

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Planning Committee held on Wednesday, 10 March 2021 at 2.00 pm in Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors N A Dugmore, I T W Fletcher, J E Lavery, J Loveridge (as substitute for J Jones), R Mehta, P J Scott, C F Smith (Chair), C R Turley (Vice-Chair) and D R W White (as substitute for K Middleton)

In Attendance: V Hulme (Development Management Service Delivery Manager), A Gittins (Area Team Planning Manager – West), K Denmark (Principal Planning Officer), I Ross (Legal Advisor), K Robinson (Democratic Services Officer) and J Clarke (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillors J Jones and K Middleton

PC143 Declarations of Interest

None.

PC144 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 10 February 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

PC145 Deferred/Withdrawn Applications

None.

PC146 Site Visits

None.

PC147 Planning Applications for Determination

Members had received a schedule of planning applications to be determined by the Committee and fully considered each report and the supplementary information tabled at the meeting regarding the planning application TWC/2020/0851.

PC148 TWC/2020/0851 - Land north of Roden Lane Farm, Roden Lane, Roden, Telford

This application was for the installation of a renewable energy scheme comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with transformer stations, access, internal access track, landscaping, security fencing, security measures, access gate, and ancillary infrastructure on land north of Roden Lane Farm, Roden Lane, Roden, Telford, Shropshire.

This application was before Committee at the request of Councillor S Bentley.

An update and additional information from the speakers had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting.

The Planning Officer addressed the Committee and confirmed that this application was located on the north of the B5062 and covered an area of 133 hectares. It was envisaged that it would develop 49.9MW of renewable energy for a period of 40 years. Further representations had been received prior to the meeting and an update report circulated to Members.

Councillor R Wickson spoke against the application on behalf of Ercall Magna Parish Council. Although the Parish Council were in support of green energy, they raised concerns regarding this application due to the size of the site, loss of agricultural land, the disposal of waste from the chicken farm, the accumulative impact of planning applications on the area, not a recognised power company, purely for profit application, change of ownership, the use of wildflowers and sheep grazing and the contamination of the land. It was felt that the application did not comply with Policy ER1 and NE2. Decommissioning and the lack of a financial package on the site was also a concern and they felt that this application was not fit for purpose.

Councillor S Bentley, Ward Councillor, addressed Members that whilst he was not opposed to the solar farm or renewable energy, the needed to be confident that this application met the requirements of the Local Plan and policy ER1. This application was on productive agricultural land situated in a picturesque area. He raised concerns regarding the poultry waste and decommissioning and asked that a financial plan be in place prior to the farm becoming operational. It was requested that a legal agreement be secured at the end of the 40 year life in order to protect the community, the land be cleared of contamination and returned to agricultural land.

Mr P Birne, a member of the public, supported green energy but spoke against the application and raised concerns regarding the cost and legal arrangements for the decommissioning the site and the financial risks, impact on the community, loss of agricultural land if the land became a brownfield site and asked if this application could be deferred in order for the application to be looked at more transparently.

Mr C Cox, Applicant's Agent, spoke in favour of the application and addressed the Committee that the solar farm would help to the Council to become carbon neutral by 2030 and would serve 15,000 homes during its operation lifetime. Funds would be set aside for the decommissioning of the site and the site would be returned to agricultural land with 80% of the materials being recyclable. This was an industry standard solar farm and mitigation measures would be put in place in order to limit the impact on the local area. A consultation had taken place via leaflet, online and one to one meetings with the project board. The site was not in a particularly sensitive area and was on grade 3b agricultural land which was used for crops due to heavy clay. There

were relatively few homes near to the site and the area would be screened. He felt that due to the 53% biodiversity gain that the benefits to the community outweighed the harm.

The Planning Officer informed Members that the land subject to the application was mainly grade 3b agricultural land with some areas of grade 2 and 3a. The grade 2 and 3a land lay in the natural land boundaries and was thin slithers of ground and these could be planted with meadow and not subject to any equipment being erected on it. Solar panels and ancillary equipment would be located through the site which would be fencing and motion sensor CCTV fitted. There had been no objections from statutory consultees. Decommissioning of the site had been addressed in the update report. With regard to Policy ER1 this was supportive of the application as there was no landscape heritage, areas or features and no loss of amenity value and although there was some impact on the landscape this was not considered to be substantial harm. The benefits of the application were the production of electricity for some 15,000 homes and the displacement of 20,000 tonnes of Co2, new hedgerow planting and 53% biodiversity which would benefit health and quality of life. With regard to the manure from the chicken sheds and its environmental impact, consideration had been given to the impact of the solar farm and this, together with conditions regarding the reinstatement of the site had been considered and on balance the site recommended for approval. It was also asked that additional standard wording be added to the recommendation giving authority to finalise conditions and reasons for approval to be delegated to Development Management Service Delivery Manager.

During the debate some Members raised concerns regarding the size of the farm, the area of Roden becoming an urban settlement, upon being restored the land would become a brownfield site, loss of rural characteristics, decommissioning and the financial impact. Other Members felt that it was at the farmer's risk and the cost of decommissioning lay with them. Hedging would be put in place and grazing of the site would take place and this can enhance the biodiversity of a site and the positive benefits to climate change, although it was considered that there needed to be security and natural bunding on the site. Some further concerns were raised regarding the quantities of grade 2 and 3a land and what this would be used for and if stronger conditions regarding decommissioning could be put in place. It was suggested that the energy company may like to offer electricity at a reduced rate to the immediate local community.

The Planning Officer confirmed that there was 0.2 hectares of grade 2 land and 3.62 hectares of non-agricultural grade 3a land with the rest of the land being grade 3b. The grade 2 and grade 3a land would be used as landscaping within the site. A decommissioning strategy and vehicular movements on the site would be submitted and agreed in writing prior to the site becoming operational and the land would be returned to agricultural land once the site had been decommissioned.

The Development Management Service Delivery Manager confirmed that the wording would be appropriately written and there would be controls through legislation with conditions being followed through at the end of the period. Enforcement action could be taken if conditions were broken with the costs going back to the land owners who could be prosecuted.

Upon being put to the vote it was, unanimously:-

RESOLVED - that in respect of planning application TWC/2020/0851 that full planning permission be granted subject to the conditions and informatives set out in the report and update report (with authority to finalise conditions and reasons for approval to be delegated to Development Management Service Delivery Manager).

The meeting ended at 2.56 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday, 7 April 2021