal would result in loss of views from the PRowS within the site despite mitigation and landscaping improvements along the public footpaths. However, the amendments to the scheme have limited the impact the development would have upon users of the PRowS.
- 4.37 The impact upon views from outside the site would be low and minor after 15 years of operation. The construction methodology comprising minimal use of concrete would support site restoration and decommissioning of the temporary solar farm development. The loss of views from the PRowS is considered unavoidable due to the large scale nature of the development, however the impacts are considered to be reversible in the future.

Policies and Guidance:-

National Planning Policy Framework:

Sections 8, 12, 15

The Plan for Stafford Borough

SP1	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
N1	Design
N7	Cannock Chase AONB
N8	Landscape Character

BRE Planning guidance for the development of large scale ground mounted solar PV systems

5.0 Impact on heritage assets

5.1 Paragraph 205 of the NPPF states:

“When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.”

5.2 Furthermore paragraph 208 of the NPPF states that:

“Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”

5.3 Policy N9 of the TPSB expects development proposals to sustain and, where appropriate enhance the significance of heritage assets and their setting by understanding the heritage interest, encouraging sustainable re-use and promoting high design quality. Furthermore, policy N9 states:

“Where harm to significance is unavoidable, appropriate mitigation measures will be put into place, including archaeological investigation (including a written report) or recording. This information should be deposited at the County Record Office and be available to the general public.”

5.4 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that special regard shall be had to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

5.5 There are no designated or non-designated heritage assets or identified archaeological features located within the site boundary.

5.6 Designated Heritage Assets

The nearest designated heritage asset is the Grade II Listed Old Hall Farmhouse located approximately 200m to the west of the site. It should be noted there are curtilage listed barn conversions at Old Hall farm. Further away from the site, approximately 720m to the east of the main site is Lower Booth moated site and deserted medieval village scheduled ancient monument, which contains the Grade II Listed Lower Booth Farmhouse. Chartley Castle, Chartley Old Hall and associated water systems including garden remains (Grade II Listed Building and Scheduled Monument) lies approximately 2km to the northwest of the main site and is situated on higher ground, located to the north of the A518.

5.7 The Parish and neighbours’ concerns regarding heritage assets are noted. The Conservation Officer examined the submitted ‘Archaeology and Heritage Statement (dated 2022)’ and raised an objection due to the lack of information provided in order to determine the impacts of the proposed development upon Chartley Castle heritage assets (including Chartley Old Hall and associated water systems

including garden remains), the Lower Booth heritage assets (including scheduled monument and farmhouse), as well as the Grade II Listed Old Hall Farmhouse. Historic England were also consulted and expressed concerns due to insufficient information on viewpoints to demonstrate the impacts on Chartley Castle and Lower Booth Farmhouse heritage assets.

- 5.8 In response to the objection and concerns identified by Historic England and the Conservation Officer, the applicant submitted additional information, including a technical note and views from Chartley Castle. Technical notes were also provided for the Grade II Listed Old Hall Farmhouse and Grade II Listed Lower Booth heritage assets. Following the submission of additional information, the Conservation Officer has withdrawn the objection against the proposed development and considers there would be less than substantial harm, to the degree of some harm (the lower end of the spectrum) and considers that the public benefits of the development proposed would outweigh the harm to the heritage assets. Historic England were also re-consulted on the additional submitted information and have confirmed that they agree with the Conservation Officer's comments that the proposal would cause less than substantial harm and in the lower half of the spectrum.

5.9 Archaeology

The County Archaeologist has identified the site as an historic agricultural landscape. The submitted Archaeology and Heritage Statement (AHS) has been informed by a geophysical survey (GS) which was requested following pre-application advice provided by the County Archaeologist. Although the archaeological potential of the site is considered low, due to the inconclusive results of the GS, lack of previous archaeological interventions in the wider area and the scale of the development proposed, the County Archaeologist has advised that a further stage of archaeological evaluation such as trial trenching across the site would be appropriate. The County Archaeologist has stated that:

“...this trial trenching should be undertaken in advance of any groundworks in order for the results to inform the need for further staged works and to inform the scale and extent of these further archaeological works (such as excavation, watching brief etc.), and indeed assist the applicant in developing alternative design or installation options, should the results deem it necessary”.

For the reason outlined above, a condition should be applied to secure a written scheme of archaeological investigation.

- 5.10 Subject to conditions, the proposal would preserve archaeological remains and potential, and the public benefits of the proposed development are considered to outweigh the less than substantial harm (the lower end of the spectrum) to designated heritage assets. Overall, the proposal accords with policy N9 of the TPSB and section 16 of the NPPF.

Policies and Guidance:-

National Planning Policy Framework:

Section 16

The Plan for Stafford Borough:

SP1	Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
N1	Design
N8	Landscape Character
N9	Historic Environment

6.0 Highways, access and parking

6.1 Paragraph 115 of the NPPF stipulates that:

“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”

6.2 In turn, TPSB Policy T1 seeks to achieve sustainable transport. Policy T2 also requires new development to have a safe and adequate means of access and internal circulation; not have unacceptable highway safety impacts and provide sufficient parking provision.

6.3 The submission is supported by a Transport Statement, which includes recommended traffic management measures, and a Route Assessment Technical Note. The Parish and neighbours’ concerns regarding highway safety are noted.

6.4 Vehicular accesses

The sites would be accessed from Drointon Lane and Grindley Lane via the A518 (Uttoxeter Road) to the north. Drointon Lane and Grindley Lane are narrow unrestricted country roads, with no footpath or lighting.

6.5 The main site would have a single vehicle access point from Drointon Lane to the north. An existing field access would be utilised and upgraded to accommodate heavy good vehicles (HGVs) and to provide sufficient visibility splays. Internal access tracks would be provided to serve the development. A new access would be created to serve the substation site adjacent to the junction of Stowe Lane, Drointon Lane and Drointon Road.

6.6 The Highway Authority have raised no objections to the adequacy of the proposed access points and have recommended conditions to ensure that the accesses and visibility splays are provided. These should be attached to any approval.

6.7 Construction phase

The construction phase is expected to last 6 months. It is proposed that there would be one main temporary construction compound within the main site, accessed via the upgraded field access. The compound would provide sufficient space for contractor parking, delivery and storage of materials, plant, equipment

and turning of HGVs. The majority of the equipment for the substation site would be delivered to the main compound then redistributed via light good vehicles. Although some direct HGV access to the substation site would be required to deliver the larger components. The layout details of the construction compound should be secured via condition.

- 6.8 Construction traffic would arrive from the Strategic Road Network and approach via the A518 (Uttoxeter Road) and Grindley Lane.
- 6.9 During the construction period there is estimated to be a total 2822 two-way HGV movements and a maximum of 50 construction workers are forecast to be on site during peak construction activity. The highest average number of movements per day is expected to be approximately 79 two-way movements comprising of 58 Cars/LGVs and 21 HGVs. The Transport Statement concludes that this level of construction traffic on Grindley Lane and the local highway network during the 6-month construction period is expected to have no significant adverse impact on the operation of the local highway network subject to traffic management measures.
- 6.10 The Highways Authority originally objected to the scheme on highway safety grounds relating to inadequate information regarding the construction traffic route, amount and vehicle size given the nature of the local roads. Following subsequent site meetings and discussions an amended Transport Statement was submitted which includes a preliminary construction traffic management plan (CTMP). The preliminary CTMP includes:
- Only one HGV generated by the development on Grindley Lane at any one time,
 - All HGVs to wait at Loxley Layby, at the junction of Loxley Lane and the A518, until the site operator confirms that Grindley Lane is clear of construction vehicles, before proceeding to site,
 - All HGVs will have an escort vehicle when entering and leaving the site along Grindley Lane,
 - Provision of six additional passing on Grindley Lane within highway land,
 - Provision of temporary traffic lights on Grindley Lane,
 - Undertake highway condition surveys before and after construction period, and repair any damaged caused by construction traffic,
 - Provide banksmen or stop/go procedures for all vehicle movements to/from the substation site,
 - Ensure sufficient onsite parking provision,
 - Provide wheel wash facilities,
 - Ensure PRoW are protected and remain open,
 - Restrict vehicle arrival/departure times to avoid disruption at peak times,
 - Route signage.
- 6.11 The Highway Authority now have no objections to the scheme subject to conditions to ensure that the access and visibility splays are provided prior to first use, to secure a final CTMP expanding upon the preliminary CTMP, to secure dilapidation surveys and required works, and the passing places. These conditions are considered to be reasonable and necessary and should be attached to any approval. Any works to the highways would require a separate highways agreement and an informative should be included to ensure that the developer is aware of this.

6.12 Operational phase

Once operational the development would largely be unmanned. Routine maintenance and inspections of the site would be carried out by a light van or 4x4 type vehicle with a frequency of approximately 50 visits per year (once a week). Maintenance vehicles would access the sites via the established accesses and would park within the site. During the operational phase traffic movements are not considered to impact upon the local road network.

6.13 The additional passing places on Grindley Lane provided to accommodate construction traffic would become a permanent feature of the highway. As such the scheme would provide a benefit to highway safety during the operational phase and after.

6.14 Conclusion

In conclusion, whilst concerns regarding highway safety have been raised the proposal is considered to provide sufficient mitigation measures to overcome the concerns. The proposal is considered to be acceptable with regards to highways, access and parking, subject to conditions.

Policies and Guidance:-

National Planning Policy Framework:

Section 9:

The Plan for Stafford Borough:

T1 Transport

T2 Parking and Manoeuvring Facilities

7.0 Residential Amenity

7.1 TPSB Policy N1 and the Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) seek to ensure that new development does not detract from residents' amenity, such as overlooking, privacy, daylight/sunlight and noise impacts.

7.2 Outlook

The principal residential receptors near the site include:

- Plough Farm to the west of the site, 40m from the main site access and approximately 126m from the closest solar panel area;
- Dwellings within Drointon to the east of Drointon Lane (Upper Farm, Drointon House and Lower Farm), approximately 200m to closest solar panel area and approximately 60m to site boundary at closest point;
- Brookside Farm to the south of the site, approximately 60m from the site boundary at the closest point;
- Dwellings on Drointon Road to the south of the site, approximately 200m from the site boundary at the closest point and;

- Dwellings on Booth Lane to the east of the site approximately 650m from the site boundary at the closest point.

7.3 When considering the separation distances between the development and neighbouring residential properties in terms of the proposed landscaping and the nature of the scheme, it is concluded that the proposal would not cause a material loss of residential amenity with regards to outlook, overbearing impact, loss of daylight/sunlight or overshadowing. Furthermore, the nature of the development does not give rise to any privacy issues.

7.4 Noise and disturbance

The submission includes a Noise Impact Assessment which assesses the worst case noise-impact scenario and recommends mitigation measures. The recommended mitigation measures include the provision of low noise equipment or installation of noise reduction kits to equipment, also the provision of a 3m high acoustic fence to the north and west of the battery compound. The assessment concludes that the development when operational, with the recommended mitigation measures, would result in 'No Observed Adverse Effect Level'. Which is defined within the report as:

"Noise can be heard, but does not cause any change in behaviour, attitude or other physiological response. Can slightly affect the acoustic character of the area but not such that there is a change in the quality of life."

7.5 The Environmental Health Officer notes the assessment findings and raises no objections or concerns. It is noted that the proposed layout does not include the acoustic fence and this would not be desirable given the rural nature of the site. The report refers to generic equipment and recommends a number of mitigation measures which could be utilised. Given that the final equipment details are not available and that the associated technology is improving rapidly it is considered necessary to secure a further noise assessment, and any mitigation measures, prior to the commencement of development. This would allow the LPA to ensure that the nearby residents would not be unduly impacted by noise once the development is operational.

7.6 It is noted that the construction of a development at this scale is likely to cause some disturbance to neighbouring residents, however the construction period is relatively short. A condition should be applied to limit construction and delivery hours. It is likely that that the main cause of disturbance would be due to construction traffic, the proposed mitigation measures discussed in paragraph 6.10 should however alleviate some of the disturbance. Once operational the development is not considered to cause disturbance to residential properties due to the minimal traffic movements to site and the nature of the scheme.

7.7 External lighting

The main site does not include any external operational lighting and as such would not impact upon residential amenity. The substation site would have floodlights on 4 columns, however details of these are not provided. In order to ensure that any external lighting is of a suitable design given the rural location and proximity to residential properties a condition should be attached to ensure that approval is secured prior to any installation of external lighting. A condition should also be attached to secure details of any construction external lighting.

7.8 Glint and glare

The application is supported by a Glint/Glare Assessment, which considers the impact of glint and glare upon receptors including residential properties, road, rail, air traffic and national trails. Glint is defined within the report as:

“Also known as a specular reflection is produced as a direct reflection of the sun on the surface of the solar panel. It occurs with the reflection of light from smooth surfaces such as glass, steel, and calm water.” Glare is defined as: “A scattered reflection of light. Glare is significantly less intense than glint and is produced from rougher surfaces such as concrete, tarmac, and vegetation.”

The Environmental Health Officer notes the assessment findings and raises no objections or concerns.

7.9 The assessment found that glint would only occur during the early morning, circa 6am, for less than an hour during spring and summer months. The glint would be limited to the properties immediately to the west of the site. The existing and proposed landscaping would largely prevent the glint. As the glint would be experienced for a short period within the early hours it is not considered to be a detrimental impact upon the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

7.10 The assessment concludes that there would be some glint experienced by users of the PRoWs crossing and adjacent to the sites, however the proposed hedgerow planting and landscaping would prevent this. When considering the existing and proposed landscaping there would be no glint impact upon any national trails, railways or aviation receptors. There are no health and safety issues arising from glint.

7.11 Conclusion

The Parish and neighbours' concerns regarding impact upon residential amenity are noted. However, in light of the above, the proposal is not considered to cause a detrimental impact upon the residential amenities enjoyed by neighbouring properties.

Policies and Guidance:-

National Planning Policy Framework:

Section 12

The Plan for Stafford Borough:

N1 Design

8.0 Ecology

- 8.1 TPSB Policy N4 requires developments to ensure the Borough's natural environment will be protected, enhanced and improved. The enhancement and protection of biodiversity is also echoed by TPSB Policy N8.
- 8.2 The site does not fall within any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation sites. The nearest European statutory nature conservation site is the West Midlands Mosses SAC, Midland Meres and Mosses - Phase 1 Ramsar which is located approximately 0.4km to the north of the site. The Pasturefields Salt Marsh SAC is approximately 3.5km southwest of the site and Cannock Chase SAC is approximately 6.1km southwest of the site. In terms of national statutory nature conservation sites, Chartley Moss (NNR and SSSI) is located approximately 0.5km to the north of the site and Blithfield Reservoir (SSSI) is approximately 1.4km to the southeast of the site.
- 8.3 **Habitat Regulations Assessment**
- Under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the Local Planning Authority as the competent authority, must have further consideration to the impact of this development. In this case, due to the relative proximity of the Chartley Moss SAC, Cannock Chase SAC and Pasturefields Salt Marshes SAC. These sites are sensitive to the increase in nitrogen disposition associated with increased vehicle movements and surface water run-off.
- 8.4 The LPA have completed a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) which concludes that the level of vehicle traffic resulting from this development would be below the nitrogen thresholds set out by Natural England, and following the submission of additional information that there is no existing or proposed hydrological link to the Chartley Moss SAC. The HRA therefore concludes that the proposal would not result in a likely significant negative impact upon the reasons for designation of the sites, directly or indirectly, alone or in combination.
- 8.5 Natural England were consulted on the HRA and concur with the conclusions and therefore have offered no objections to proposal. On this basis, it is concluded that the LPA have met its requirements as the competent authority, as required by the Regulations and therefore the proposal would comply with the requirements of the Development Plan and the NPPF in this regard.
- 8.6 The submitted Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) recommends that a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is secured to control dust pollution and avoid water pollution to protected sites. The SBC Biodiversity Officer concurs with this and as such this should be secured via a condition.

8.7 Protected species

The submitted Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) found that the sites provide habitat for bats, birds and hedgehogs. No evidence of badgers or newt/amphibians were found on the site. The EcIA concludes that the proposal would not detrimentally impact upon protected species, subject to appropriate working methods being followed. The SBC Biodiversity Officer raises no concerns with the submitted EcIA and advises that the recommendations should be adhered to. A condition should be attached to ensure compliance with the EcIA.

8.8 According to 'House of Commons Library: Planning for Solar Farms' (February 2024),

"Some organisations have also raised concerns about the impact of solar farms on biodiversity. For example, CPRE Hertfordshire argued that solar farms "can impact detrimentally on biodiversity and wildlife" as they may prevent "the movement of animals" and restrict "wildlife corridors".

Officers expressed concerns about the design of the fencing proposed around the solar panels due to its restriction on wildlife movements. In response the applicant has amended the fence design surrounding the proposed solar panels to provide 'mammal gates'. The proposed landscaping would also retain the hedgerow corridors through the site aiding wildlife movement.

8.9 Biodiversity Net Gain

According to the 'BRE National Solar Centre Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments'

"...recent studies of agri-environment schemes indicate that appropriate land management can bring about significant increases in wildlife populations on agricultural land. In the same way, with appropriate land management, solar farms have the potential to support wildlife and contribute to national biodiversity targets. Indeed, solar farms may have several additional advantages in that they are secure sites with little disturbance from humans and machinery once construction is complete. Recent research suggests biodiversity gains on solar farms can be significant".

8.10 The application was submitted before the introduction of new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) legislation and is therefore exempt. However, the submitted Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) states that, through the proposed landscaping and habitat creation, the proposal would deliver a total biodiversity net gain of 79.75%. This is therefore significantly greater than 10% which is now required under BNG legislation. The Biodiversity Officer has advised that the recommendations made in the EcIA should be carried out as stated and that new planting should be of a suitable native species. The Biodiversity Officer has also advised that a biodiversity management plan would be required to ensure that the new habitat features are maintained effectively which should be secured via condition. These conditions are considered to be necessary and reasonable and should be attached.

8.11 Trees

The application is supported with an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA), including Tree Protection Plans produced by 'RPS'. The AIA advises that the only vegetation to be removed to facilitate the development would be two 5m sections of hedgerow. However, the removal would be offset through the proposed landscape planting. All trees are to be retained and provided protection during the construction period. The proposed access tracks avoid tree conflicts and where there are issues the AIA identifies these and recommends a no-dig track design.

- 8.12 The SBC Tree Officer has raised no concerns with the submitted information and recommends that an Arboricultural Method Statement is secured via condition, to include details of works within the root protection areas of retained trees, and any that have the potential to result in damage to retained trees and to secure Arboricultural site supervision. This is considered to be reasonable and necessary and should be attached. A condition should also be attached to secure suitable tree protection measures during construction.

8.13 Conclusion

The Parish and neighbours' concerns regarding impact upon biodiversity and protected sites are noted. Subject to conditions, the proposal is not considered to detrimentally impact upon protected species or protected sites and would provide a significant biodiversity net gain. The proposal would also retain the health of adjacent trees in accordance with policies N4 and N8 of the PSB.

Policies and Guidance:-

National Planning Policy Framework: Section 15

The Plan for Stafford Borough

SP1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

N4 The Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure

N8 Landscape Character

BRE National Solar Centre Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments

House of Commons Library: Planning for Solar Farms (February 2024)

9.0 Flooding and Drainage

- 10.8 TPSB Policy N1 states that development should not be located in areas of flooding or contribute to flooding elsewhere. Policy N2 of TPSB states that all new development is expected to provide Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

10.9 Flood risk

The Bourne Brook runs along the northern border of the main site and an unnamed watercourse runs through the south of the site, possibly a tributary of the River Blithe. The River Blithe lies 1.2km east of the Site.

10.10 Both sites are designated within the Environment Agency's Flood Zone 1, the zone of least flood risk. The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) produced by Wardell Armstrong (dated December 2022).

10.11 The Environment Agency have confirmed that the Bourne Brook is not classified as a main river but an ordinary watercourse, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA). Therefore, the Environment Agency have advised that a consultation is not required.

10.12 Surface water drainage

The submitted FRA demonstrates that surface water generated by the development would discharge to the ground and to existing land drains as per the existing scenario. The indicative surface water management plan includes the provision of linear swales throughout the site, measuring 1-5m wide and 0.5m deep. The swales would direct surface water to the existing drainage ditches and provide attenuation. The swales would provide 1,621m³ of temporary storage for surface water runoff during storm events. The indicative surface water management plan also includes optional filter drains between the solar panel arrays to intercept runoff and direct water towards the swales and existing drainage ditches. The FRA concludes that the proposal would provide a betterment to the current uncontrolled runoff as attenuation areas would be provided. There would not be an increase in downstream surface water flooding.

10.13 The neighbours' concerns regarding flooding are noted. The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) concur with the findings of the FRA and raise no objections to the indicative surface water management plan. The LLFA have recommended a pre-commencement condition to secure the final detailed surface water drainage design, this should be attached. They have also recommended a condition to secure the details of the body who would be responsible for the drainage management which is also considered to be reasonable and necessary and should be attached.

10.14 Conclusion

Subject to conditions, it is considered that the proposed development would be acceptable with regards to flooding and drainage and accords with the development plan and NPPF in this regard.

Policies and Guidance:-

National Planning Policy Framework: Section 14

The Plan for Stafford Borough

SP1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

N1 Design

N2 Climate Change

10.0 Other Matters

- 10.1 The Police Designing Out Crime Officer has no objections to the scheme but has advised that solar farms are often targeted by thieves and as such recommends various security measures. The proposed scheme includes these and as such provides a suitable level of security.
- 10.2 The Fire and Rescue Service also raise no objections to the scheme and provide advice regarding fire mains, hydrant, vehicle access and sprinkler systems. An informative should be included to ensure that the applicant/developer is aware of the advice.

11.0 Conclusion and planning balance

- 11.1 The recent adoption of the National Policy Statements (NPSs) on 17th January 2024 to provide planning guidance for developers of nationally significant energy infrastructure projects, is also intended to speed-up the decision making for the Secretary of State to determine Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) for renewable energy schemes, including renewable electricity generation such as solar power.
- 11.2 Whilst the proposal is not a NSIP, the development of the 49.5MW Solar Energy Scheme would help to accelerate the governments intentions towards achieving a fivefold increase in solar power by 2035 (from a capacity of 14GW to 70GW), to create a fully decarbonised, reliable and low-cost power system by 2035 and also meeting its net zero target by 2050.
- 11.3 The proposed development would enable agricultural practices to continue while delivering renewable energy, enabling a viable use and public benefit to the borough. Although the proposed 40 year operation of the solar farm is a long period of time and can be considered to be a semi-permanent development, the construction methodology alongside the ecological enhancements is expected to allow the full agricultural use to be restored.
- 11.4 Whilst there would be a visual impact upon the PRowS intersecting the main site which is considered unavoidable due to the scale of the development, mitigation measures have been provided which are considered to be appropriate. It is also noted that the impacts on the public footpaths would be reversible once the panels are removed. The impacts on views further from the site are not considered to be detrimentally harmful and the development would preserve designated heritage assets. There would be no loss to the residential amenities enjoyed by surrounding neighbours.
- 11.5 The renewable energy development supports the government's aim towards tackling climate change as well as meeting its net zero target and the proposal is strongly balanced in accordance with the development plan policies and national guidance.

- 11.6 The development is therefore considered to accord with the development plan and NPPF and is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

Consultations (summarised)

SCC Highway Authority:

19 June 2024

No objection subject to conditions to secure final Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), based on the submitted preliminary CTMP. Recommend conditions to ensure accesses and visibility splays are provided prior to first use and to secure dilapidation surveys. Provide an informative.

8 May 2024

No objection subject to conditions to secure details of off-site highway works (including passing places), a construction environment management plan and dilapidation surveys. Recommend conditions to ensure accesses and visibility splays are provided prior to first use. Provide an informative. To mitigate issues with construction traffic it has been agreed that HGVs will wait at the lay by at Loxley Lane before entering Grindley Lane when the lane is clear of vehicles, that additional passing places will be provided on Grindley Lane and that temporary traffic lights will be utilised. Advised that proposed accesses are acceptable.

14 April 2023

Objection. Inadequate information regarding vehicle movements, the proposal would result in an increase in the likelihood of highway danger due to vehicles being unable to access and egress the site safely. Require the submission of a full route assessment of the proposed access route from the A518, to include full details of the width of the route over its full length, visibility splays at junctions, forward visibility splays and passing places.

SBC Conservation Officer:

14 March 2024

No objections subject to conditions to secure full details of CCTV poles, substations, containers, ancillary buildings and security fencing. The development would result in less than substantial harm to heritage assets (lower end of the spectrum). Recommend that the public benefits would outweigh the harm and appropriate mitigation measures are now proposed.

7 August 2023

Comments as before, submitted information has not overcome concerns.

9 May 2023

Objection, further information required regarding intervisibility between proposal and heritage assets. Request increased green corridors and planting through the development site. Advise that Historic England need to be consulted.

SBC Design Advisor:

15 February 2024

No objection following amendments and engagement with consultant landscape architect.

5 June 2024

The existing topography and landscape features within and surrounding the site would appear to largely screen and/or visually filter the proposal from being a significant and highly stand out feature at greater distance from most directions expect from the southern aspect. The impact upon the Cannock Chase AONB and public footpaths will need assessing. The associated infrastructure will need to be adequately screened by landscaping and have a suitable external finish and colour.

SBC Biodiversity Officer:

20 April 2023

No further comments following receipt of additional bird survey.

6 April 2023

The recommendations of the submitted Ecological Impact Assessment should be adhered to, including additional planting, securing a Construction Environmental Management Plan and Biodiversity Net Gain Management Plan.

SBC Tree Officer:

21 April 2023

No objection. Accept findings of submitted documents. Recommend an Arboricultural Method Statement is secured prior to commencement.

SBC Environmental Health Officer:

28 April 2023

No objections. Note the findings of the glare and acoustic reports.

SCC Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA):

13 April 2023

No objection subject to conditions to secure a full detailed drainage design in accordance with the submitted indicative surface water management plan and flood risk assessment, and the details of the management and maintenance regime.

SCC County Archaeologist:

13 April 2023

No objection subject to pre-commencement condition to require a written scheme of archaeological investigation.

SCC Rights of Way Officer:

20 March 2024

No objection, subject to the inclusion of an informative regarding PRow management.

28 March 2023

The submission correctly identifies the PRow's within and adjacent to the proposals. Advise that PRow's are to remain accessible, request that planting is not within 3m of PRow unless the developers is intending to maintain these.

Historic England:

28 March 2024

No objection. The proposal would cause less than substantial harm (lower half of the spectrum) to the settings of the heritage assets.

14 June 2023

Further information is needed to assess the impacts upon the settings of heritage assets and confirm if there would be any to significance. Heritage assets to be assessed: Lower Booth moated site and deserted medieval village scheduled monument, Chartley Castle scheduled monument and Grade II* listed Lower Booth farmhouse.

Natural England:

1 May 2024

No objection. The proposal will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites West Midlands Mosses SAC, Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 RAMSAR, Chartley Moss SSSI, and Blithfield Reservoir SSSI. Concur with LPA's HRA conclusion. The proposal is likely to affect 7.8 ha of BMV agricultural land. We consider that the proposed development, if temporary as described, is unlikely to lead to significant permanent loss of BMV agricultural land, as a resource for future generations. Some components of the development, such as construction of a sub-station, may permanently affect agricultural land this would be limited to small areas. LPA should consider whether this is an effective use of land in line with planning practice guidance which encourages the siting of large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land. Recommend conditions relating to appropriate agricultural land management and/or biodiversity enhancement during the lifetime of the development, and to require the site to be decommissioned and restored to its former condition when planning permission expires.

13 July 2023

A Habitats Regulation Assessment is required with regards to the impact upon the Midland Meres and Mosses - Phase 2 Ramsar and the West Midlands Mosses SAC.

Design Midlands (Consultant Landscape Officer):

25 April 2024

The key impact of this development is on the PRow's, require more viewpoints along these routes and details of boundary interface. A supporting landscape strategy should be requested. Provide detailed assessment of scheme.

National Landscape (formerly Cannock Chase AONB):

24 July 2023

No comment response.

District Newt Officer:

27 July 2023

No objection subject to condition to ensure compliance with the submitted Precautionary Method of Work and Ecology Report.

Ramblers Association:

26 March 2024

Objection against the impact on the upon two PRoWs (Stowe by Chartley 27 and Stowe by Chartley 0.1620); the proposed mitigations would not protect and enhance the experience of the users of the PRoWs, the open aspect of the PRoWs would enclose the paths in a tunnel of hedging. Other concerns relate to the maintenance of the hedges, if not regularly trimmed the paths will become impassable.

Staffordshire Police - Designing Out Crime Officer

17 April 2023

No objections. Advised that solar farms are a target for thieves due to the rise in the price of scrap metal, recommendations provided on reinforcing security measures concerning perimeter fencing, access, CCTV systems, alarms and construction security.

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service:

12 April 2023

No objection, provides advice regarding fire mains, hydrant, vehicle access and sprinkler systems. Provide advice concerning access route being affected in the event of a fire due to vapour clouds, and need for alternative water source which may be required in the event of a fire.

Ministry of Defence (MoD):

4 September 2023

No objections.

National Grid:

31 March 2023

Advise the developer to contact Western Power Distribution prior to commencement.

NATS Safeguarding:

28 March 2023

No objections.

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE):

15 June 2023

Objections were received. There are concerns that the development would adversely impact on landscape character/visually intrusive, involves loss of a substantial amount of high-quality productive arable farmland and impact on biodiversity (Chartley Moss SSSI). Roads would struggle to accommodate the HGV construction traffic.

East Staffordshire Borough Council:

20 April 2023

No specific comments. Recommend that the following are assessed: residential amenity, visual amenity, biodiversity and highway safety.

Stowe-by-Chartley Parish Council:

24 April 2023

Objection, raises following concerns:

- 1) There is the issue of HGV's destroying small country lanes during the construction period and the sheer volume of HGV's creating a nuisance for local residents.
- 2) The visual impact of the solar panels.
- 3) The issue of what happens to the panels at the end of the 40 year period and the funding to remove them.
- 4) Pollution for HGVs during construction.
- 5) Noise pollution from fans situated in near proximity to residents.
- 6) The proposed site is close to a major HS2 haul route and sites of Special Scientific Interest and there seems to be no account taken of this in the application.
- 7) There are concerns about the impact of this proposed solar farm on the SSSI at Chartley Moss.
- 8) Loss of earnings and trade in livestock.
- 9) The placement of a battery store alongside an individual's home with the potential of fumes and pollution would be a direct threat to his home and family.
 - Raised concerns about consultation length and lack of communication with Planning Team and residents.
 - Intrusive development on agricultural land.
 - If development is approved then a contribution should be secured to repair damage to local roads following construction.

Hixon Parish Council:

23 May 2023

Support comments of Stowe-by-Chartley Parish Council.

DEFRA, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, National Grid, Western Power Distribution, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, RSPB - No response received

Neighbours:

Whilst no neighbour consultation letters were sent in relation to this application, publication of this application was completed in accordance with the Development Management Procedure Order, with site and press notices posted.

288 representations received from 240 properties (142 outside of the Borough)

55 letters of objections, material planning considerations summarised:

- Inappropriate development
- Eye sore
- Brownfield sites should be utilised
- Design in rural area
- Urbanisation
- Increased traffic
- Already dangerous road
- Inappropriate roads for HGVs
- Access from A518 is inappropriate for HGVs
- No passing places on narrow lanes
- Solar panels have limited use and life span
- Speed/traffic audit insufficient - carried out on quieter section of route and during school holidays, doesn't include traffic using Grindley Lane
- Proposed passing place not acceptable, and no consultation with adjoining land owners
- Transport report doesn't consider diversions
- There has been fatal accidents on the A518
- Speed audit inaccurate
- Safety concerns of other road users: pedestrian, cyclist, horse riders
- Residential amenity
- Pollution – dust, fumes
- Noise
- Implications of infill development
- Other applications for solar farms have been submitted (23/37693/ESS) and 23/37774/ESS
- Loss of farm land, impact upon food production
- Impact upon land quality
- Loss of nature
- Highly visible
- Close to historic village, farmsteads and castle

- Close to Chartley Moss SSSI
- Impact upon wildlife
- Existing infrastructure not capable of supporting development
- No benefit to local community
- No consideration of de-commission strategy
- Toxic run off from panels
- Land will not be suitable for grazing
- Proposal will cause flooding
- Screening to PROWs will make them unsafe
- Safety concerns
- Battery store is a fire hazard
- Proposal will increase rural crime which this area is already subject to

232 letters of support, material planning considerations summarised:

- Tackle climate change
- Energy production
- Supports SBC Climate Emergency declaration
- Provides biodiversity net gain
- Local and national economic benefits
- Supports decarbonisation target
- Low cost source of energy
- Renewable energy
- Local benefits
- Sustainable

1 neutral response.

Publicity

Site Notice expiry: 18 April 2023

Press Notice expiry: 26 April 2023

Relevant Planning History

None

Recommendation

Approve 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 on which this permission is granted.
2. The development authorised by this permission shall be carried out in complete accordance with the approved plans and specification, as listed below, except insofar as may be otherwise required by other conditions to which this permission is subject;

Drawing V1 - Site plan

Drawing V1 - Onsite transformer
 Drawing LF14 - Planning Capacity Plan (27/06/24)
 Drawing 1 - NG Battery side elevation
 Drawing 1 - CCTV and security fence elevations - with mammal door
 Drawing 2 - Palisade fence
 Drawing 4 - PV panel detail
 Drawing 6 - Onsite transformer
 Drawing 7 - Security gate detail
 Drawing 8 - Spares container
 Drawing 9 - Substation
 Drawing 10 - Communications Tower
 Drawing 14 - MV skid / inverter dimensions
 Drawing 17 - Access Track
 Drawing ST19768-153-A1 - Proposed site access arrangement (1 of 2)
 Drawing ST19768-154-A1 - Proposed site access arrangement (2 of 2)
 Drawing ST19768-218 B - Landscape strategy plan
 Drawing EP-22.135-2004 P2 - Overhead line teed connection.

3. No development shall commence unless and until a final detailed surface water drainage design has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The design shall be in accordance with the indicative surface water management plan attached to the approved Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) (produced by Wardell Armstrong, dated December 2022, ref 0005 V1.0) and shall further demonstrate:
 - Surface water drainage system(s) designed in accordance with the Non-technical standards for sustainable drainage systems (DEFRA, March 2015).
 - Detailed design (plans, network details and full hydraulic calculations) in support of any surface water drainage scheme, including details on any attenuation system, SuDS features and the outfall arrangements.
 - Attenuation storage and conveyance of surface water to existing land drains using a network of swales as outlined in the approved FRA.
 - Provision of an acceptable management and maintenance plan for surface water drainage to ensure that surface water drainage systems shall be maintained and managed for the lifetime of the development.

The approved drainage scheme shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to the development first being brought into use and retained as such for the life of the development.

4. No development shall commence unless and until a final Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The CTMP shall expand upon the Preliminary CTMP detailed within the Transport Statement (produced by Wardell Armstrong, dated June 2024, version V2). All site operations shall then be undertaken strictly in accordance with the approved CTMP for the duration of the construction phase.

5.
 - a) No development shall commence unless and until an inspection of the highway to be used by construction traffic has been completed and a report setting out the findings, including photographic evidence, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
 - b) Before the first export of electricity, a post construction inspection of the highway used by construction traffic shall be completed and a report identifying any required repairs, including photographic evidence, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
 - c) Within three months of the first export of electricity, any required repairs to the highway identified in the post construction inspection report shall be completed and a verification report submitted for approval in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
6. No solar panels, battery storage components or any associated on-site infrastructure shall be brought onto the sites unless and until the passing places shown in the locations on drawing ST19768-402 revision A within the Transport Statement (produced by Wardell Armstrong, dated June 2024, version V2) have been provided.
7. No on-site development shall commence unless and until the site accesses and associated visibility splays, as shown on drawings ST19768-153-A1 and ST19768-154-A1, have been provided. The accesses and associated visibility splays shall thereafter be retained as such for the life of the development with the visibility splays being kept free of all obstructions to visibility over a height of 600mm above the adjacent carriageway level for the life of the development.
8. No construction works of the internal access tracks shall take place until details of the surfacing track material have been submitted to and approved writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved surfacing material and retained as such for the life of the development.
9. Before the development hereby approved is commenced, a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The CEMP shall include details relating to:
 - (a) hours of construction,
 - (b) a scheme for the management and suppression of dust from construction activities,
 - (c) a scheme for the prevention of water pollution from construction activities,
 - (d) temporary external lighting during the construction phase.All site operations shall thereafter be undertaken strictly in accordance with the approved CEMP for the duration of the construction phase.
10. Before the development hereby approved is commenced, a soil management plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The soil management plan shall include:

- (a) measures to improve soil quality and ensure that there will be no loss of soil quality within the operational lifetime of the site,
- (b) a methodology for soil stripping during site development. Topsoil and subsoil should be stripped, stored and replaced separately to minimise soil damage and to provide optimum conditions for site restoration.

The soil management plan shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details for the life of the development.

11. Before the development hereby approved is commenced, including any ground works, an Arboricultural Method Statement covering all aspects of development that are within the root protection areas of retained trees, or that have the potential to result in damage to retained trees, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Arboricultural Method Statement shall include the provision of appropriate Arboricultural site supervision during the construction period. The measures within the approved Arboricultural Method Statement shall be implemented and maintained until the completion of all construction related activity.
12. Before the development hereby approved is commenced, including any ground works or any equipment, machinery or materials are brought onto the sites, full details of protective fencing and/or other protective measures to safeguard existing trees and hedgerows on and adjacent to the sites shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved tree and hedge protection measures shall thereafter be provided and retained for the duration of the construction phase. No fires, excavation, change in levels, storage of materials, vehicles or plant, cement or cement mixing, discharge of liquids, site facilities or passage of vehicles, plant or pedestrians, shall occur within the protected areas.

The approved scheme shall be kept in place until all parts of the development have been completed, and all equipment; machinery and surplus materials have been removed from the sites.

13. Before the development hereby approved is commenced, a detailed final landscape and planting scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The final landscape and planting scheme shall:
- (a) Expand upon drawing ST19768-218 B (Landscape strategy plan) and adhere to the principles within the 'Landscape Design - Public Right of Way' (produced by Wardell Armstrong, dated Dec 2023),
 - (b) Provide details of the plant species, size, planting numbers and distances,
 - (c) Provide a programme detailing the timing of the landscaping works in relation to the phasing of construction.

The approved landscape and planting scheme shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Any tree, hedge or shrub planted as part of the approved landscape and planting scheme (or replacement tree/hedge) on the sites and which dies or is lost through any cause during a period of 5 years from the date of first planting shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species.

14.

- (a) Before the development hereby approved is commenced, a written scheme of archaeological investigation ('the Scheme') shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Scheme shall provide details of the programme of archaeological works to be carried out within the site, including post-excavation reporting and appropriate publication.
- (b) The archaeological site work shall thereafter be implemented in full in accordance with the approved written scheme of archaeological investigation approved under provision A of this condition.
- (c) The site investigation and post excavation assessment shall be completed in accordance with the approved written scheme of archaeological investigation approved under provision A of this condition and provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of the results.

15. Before the development hereby approved is commenced, a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The HMP shall include the following information:

- (a) Proposed management prescriptions for all habitats for a period of no less than 25 years;
- (b) Assurances of achievability;
- (c) Timetable of delivery for all habitats; and
- (d) A timetable of future ecological monitoring to ensure that all habitats achieve their proposed management condition as well as a description of a feedback mechanism by which the management prescriptions can be amended should the monitoring deem it necessary. All ecological monitoring and recommendations for the maintenance/amendment of future management shall be submitted, on application, to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The development shall be undertaken and thereafter maintained in accordance with the approved HMP.

16. Notwithstanding any description / details within the application submission, prior to their erection on site, details of the proposed materials and external colour finish of all solar panels, frames, ancillary buildings, containers, equipment, fencing, CCTV and enclosures shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details and retained as such for the life of the development.

17. Notwithstanding any description / details within the application submission, prior to the installation of any external lighting within or on the boundary of the sites a scheme of illumination shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such details shall include:

- The location of all units of external illumination,
- The design and height of all units of external illumination together with any mitigation features such as cowls,
- Levels of illumination and light spread.

The approved scheme of illumination shall thereafter be provided and maintained in accordance with the approved details for the life of the development.

18. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in strict accordance with the recommendations and methods of working, detailed within the Ecological Impact Assessment (dated 22nd December 2023) and the Wintering Bird Survey Report (dated 14th March 2023), both produced by Tyler Grange.
19. Before the development hereby approved is first brought into use, full details of the body / management company responsible for undertaking the approved surface water drainage design management and maintenance regime pursuant to condition 3 of this permission shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
20. Before the first export of electricity, an updated noise report shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The report shall provide details of the plant design, noise mitigation and resultant noise levels at noise sensitive premises. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details and retained as such for the life of the development.
21. Within 1 month of the date of first export of electricity, written confirmation shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority of the date of first export to the Grid. The development hereby permitted shall cease on or before the expiry of a 40-year period from the date of the first export of electricity and the Local Planning Authority shall be notified of the cessation of electricity generation and storage in writing no later than 5 working days after the event.
22. Within 3 months of the date of the Local Planning Authority receiving written notification of the cessation of electricity generation and storage pursuant to condition 21 of this permission, a Decommissioning Scheme shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval in writing. The Decommissioning Scheme shall include, but not be limited to, the provision for the dismantling and removal from the site of the solar PV panels, frames, foundations, inverter housings and all associated structures, storage facilities, hard-surfacing and fencing, together with a scheme for the restoration of the land to its former condition and timetable for implantation and completion. The decommissioning shall thereafter be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved scheme.
23. In the event of the development ceasing to generate electricity for supply to the electricity grid network for a period in excess of 12 months, a Decommissioning Scheme shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval in writing, no later than 3 months from the end of the 12-month period. The Decommissioning Scheme shall include and be subject the same provisions referred to in condition 22 of this permission.

The reasons for the Council's decision to approve the development subject to the above conditions are:

1. To comply with the requirements of Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
2. To define the permission.
3. To ensure the provision of adequate drainage facilities and to reduce the risk of surface water flooding for the lifetime of the development (Policies N1 n and N2 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
4. In the interests of the safety and convenience of users of the highway and to safeguard the occupiers of nearby residential properties from undue noise and general disturbance. (Policies T1c and N1e of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
5. To maintain the quality of the highway in the interests of highway safety (Policy T1 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
6. In the interests of the safety and convenience of users of the highway. (Policy T2 b of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
7. In order to ensure that the access arrangements are satisfactory to serve the development and to ensure the safety of all road users thereafter (Policy T1 of the Plan for Stafford Borough).
8. To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development. (Policy N1 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
9. To safeguard the amenity of neighbouring residents and to prevent disturbance to wildlife and habitats (Policies N1 and N4 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
10. To retain the quality of the soil during and post development, and to support the restoration of the site (Policies E2 and N3 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
11. To protect the trees and vegetation to be retained. (Policy N1 f of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
12. To protect the trees and vegetation to be retained. (Policy N1 f of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
13. To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development and to encourage enhancements in biodiversity and habitat, to ensure that any initial plant losses are overcome in order to secure enhancements in biodiversity and habitat. (Policies N1 and N4 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
14. In order to afford proper archaeological investigation recording and protection. (Policy N9 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
15. To safeguard habitats and biodiversity (Policies N1 and N4 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).

16. To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development. (Policy N1 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
17. To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development and to safeguard the occupiers of nearby residential properties from light pollution. (Policy N1 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
18. To safeguard habitats and biodiversity (Policies N1 and N4 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
19. To ensure the management of adequate drainage facilities for the lifetime of the development (Policies N1 n and N2 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
20. To safeguard the occupiers of nearby residential properties from undue noise and to ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development (Policy N1 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
21. In accordance with the applicants stated intentions and to ensure that the development has a timeframe for its operation and decommissioning (Policy N3 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
22. To ensure restoration of the site following cessation of energy production (Policy N3 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).
23. To ensure restoration of the site following cessation of energy production (Policy N3 of The Plan for Stafford Borough).

Informatives

1. In accordance with the requirements of Article 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Order) 2015, as amended, and the National Planning Policy Framework 2023, the Council has worked in a positive and proactive way in determining the application and has granted planning permission.
2. Any off-site work within the adopted highway, including work to alter access points or to provide additional or to enhance existing passing places, would require a Highway Works Agreement with Staffordshire County Council. The applicant is requested to contact Staffordshire County Council in order to secure the Agreement. The applicant is advised to begin this process well in advance of any works taking place in order to meet any potential timescales. Further information can be found at:

www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Highways/highwayscontrol/HighwaysWorkAgreement.s.aspx
3. The County Councils Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way shows the following:
 - Public Footpath Nos. 27 Stowe by Chartley Parish and Public Footpath No. 12 Blithfield Parish run through the northern area of the site.

- Public Footpath Nos. 0.1620, 0.1621 Stowe by Chartley Parish run through the southern area of the site.
- Public Footpath Nos. 18 and Stowe by Chartley Parish runs adjacent to the site, near the south western area of the site.

The attention of the applicant shall be drawn to the existence of these routes and to the requirement that any planning permission given does not construe the right to divert, extinguish or obstruct any part of the public path. The applicant is advised to note and act upon as necessary the comments of the SCC Rights of Way Officer dated 20 March 2024, uploaded to the Council's planning system on 3 April 2024.

4. The applicant is advised to note and act upon as necessary the comments of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service dated 12 April 2023; Police Designing Out Crime Officer dated 17 April 2023 and the National Grid dated 31 March 2023.
5. With regards to condition 5, the scope and methodology of the highway inspection should be agreed in advance with the highway authority.

23/36938/FUL

Lower Farm

Drointon Lane

