

ITEM

Application Reference	DC/087922
Location:	Whitebottom Farm Etherow Country Park Compstall Stockport SK6 5JQ
PROPOSAL:	Installation of a ground mounted solar PV system within field to North of property.
Type Of Application:	Full Application
Registration Date:	16/02/2023
Expiry Date:	13/04/2023
Case Officer:	Mark Burgess
Applicant:	Whitebottom Farm Estates
Agent:	Project Better Energy

DELEGATION/COMMITTEE STATUS

Committee Item. Should Marple Area Committee be minded to agree the Officer recommendation to grant, the application shall be referred to the Planning and Highway Regulation Committee for determination as a Departure from the Development Plan.

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Full planning permission is sought for the installation of a ground mounted solar PV system within a field to the North of Whitebottom Farm, Etherow Country Park, Compstall.

The proposed solar PV system would be sited within a field used for grazing, outside the residential curtilage of the property. The proposed solar PV system would be arranged in two rows of 25 no. solar panels, each row would have a width of 1.724 metres, a length of 28.6 metres and a height above ground level of 1.32 metres. The proposed solar panels would face South to maximise solar energy generation and is required to help to reduce the energy consumption at the site.

The application is accompanied by the following supporting documents :-

- Design and Access/Planning Statement.
- Technical Specification.
- Preliminary Ecological Assessment.

The plans and drawings submitted with the application are appended to the report.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The application site comprises an existing field, located to the North of and within the ownership of Whitebottom Farm, Etherow Country Park, Compstall.

Further fields adjoin the site to the site to the North, East and South. To the West of the site are a cluster of residential properties at 'Toad Hall', 'Badgers Sett' and 'Foxes Lair'.

Access to the site is provided through Etherow Country Park to the South West.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications and appeals to be determined in accordance with the Statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Statutory Development Plan for Stockport comprises :-

- Policies set out in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review (saved UDP) adopted on the 31st May 2006 which have been saved by direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; and
- Policies set out in the Stockport Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Core Strategy DPD) adopted on the 17th March 2011.

The application site is allocated within the Green Belt, as defined on the UDP Proposals Map and is located within the Etherow Parklands Landscape Character Area. The following policies are therefore relevant in consideration of the application :-

Saved UPD policies

- LCR1.1 : LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS
- LCR1.1A : THE URBAN FRINGE INCLUDING THE RIVER VALLEYS
- NE1.1 : SITES OF SPECIAL NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE
- EP1.9 : SAFEGUARDING OF AERODROMES AND AIR NAVIGATION FACILITIES
- GBA1.1 : EXTENT OF GREEN BELT
- GBA1.2 : CONTROL OF DEVELOPMENT IN GREEN BELT

Core Strategy DPD policies

- CS1 : OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE
- SD-1 : CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

- SD-3 : DELIVERING THE ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES PLAN – NEW DEVELOPMENT
- SD-5 : COMMUNITY OWNED ENERGY
- CS8 : SAFEGUARDING AND IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT
- SIE-1 : QUALITY PLACES
- SIE-3 : PROTECTING, SAFEGUARDING AND ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT
- SIE-5 : AVIATION FACILITIES, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND OTHER BROADCAST INFRASTRUCTURE
- CS9 : TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT
- T-1 : TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT
- T-2 : PARKING IN DEVELOPMENTS
- T-3 : SAFETY AND CAPACITY ON THE HIGHWAY NETWORK

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF, initially published in March 2012 and subsequently revised and published in September 2023 by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

In respect of decision-taking, the revised NPPF constitutes a ‘material consideration’.

Paragraph 1 states *‘The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these should be applied’*.

Paragraph 2 states *‘Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise’*.

Paragraph 7 states *‘The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development’*.

Paragraph 8 states *‘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’*

Paragraph 11 states *‘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'.

Paragraph 12 states '*.....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'.*

Paragraph 38 states '*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'.*

Paragraph 47 states '*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'.*

Paragraph 219 states '*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)'.*

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

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

- DC072663 : Change of use of barns and hardstanding to a mixed use comprising agricultural use and for events : Pending Consideration.
- DC009865 : Conversion of existing redundant stable and hay barn to form 1 no. dwelling. Conversion of conjoined barns to form 2 dwellings with

associated underpinning and parking provisions (Listed Building Consent) :
Granted – 25/03/2003.

- DC009863 : Conversion of existing stable and hay barn to form 1 no. dwelling. Conversion of conjoined barns to form 2 dwellings and associated parking provisions (Full Planning Permission) : Granted – 25/03/2003.
- J.66195 : Change of use to private burial ground (up to four bodies) : Granted – 19/12/1996.
- J.65837 : Agricultural land since 1690 to private burial ground (Lawful Development Certificate) : Refused – 06/11/1996.
- J.42561 : Two storey side extension : Granted – 12/07/1988.

NEIGHBOUR'S VIEWS

The owners/occupiers of surrounding properties were notified in writing of the application and the application was advertised by way of display of notices on site and in the press.

No letters of representation have been received to the application.

CONSULTEE RESPONSES

Conservation Officer

Whitebottom Farm is a Grade II listed building. The farmstead lies outside the boundary of the Compstall Conservation Area.

Given the nature and siting of the proposed solar installation it is considered that it will have no detrimental impact upon the setting of the listed building or conservation area and therefore I have no objections to approval of the application as submitted from a heritage conservation perspective.

Highway Engineer

This application seeks permission to install a ground mounted solar PV system on agricultural land at Whitebottom Farm, Compstall. The system will not affect site access, nor parking or turning facilities within the site and, once installed, I understand that they will require little maintenance and should therefore should generate few vehicle movements. Installation of the system will, however, generate vehicle movements. Access to the site is via an unadopted access drive which runs through Etherow Country Park. This is fairly narrow with few passing places, is unsuitable for large vehicles, has no footways and is well used by pedestrians and cyclists. As such, the drive is not suitable for large vehicles and large numbers of vehicle movements could affect the safety of existing users of the drive. As such, I consider that construction activities need to be managed to minimise the impact on the drive. Consequently, I would recommend that any approval granted is subject to a condition

which requires the production, approval and implementation of a construction method statement.

- Recommendation: No objection, subject to a condition.

No development shall take place until a method statement detailing how the solar PV system will be constructed has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The method statement shall include details on how the system and materials will be transported to the site, including details on the size and number of vehicles that be involved and days and times that materials will be transported. Installation of the system shall be carried out in complete accordance with the approved method statement.

Reason: To ensure that the approved development is constructed in a safe way and in a manner that will minimise disruption during construction, in accordance with Policy T-3 'Safety and Capacity on the Highway Network' of the Stockport Core Strategy DPD. The details are required prior to the commencement of any development as details of how the development is to be constructed need to be approved prior to the commencement of construction activities.

Informative

A condition of this planning consent requires the submission of a Construction Method Statement. In order to ensure that the statement includes all the required information the applicant / developer is advised to use the Council's template Construction Method Statement. This can be obtained from the 'Highways and Transport Advice' section within the planning pages of the Council's web-site (www.stockport.gov.uk).

Arboricultural Officer

The proposed development site is located within the footprint and gardens of the site predominantly on the existing informal grounds and hard standing areas. The plot is comprised largely of hardstanding, informal grounds and associated infrastructure.

The proposed development is not within or affected by a conservation Area.

There are legally protected trees within this site or affected by this development (UDC of Marple No.2).

The proposed development footprint is indicated at this time within the vicinity of the existing site and it is assumed the proposed new developments will potentially not impact on the trees and hedges within the site or neighbouring site even though the development site is located in proximity of several trees on site or adjacent to the site.

A full tree survey has not been submitted as part of this planning application to show the condition and amenity levels of the existing neighbouring trees and where applicable which trees will have a potential impact on the proposed development, however due to the nature of mostly working outside of root zones and the applicant

stating no tree impact on the application I am happy to proceed on my views and judgement alone.

The layout plan does however need to further consider the opportunity for tree planting throughout the site to increase the amenity levels of the site with planting of semi- mature trees or fruit trees.

A detailed landscaping scheme will need to be considered/drawn up as part of any planning application submitted which clearly shows enhancements of the site and surrounding environment to improve the local biodiversity and amenity of the area. In principle the main works and design will not have a negative impact on the trees on site, in neighbouring properties on all the boundaries.

In its current format it could be considered favourably with additional consideration for the site enhancement and considered favourably with the submission of full details as requested above justifying any close proximity to trees of the site and some consideration given to the existing trees in or around the site when planning material storage, as well as improved landscaping design to include a detailed landscaping scheme that includes a greater number of new trees to improve the amenity and aesthetics of the site for users and making sure a percentage of these are native large species and fruit trees at every opportunity.

The following conditions would be relevant to any planning application relating to the site :-

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 Officer

Ecology Surveys

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) report has been produced by Envance (July 2023). A UK Habitats survey was undertaken and identified modified grassland within the site with further modified grassland fields adjacent to it. Ecological receptors identified were amphibians (and GCN), badger and brown hare. However, it was concluded that potential impacts are not expected to be significant due to the proposed development causing only temporary disturbance to terrestrial habitats. Reasonable avoidance measures (RAMS) pertaining to amphibians are deemed to be enough to mitigate any negative impacts.

Nature Conservation Designations

The site has no nature conservation designations, legal or otherwise as listed in Stockport's current Local Plan (e.g. Site of Biological Importance, Local Nature Reserve, Green Chain). However, it is within 80m of Etherow Country Park LNR and Compstall Nature Reserve SSSI. The application area is within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zone (IRZ), however it is not within a zone applicable to this type of development.

Legally Protected Species

There are GCN data records, suitable habitat and several ponds within 250m of the development site, the nearest pond being within 50m. GCN are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. The latter implements the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora. Bats are included in Schedule 2 of the Regulations as 'European Protected Species of animals' (EPS). Under the Regulations it is an offence to :-

- 1) Deliberately capture or kill a wild EPS
- 2) Deliberately disturb a wild EPS in such a way that significantly affects:
 - a) the ability of a significant group to survive, breed, rear or nurture young.
 - b) the local distribution of that species.
- 3) Damage or destroy a breeding place or resting site of such an animal

Site habitats have been assessed to be sup-optimal to support GCN, and there is a low potential risk of encountering individual GCN within the Site. However, it is recommended as a precautionary measure that reasonable avoidance measures

(RAMs) are implemented specifically pertaining to GCN. These measures are detailed within the Envance PEA report.

There are numerous records of badger in the wider area. No evidence of badger was identified on the site during the surveys. However, badger are a highly mobile species and the report notes that the implementation of measures under the RAMs for amphibians will also cover other wildlife such as badger which may pass through the site. In addition to this I would recommend a pre-commencement survey is undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist given the sites close proximity to high quality habitat for both foraging and sett building.

The open field and field margin habitat has potential to support ground-nesting breeding birds. The nests of all wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended). The Envance report notes that the fields are grazed, modified grassland which are species poor and do not provide suitable cover for nesting birds. No mention of hedgerows has been made within the report, although the development is described as being entirely within the field itself and it is inferred that there will be no impacts on the hedgerows or field margins themselves.

Planning Policy Framework

- Core Strategy DPD policy CS8 ‘Safeguarding and Improving the Environment’ (Green Infrastructure : 3.286; Strategic and Local Open Space : 3.290; Biodiversity and Nature Conservation : 3.296).
- Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-3 ‘Protecting, Safeguarding and Enhancing the Environment’ (Protecting the Natural Environment : 3.345, 3.346, 3.364, 3.369).
- Saved UDP policy NE1.1 ‘Sites of Special Nature Conservation Importance’.

Recommendations

There is considered to be sufficient ecological information available to inform determination of the application. The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal report (Envance 2023) has been undertaken to a suitable standard and level of detail and the proposed works are considered to be of low risk.

Notwithstanding the above the following measures will need to be considered;

All retained trees and hedgerows should be adequately protected from potential adverse impacts in accordance with British Standards and following advice from the Council’s Arboriculture Officer.

- *Precautionary measures*

Reasonable avoidance measures (RAMs) should be implemented specifically pertaining to badger, amphibians including GCN. The following reasonable

avoidance measures should be implemented and secured by condition. Measures are detailed within the Envance PEA report but should include :-

- Vegetation removal to be carried out sensitively and in a phased manner.
 - Sward height should be cut as low as possible prior to installation of the ground mounted solar panels on the Site, which will reduce the chance of amphibians utilising the modified grassland during installation.
 - Directly prior to installation, a suitably licensed ecological clerk of works should complete a hand search of the Site to remove any amphibians present.
 - This ecological clerk of works can also supervise the installation to ensure that no amphibians are harmed.
 - If any excavations are required to take place as part of the proposed development this should also be supervised, and any exposed excavations should be checked and covered at the end of each shift to avoid amphibians becoming trapped.
- Suitable badger habitat is present adjacent to the application area. The proposals do not indicate that there is likely to be any significant excavation required to install the solar panels. However, should excavations be required, to protect badgers which may pass through the site and prevent potential disturbance during works,
 - a) sloping ramps should be installed within excavations for badgers to escape via, which may be achieved by edge profiling of trenches/excavations or by using planks placed into them at the end of each working day; and
 - b) open pipework greater than 150 mm outside diameter should be blanked off at the end of each working day.
- *Biodiversity Enhancements*

The PEA report does not detail any biodiversity enhancements which is disappointing. However, biodiversity enhancements are expected as part of developments in line with local (paragraph 3.345 of the LDF) and national planning policy (NPPF) and can be secured by condition.

- Tree planting should be maximised within the site and any landscape planting should comprise wildlife-friendly (preferably locally native species) and be selected to provide a nectar/berry resource across the seasons.
- It is noted that the intention is to continue using the field for grazing. Sectioning off area around the solar panels and leaving them ungrazed can benefit a variety of wildlife.
- Furthermore, leaving ungrazed buffer strips around the field margins would enhance for wildlife by providing seeds and insects for foraging birds.

Enhancement measures should be detailed on a Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancements Plan and submitted to the LPA for review.

- *Ecology shelf-life*

Ecological conditions can change over time. In the event that works have not commenced within two years of the detailed surveys above it is advised that update survey work is undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist. This is to ensure that the ecological impact assessment and protection measures are based on sufficiently up to date survey data and so that any required amendments to proposed mitigation can be identified and incorporated into the scheme. This can be secured by condition.

Manchester Airport

The Safeguarding Authority for Manchester Airport has assessed this proposal and its potential to conflict aerodrome Safeguarding criteria. We have no objection to this development.

Informatives

The applicant's attention is drawn to the procedures for crane and tall equipment notifications, please see: <https://www.caa.co.uk/Commercial-industry/Airspace/Event-and-obstacle-notification/Cranenotification/>

It is important that any conditions or advice in this response are applied to a planning approval. Where a Planning Authority proposes to grant permission against the advice of Manchester Airport, or not attach conditions which Manchester Airport has advised, it shall notify Manchester Airport, and the Civil Aviation Authority as specified in the Town & Country Planning (Safeguarded Aerodromes, Technical Sites and Military Explosive Storage Areas) Direction 2002.

ANALYSIS

Policy Principle – Green Belt

The application site is allocated within the Green Belt, as defined on the UDP Proposals Map. As such, assessment of the proposal against the provisions of saved UDP policy GBA1.2 and the NPPF is required.

Saved UDP policy GBA1.2 sets out, among other things that *'Forms of development other than new buildings, including changes in use of land, will not be permitted unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt'*.

Whilst saved UDP policy GBA1.2 is considered to be up to date with the NPPF in broad terms, it is not entirely consistent with this national policy on Green Belt set out within Chapter 13 of the NPPF, which is considered to provide a more suitable framework for the determination of this application.

Within Chapter 13, Paragraph 147 of the NPPF states that *'Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances'*.

Paragraph 148 of the NPPF then sets out that *'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 resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations'*.

Paragraph 151 of the NPPF states that *'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'*.

In assessment of the proposal against the requirements of saved UDP policy GBA1.2 and the NPPF, it is inevitable that the footprint and height above ground level of the proposed solar PV system would undoubtedly have a certain degree of impact on the openness of the Green Belt, in both spatial and visual terms. On this basis, the proposal is considered to comprise inappropriate development within the Green Belt. As such, in accordance with the requirements of Paragraphs 148 and 151 of the NPPF, there is a requirement for the applicant to demonstrate that 'Very Special Circumstances' exist to justify that any potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The applicants case for 'Very Special Circumstances' contained within the submitted supporting information has been assessed by Officers and the following is noted :-

- The UK has set into law a target to bring all its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. In March 2019, Stockport Council declared a climate emergency and agreed that Stockport should become carbon neutral by 2038, in advance of the UK 2050 target. The Stockport Climate Action Now (CAN) strategy was developed to underpin this agreement and was approved by the council in October 2020. The strategy sets out to ensure that Stockport achieves carbon neutrality by 2038, in order to support global efforts to prevent global warming going above 1.5°C. The Environmental Law Foundation has suggested that climate emergency declarations should be regarded as material considerations in the determination of planning matters.
- Stockport's local approach reflects the Greater Manchester Five Year Environment Plan, which includes a commitment to be carbon neutral by 2038. Priorities 1 and 3 of this plan specifically relate to this proposed development and seeks to increase local renewable energy generation and increase the diversity and flexibility of our electricity supply.

- Paragraph 8 of the NPPF places mitigating/adapting to climate change as an overarching objective for the planning system, to ensure sustainable development.
- Paragraph 158 of the NPPF states that *‘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) acceptable. 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’.*
- Objective 1 of the Core Strategy relates to climate change and is supported by a number of policies that seek to deliver this primary objective. Core Strategy DPD policy SD-5 states that *‘The Council recognises the important role that community owned energy generation including wind and hydro energy will play in reducing CO2 emissions and increasing installed low carbon and renewable energy capacity. While the Council will consider favourably all applications for standalone or ‘onsite’ low carbon and renewable energy generation, the Energy Opportunities Plan identifies a number of principal opportunities’.*
- Information submitted in support of the planning application confirms that the capacity of the proposed solar PV system would be 22.25KW which would meet around 40% of the sites electricity needs. Alternative renewable energy installations, including roof mounted solar PV, air source heat pumps and wind turbines have been discounted on the grounds of the main farmhouse buildings Listed Building status, visual impact on financial viability.
- The relatively small volumetric quantum of development compared to the existing wider site would result in a relatively minor impact on the Green Belt in spatial terms. The lack of public access to the site and publicly accessible vantage points would result in a very limited impact on the Green Belt in visual terms.

In view of the above, it is acknowledged that the proposed renewable energy project comprises inappropriate development within the Green Belt, as defined by Paragraph 151 of the NPPF and would be contrary to saved UDP policy GBA1.2. However, it is considered that ‘Very Special Circumstances’ exist in the form of the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources, reduction on the reliance on fossil fuels to generate domestic energy and associated CO2 reductions and the positive contribution the proposal would make to help deliver the national and local objectives and policies in respect of

climate change. Coupled with the limited resulting impact the proposal would have on the openness of the Green Belt from a spatial and visual perspective, the requirement of Paragraphs 148 and 151 of the NPPF are considered to be met and the proposal is considered to be acceptable within the Green Belt in this particular case on the grounds of 'Very Special Circumstances'.

Impact on Heritage Assets, Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Whitebottom Farm is a Grade II Listed Building. Given the nature and siting of the proposed solar PV system, no objections are raised by the Council Conservation Officer who considers that the proposal would have no detrimental impact on the setting of the Listed Building. On this basis, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on heritage assets, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-3.

The site is located within the Etherow Parklands Landscape Character Area. Saved UDP policy LCR1.1 requires that development within such areas is sensitively sited, designed and accommodated without adverse effects on the landscape quality of the particular character area. In addition, saved UDP policy LCR1.1a seeks to protect, conserve and improve the landscape quality and natural history of the locality and encourage the development of a variety of attractive landscapes.

Given the sensitive siting of the proposed solar PV system against the backdrop of existing buildings and in view of the modest size and scale of the proposed development, it is considered that the proposal could be accommodated on the site and assimilated within the wider landscape setting without causing undue harm to the visual amenity of the area or the quality of the Etherow Parklands Landscape Character Area. On this basis, the proposal complies with saved UDP policies LCR1.1 and LCR1.1A and Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-1.

Impact on Residential Amenity

Whilst it is acknowledged that the site is located in proximity to a cluster of residential properties comprising 'Toad Hall', 'Badgers Sett' and 'Foxes Lair', the siting, scale, height and nature of the proposed solar PV system would be such that it could be accommodated on the site without causing harm to the residential amenity of surrounding properties, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policies CS8, SIE-1 and SIE-3.

Highways Considerations

The detailed comments received to the application from the Council Highway Engineer are contained within the Consultee Responses section above.

In raising no objections to the proposed development, the Highway Engineer notes that the proposal would not affect site access, parking or turning facilities within the site and, once installed, would require little maintenance and should therefore generate few vehicle movements.

Installation of the proposed development would generate vehicle movements and the Highway Engineer notes that access to the site is via an unadopted access through Etherow Country Park. The access is narrow with few passing places, has no footways, is not suitable for large vehicles and large numbers of vehicle movements could affect the safety of existing users. As such, a condition is recommended by the Highway Engineer to require the submission, approval and implementation of a Method Statement to ensure that construction activities are appropriately managed to minimise impacts on the access.

In view of the above, in the absence of objections from the Highway Engineer and subject to conditional control, the proposal is considered acceptable from a traffic generation, parking and highway safety perspective, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policies SIE-1, CS9, T-1, T-2 and T-3.

Impact on Trees

The detailed comments received to the application from the Council Arboricultural Officer are contained within the Consultee Responses section above.

Whilst the Arboricultural Officer notes that trees on the wider side are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (UDC of Marple), such protected trees are well separated from the proposed solar PV system.

Although a Tree Survey has not been submitted in support of the application, the Arboricultural Officer considers that the proposed development would not have a negative impact upon existing trees and hedges within the site. In order to prevent adverse impacts on existing trees during installation, conditions are recommended to ensure that no existing tree is worked to and to require the provision of tree protection measures to existing trees during installation. A further condition is recommended to require the provision of additional planting to enhance the site from a visual and ecological perspective.

In view of the above, in the absence of objections from the Arboricultural Officer and subject to conditional control, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on trees, in accordance with Core Strategy DPD policies CS8, SIE-1 and SIE-3.

Impact on Protected Species and Ecology

A Preliminary Ecological Assessment has been submitted in support of the application. The detailed comments received to the application from the Council Nature Development Officer are contained within the Consultee Responses section above. The Nature Development Officer considers that sufficient ecological information has been submitted in order to inform determination of the application.

The Nature Development Officer notes that the site has no nature designations, legal or otherwise. However, the site is located within 80 metres of Etherow Country Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Compstall Nature Reserve Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is within a SSSI Impact Risk Zone.

There are data records, suitable habitat and ponds in proximity to the site which could support Great Crested Newts (GCN), a protected species. However, the Nature Development Officer considers that there is a low potential risk of encountering individual GCN within the site and subject to the imposition of a condition to require the implementation of Reasonable Avoidance Measures during installation, any potential impacts on GCN could be appropriately mitigated.

Badgers and their setts are legally protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Badger Survey work has been submitted in support of the application, the contents of which are confidential and not for public viewing. Members are advised that the submitted Surveys have been assessed by the Nature Development Officer, who considers that subject to the submission of pre-commencement surveys and the imposition of a condition to require the implementation of Reasonable Avoidance Measures during installation, potential impacts to any badgers that may be present on the site could be appropriately mitigated.

Further conditions are recommended by the Nature Development Officer to secure appropriate biodiversity enhancements and to require the submission of update Ecological Surveys should the development not be implemented within two years of the submitted Surveys.

In view of the above, on the basis of the submitted information, in the absence of objections from the Nature Development Officer and subject to conditional control, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on protected species, biodiversity and the ecological interest of the site, in accordance with saved UDP policy NE1.1 and Core Strategy DPD policies CS8 and SIE-3.

Airport Safeguarding

No objections are raised to the proposal from Manchester Airport. On this basis, the proposal is considered acceptable from an aerodrome safeguarding perspective, in accordance with saved UDP policy EP1.9 and Core Strategy DPD policy SIE-5.

SUMMARY

At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 of the NPPF establishes three dimensions to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental and indicates that these should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

Full planning permission is sought for the installation of a ground mounted solar PV system within a field to the North of Whitebottom Farm, Etherow Country Park, Compstall.

The site is located within the Etherow Parklands Landscape Character Area. It is considered that the siting, scale and size of the proposed solar PV system would be such that it could be accommodated on the site and assimilated within the wider landscape setting without causing undue harm to the visual amenity of the area or the quality of the Etherow Parkland Landscape Character Area. In the absence of

objections from the Conservation Officer, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on the setting of the adjacent Grade II Listed Whitebottom Farm.

In the absence of objections from relevant consultees and subject to conditional control, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on residential amenity; highway safety; impact on trees, protected species and ecology; and aerodrome safeguarding.

The site is located within the Green Belt and it is acknowledged that the proposed renewable energy project comprises inappropriate development within the Green Belt, as defined by Paragraph 151 of the NPPF and would be contrary to saved UDP policy GBA1.2. However, it is considered that 'Very Special Circumstances' exist in the form of the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources, reduction on the reliance on fossil fuels to generate domestic energy and associated CO2 reductions and the positive contribution the proposal would make to help deliver the national and local objectives and policies in respect of climate change. As such, the requirements of Paragraphs 148 and 151 of the NPPF are considered to be met and the proposal is considered to be justified within the Green Belt in this particular case as a departure from the Development Plan and the NPPF on the grounds of 'Very Special Circumstances'.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant.

Should Marple Area Committee be minded to agree the recommendation to grant planning permission, the application should be referred to the Planning and Highways Regulation Committee for determination as a Departure from the Development Plan.

MARPLE AREA COMMITTEE (18TH OCTOBER 2023)

The webcast of the meeting can be viewed using the following link - https://stockport.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/812277/start_time/3976000

The Planning Officer introduced the application and highlighted the pertinent issues of the proposal.

Members sought clarification from the Planning Officer as to the relationship of the proposed development to existing trees and recommended conditions in respect of trees protection and planting, which was provided by the Planning Officer.

There were no requests to speak in objection to the application.

The applicant spoke in support of the application. It was noted that all matters had been covered within the report. The siting of the proposed development was to ensure that its impact was minimised and so that was closest to the main supply, in order to cause least disturbance.

Members debated the proposal. The location of the site within the Green Belt was noted, however the environmental benefits of the proposal were acknowledged. It was also noted that no neighbour or consultee objections had been raised.

Following the debate, it was proposed, seconded and resolved to refer the application to the Planning and Highways Regulation Committee with a recommendation to grant.