Application Reference	**DC/077298**
Location:	Welkin Mill Welkin Road Bredbury Stockport SK6 2BH
PROPOSAL:	Grid Scale Battery Storage Facility
Type Of Application:	Full Application
Registration Date:	24.08.2020
Expiry Date:	19.10.2020
Case Officer:	Mark Jordan
Applicant:	Noriker Power Limited
Agent:	

DELEGATION/COMMITTEE STATUS

Planning & Highways Regulations Committee – Departure to the Development Plan.

Comments are sought from the Central Stockport Area Committee, in order that these can be reported to the relevant meeting of the Planning & Highways Regulations Committee if the recommendation to grant permission is supported.

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Full planning permission is sought for the installation of a 50MW battery storage facility for a 30 year period. The development is intended to operate in support of National Grid and the local electricity distribution network.

The two main aims of the proposed facility will be to:-

1) Act as a highly flexible power plant supporting the national grid and local distribution network. This type of plant forms a key part of the solution to retirement of old fossil generation plant and directly supports renewable electricity production;

2) Offer mobile battery hire. When not supporting the grid a proportion of the batteries will be available for hire to act as back-up power where traditionally carbon intensive diesel generators have been used.

The proposed facility will be set within its own secure compound enclosed by 2.4m high perimeter fencing which is proposed to be interwoven with soft landscaping to create a ‘living wall’.

A variety of equipment is proposed to form part of the facility, the precise details of which are best appreciated via the submitted drawings which accompany the Officers report. However as a summary the infrastructure includes:-

1) battery units and associated electrical plant in containers ranging in size from under 3m up to 40m in length, with electrical cables connecting between the containers and plant;
2) high voltage switch gear and a Distribution Network Operator (DNO) 132 kV compound. The battery and switchgear containers are raised on pre-cast concrete plinths and the transformers are on bunded drip trays;

3) other welfare and storage cabins / containers, compound floodlighting (not lit outside of operational working hours) and CCTV.

Vehicular access to the compound is proposed via Welkin Road, with the main entrance set off the road on the south boundary, exiting at the same south east corner using an internal one way system. A total of 7 parking spaces will be provided on site.

When operating in support of the National Grid, the facility is designed to operate autonomously with routine maintenance by a site engineer and service contractors. In respect of the proposed mobile battery service, it is anticipated that this will have low level usage, with an estimated 2 hires per day on average. No public access to the site will be permitted. The proposal will result in the creation of a minimum of 10 equivalent full time positions.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The site comprises a rectangular shaped parcel of land covering approximately 0.7 hectares and is bounded to the east by Welkin Mill, to the west by a sports pitch, to the north by the M60 and A560, and to the south by a number of commercial and industrial units. The nearest residential properties are approximately 180m away from the site.

The site is currently vacant land in a derelict condition. Scrub planting is interspersed across the site. At the northern end of the site lies an area of dilapidated hardstanding which has previously been used as an informal parking area. Ground levels are relatively flat across the site.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (“PCPA 2004”) requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan includes-

- Policies set out in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review adopted 31st May 2006 which have been saved by direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; &

- Policies set out in the Stockport Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document adopted 17th March 2011.

Saved policies of the SUDP Review

GBA1.1, 'Extent of Green Belt'
GBA1.2 'Control of Development in Green Belt'
LCR1.1 'Landscape Character Areas'

LDF Core Strategy/Development Management policies

CS7 Accommodating Economic Development
AED-4 Employment Development in Rural Areas
CS8 Safeguarding and Improving the Environment
SIE-1 Quality Places
SIE-3 Protecting, Safeguarding and Enhancing the Environment
CS9 ‘Transport and Development’
CS10 'An effective and sustainable transport network'
T-1 ‘Transport and Development’
T-3 ‘Safety and Capacity on the Highway Network’
SD-3 'Delivering the Energy Opportunities Plans - New Development'
SD-6 'Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change'

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Supplementary Planning Guidance does not form part of the Statutory Development Plan; nevertheless it does provide non-statutory Council approved guidance that is a material consideration when determining planning applications.

The following guidance is considered to be relevant:

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD
Sustainable Transport SPD

National Planning Policy Framework

A Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 19th February 2019 replaced the previous NPPF (originally issued 2012 & revised 2018). The NPPF has not altered the fundamental legal requirement under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations (such as the NPPF) indicate otherwise.

The NPPF representing the governments up-to-date planning policy which should be taken into account in dealing with applications focuses on achieving a lasting housing reform, facilitating the delivery of a greater number of homes, ensuring that we get planning for the right homes built in the right places of the right quality at the same time as protecting our environment. If decision takers choose not to follow the NPPF, then clear and convincing reasons for doing so are needed.

N.B. In respect of decision-taking the revised NPPF constitutes a “material consideration”.

Para.1 “The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these should be applied”.

Para.2 “Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise”.

Para.7 “The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”.

Para.8 “Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

a) an economic objective
b) a social objective
c) an environmental objective”

Para.11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For decision-taking this means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole”.

Para.12 “……..Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed”.

Para.38 “Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way…... Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible”.

Para.47 “Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing”.

Para.124 “The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities”.

Para.130 “Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design

should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development".

Para.133 "The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence".

Para.134 "Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land".

Para.141 "Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land".

Para.143 "Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances".

Para.144 "When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. "Very special circumstances" will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations".

Para.145 "A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

e) limited infilling in villages;

f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and

g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would: – not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the

existing development; or – not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

Para.146 “Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

a) mineral extraction;
b) engineering operations;
c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
f) development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Para 147 “When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources”.

Para 148 “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”.

Para.153 states “In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should expect new development to:

a) comply with any development plan policies on local requirements for decentralised energy supply unless it can be demonstrated by the applicant, having regard to the type of development involved and its design, that this is not feasible or viable; and

b) take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption”.

Para 154 “When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:

a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and

b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable49. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.

Para 190 “Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal”.

Para 192 “In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness”.

Para 197 “The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset”.

Para.213 “existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to the publication of this Framework. Due weight should be given to them, according to their degree of consistency with this Framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)”.

Planning Practice Guidance

The Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) is a web-based resource which brings together planning guidance on various topics into one place (launched in March 2014) and coincided with the cancelling of the majority of Government Circulars which had previously given guidance on many aspects of planning.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

The site and its surroundings has an extensive planning history. The following applications are pertinent to the current proposal:-

DC/075050 Grid Scale Battery Storage Facility. Withdrawn 28/05/20

DC/047842 Landfill to the existing low area. Installation of drainage and create 2 new football pitches. Re-soil & re-turf two existing football pitches. Erection of 2m high green weldmesh fencing around site. Granted 04/06/14

J/68602 Proposed football pitches, pavilion and associated car parking and landscaping. Granted 12/11/97.

J/66450 Proposed football pitches, pavilion and associated car parking and landscaping. Granted 10/03/97

J/26772 Extraction of low-grade fuel from former refuse tip; re-spreading on site of discarded material; covering with excavated spoil from M63 contract and final restoration as a sports field. Granted 17/01/83

J/8124 Use of garage and adjacent land for the storage and renovation of historic vehicles. Granted 04/05/77

In addition to the above, a separate planning application (DC/078965) is also currently sat with the Local Planning Authority pending determination. This proposal, which has been submitted by a different applicant, relates to a nearby site on land at the junction of Welkin Rd and Stockport Rd and seeks permission to install and operate a battery energy storage system.

NEIGHBOUR'S VIEWS

The owner/occupiers of nearby properties have been notified by letter and the proposal has been advertised as a Departure from the Development Plan by site and press notices. The consultation period has now closed.

At the time of report preparation 1 representation has been received objecting to the proposal, the comments of which are summarised below:-

1) The site location plan appears to indicate an intrusion onto the land currently used by the football club;

2) Land Registry Title MAN289130 indicates that the land owned by the football club to be a distance outside the current fence line whilst WEL-ELEV-SiteLocationPlan-002 (as part of the application pack) indicates the site boundary to be the current fence line and barrier. (guestimate 3 to 4 metres?).

CONSULTEE RESPONSES

Planning Policy:

Principle

The proposal is for a battery storage facility with containers and security fence. The site is vacant and derelict brownfield land including ruderal vegetation, inert waste and hardstanding previously used for parking.

The proposal would potentially meet Policy GBA1.2 of the Saved Unitary Development Plan in relation to changes of use of land providing they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, however the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) offer a more up-to-date position and is a material consideration of significant weight.

Paragraph 145 of the NPPF states that new buildings are inappropriate development in the Green Belt and follows this with a list of exceptions. The proposal could meet criterion (g) relating to the 'limited infilling…of previously developed land' subject as the land is previously developed and redundant. However, this is dependent on the proposal not having 'a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development'.

As there is currently an absence of development on-site it is judged that the size and number of the proposed structures would reduce openness and therefore Paragraph 145g is not met. I would advise that the proposal does not meet any of the other exceptions under Paragraph 145 and, as such, it should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt and a case for very special circumstances is required under Paragraph 143. Paragraph 144 gives substantial weight to any harm to the Green Belt and notes that a case for very special

circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Other harm

The Planning Practice Guidance states that 'openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume'. With regard to visual impact, the LVIA finds the immediate area to have poor visual amenity which is of a context and setting that is not reflective of the wider Landscape Character Area. I would agree with this given the urban fringe industrial uses at its edges and the major transport artery of the M60. Any views of the site would be seen against the backdrop of high density mill buildings at Welkin Mill and Pear Mill and tall pylons, whilst heavy screening from tree belts limits the potential for the site to be seen from distances in any case. The pre-planted hedge feature with evergreen climbing plants around the perimeter fence will provide further mitigation.

In spatial terms, the LVIA records a 'slight adverse' change to openness as a result of the proposals which would replace the car park hardstanding and uneven land formation with an even grade and structures that would be 5 metres tall at their highest and with a 2.4 metre pre-planted high mesh fence. Areas not covered by concrete plinths underneath the containers will be covered by gravel. The elevations satisfactorily demonstrate that, though there will be added volume to the site, this would be minimal. In addition, the proposed structures would be smaller than adjacent mills and industrial units and sits in an area least sensitive to changes in openness given its well contained context, as the LVIA attests.

Floodlighting will also cause an impact on openness, although it is noted from the planning statement that its design will limit light pollution to the wider area by directing light down to the site and the use of the floodlights will be rare and not outside working hours in normal circumstances.

As a result of the above considerations, I conclude that in relation to 'any other harm' in the balance required by Paragraph 144 there would be a limited impact on the openness of the Green Belt, primarily from a spatial perspective given the increased volume provided by the structures and very limited impact from floodlighting.

The applicant requires a 30 year temporary consent to allow the local distribution network to benefit from flexibility services for an extended period, and also to enable the sufficient infrastructure to be set up and consequently make the expense attached to this feasible. Given these reasons, the limited impact of the proposal on openness and the location of the site in a non-sensitive area not close to receptors I consider that this timeframe is appropriate. The fact that this permission is temporary forms part of the case for very special circumstances and so a condition should be attached to any permission, not least to ensure this timeframe is not exceeded.

The case for very special circumstances

Whilst neither local nor national policy specify what demonstrating a case for 'very special circumstances' should entail there is considerable case law which suggests that adhering to the following approach is likely to be suitable:

1. Identify (with evidence) an essential objective that the proposal is intended to meet;

2. Demonstrate that that essential objective could not reasonably be met in a less harmful way (i.e. consideration of other sites outside of the Green Belt or alternative sites within the Green Belt but where less harm would be caused or which would amount to a form of development excepted by NPPF paragraph 89 – now paragraph 145)

3. Demonstrate that the proposed development would meet the essential objective and that doing so clearly outweighs the degree of harm caused by the proposal (this should include demonstrating that the essential objective could not be achieved less harmfully by an alternative scheme at the same site).

The applicant has provided a number of considerations, and these are as follows:

- The development will respond to national energy needs and is required to store electricity from the national grid when supply at generating stations exceeds demand and to return it when supply falls below demand, enabling the grid to be balanced in coming years when intermittency is set to be common and without reliance on non-renewable sources.

- The essential need for the scheme to be located on the application site and within the Green Belt has been demonstrated, and is due to the site being of minimum 0.6 hectares to accommodate the necessary infrastructure, it is within the maximum viable distance of 800 metres of the Bredbury and Vernon Park substations, and finally these 2 substations are the only sites in the Borough that have sufficient import and export capacity to deliver the minimum viable 40MW capacity requirement. An alternative site for the battery storage that meets the criteria and is outside the Green Belt has been identified off New Zealand Road although this would be clearly inferior to the proposed as it would give rise to unacceptable noise impacts for nearby residents.

- The sustainability benefits include the reduction in losses associated with long distance electricity transmission, reduced carbon emissions from a wholly renewable alternative to fossil fuel (and the increased production from non-renewables in line with Paragraph 147 of the NPPF) and which delivers equivalent benefits to wind energy but with less harm on openness of the Green Belt.

- The ability to co-locate electricity infrastructure at sub stations with surplus export capacity is rare and cannot even be met in neighbouring boroughs on the same network. The installation will double the renewable export capacity in the borough which has a scarcity of such opportunities.

- There are economic and employment benefits arising including increased economic security for local businesses offering potential for growth, and the creation of ten new full time equivalent positions.

- The development is temporary and reversible, with the intention of being decommissioned and removed from the site after 30 years with a plan for restoration and remediation of the application site.

In my view, the applicant has fulfilled the criteria advocated by case law, in that the essential objective is to provide a battery storage facility to meet an identified need, and by necessity this must be within a required distance threshold, site size and fulfilling a required energy output in order to be viable. It has been satisfactorily proved in supporting statements that this area of the borough is in an optimum

location providing a unique opportunity to balance supply and double the capacity, and that other locations would not be suitable as other substations around the Borough would not meet requirements and that the one non-Green Belt alternative in the area of focus would impact on neighbouring residents through noise as opposed to the application site which is located away from residential uses.

I am of the view that it has been demonstrated the proposed site does fulfil the essential objective and I judge that the in-principle harm by reason of inappropriateness and limited additional harm to openness are mitigated by the proposed green walls and minimised with the temporary permission. I am satisfied that no alternative scheme of less harm could have secured the objective, particularly as the entirety of the site is required for supporting infrastructure.

As such I advise that very special circumstances exist that clearly outweigh the in-principle harm and additional harm and that permission should be granted.

Finally, I advise that conditions be imposed on the 30 year temporary consent and the regarding the requirement for restoration and remediation of the site following the removal of the on-site structures.

Highway Engineer:

Access will be from track off Welkin Road. Both track and Welkin Rd are un-adopted though Welkin Rd is considered public highway.

The development will not generate significant traffic movements during operation and in this respect will not impede aspirations to develop Welkin Road for cycle use, to extend the cycle network within the borough.

The access permits vehicles to wait off highway/off track whilst gates opened to avoid obstruction.

Adequate space is provided for vehicular movements within the site and to allow vehicles to enter in forward gear, manoeuvre within the site and exit in forward gear.

Revised plan shows provision of adequate visibility where site access meets highway. A condition to secure the ongoing provision of this visibility is recommended.

Details of the surfacing and drainage of the compound and access will be required to show compliance with SuDS policies. I am satisfied that this may be secured by condition.

Recommendation: no objection subject to conditions relating to the construction of the approved access and details of servicing facilities.

Environment Team (Air)

I have looked at the application for a battery facility and in the report it states

2.12. Air Quality

The site lies outside of Stockport's Air Quality Management Area and the facility does not produce any emissions, however there are drawings included for a generator. Following further points of clarification no objections are raised.

Planning Policy (Energy)

Given the nature of the development at Welkin Mill a standard energy statement would not be suitable given the lack of typical building structures for this development so I waive the need for any submission of such a document. The development proposes a Battery Storage Facility on land adjacent to the Welkin Mill site. Aspects of the development to be considered in terms of carbon emissions are as follows:

Stockport Council declared a climate emergency in March 2019 and acknowledged the need to become carbon neutral by 2038. With this declaration, the council committed to 'play our part to reduce carbon emissions across the borough, and to use our role as an influencer of the Borough to encourage everyone to play their part'.

This reflects the Greater Manchester 5 Year Environment Plan drivers for the GM area to achieve net zero carbon by 2038. Priorities 1 and 3 specifically relate to this proposed development: Increasing local renewable energy generation; increasing the diversity and flexibility of our electricity supply.

As a result of the climate emergency declaration, Stockport Council will shortly publish the Stockport Climate Action Now Strategy committing the Council to the following actions: change Council processes to show leadership on tackling the climate emergency, ensure a climate friendly borough, support renewable energy, promote sustainable transport (including electric vehicle charging), enhance Stockport's natural capital and undertake sustainable financial appraisal of all projects, programmes and schemes.

The points made in the Planning Statement on the Green Belt aspects of this application make the case for the need for this infrastructure to facilitate the storing of electricity from the national grid at times when baseload supply from generating stations exceeds demand, and return it to the grid at times when supply falls below demand. The mismatch between supply and demand highlights the need for the balancing services which are operated by the National Grid. Balancing the grid in order to provide electricity at times when supply falls below demand is essential to every aspect of life, and without it the country would experience frequent rolling blackouts which would be damaging to society in every respect. The increasing proportional contribution of intermittent sources of electricity to the grid means that the requirement for balancing is rising and will continue to rise as the UK endeavours to meet its legal obligations for decarbonisation in 2050 (and earlier in many city regions who are declaring earlier targets such as Greater Manchester's) . Providing the balancing infrastructure to enable the national grid to function without blackouts is therefore equal in importance to providing baseload power supply. Unlike other options, including fossil fuel powered short term reserve plant and electricity imports, battery storage will enable the grid to be balanced without reliance on non-renewable sources.

The case is made that the site must be within a viable connection distance of the connection point at a substation. A distance of 800 metres is considered the maximum viable, due to the costs of cabling, installation and maintenance and the practicalities of securing the necessary easements. The location has been assessed for it's appropriateness in terms of the identified balancing need and it has been clearly shown that the location is the most suitable of two potential sites – the other

potential site would have greater impact on people, homes and local open space. If the natural capital improvements recommended from the Habitat Survey are achieved then the site could result in net gain in biodiversity where native planting and considerations of local species' needs are addressed.

Stockport's Landscape Character Area Study 2018 cites the following impacts for this LCA: 'The impacts of climate change may contribute to more frequent flooding events and loss/damage to the semi-natural habitats found throughout the valley. Climate change / urbanisation may also increase levels of run-off and affect the water quality of the [river] and its supported wildlife.' The short term impact of this development on landscape must be weighed against the longer term benefits of zero carbon infrastructure in this appropriate location contributing to Stockport's efforts to tackle the climate emergency which threatens landscapes in the longer term.

As detailed in the Planning Statement, the proposals will result in a range of economic employment benefits, including the creation of at least ten new FTE positions and providing economic security and potential growth to existing business in the local area which are currently constrained by the limited capacity for electrical connections. It will also signal to businesses that Stockport Council support those willing to decarbonise their processes and practices, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for the Borough and the wider world.

There is an established need for the proposed development in terms of enabling renewable energy generation that is needed to address zero carbon energy demand; the location is an essential need for the scheme to access the grid at appropriate points; the sustainability benefits of the proposals have been outlined; sensitive design can enhance the neighbouring heritage asset with the opportunity for contributions to improvements to Welkin Mill; there are identified economic and employment benefits; and finally the temporary and reversible nature of the development offers the opportunity to deliver further net gain in natural capital in the future.

Conservation Officer

The proposed battery storage facility lies within the setting of Welkin Mill, a building of local architectural and historic interest. Although the height of the proposed structures is modest in relation to the height of the mill, it will result in some harm to the immediate open setting of the mill which is also, given the proximity of the M60, highly publicly visible. Retention of existing trees and the development and implementation of an appropriate landscape strategy will be essential in order to minimise any harmful visual impact upon the setting and significance of the mill as a heritage asset.

Arboricultural Officer

Legally Protected Trees

There is no legally protected tree within this site or affected by this development.

The proposed development would have a potentially negative impact on trees located in the proposed construction work area site, which has a low value amenity and biodiversity, so the proposed works will have a negative impact on the low value trees on site. The proposed works require loss of all trees, as well there is potential for impact from encroachment/potential damage from machinery working in close proximity of the trees on or adjacent the site. The site has a poor/low value level of vegetation and trees and as such, there cannot be any loss of trees on site as this

will have a negative impact on amenity and biodiversity, without the submission of an improved landscaping design to show the replacement and enhancement of the tree cover on site which has been included in the proposed site layout plan.

The only concerns for this site is the potential accidental tree damage during deliveries, storage and construction works to the trees in and around the site, therefore the construction traffic and material storage needs to be directed away from or not located within proximity to the retained trees in the area which will have a negative impact on the trees systems, therefore an advisory on exclusion zone and protective fencing will be required for the protection of the trees to the local area including those in neighbouring properties of the site as the trees are an integral part of the tree scape for the residential estate and therefore cannot be lost.

The trees offer a low level of biodiversity/habitat benefit and as such as many as possible need retaining as the loss would be unacceptable without an increased landscaping design submission or conditioned.

In principle the scheme will have a negative impact on the trees in the area however due to the poor value of the existing tree stock it only requires the submission of a detailed landscaping scheme to show the replacement and enhancement of the site to comply with policy as well as the submission of an advisory and protective fencing restricting all access to the protected trees in the working area/storage areas of the site.

The following conditions are required if the scheme is approved;

Condition Tree 1

No existing tree within the site shall be cut down, topped, lopped, uprooted, wilfully damaged or wilfully destroyed without the prior written approval of the local planning authority, with the exception of those indicated otherwise on the approved plan. Any hedgerows, woody plants or shrubbery removed without such consent or dying or being severely damaged or being seriously diseased, within 5 years of the development commencing, shall be replaced within the next planting season with trees of such size and species as may be approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Condition Tree 2

No development shall take place until all existing trees on the site except those shown to be removed on the approved plans, have been fenced off in accordance with BS 5837:2012 "Trees in relation to construction - Recommendations". The fencing shall be retained during the period of construction and no work, excavation, tipping or stacking of materials shall take place within any such fence during the construction period.

Condition Tree 3

No development shall take place until details of all proposed tree planting, including the intended dates of planting, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. All tree planting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the development being brought into use.

Nature Development

Nature Conservation Designations

The site has no nature conservation designations, legal or otherwise.

Legally Protected Species

An ecological survey has been carried out and submitted with the application. The survey comprised an extended phase 1 habitat survey undertaken in October 2019 to map the habitats present and assess the potential for protected species to be present and impacted by the proposals. The survey was undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist and in accordance with best practice guidance. Habitats on site comprise semi-improved grassland, scattered and dense scrub with scattered (mainly) self-set trees and bare ground (old car park)

Many trees have the potential to support roosting bats. In the main, the trees on site were not considered suitable for use as bat roost sites on account of their young age and/or lack of suitable roosting features. A willow tree in the northern part of the site was found to have a damaged limb, but this feature faces upwards and so was discounted as a potential bat roosting feature as it would be exposed to the elements/rainwater ingress. All species of bats and their roosts are protected under UK (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)) and European legislation (The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations, 2017). Habitats on site are considered to offer suitable bat foraging habitat.

The trees, scrub and vegetation on site offer potential nesting habitat for breeding birds. All breeding birds and their nests are legally protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Ponds and their surrounding terrestrial habitat have the potential to support amphibians such as great crested newts (GCN). An ephemeral pool was recorded on site. This was considered to have been the result of recent heavy rainfall as opposed to likely to be a more permanent feature on site and so was not considered to offer suitable newt breeding habitat. No ponds were identified within 250m of the site. Scrub, tall ruderal vegetation, tussocky grassland and the spoil heap on site offer suitable GCN terrestrial habitat but in the absence of suitable breeding habitat in the vicinity it is considered unlikely that GCN are present within the application area. Paragraph 016 of the Natural Environment Planning Practice Guidance (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#biodiversity-and-ecosystems) states that the local authority should only request a survey if they consider there is a reasonable likelihood of a protected species being present and affected by development. In light of the above I would not consider it reasonable to request further survey information in respect of GCN as part of the current application.

Records for badger exist in the local area. No evidence of badger activity was however recorded during the survey. Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. This makes it an offence to kill or injure a badger, damage or destroy a badger sett or obstruct access to it, or disturb a badger in it.

Invasive Species

No invasive species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were recorded during the survey.

Recommendations:

The proposals are considered to be of low risk to roosting bats and great crested newts. Protected species can sometimes be found in seemingly unlikely places however and so I would advise that an informative is attached to any planning consent so that the applicant is aware of the potential (albeit low) for protected species to be present. It should also state that the granting of planning permission does not negate the requirement to abide by the legislation in place to protect biodiversity. If at any time during works, evidence of protected species is discovered on site, works must stop and a suitably experienced ecologist contacted for advice.

Ecological conditions can change over time. In the event that works have not commenced within two years of the October 2019 survey then an update survey will be required to ensure the impact assessment and mitigation remains current. A suitably worded condition can be used to ensure update surveys are carried out as appropriate.

In relation to breeding birds, vegetation clearance should be timed to avoid the bird nesting season where possibly (which is March-August inclusive). If this is not possible a breeding bird survey will be required by a suitably experienced person no more than 48 hours in advance of works to confirm presence/absence of nesting birds. This approach is outlined in section 5.1 of the ecology report and should be secured by condition.

Information submitted with the application indicates that flood lights will be used but that this will be restricted to until 8pm in the winter months or when there is an alarm event (e.g. intruder) or on occasions where maintenance engineers require lighting to undertake their work. Minimising lit times will help reduce any impacts on wildlife associated with light disturbance It is important that any lighting is sensitively designed so as to minimise impacts on wildlife associated with light disturbance (following the principles outlined in Bat Conservation Trust guidance: http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/bats_and_lighting.html).

Biodiversity enhancements are expected as part of developments in line with local (paragraph 3.345 of the LDF) and national planning policy (NPPF). Section 5.3 of the ecology report refers to tree planting and soft landscaping to mitigate for habitats and trees to be lost and to enhance the site. There does not however appear to be space within the proposed scheme to accommodate onsite landscape planting. Alternative options including off-site compensation should therefore be explored. For example the grassland to the west of Warth Meadow playing fields (immediately west of the application site) and/or woodland areas (e.g. to the north of the ring road off Brinnington Road and/or Crookiley Wood to the northeast) should be considered as suitable candidate areas for habitat enhancement works.

The proposals also include the provision of a living green screen to grow up the security fencing. Species suggested within the proposals include ivy, Pyracantha and hornbeam. This is a welcome inclusion within the scheme. It is recommended that a mix of species are carefully chosen to maximise benefits to biodiversity (i.e. locally native where possible and berry producing and/or nectar-rich species to provide a food resource for birds/benefit pollinators.

Environment Team (Contaminated Land)

The proposed development site is in between two sites that have been identified as potentially contaminated, one of those being a landfill site. As such the developer will need to keep a watching brief should any unexpected contamination be suspected or found. A CON2 informative is recommended.

Public Rights of Way Unit: No response therefore no objection.

Landscape Officer: No response therefore no objection.

Environment Team (Noise): No response therefore no objection.

Lead Local Flood Authority: No response therefore no objection.

Health & Safety Executive: Refer to standing advice.

Cadent Gas: Consultation referred to National Grid for response.

United Utilities: We have reviewed the documents submitted as part of this planning application and note that there is existing water infrastructure within the site boundary which the proposed layout plan indicates will be built on top of. This is not acceptable to United Utilities and therefore at this time we must object to the scheme. The applicant should contact Water Developer Services to seek advice on confirming the exact location of this main and understand the constraints of the associated easement details.

Should the Council deem it appropriate to determine this application irrespective of our comments, conditions relating to 1) surface water 2) foul water and 3) infrastructure protection measures, must be attached to any decision notice.

Environment Agency: No response therefore no objection.

National Grid: No objection.

Electricity North West: No response therefore no objection.

ANALYSIS

In terms of policy principle, the application site is located within the Green Belt, as defined on the UDP Proposals Map.

The proposal represents a departure to local and national Green Belt Policy that precludes the construction of such buildings and structures.

Inappropriate development

The proposal is subject to assessment under Paragraphs 133, 134, 141, 143, 144, 145, 146 and 147 of the NPPF.

Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence.

Paragraph 145 sets out that a Local Planning Authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt, but lists a number of exceptions. The exceptions include:-

a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

e) limited infilling in villages;

f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and

g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would: – not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or – not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

In addition paragraph.146 sets out that certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are

a) mineral extraction;

b) engineering operations;

c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;

d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;

e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and

f) development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Saved UDP policy GBA1.2 states that there is a presumption against such new buildings and structures in the Green Belt and lists a set or criteria that could form acceptable forms of development. The proposal does not constitute any of these forms of development and therefore is contrary to saved UDP policy GBA1.2 and paragraphs 145 and 146 of the NPPF.

Other Harm

Planning Practice Guidance states that ‘openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects. With regard to visual impact the character of the surrounding landscape is considered to have poor visual amenity, which is of a context and setting that is not reflective of the wider Landscape Character Area. In particular the immediate area is predominantly characterised by urban fringe industrial uses at its edges and the major transport artery of the M60. Any views of the site would be seen against the backdrop of high density mill buildings at Welkin Mill and Pear Mill and tall pylons, whilst heavy screening from tree belts limits the potential for the site to be seen from distances in any case. The proposed pre-planted hedge feature with evergreen climbing plants around the perimeter fence will provide further mitigation.

In spatial terms, the proposal would result in a ‘slight adverse’ change to openness as a result of the structures (max 5m height) which would replace the car park hardstanding and scrub wasteland. Areas not covered by concrete plinths

underneath the proposed containers will be covered by gravel. It is considered that the elevations of the proposed structures satisfactorily demonstrate that, though there will be added volume to the site, this would be minimal. In addition, the proposed structures would be smaller than adjacent mills and industrial units and sits in an area least sensitive to changes in openness given its well contained context.

Floodlighting does form part of the proposal and as such will also cause an impact on openness. It is however acknowledged noted that their design will limit light pollution to the wider area by directing light down to the site and the use of the floodlights will be restricted and not outside working hours in normal circumstances.

As a result of the above considerations, Officers conclude that in relation to 'any other harm' in the balance required by Paragraph 144 of the NPPF, there would be a limited impact on the openness of the Green Belt, primarily from a spatial perspective given the increased volume provided by the structures and very limited impact from floodlighting.

The application has been submitted on the basis of requiring a 30 year temporary consent to allow the local distribution network to benefit from flexibility services for an extended period, and also to enable the sufficient infrastructure to be set up and consequently make the expense attached to this feasible. Given these reasons, the limited impact of the proposal on openness and the location of the site in a non-sensitive area not close to receptors Officers consider that this timeframe is acceptable and would be covered by an appropriate planning condition.

'Very Special Circumstances'

Paragraphs 143 and 144 of the NPPF set out that 'inappropriate development' is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. When considering any planning application, Local Planning Authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Relevant case law assists in the consideration of what constitutes 'Very Special Circumstances'.

As quoted in the supreme court decision , Wychavon District Council v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2008] EWCA Civ 692:

"The guidance in the NPPF is unchanged in relation to very special circumstances. As such, whether a factor constitutes a very special circumstance is a matter for the decision maker in the exercise of his judgment in any particular case."

Whilst neither local nor national policy specify what demonstrating a case for 'very special circumstances' should entail there is considerable case law which suggests that adhering to the following approach is likely to be suitable:

1. Identify (with evidence) an essential objective that the proposal is intended to meet;

2. Demonstrate that that essential objective could not reasonably be met in a less harmful way (i.e. consideration of other sites outside of the Green Belt or alternative sites within the Green Belt but where less harm would be caused or which would amount to a form of development excepted by NPPF paragraph 89)

3. Demonstrate that the proposed development would meet the essential objective and that doing so clearly outweighs the degree of harm caused by the proposal (this should include demonstrating that the essential objective could not be achieved less harmfully by an alternative scheme at the same site).

As part of this current proposal before Members the applicant has outlined a detailed case seeking to demonstrate the existence of very special circumstances. These are as set out in the submitted Planning Statement, which seeks to evidence specific parameters justifying the selection of this site. In addition a Sequential Test assessment also been provided which seeks to evidence the lack of any suitable, less harmful alternative sites. The case for the very special circumstances being proposed by the applicant can be summarised as comprising the following:-

- The development will respond to national energy needs and is required to store electricity from the national grid when supply at generating stations exceeds demand and to return it when supply falls below demand, enabling the grid to be balanced in coming years when intermittency is set to be common and without reliance on non-renewable sources.

- The essential need for the scheme to be located on the application site and within the Green Belt has been demonstrated, and is due to the site being of minimum 0.6 hectares to accommodate the necessary infrastructure, it is within the maximum viable distance of 800 metres of the Bredbury and Vernon Park substations, and finally these 2 substations are the only sites in the Borough that have sufficient import and export capacity to deliver the minimum viable 40MW capacity requirement. An alternative site for the battery storage that meets the criteria and is outside the Green Belt has been identified off New Zealand Road although this would be clearly inferior to the proposed as it would give rise to unacceptable noise impacts for nearby residents.

- The sustainability benefits include the reduction in losses associated with long distance electricity transmission, reduced carbon emissions from a wholly renewable alternative to fossil fuel (and the increased production from non-renewables in line with Paragraph 147 of the NPPF) and which delivers equivalent benefits to wind energy but with less harm on openness of the Green Belt.

- The ability to co-locate electricity infrastructure at sub stations with surplus export capacity is rare and cannot even be met in neighbouring boroughs on the same network. The installation will double the renewable export capacity in the borough which has a scarcity of such opportunities.

- There are economic and employment benefits arising including increased economic security for local businesses offering potential for growth, and the creation of ten new full time equivalent positions.

- The development is temporary and reversible, with the intention of being decommissioned and removed from the site after 30 years with a plan for restoration and remediation of the application site.

Having regard to the above, it is evident that the proposal would undoubtedly offer socio-economic and energy benefits. However these need to be carefully balanced to judge whether they clearly outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt, caused by the ‘inappropriateness’ of the proposal, as set out in paragraph 144 of the NPPF.

Weighted against the above is the fact that the use is not already established and operating from the site. However, the applicant has sought to identify a need for the

proposal in this particular Green Belt setting that reflects the essential objectives and specific parameters of the proposal, as well as demonstrating via a sequential assessment that no less harmful alternative sites exist.

In considering the current proposal, Officers believe that on balance, based on the detailed case put forward in support of the application and in the absence of any objections from Planning Policy Officers, very special circumstances are considered to exist.

In order to ensure that the case for very special circumstances is maintained, should planning permission be granted this should be subject to appropriate conditions. These should include, but not be limited to conditions ensuring any permission be for a time limited period of 30 years (as applied for) and requiring an agreed site restoration scheme to be implemented once any such consent has lapsed.

On balance after having regard to all of the above, including the case put forward in support of the proposal, it is considered that very special circumstances are present in this particular case which are sufficient to outweigh the harm the proposal would cause to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness, in accordance with paragraphs 143 and 144 of the NPPF.

Residential Amenity

In view of the location of the site and the retained separation to residential properties (in excess of 180m), noting that commercial and industrial premises already exist along Welkin Rd and having regard to the absence of any objections from relevant consultees, it is considered that the proposed development could be accommodated on the site without causing harm to the amenity of residential properties.

Design

Whilst the proposed development is functional in appearance, this a technical requirement of the operational aspects of the proposal. The scale and mass of the proposed structures is largely low level and comparable to nearby commercial / industrial units along Welkin Rd. As part of the proposal a 2.4m high perimeter fence is to be interwoven with planting, so as to soften the external appearance of the development were possible.

Having regard to the above and the existence of commercial and industrial premises along Welkin Rd of varied design, together with the fact that overhead power lines and electricity pylons exist in the immediate locality, the proposal is considered acceptable with regard to its design and siting and its subsequent visual impact on the surrounding Landscape Character Area.

On this basis, the proposal is considered to comply with the requirements of saved UDP policies LCR1.1 and LCR1.1A and Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-1.

Highway and Pedestrian Safety

The proposed access arrangements and traffic generation resulting from the proposed development have been assessed by Officers. In this respect the detailed comments of the Council’s Highway Engineer are set out earlier in this report.

Officers conclude that the development will not generate significant traffic movements during its operation and that the proposed vehicular access arrangements off Welkin Rd would allow vehicles to wait off highway/off track whilst gates open to avoid obstruction. Similarly adequate manoeuvring space will be provided for vehicles within the site.

No objections are raised to the proposal from the Highway Engineer, subject to the imposition of suitably worded planning conditions relating to the construction of the approved access and details of servicing facilities, surfacing and drainage.

On this basis, the proposal is considered acceptable with regard to the site access arrangements, highway safety and parking, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policies SIE-1, SD-6, CS9, T-1, T-2 and T-3 and the Council's Sustainable Transport SPD.

Landscaping

The comments received to the application from the Council Arboricultural Officer are contained within the consultee responses section above.

Whilst the Arboricultural Officer raises some concerns to the potential negative impact of the proposal on existing planting on the site, especially during construction, these concerns could be addressed by way of the imposition of suitably worded to conditions to require the provision of protective and the submission, approval and implementation of a landscaping scheme to compensate for any loss.

Irrespective of the above, it is acknowledged that as part of the submission the applicant is proposing to interweave planting within the proposed perimeter fencing.

In the absence of any fundamental objections from the Arboricultual Officer and subject to conditional control, the proposal is considered acceptable with regard to its impact on trees, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policies SIE-1 and SIE-3.

Ecology

In terms of ecological interests, the detailed comments of the Council's Nature Development Officer are contained within the consultee responses section above.

Whilst the site has no nature conservation designations and there are no records of protected species in the site, it is noted that the site contains habitats that could support legally protected species such as bats and nesting birds.

In the absence of objections from the Nature Development Officer, it is considered that the proposal would not result in harm to protected species, biodiversity or the ecological interests of the site, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-3.

Heritage

In assessing the proposal it is acknowledged that the building known as Welkin Mill, which is positioned off Welkin Rd to the north-east of the site, is a non-

designated heritage asset, being a building of local architectural and historic interest.

Given the juxstaposition between the site and Welkin Mill and having regard to the limited scale of the proposed structures and the existence of other larger structures in the immediate locality such as electricity pylons and industrial / commercial premises, it is not considered that the proposed development would have a significantly adverse visual impact on the setting and significance of the mill as a heritage asset.

Overall and in the absence of any fundamental objections from the Council's Conservation / Heritage Officer the proposal is considered to comply with Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-3.

Other Matters

No objections are raised to the application from the Council's Environment Team, therefore the proposal is not considered to be at risk from land contamination, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-3.

In terms of the Council's carbon reduction targets, the Council's Planning Policy (Energy & Sustainability Officer) has assessed the application and for the reasons previously set out in the consultee section is fully supportive of the proposal in terms of the principles of Core Strategy DPD policy SD-3.

With regard to flood risk and drainage, in the absence of any objections from the Environment Agency or the Lead Local Flood Authority, the proposal is considered to comply with the principles of Core Strategy DPD policy SD-6. Whilst the comments received from United Utilities are noted, these relate to potential easement matters which would be required to be resolved with the applicant outside of the planning regime. Notwithstanding this the recommended conditions relating to surface water, foul water and infrastructure protection measures are suggested to be attached to any grant of planning permission.

The objection of a 3rd party relating to details of land ownership is noted. Subsequently the applicant has submitted amended plans to address this matter.

SUMMARY

At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through decision-taking. The NPPF establishes three dimensions to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental, which should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

The layout and design of the proposed development is considered acceptable, in terms of its impact on the visual amenity of the area and the residential amenity of properties. Noting the analysis earlier in this planning report, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of parking and highway safety; heritage assets, land contamination; ecological interests, landscaping, public rights of way, drainage and energy / sustainability.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of the scheme highlighted earlier in this planning report, the proposed development within the Green Belt constitutes inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and in reducing openness conflicts with the purposes of including land in Green Belt.

The current proposal would clearly deliver significant benefits to wider society. In light of this and based on the detailed case put forward in support of the application it is considered that a sufficiently robust case has been presented to demonstrate 'very special circumstances' sufficient to outweigh harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm, in accordance with the NPPF.

In view of the above, when considering the planning merits of the proposal against the requirements of the NPPF and development plan policies, the proposal is considered to represent sustainable development. On this basis, in accordance with the requirements of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant.