

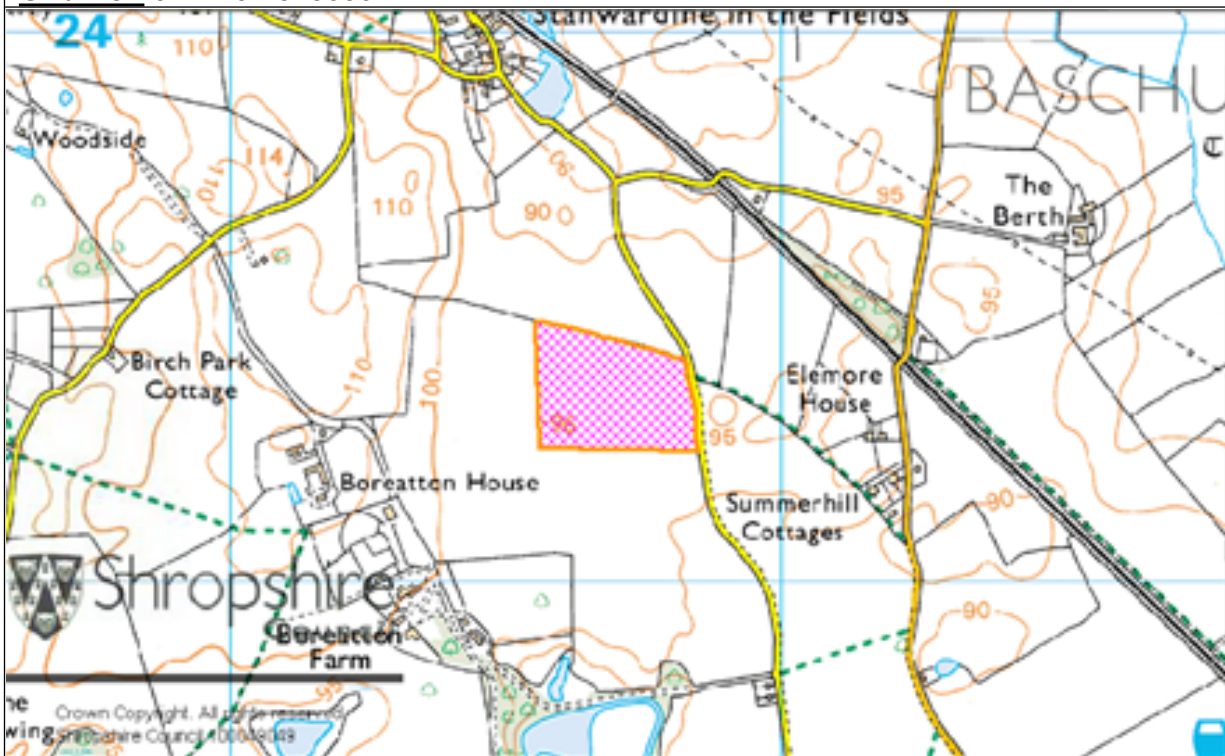
Development Management Report

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Summary of Application

Application Number: 15/01805/FUL	Parish:	Baschurch
Proposal: Installation of a solar park with an output of approximately 3.75 MW on land associated with Moor Farm		
Site Address: Land To The North Of Moor Farm Baschurch Shropshire		
Applicant: Navitas Projects Limited		
Case Officer: Kelvin Hall	email: planningdmc@shropshire.gov.uk	

Grid Ref: 341779 - 323030



Recommendation: Grant planning permission subject to conditions as set out in Appendix 1 and subject to the completion of a Section 106 legal agreement to provide for off-site landscaping and long term maintenance.

REPORT

1.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 1.1 The planning application seeks permission for the construction of a solar farm on agricultural land, comprising arrays of solar panels with associated buildings and infrastructure. The proposal would involve the installation of 15,532 solar panels generating approximately 3.75MW of electricity which would be fed into the national grid network.
- 1.2 The panels would be mounted on fixed aluminium frames arranged in west-east orientated rows. These frames would be secured to the ground through metal piles. The panels would face south, angled at approximately 25 degrees to the horizontal, with the highest edge at a height of 2.33 metres and the lowest at 0.8 metre. There would be a separation of 3 to 4 metres between each row.
- 1.3 Buildings and other infrastructure proposed comprises the following:
- Inverters (4no.): two of these would be positioned at the centre of the site; the other two along the northern boundary; they would measure 9.8 metres x 3 metres x 3.6 metres high;
 - Control building/substation: this would house control panels and the transformer: it would be sited at the north-eastern corner of the site and would be of brick construction with dimensions 3.6 metres x 3.6 metres x 2.4 metres high;
 - DNO substation: this would be accessed by the Distribution Network Operator; it would be sited at the north-eastern corner of the site, of similar construction and dimensions to the control building;
 - Perimeter fencing: wire mesh, 2.4 metres high;
 - 4no. CCTV cameras, installed on 3 metres high wooden poles.
- 1.4 Once the panels have been erected the land is proposed to be grazed by sheep. The application states that the operational life of the panels is 25 years. Existing trees and hedgerows would be retained, and additional landscape planting would be undertaken.
- 1.5 The application is supported by a number of detailed documents, including: Soils and Agricultural Quality report; Assessment of Alternatives report; Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Assessment; Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment; Ecological Appraisal; Flood Risk Assessment; Geophysical Survey Report; Noise Assessment report; Transport Assessment.

2.0 SITE LOCATION/DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The application site occupies the north-eastern corner of an agricultural field which is located approximately 1.1km to the north-west of Baschurch and 430 metres to the south-east of Stanwardine in the Fields. The site is roughly rectangular in shape and covers an area of approximately 6.1 hectares (300 metres x 200

metres). The site itself is relatively flat, and is bounded to the north and east by a hedgerow. Surrounding land is in agricultural use. A public highway runs in a generally north-south direction to the east.

- 2.2 There are scattered residential properties in the vicinity of the site. The nearest of these are: Boreatton Farm, Boreatton Hall and associated cottages (approximately 320 metres to the south-west), properties known as Summerhill Cottage (approximately 325 metres to the south-east), Elemore House (approximately 335 metres to the east), Rose Bungalow (approximately 360 metres to the west), Boreatton House (approximately 370 metres to the south-west) and Smithy Cottage (approximately 405 metres to the west),
- 2.3 Boreatton Hall is a Grade II* Listed Building. The Kitchen Garden Walls, Archways and Attached Cottages north of Boreatton Hall are a Grade II Listed Building.

2.4 Vehicular access to the site would be gained from the public highway to the east.

3.0 **REASON FOR COMMITTEE DETERMINATION OF APPLICATION**

3.1 The views of the Parish Council are contrary to the Officer recommendation, and the Planning Manager in consultation with the Committee Chairman has agreed that the Parish Council has raised material planning issues.

4.0 **COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIONS**

4.1 **Consultee Comments**

4.1.1 **Baschurch Parish Council** Strongly object to the solar farm development application on the following material planning grounds.

Land classification: The site does not come within the Government guidelines as land suitable for solar development. The guidelines state that suitable land for solar development should be brown field sites and poor grade land of grade 3 or more.

Screening and visual impact: It is impossible to totally screen off the area. The site sits below the adjoining properties. It will also be seen from the Cliffe which is a local beauty spot. The new hedge planting would take years to mature effectively resulting in no effective screening for a number of years. It is inappropriate to plant screening hedge on someone else's property. The substation would not blend in with the rural area.

Access and road safety: The road between Baschurch is very narrow; it is used regularly by cyclists, runners, walkers and horse riders also used by coaches carrying students to PGL and farm traffic. Any more heavy traffic will increase the risk of accidents considerably.

Baschurch Parish Council supports the detailed and valid objections sent in by the Action group.

4.1.2 **Ruyton XI Towns Parish Council (adjacent parish)** Given that the planning application will have an impact on Ruyton XI Towns primarily during installation

when there is considerable HGV activity for a fixed period of time; the Parish Council trusts that a sensible traffic plan will be agreed which:

- Avoids school pick up / drop off times;
- Takes into account PGL coach movements;
- Takes into account busy agricultural harvest times.

4.1.3 Historic England Do not wish to comment in detail, but offer the following general observations.

The proposed solar park is situated within the vicinity of a number of listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments which are identified within the Zone of Theoretical Visibility. These include the Grade II* Boreatton Hall (UID 1055962) and The Berth SAM (UID: 1004770).

If the scheme is approved, to minimise the visual intrusion of the proposed development on the setting of The Berth and Boreatton Hall, conditions should be imposed requiring your Council's Historic Environment advisors prior approval of all boundary treatments and structures including security measures.

The Council's Historic Environment advisors advice should be sought regarding undesignated heritage assets which will be affected by the proposed development and there advice implemented in full.

Historic England urges the planning authority to address the above issues, and recommend that the application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.

4.1.4 SC Conservation No objections subject to mitigation being undertaken.

An archaeological and cultural heritage assessment has been submitted with the application and within that designated heritage assets have been identified and an assessment of impact on significance made. This is considered accurate in its conclusions, however, it would appear that whilst undesignated heritage assets are listed in Table 5 as being within 1km no assessment of impact on their significance has been made, other than Boreatton House. It is considered that this appears to be an omission within the document, although on visiting the site it is likely that the conclusions will be similar to the assessment made for the designated assets and therefore this information is not considered to be required for a recommendation to be made, from a historic environment perspective.

Some concern is raised with regard to the impact on the Kitchen Garden Wall etc. at Garden Cottage (Boreatton Farm) but it is considered that as suggested in the landscaping plan the new proposed hedgerow will help mitigate this. Possibly more tree planting could be considered. An extension to the already proposed tree planting in connection with Boreatton House may achieve this, especially if the trees planting are of at least standard or heavy standard size to provide more immediate screening, as developments of this type have the potential to have an adverse impact on the landscape character of the area as well as setting of Heritage Assets. However, landscaping is not something which the Historic Environment Team can advise on other than to suggest how it may be used in mitigation.

The type of panel used should have a low visual impact i.e. matt black with black frames to help avoid glare and glint visual impacts.

The scheme is considered to not have an unacceptable impact on the preservation of the character and significance of the listed buildings in accordance with section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and with mitigation no objection is made.

4.1.5 **Natural England** No response received.

4.1.6 **SC Highways** From a highway perspective the fundamental issue in relation to the development proposal is the construction/installation of the solar panels on the site. Post construction/installation the traffic movements associated with the solar farm are limited.

It is noted that concerns have been raised by operators PGL, who traffic the same access approach road as the proposed solar farm. The concerns relate to potential conflict in traffic movements associated with PGL and the solar farm construction traffic movements. It is considered however that these are issues to be managed and not ones that should prevent the solar farm development taking place.

It is recommended that a condition is imposed on any consent granted to require the submission of a Construction Traffic Management Plan for approval (see condition in Appendix 1).

4.1.7 **SC Drainage** The Surface Water Management Statement states that swales will be constructed to intercept the surface water runoff are acceptable.

4.1.8 **SC Ecologist** Recommends conditions and informatives.

Protected/notable species: There are some protected and notable species recorded that should be conserved through a condition requiring the submission of a Biodiversity Conservation Plan.

4.1.9 **SC Archaeology** The proposed site is located c.800m north of a loose group of cropmark ring ditches within the fields north of the B4397. These features are likely to represent the remains of Early Bronze Age funerary monument, which together comprise a dispersed barrow cemetery of a type characteristic of Shropshire. As a consequence the applicant has submitted a Heritage Assessment and an archaeological Geophysical Survey Report. The latter survey has identified a number of anomalies, the majority of which are interpreted as post-medieval agricultural features. No anomalies of potentially prehistoric date were identified, and the archaeological potential of the site is therefore now deemed to be lower than advised in our previous consultation response.

Given the results of the geophysical survey, and in line with requirements of Paragraph 141 of the NPPF, it is recommended that a programme of archaeological work should be made a condition of any planning permission for the proposed development. This should comprise an archaeological watching brief during the ground works for any access tracks and infrastructure (see condition in

Appendix 1).

4.1.10 **SC Trees** No objections on arboreal grounds. No trees appear to be lost to the scheme which includes additional native hedgerow and new tree planting.

4.1.11 **SC Public Protection** No objections. The proposed layout of this development will have no detrimental impact on closest residential receptors.

4.1.12 **Shropshire Wildlife Trust** No response received.

4.2 Public Comments

4.2.1 The application has been advertised by site notice and in the local press. In addition 30 residential properties in the local area have been individually notified. 30 objections have been received. This includes a statement prepared on behalf of 14 residents. In addition two letters of support has been received, and one letter making general comments.

4.2.2 The grounds for objection are summarised below.

- Use of Grade 2 and Grade 3a agricultural land, contrary to government guidance; insufficient justification for use of BMV land
- Other sites of lower agricultural land quality should be prioritised, even if not owned by the landowner
- Proposal would degrade the best and most versatile agricultural land to low grade sward suitable for minimal sheep grazing at best
- Impact on and proximity to listed buildings and heritage assets, including the Grade II* Boreatton Hall, and The Berth, a scheduled monument
- Impact on archaeological importance of the area
- Major traffic disruption
- Inadequate road infrastructure for size and volume of traffic
- Use of roads which are already busy with coaches to and from PGL
- Use of narrow, single track country lane; few passing places
- Traffic impact during construction works
- Allowing hedges to grow to 2.5-3 metres would limit how much drivers could see other vehicles on the highway
- Unclear as to proposals for wheel cleaning and off loading
- Impact on appearance and landscape quality of area
- Impact on enjoyment of countryside and leisure pursuits such as walking, horse riding and cycling
- Inadequacy of screening for proposal which includes panels, fencing, and associated security lighting and substations
- Potential impact on badgers
- Proximity to wildlife sites eg. Boreatton Moss, and impact on birds, butterflies and insects
- Impact from glare from panels on helicopters from RAF Shawbury
- Contrary to NPPF and Development Plan policies
- Until last year the land was in arable use for corn and other cereals
- Contrary to Ministerial Statement of March 2015
- Panels should be sited on roofs or on brownfield sites
- Insufficient justification in relation to economic benefits to landowner
- Recent appeal decisions are following emphasis of Government of avoiding

- the use of BMV
- Previous appeal decisions should not be used as setting a precedent
- Recent precedent on decision to refuse site at Sheriffhales on agricultural land quality grounds should be maintained
- Local harm outweighs the benefits
- Any tree planting should be on the applicant's land
- Noise impact
- Impact from lighting
- Impacts from increased runoff
- Query why development is necessary given that the Council does not have a renewable energy quota to achieve
- Not clear that there is a real financial need for diversification at the farm
- Applicant's assertion that a site 2km from the connection point is unviable is questioned, given 25 year life of project
- site is not relevant to achieving renewable targets as it is too small to have any county or regional impact
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Shropshire Riding and Carriage Driving Forum [comprising representatives from Bridleway Groups active in Shropshire, Association of British Riding Clubs, BHS representatives, Affiliated BHS Bridleway Groups, Carriage Driving Groups, Parish Path Partnership Groups, and Independent Riding Groups] Objects for the following reasons:

- industrial type development in open countryside
- very few off road routes in the area and horse riders rely on the lane for rides out, and to link to the few off road routes
- heavy construction traffic, which will have to use this narrow lane which has few passing places, will impact on horse rider's safety
- Shropshire Council has a duty of care to all road users
- Contrary to Policy CS17
- Proposal will be very visible, accessed via a narrow country lane used by horse riders that provides a connecting corridor for leisure users to other off road routes, goes against Policy CS17.

Nesscliffe Hills and District Bridleway Association

- Access lane is an important link between the very few off road riding routes in the area
- Large construction vehicles will put horse riders at risk
- Adverse impact on the landscape and on the enjoyment of the area
- Effect on horse riders from reflection from panels
- Inadequacy of new screening

4.2.3 In addition to the above, general comments have been received from PGL Travel plc, summarised as follows:

- PGL Travel plc is a large business situated at Boreatton Park on Stanwardine Lane
- business creates a lot of traffic along the lanes that this proposal sits against
- concern over lack of consultation with PGL and lack of risk assessment on the current and proposed level of traffic
- on average PGL will have over sixty coaches coming in and out of the centre

each week, and over a hundred staff with vehicles that again will come in and out of the centre each day

4.2.4 The grounds for support are summarised below:

- excellent diversification opportunity
- will help the UK meet renewable energy targets
- concerns about traffic movements are not a sensible reason for declining this application - any development will have a short term traffic impact, but with careful management this should not be a problem to local communities
- farming has to be allowed to modernise and take up the challenge of providing food and power to the ever growing population
- wheat, potatoes, milk, beef and lamb are in surplus; renewable energy is one of the best ways farmers can produce something the country needs
- will protect us from climate change
- better than a golf course or horses which are a waste of land
- traffic will be all over in 2 months then 25 years of peace and quiet

5.0 THE MAIN ISSUES

- Principle of development
- Community consultation
- Siting, scale and design and impact on landscape character
- Site selection and agricultural land quality considerations
- Local amenity considerations
- Historic environment considerations
- Ecological considerations
- Highways considerations
- Flood risk and drainage considerations

6.0 OFFICER APPRAISAL

6.1 Principle of development

6.1.1 Applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan policies relevant to the current proposal are discussed below. In addition to these, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies and this is a material consideration which should be taken into account in the determination of this application. Further national policy guidance is provided by National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).

6.1.2 Renewable energy: The NPPF sets out core land-use planning principles, and one of these is to support the transition to a low carbon future. This includes encouraging the use of renewable resources. The current proposal is in line with this. The NPPF advises local planning authorities to recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources (para. 97). It states that:

- applicants do not need to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy;
- it should be recognised that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gases;
- applications for renewable energy should be approved if its impacts are (or

can be made) acceptable.

- 6.1.3 The Shropshire Core Strategy provides similar support by stating that the generation of energy from renewable sources should be promoted (Strategic Objective 9), and that renewable energy generation is improved where possible (Policy CS6). Core Strategy Policy CS8 positively encourages infrastructure, where this has no significant adverse impact on recognised environmental assets, that mitigates and adapts to climate change, including decentralised, low carbon and renewable energy generation, and working with network providers to ensure provision of necessary energy distribution networks.
- 6.1.4 Planning Practice Guidance on Renewable and low carbon energy sets out the particular planning considerations that apply to large scale ground-mounted solar farm proposals (see Section 10.2 below). The Guidance does not define 'large scale' nevertheless it is considered that its contents can be applied to the current proposal. It states that increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses.
- 6.1.5 The proposed solar farm would be capable of generating 3.75MW of renewable energy. This would be enough electricity to power 1,140 average sized homes per year, and result in the reduction of more than 1,900 tonnes of carbon per year. The proposal would provide significant environmental benefits in terms of the production of renewable energy. As such the principle of the proposal is in line with planning policies and national guidance.
- 6.1.6 Rural diversification: Core Strategy policy CS13 provides support for rural enterprise and diversification of the economy. This is in line with the NPPF which seeks to support a prosperous rural economy by stating that local plans should promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses (para. 28).
- 6.1.7 The application states that the proposed solar farm represents an important diversification opportunity for ongoing agricultural operations at Moor Farm. It states that the scheme would stabilise profitability, provide insurance against weather and price volatility, and facilitate ongoing investment.
- 6.1.8 Officers accept that the proposal would allow for agricultural activities to take place alongside the generation of renewable electricity, thereby increasing the profitability of the land. In principle it is accepted that there would be direct benefits to the existing agricultural business at Moor Farm as a diversification scheme which allows for the continuation of farming on the land through sheep grazing, in line with Policy CS13.
- 6.2 **Community consultation**
- 6.2.1 The application is accompanied by a Statement of Community Involvement which summarises the pre-application engagement and consultation that the applicant undertook with the local community and stakeholders. Formal pre-application advice was received from Shropshire Council, following a site visit. This resulted in some amendments being made to the design of the scheme, in particular in relation

to access, tree protection and the location of the substation.

6.2.2 The applicant's agent undertook a public consultation exercise, held at Baschurch Village Hall. The applicant's agent also attended a Parish Council meeting to present the plans to councillors.

6.3 **Site selection and agricultural land quality considerations**

6.3.1 Development in the countryside: Core Strategy Policy CS5 seeks to control new development in the countryside. It states that development on appropriate sites which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character will be permitted where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic and community benefits, particularly where they relate to types including:

- small-scale new economic development diversifying the rural economy, including farm diversification schemes;
- required community uses and infrastructure which cannot be accommodated within settlements.

6.3.2 The Core Strategy does advise that larger scale agricultural related development can have significant impacts and will not be appropriate in all rural locations. However the proposed development would provide a level of renewable energy infrastructure which could not be accommodated within settlements, and represent a farm diversification scheme. As such it is not considered that, in principle, this type of proposal is restricted by Policy CS5.

6.3.3 Agricultural land quality: The NPPF states that the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land should be taken into account in determining planning applications. It states that where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, poorer quality land should be sought in preference to that of a higher quality (para. 112). In relation to solar farms, Planning Practice Guidance advises that local planning authorities should encourage the effective use of land by focussing these developments on previously developed and non agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value (para. 013).

6.3.4 The objection raised by the Parish Council that the proposal is contrary to Government guidelines that state that solar development should be on brownfield sites and poor grade land of Grade 3 is noted, however this is not accurate. Planning Practice Guidance advises that, in considering solar farm proposals located on greenfield sites, local planning authorities should consider whether:

- the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and
- the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.

6.3.5 The Guidance also makes reference to a Ministerial Speech made in April 2013 and a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) made in March 2015. In relation to the former, this stated that where solar farms are not on brownfield land, the industry should be looking at sites on low grade agricultural land where grazing can take place in parallel with generation. In relation to the WMS this states that meeting our energy goals should not be used to justify the unnecessary use of high quality

agricultural land. It states that any proposal for a solar farm involving BMV agricultural land needs to be justified by the most compelling evidence.

- 6.3.6 The submitted Soils and Agricultural Quality report is based upon a series of soil samples that were taken of the site, at a density of one per hectare. The report confirms that 2.6 hectares of the site (43%) is Grade 2 (very good quality), and 3.5 hectares (57%) is Grade 3a (good quality). Best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land is that classed as Grade 1, Grade 2 or Grade 3a. As such all of the site is BMV agricultural land.
- 6.3.7 Impact on BMV land: Whilst the proposed development is sited on land classed as BMV, Officers consider that it is relevant to note that the proposed development would not result in the loss of BMV, as it is proposed that the land would be grazed by sheep once the panels have been installed. The existing agricultural use of the land would therefore not change, and the land would be put to a dual use of renewable energy generation and grazing. The impact of the proposal on agricultural land would be limited to the change from arable to grazing land for the temporary period, and there is no expectation that quality of the land would be affected.
- 6.3.8 Size of site: Another relevant consideration to note is the limited scale of the site. The proposal would affect 6.1 hectares of BMV agricultural land. There is no specific guidance as to whether this amount of land can be considered to be significant. Nevertheless it is noted that Natural England, the Government's adviser, is only required to be consulted on planning applications for non-agricultural purposes that would result in the loss of 20 hectares or more of BMV. On this basis the submitted Soils and Agricultural Quality report states that the magnitude of change is considered to be low, and that this would result in a minor adverse impact to agricultural land, which leads to no significant effect. Officers are of the opinion that the amount of BMV agricultural land that would be affected is notable, but not necessarily significant.
- 6.3.9 Site selection constraints: Following a request from Officers, a revised Assessment of Alternatives (AoA) has been undertaken. This seeks to identify any alternative sites within 1km of the proposed point of connection. The AoA report states that the availability of an affordable grid connection represents a significant contributory factor when identifying a suitable site for such a proposal. The AoA report states that designations within Shropshire, such as the AONB, the Green Belt, SSSIs and heritage assets eliminate the vast majority of the county for a potential solar farm development. It states that when assessing individual sites for their suitability for a solar farm, sites within such designated sites should be avoided. It states that the land which would be potentially suited to a solar farm is predominantly limited to the northern area of the county. Officers do not necessarily concur with the generality of these statements. For example planning permission for a number of large-scale solar farms has been granted for sites located within the southern half of the county, including within the Green Belt. This demonstrates that such designations do not necessarily rule out solar farm development.
- 6.3.10 The AoA report states that solar PV is highly constrained by the requirement to be close to a suitable grid connection point. The proposed connection point has the capacity to accept additional load from the application site and therefore the

proposal fulfils this critical constraint. The AoA states that other considerations include:

- Gradient and aspect: the AoA report states that predominantly flat sites are preferred, in the interests of minimising any landscape and visual impact, and facilitating screening. It states that the applicant therefore applies a constraint to any land that has an average slope of greater than 5 degrees
- Distance from the grid connection: The AoA states that sites that are greater than 1km from the electricity grid connection are eliminated from the site selection process as the cost of connection would be prohibitively expensive.

6.3.11 Officers accept that the proximity of the proposed site to a suitable connection point is a favourable consideration in terms of the costs and therefore deliverability of the proposal. Officers do not have any information to verify that a site further than 1km from the point of connection would not be viable. In addition planning policies do not suggest that the most favourable site within a viable distance of an available point of connection should be permitted. However it is relevant to look into whether there are other more preferable sites within this 1km radius of the connection point, to test the extent to which the selection of the current site is justified. This is discussed below.

6.3.12 Alternative sites considered: In terms of assessing alternative sites, the AoA report focusses on those sites within 1km of the grid connection point. Officers do not consider that it is reasonable to require applicants to assess potential alternative sites in proximity of other connection points in the county. In making a decision on the current application it is not necessary to sequentially assess all other sites in proximity to other connection points.

6.3.13 In terms of assessing potential alternative sites within 1km of the grid connection point the AoA report discounts sites east of the railway as it states that the cost of taking cables over or under the railway line would make the project financially unviable. It has also taken into consideration the visual impact of alternative sites on the Grade II* Boreatton Hall and the Berth Scheduled Ancient Monument. The report identifies two potential alternative sites within the 1km radius: one to the north east, and one to the south-east of the application site. It is accepted that both of these sites are located on Grade 2 agricultural land and therefore, in terms of agricultural land quality, would be less favourable than the application site, part of which comprises lower quality land. The AoA report concludes that neither of these two sites would be more suitable than the application site. In addition it states that the availability and deliverability of the two alternatives is not certain.

6.3.14 The applicant has confirmed that the only areas of agricultural land of lower than Grade 2 quality within the 1km radius are in an arc around the northern edge of this zone. The applicant has advised that the constraints that apply to this land include: the prohibitive cost of the cable crossing the railway line to the point of connection; the visual impact including on properties in these areas; and impact on The Berth Scheduled Monument.

6.3.15 The AoA report has also considered the scope of potential large scale rooftop installations within the county. It concludes that ground-based and rooftop solar installations are complimentary, but commercial scale rooftop solar PV is likely to make a relatively limited contribution to the UK's statutory targets of generating

15% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020. Officers accept this.

6.3.15 In overall terms it is considered that the AoA report provides a reasonable assessment of selection constraints for the siting of ground-mounted solar farms. In addition, Officers accept that there are likely to be limited alternative sites available within a reasonable distance of the grid connection point that are more favourable than the application site. The application has justified the use of agricultural land for the installation of solar panels. It is accepted that the proposal would affect BMV agricultural land, however the amount of BMV land affected is limited. The applicant states that the landowner has been offered a grazing licence for the site which would allow grazing for up to 50 sheep per hectare (albeit that the landowner's normal stocking rate is 15 per hectare). As such the development would not result in the loss of agricultural land, as it is proposed that the land would be grazed by sheep once the panels have been installed. In addition land would be returned to its current agricultural use by no later than 25 years following installation. Furthermore the application would result in significant biodiversity enhancements to the area, as discussed below.

6.3.16 In summary Officers consider that a satisfactory level of justification has been put forward for the use of the 6.1 hectares of BMV land as part of the solar farm proposal. As such the proposal is in line with the March 2015 WMS, and meets the criteria for consideration as set out Planning Practice Guidance as outlined in sections 6.3.4 and 6.3.5 above. The extent to which the proposal is acceptable in land-use terms is considered further below.

6.4 **Siting, scale and design and impact on landscape character**

6.4.1 Core Strategy Policy CS6 seeks to ensure that development is appropriate in scale and design taking into account local context and character, having regard to landscape character assessments and ecological strategies where appropriate. Policy CS17 also seeks to protect and enhance the diversity, high quality and local character of Shropshire's natural environment and to ensure no adverse impacts upon visual amenity, heritage and ecological assets. It is noted that the site and surrounding land do not fall within an area designated for landscape importance. In addition it is acknowledged that the development would be temporary, and a condition can be imposed requiring that the panels would be removed at the end of their operational life or after 25 years, whichever sooner.

6.4.2 The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which has been undertaken based on recognised methodology. The LVIA assesses the proposed development on both landscape character and in relation to visual impacts.

6.4.3 Impact on landscape character: The LVIA notes that the site is located within the landscape type Estate Farmlands (as defined in the Shropshire Landscape Typology). This landscape type is characterised by mixed farming landuse; clustered settlements; large country houses; planned woodland character; medium to large scale landscapes. The LVIA assesses the site as being medium in value, given that although it is in good condition, it is not subject to any landscape designations. The LVIA states that the overall effect of the introduction of the solar farm on the landscape character of the site would be substantial adverse, but that the overall level of effect of the development on the landscape character area

(Estate Farmlands) would be slight adverse to imperceptible.

- 6.4.4 The site benefits from some hedgerow screening along the northern and eastern boundaries. There are also other pockets of vegetation in the local landscape that break up open views. As such the visibility of the solar farm would be limited from some directions, particularly in view of the limited scale and relatively low height of the panels. The proposal would have some impact on the character of the local landscape, but it is considered that views in the wider landscape would be limited.
- 6.4.5 Visual impacts: The LVIA notes that residential properties comprise high sensitivity receptors when assessing visual effects. It states that properties to the west around Boreatton House and Boreatton Hall would experience a moderate adverse visual effects, as views of the site would generally be screened by intervening vegetation, and usually limited to upper floor views. It states that views from properties to the east and south-east (Summerhill Cottages, Elemore House and neighbouring properties) would have views screened by intervening vegetation and neighbouring properties, and the visual impact would be moderate adverse. It states that a similar level of visual impact would be experienced at Meadowvale to the northwest and Mount Cottage to the south-east.
- 6.4.6 The LVIA states that users of the public highway to the east of the site would experience a moderate adverse visual impact for a maximum 900 metres section of the road. The LVIA states that users of the public right of way that runs in a west-east orientation east of the public highway would also experience substantial adverse visual impact.
- 6.4.7 It is considered that this distance would generally reduce the significance of any views. Proposed mitigation includes reinforcing existing hedgerows through infill planting, and allowing hedgerows to grow to a height of 2.5–3 metres. Additional mitigation would take the form of a new hedgerow to be planted along the western and southern boundary of the site, together with tree/hedgerow planting further to the west close to the properties to the south-west.
- 6.4.8 Officers acknowledge that views of the solar farm from some properties, from the public highway and from the public right of way would be possible, and as such the proposed development would have an impact upon these receptors. In addition it is recognised that new hedgerow screening would take around eight years to mature. Nevertheless it should be noted that the closest properties are some 320 metres from the site. This distance would generally reduce the significance of any views. Officers do not consider that the visibility of the solar farm from surrounding properties would not have an overbearing impact on residential amenity. In terms of impact upon users of the highway and footpath, it should be noted that these views would be transient as users pass along these routes. The comments of the Parish Council that the site would be visible from The Cliffe are noted. However this area of higher ground is more than 2.5km away and from this distance it is not considered that the development would be prominent in the overall view.
- 6.4.9 In terms of potential cumulative impacts there are no other large-scale ground-mounted solar farms within the general area of the application site. As such there would be no cumulative impact with other solar farms in the area.

6.4.10 Overall it is considered that a satisfactory level of mitigation has been put forward in terms of new hedgerow, tree planting and management and that, given the level of environmental benefit of the proposal, these residual impacts would not be unacceptable. As such the application can be acceptable in relation to Core Strategy Policy CS6.

6.5 Local amenity considerations

6.5.1 Core Strategy policy CS6 seeks to safeguard residential and local amenity.

6.5.2 Noise: A noise assessment has been submitted in support of the application, which includes details of a noise survey undertaken to assess background noise levels at sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the site. The noise report identifies the noise emission levels from the inverters, transformers and substations, and undertaken an assessment of impact based upon BS412. It states that noise from the proposed solar farm is likely to cause a low impact at existing sensitive receptors during the daytime, and during the night-time during the summer months. It concludes that no mitigation measures are required. The Public Protection Officer has advised that the proposal would have no detrimental impact on closest residential receptors.

6.5.3 Glint and glare: The planning application notes that the main issue with solar farms normally only relates to glint, rather than glare. It provides details of the specific effects of glint from the proposed development. It is noted that the panels are very dark in colour as they are designed to absorb light rather than reflect it. The application states that any glint from the solar panels would be significantly dimmer than other common sources of glint. They have a low level of reflectivity when compared to surfaces such as window glass, water or snow. There is no information to suggest that the proposal would result in adverse levels of impact upon local amenity, horses or aircraft due to glint or glare.

6.5.4 Decommissioning and land reinstatement: Planning Practice Guidance on renewable energy recognises that solar farms are normally temporary structures and that planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use (para. 013). The applicant has confirmed that the operational lifespan of the solar panels is 25 years. A planning condition can be imposed to require the removal of all of the equipment at the end of its useful life, or within 25 years whichever sooner, and the land reinstated. The application states that the applicant has signed a contract with the landowner to clear the site and revert it back to agricultural use, and that a 'clean up' bond would be put in place to ensure reinstatement.

6.6 Historic environment considerations

6.6.1 Core Strategy Policy CS17 requires that developments protect and enhance the diversity, high quality and local character of Shropshire's historic environment. Paragraph 134 of the NPPF requires that, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In addition, Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that, in considering whether to grant planning permission which affects the setting of a Listed Building, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting.

- 6.6.2 An Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Assessment has been submitted as part of the planning application to assess the impact of the proposed development on the setting of designated heritage assets in the area. This assessment concludes that no designated heritage assets would be impacted upon by the proposals. It states that the Grade II* Listed Boreatton House may experience an impact to its setting but this would be of slight adverse significance and temporary. In addition it states that proposed hedgerow planting would mitigate this impact. The Assessment states that the presence of vegetation within the intervening landscape would screen views of the solar farm from The Berth, a Scheduled Monument approximately 1km to the east of the site. As such it considers that the significance of the impact is neutral.
- 6.6.3 The Council's Conservation Officer considers that the conclusions of the Cultural Heritage Report are accurate, but that consideration should be given to additional tree planting such as between the site and Boreatton House. The applicant has put forward an outline landscaping scheme that proposes tree planting in this area. Given that this land is outside of the application site the applicant has confirmed that they would be willing to deal with landscaping matters under a Section 106 agreement to ensure full control over the longer term maintenance of such planting.
- 6.6.4 In relation to archaeological matters, the Geophysical Survey report undertaken has confirmed an absence of anomalies of prehistoric date. The planning condition recommended by the Council's Archaeological Officer that an archaeological watching brief is undertaken can be added should permission be granted.
- 6.6.5 On the basis of the above it is considered that subject to the condition and legal agreement recommended the proposed development would provide satisfactory protection against harm to heritage assets, particularly when considered against the significant public benefits of the proposal in terms of renewable energy production.
- 6.7 Ecological considerations**
- 6.7.1 Core Strategy Policy CS17 seeks to protect and enhance the diversity, high quality and local character of Shropshire's natural environment and to ensure no adverse impacts upon visual amenity, heritage and ecological assets. It is noted that the application site does not form part of any statutory or non-statutory designated site for nature conservation. In addition there are no statutory designated ecology sites within 2km of the site.
- 6.7.2 Protected species and habitats: A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been submitted as part of the planning application. This identifies that habitats and species that would be potentially affected by the proposed development are: arable field margins; hedgerows; bats; hedgehogs; and breeding birds. The ecology report recommends that a minimum 10 metres buffer strip is maintained around the field margins, to retain wildlife corridors. The proposed development would result in some hedgerow loss to facilitate the construction of the access. However infill planting of the existing hedgerow adjacent to the site, together with the planting of new hedgerow along the western and southern boundary of the site (a length of more than 500 metres) would result in a significant net increase in hedgerow and wildlife corridor.

- 6.7.3 The Council's Ecologist has recommended that a condition is imposed to require the submission and approval of a Biodiversity Conservation Plan. This would set out the detailed protection measures to be implemented in relation to protected habitat and protected or notable species (see Appendix 1). Concern has been raised by local residents regarding potential impact upon badgers. No specific issues have been raised by the Ecological Appraisal or the Council's Ecologist, however it is considered that the Biodiversity Conservation Plan is an appropriate mechanism to ensure that satisfactory protection is afforded to this protected species. Concern over the impact of the proposal on Boreatton Moss, an area of former bogland, has been raised as part of local objections. This area is approximately 360 metres to the south of the site, and it is not anticipated that the installation of panels would have any impact on this area.
- 6.7.4 Biodiversity considerations and management: The proposed development offers the opportunity to provide significant biodiversity enhancements to the area. Whilst it is proposed that the central parts of the site would be grazed by sheep, the peripheral areas can be managed for the benefit of wildlife. Proposals put forward included the retention of the 10 metres buffer strip and the planting of new hedgerow as noted above, and also the planting of trees/hedgerow to the west of the site. These would provide habitat for invertebrates, ground nesting birds, small mammals and reptiles. It is proposed that the field margins would be planted with a species rich mix of wildflowers and grasses to support a wide range of wildlife. In addition the application states that log piles can be provided at the site for the benefit of butterflies, solitary bees, beetles and reptiles. It is considered that a detailed management plan for the site should be agreed to maximise the biodiversity benefits over the 25 year period of the solar farm. An appropriate condition can be imposed to require this (see Appendix 1).
- 6.7.5 Subject to this, it is considered that the measures proposed in relation to protected species, and those for ecological enhancement are appropriate, and that the proposal is therefore in line with Core Strategy Policy CS17.
- 6.8 **Highways considerations**
- 6.8.1 The application is accompanied by a Transport Statement and Construction Traffic Management Plan. The Transport Statement states that during the operation of the solar farm, traffic to and from the site would be minimal as all metering and recording devices are remotely monitored. Planned traffic would be restricted to maintenance contractors associated with cleaning the panels, and agricultural traffic movements associated with sheep grazing on the land. It is not considered that such movements would be significant. It is considered that the existing access arrangements to the site, via a field entrance, is satisfactory.
- 6.8.2 The construction period is anticipated to last approximately 3 to 4 months. During this time it is estimated that there would be approximately 30-40 HGVs movements associated with the delivery of materials. It is proposed that such movements would be staggered throughout the construction period such that the maximum number of HGVs to the site per week would not be expected to exceed 8. Vehicle types would comprise: curtain sided trailer and tractor unit for transportation of modules; flatbed trailers and tractor unit (for transportation of components); works vans; road crane (for installation of the sub-station and inverter housing). Access

to the site for construction traffic would be from A5 to the west via B4397 through Ruyton XI Towns.

- 6.8.3 The Highways Officer acknowledges the concerns raised regarding potential traffic impact, including from PGL. In addition the concerns raised by the Bridleway Association, the Riding and Carriage Driving Forum and some local road users over impacts of construction and other traffic on horse riders and other road users are noted. An outline Construction Management Plan (CMP) has been submitted by the applicant. However in view of the concerns raised it is considered that a more detailed CMP should be submitted for approval which sets out specific measures that would be adopted to minimise traffic impacts during the construction period, including the timing of deliveries to avoid conflicts on the minor approach road to the site. In addition it is anticipated that the CMP can be prepared in conjunction with dialogue with PGL. Given the limited amount of construction traffic anticipated, it is considered that traffic concerns raised by user groups and other road users can be appropriately addressed through the CMP. An appropriate condition is in Appendix 1. Concern has been raised by local residents that allowing roadside hedgerow to grow to 2.5-3 metres high would limit how much drivers could see other vehicles on the highway. The section of roadside hedgerow that is adjacent to the application site is approximately 150 metres long. Whilst there is a slight bend in the road along this section it is not considered that any restriction on forward visibility along this section of the highway would be of such significance as to prohibit a higher growth of hedgerow for screening purposes.

6.9 **Flood risk and drainage considerations**

- 6.9.1 Core Strategy Policy CS18 seeks to reduce flood risk and avoid adverse impact on water quality and quantity. The submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) confirms that the site lies entirely within Flood Zone 1, signifying areas with the lowest probability of fluvial flooding. The FRA states that the additional impermeable surfaces that would be created by the installation of the inverters and substations are considered to be negligible in the context of the size of the overall site. Nevertheless the application proposes the construction of swales alongside the buildings to intercept surface water runoff from these structures.
- 6.9.2 The Soils and Agricultural Quality report states that no formal agricultural drainage network was identified during the site survey. It states that the development has the potential to result in permanent disruption to both on- and off-site drainage, and recommends that a drainage survey combined with any required remedial works should be undertaken if field drains are affected. A condition to this effect can be imposed if permission is granted (see condition in Appendix 1).
- 6.9.3 The Drainage Officer has confirmed that the water management proposals are acceptable. The proposal does not raise any significant issues in respect of flood risk and water management and is therefore in line with Policy CS18.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The proposed installation of a solar farm at land at Moor Farm, Baschurch would allow the generation of 3.75MW of renewable energy for export to the National Grid, and contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions. As such it is supported in principle by both national and local planning policy. Whilst the site comprises best

and most versatile land, the area affected is relatively small, the land would nevertheless remain in agricultural use and a satisfactory level of information has been provided to demonstrate that the use of such land is justified. Furthermore the panels would be removed after the end of their useful life or within 25 years, whichever sooner, following which the land would revert to its former status. The landscaping proposed would satisfactorily mitigate against any impact on the setting of designated heritage assets in the area. The proposal would not result in adverse levels of noise, or significantly affect flood risk. It is accepted that the proposal would have some impact upon the local landscape character of the area, and on visual amenity to some receptors. However it is considered that the design of the site is acceptable and incorporates a satisfactory level of mitigation in relation to these impacts. On balance it is considered that, given the environmental benefits that would be provided in terms of the generation of renewable energy and also biodiversity enhancements, these impacts on the visual character of the area would not be unacceptable. On this basis it is recommended that the proposal can be accepted in relation to Development Plan policies and other material considerations, and that planning permission can be granted subject to the conditions as set out in Appendix 1 and the completion of a Section 106 agreement.

8. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

8.1 Risk Management

There are two principal risks associated with this recommendation as follows:

- As with any planning decision the applicant has a right of appeal if they disagree with the decision and/or the imposition of conditions. Costs can be awarded irrespective of the mechanism for hearing the appeal - written representations, a hearing or inquiry.
- The decision is challenged by way of a Judicial Review by a third party. The courts become involved when there is a misinterpretation or misapplication of policy or some breach of the rules of procedure or the principles of natural justice. However their role is to review the way the authorities reach decisions, rather than to make a decision on the planning issues themselves, although they will interfere where the decision is so unreasonable as to be irrational or perverse. Therefore they are concerned with the legality of the decision, not its planning merits. A challenge by way of Judicial Review must be a) promptly and b) in any event not later than six weeks after the grounds to make the claim first arose.

Both of these risks need to be balanced against the risk of not proceeding to determine the application. In this scenario there is also a right of appeal against non-determination for application for which costs can also be awarded.

8.2 Human Rights

Article 8 give the right to respect for private and family life and First Protocol Article 1 allows for the peaceful enjoyment of possessions. These have to be balanced against the rights and freedoms of others and the orderly development of the County in the interests of the Community.

First Protocol Article 1 requires that the desires of landowners must be balanced against the impact on residents.

This legislation has been taken into account in arriving at the above recommendation.

8.3 Equalities

The concern of planning law is to regulate the use of land in the interests of the public at large, rather than those of any particular group. Equality will be one of a number of 'relevant considerations' that need to be weighed in planning committee members' minds under section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1970.

9. Financial Implications

There are likely financial implications of the decision and/or imposition of conditions if challenged by a planning appeal or judicial review. The costs of defending any decision will be met by the authority and will vary dependant on the scale and nature of the proposal. Local financial considerations are capable of being taken into account when determining this planning application – in so far as they are material to the application. The weight given to this issue is a matter for the decision maker.

10. Background

10.1 Relevant Planning Policies

10.1.1 Shropshire Core Strategy

This promotes a low carbon Shropshire by promoting the generation of energy from renewable sources (Strategic Objective 9)

- Policy CS5 (Countryside and Green Belt)
- Policy CS6 (Sustainable Design and Development Principles)
- Policy CS8 (Facilities, Services and Infrastructure Provision)
- Policy CS13 (Economic Development, Enterprise and Employment)
- Policy CS17 (Environmental Networks) – to identify, protect, enhance, expand and connect Shropshire's environmental assets
- Policy CS18 (Sustainable Water Management)

10.2 Central Government Guidance:

10.2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): Amongst other matters, the NPPF: encourages the use of renewable resources (para. 17 - Core Planning Principles); promotes good design as a key aspect of sustainable development (Chapter 7); supports the move to a low carbon future as part of the meeting of the challenges of climate change and flooding (Chapter 10); advises that lpa's recognize that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and approve applications if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable (para. 98); states that the planning system should contribute to

and enhance the natural and local environment by preventing development from contributing to unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution (Chapter 11).

10.2.2 Planning practice guidance for renewable and low carbon energy (updated March 2015) states (para. 001) that increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses. Planning has an important role in the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure in locations where the local environmental impact is acceptable.

The PPG states that all communities have a responsibility to help increase the use and supply of green energy, but that this does not mean that the need for renewable energy automatically overrides environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities (para. 003).

In relation to proposals for large scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms, the PPG states that the deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. However, the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.

Particular factors the local planning authority will need to consider in relation to solar farms include:

- encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value
- where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.
- planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use
- the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare (see guidance on landscape assessment) and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety
- the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;
- the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges
- the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.

The PPG refers to a speech by the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, the Rt Hon Gregory Barker MP, to the solar PV industry on 25 April 2013. This commented that the Government will focus deployment of solar panels on buildings and brownfield land, not greenfield, and that “where solar farms are not on brownfield land, you must be looking at low grade agricultural land which works with farmers to allow grazing in parallel with generation,

incorporating well thought out visual screening, involving communities in developing projects and bringing them with you”.

It also refers to a Written Ministerial Statement made on 25th March 2015, which states that “meeting our energy goals should not be used to justify the wrong development in the wrong location and this includes the unnecessary use of high quality agricultural land”. It also states that “any proposal for a solar farm involving the best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence”.

The PPG gives guidance in relation to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact, and states that in the case of ground-mounted solar panels it should be noted that with effective screening and appropriate land topography the area of a zone of visual influence could be zero.

10.3 Emerging policy:

10.3.1 Site Allocations and Development Management (SAMDev) document: The SAMDev Plan Inspector has now confirmed the proposed main modifications to the plan following the examination sessions in November and December and these have been published for a 6 week consultation. This means that any plan content not included in the schedule of proposed main modifications may be considered to be sound in principle in accordance with NPPF paragraph 216. Therefore significant weight can now be given to SAMDev policies in planning decisions where these are not subject to modifications. The site and surrounding area are not subject to any specific allocations in the SAMDev Plan.

10.3.2 Draft Development Management policies: Relevant draft Development Management policies include:

- MD2 (Sustainable Design)
- MD8 (Infrastructure Provision)
- MD12 (Natural Environment)
- MD13 (Historic Environment)

10.4 Relevant Planning History:

- 14/02423/SCR** Screening Opinion for installation up to 3 MWp of solar panels on land ***EIA not required*** 28th July 2014

11. **Additional Information**

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information) The application ref. 15/01805/FUL and supporting information and consultation responses.
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Cllr M. Price
Local Member Cllr Nicholas Bardsley (Ruyton and Baschurch)
Appendices APPENDIX 1 - Conditions

APPENDIX 1 - Conditions**STANDARD CONDITION(S)**

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990 (As amended).

2. The development shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved plans and drawings.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans and details.

CONDITION(S) THAT REQUIRE APPROVAL BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENT COMMENCES

3. Prior to the commencement of development a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority; the CTMP shall be implemented fully in accordance with the approved details for the duration of the construction/installation of the solar farm development.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

Note: As part of the submission of the CTMP it will be necessary for liaison to take place between the solar farm contractor/managing agent and PGL in order to minimise the impact of conflicting traffic movements

4. No development shall take place until a Biodiversity Conservation Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include but not be limited to:

a) An appropriate scale plan showing “Wildlife Protection Zones” where construction activities are restricted and where protective measures will be installed or implemented;

b) Details of protective measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid impacts during construction and any enhancement. These should be based on recommendations in the “Preliminary Ecological Assessment” by Wardell Armstrong, April 2015 and particularly with respect to:

- Arable Field Margins (including location and extent);
- Hedgerows (including location and extent);
- Bats (especially details on position of any external lighting);
- Hedgehog;
- Breeding birds;
- Other habitat or species enhancements, such as the location and numbers of bat and/or bird boxes.

Reason: To ensure the conservation of protected habitat and protected/notable species.

5. The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into operation until a habitat management plan has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority. The plan shall include: a) Description and evaluation of the features to be managed; b) Ecological trends and constraints on site that may influence management; c) Aims and objectives of management; d) Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives; e) Prescriptions for management actions; f) Preparation of a works schedule (including a 5 year project register, an annual work plan and the means by which the plan will be rolled forward annually); g) Personnel responsible for implementation of the plan; h) Monitoring and remedial/contingencies measures triggered by monitoring. The plan shall be carried out as approved for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To protect features of recognised nature conservation importance.

6. No development approved by this permission shall commence until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI). This written scheme shall be approved in writing by the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works.

Reason: The site is known to hold archaeological interest.

7. No development hereby permitted shall take place until details of the specification of the solar panel frames, to include colour and finish, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To minimise the potential impact on local land users from glint.

8. No above ground works shall be commenced until full details of both hard and soft landscape works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The landscape works shall be carried out in full compliance with the approved plan, schedule and timescales. Any trees or plants that, within a period of five years after planting, are removed, die or become seriously damaged or defective, shall be replaced with others of species, size and number as originally approved, by the end of the first available planting season.

Reason: To ensure the provision, establishment and maintenance of a reasonable standard of landscape in accordance with the approved designs.

CONDITION(S) THAT REQUIRE APPROVAL DURING THE CONSTRUCTION/PRIOR TO THE OCCUPATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT

9. Notwithstanding the submitted details, the buildings hereby permitted shall not be constructed until details of their external materials, including colour, have been first submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approval details.

Reason: To ensure that the external appearance of the development is satisfactory.

CONDITION(S) THAT ARE RELEVANT FOR THE LIFETIME OF THE DEVELOPMENT

10. If, during the course of the construction of the development hereby permitted, field drains on the application site are identified, a drainage scheme shall be submitted in writing for the approval of the local planning authority within two months of such identification. The submitted scheme shall include details of a drainage survey and any remedial measures proposed to ensure that adverse impacts upon drainage are prevented or rectified. The scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure drainage does not adversely affect the site or surrounding land.

11. (a) Within one week of the completion of the construction of the solar panels, written notice of the date of completion shall be given to the local planning authority.

(b) Within 6 months of the cessation of energy generation from the site, or a period of 25 years and 6 months following completion of construction, whichever is the sooner, all infrastructure associated with the solar farm will be removed from the site.

Reason: To ensure that the solar farm development is removed from the site following the end of its operational life or within a reasonable period of time to protect the landscape character of the area.

Informatives

1. In arriving at this decision the Council has used its best endeavours to work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner to secure an appropriate outcome as required in the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 187.

2. In determining this application the Local Planning Authority gave consideration to the following policies:

Central Government Guidance:

National Planning Policy Framework

National Planning Practice Guidance

Shropshire Core Strategy and saved Local Plan policies:

Policy CS5 (Countryside and Green Belt)

Policy CS6 (Sustainable Design and Development Principles)

Policy CS13 (Economic Development, Enterprise and Employment)

Policy CS17 (Environmental Networks)

Policy CS18 (Sustainable Water Management)

3. For information, the Biodiversity Conservation Plan should be prescriptive, using words like 'will' and 'must' rather than 'could' or 'should'.

The active nests of all wild birds are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (As amended). An active nest is one being built, containing eggs or chicks, or on which fledged chicks are still dependent.

All clearance, conversion and demolition work in association with the approved scheme shall be carried out outside of the bird nesting season which runs from March to September inclusive

Note: If it is necessary for work to commence in the nesting season then a pre-commencement inspection of the vegetation and buildings for active bird nests should be carried out. If vegetation cannot be clearly seen to be clear of bird's nests then an experienced ecologist should be called in to carry out the check. Only if there are no active nests present should work be allowed to commence.