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**MAIN CASE**

**Reference No:** 20/00557/ESF

**Proposal:** Proposed Development of a Solar Farm and Ancillary Development

**Site Address:** Site North Of Hightown Drove Burwell Cambridgeshire

**Applicant:** Burwell 1 Solar Limited

**Case Officer:** Andrew Phillips Planning Team Leader

**Parish:** Burwell

**Ward:** Burwell

**Ward Councillor/s:** David Brown  
Lavinia Edwards

**Date Received:** 1 May 2020      **Expiry Date:** 21 August 2020

[V51]

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1.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

1.1 Members are recommended to approve the application subject to the recommended conditions below; the conditions can be read in full on the attached appendix 1.

- 1 Approved Plans
- 2 Time Limit
- 3 Lifetime of the development
- 4 Soft Landscaping
- 5 Landscape Management
- 6 Max Electrical Output
- 7 Archaeological
- 8 Construction/Piling Times
- 9 Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)
- 10 Biodiversity Improvements
- 11 Surface Water
- 12 No External Lights
- 13 Hard Landscaping

2.0 **SUMMARY OF APPLICATION**

2.1 This application is presented to Planning Committee in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

2.2 The proposal is seeking permission for a solar farm with a maximum output of 49.995MWe, which comes from circa 150,000 Photovoltaic Solar Panels, for a period of 40 years. In addition to this:

- 24 Inverter/Transformer Stations
- 4 Storage Containers
- 1 Switchgear Building
- 1 Control Room Building
- 45 4m High CCTV cameras

As well as other associated infrastructure and landscaping.

2.3 The application was amended to remove the work with the National Grid Substation. The developer is relying on the National Grid to undertake these works, which National Grid have confirmed they will do. The red line goes to the boundary of the Substation to allow for any suitable connection into the National Grid.

2.4 The full planning application, plans and documents submitted by the Applicant can be viewed online via East Cambridgeshire District Council's Public Access online service, via the following link <http://pa.eastcambs.gov.uk/online-applications/>. **Alternatively a paper copy is available to view at the East Cambridgeshire District Council offices, in the application file.**

### 3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 No relevant on site history. However, there are several large solar farms in the local area either seeking approval, consented or operational.

The operational solar farms in the local area to the site are at Stowbridge Farm (south of Stretham), Triangle Farm (West of Soham) and Heath Road (south of Burwell).

A solar farm is also currently under construction at Goose Hall Farm (north of Burwell).

In addition there is also a proposed solar farm between Wicken and Soham (20/00522/FUM) that is likely to be determined in the latter half of 2020.

There are also pre-application stage discussions in regards to a solar farm to the east of Soham and the National Strategic Infrastructure Project (NSIP) of Sunnica Energy Farm (solar and batteries) that is located to the south of Chippenham, west of Kennett and south east of Isleham.

### 4.0 THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

4.1 The site is an area of relatively flat open agricultural countryside located on the western edge of Burwell and to the north of Reach. The site is approximately 80 hectares (197.7 acres).

4.2 To the southwest, west and north of the site is predominantly open 'fen' countryside. There is a sparse scattering of trees and agricultural buildings, as well as the pylons

that go in a north-south direction. All of these are visible within the landscape due to the openness of the area.

- 4.3 To the east of the site is the built up area of Burwell, with the Burwell Substation being a significant piece of infrastructure immediately to the east of the site. Further east the land continues to rise and mature trees become common place.
- 4.4 To the south as well as the village of Reach there is the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Devil's Dyke. To the northwest is the SSSI of Wicken Fen, which can be reached via the Lodes Way (cycle route) that runs through the site.
- 4.5 There is an area within the middle of the site, though not within the red line, that benefits from hedges and trees.

## 5.0 RESPONSES FROM CONSULTEES

- 5.1 Responses were received from the following consultees and these are summarised below. The full responses are available on the Council's web site.

### **Burwell Parish Council - 10 June 2020**

States:

"Burwell Parish Council has No Objections as long as Biodiversity Surveys are acceptable and any comments raised by National trust Wicken Fen are addressed."

### **Burwell Parish Council - 1 July 2020**

"States:

Burwell Parish Council note the letters of objections and petition from residents. Burwell Parish support neighbours noise concerns. Please ensure quieter filing strict time guidelines.

Burwell Parish Council has No Objection - nothing to add to previous comments."

### **Reach Parish Council- 10 June 2020**

States:

"The Parish Council would like to make the following comments and reserves the right to comment again should the application be updated or amended.

Reach Parish Council is not necessarily opposed to the above application but is unable to form a definitive view as we feel it lacks sufficient detail.

The scale and location of the proposed development, in a flat, open landscape of recreational and conservation importance, has the potential for significant adverse visual intrusion. We do not think that the proposal's visual impact has been adequately assessed and therefore are not yet assured that the proposed mitigations are adequate.

Specifically, we are concerned that the glint and glare analysis does not consider the impact on residents of Reach or recreational users in the area. We also feel that the LVIA is light in its analysis of impact on views from the banks of Reach (and Burwell) Lode and from the Devil's Dyke which sit 3 metres or more above the site of the proposed development.

The Parish Council appreciates that each application must be judged on its own merits but is concerned that large developments of this type in this area should be looked at together and a strategic plan created to assess and manage the accumulative impact of several such developments.”

**Reach Parish Council – 6 July 2020**

States:

“The Parish Council would like to make the following comments and reserves the right to comment again should the application be updated or amended.

Reach Parish Council is not necessarily opposed to the above application but remains unable to form a definitive view as sufficient detail has not been forthcoming.

As stated in our earlier letter, the proposed development would be a significant presence in the landscape. We still consider that the proposal’s visual impact has not been adequately assessed and are therefore not assured that the proposed mitigations are adequate.

Specifically:

- The Parish Council can see no indication that the LVIA has taken account of the fact that viewpoint 6 stands some metres above the surrounding landscape
- there is no assessment of visual impact from Reach Lode bank to the south west of point 6 and from the Devil’s Dyke south west of point 3. We suspect that Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map would be markedly changed by assessments from these areas as both stand some height above the area of the proposed development. In these circumstances we are not confident that reed bed screening alone is sufficient mitigation. This is important as both areas are of recreational, archeological and environmental significance.
- The Parish Council remain concerned that the glint and glare analysis does not consider the impact on residents of Reach or recreational users in the area.

The Parish Council appreciates that each application must be judged on its own merits but is concerned that developments of this type in this area should be looked at together and a strategic plan created to assess and manage the cumulative impact of several such developments.”

**Cllr David Brown – 10 July 2020**

States:

“If you are minded to recommend approval, may I please suggest strict working conditions are recommended during the construction phase. This spring/early summer a Solar Farm has been being constructed in Burwell. I have rarely come across anything that has caused so many complaints, primarily associated with noise from the piling machines used to put in the supports for the panels. Hours of work and associated noise need to be addressed by conditions in my opinion.”

**ECDC Trees Team - 13 May 2020**

States:

“No tree related objections though further screening and increased biodiversity could be beneficial and this could be achieved by the planting of sections of native species hedging as well as individual and small groups of native trees this should help to reduce the visual scale of the proposed development within the wider landscape. Carefully planned the planting could mimic the existing landscape views.”

**National Air Traffic Services Ltd - 14 May 2020**

States:

“The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with our safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL") has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.

However, please be aware that this response applies specifically to the above consultation and only reflects the position of NATS (that is responsible for the management of en route air traffic) based on the information supplied at the time of this application. This letter does not provide any indication of the position of any other party, whether they be an airport, airspace user or otherwise. It remains your responsibility to ensure that all the appropriate consultees are properly consulted.

If any changes are proposed to the information supplied to NATS in regard to this application which become the basis of a revised, amended or further application for approval, then as a statutory consultee NERL requires that it be further consulted on any such changes prior to any planning permission or any consent being granted.”

**Cambridge Airport Ltd - 26 May 2020**

States:

“The proposed development has been examined from an aerodrome safeguarding perspective and does not conflict with safeguarding criteria. We, therefore, have no objection to this proposal.”

**Defence Infrastructure Organisation Safeguarding (Wind Turb) - 5 June 2020**

States:

“Thank you for consulting the Ministry of Defence (MOD) on the above proposed development which was received by this office on 12/05/2020. I can confirm the MOD has no safeguarding objections to this proposal.

I trust this is clear however should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.”

**The National Trust - 16 June 2020**

States:

“The proposed development is immediately adjacent to land owned by the National Trust at Wicken Fen. It is approximately 1800 metres from Wicken Fen SSSI, also part of Fenland SAC and also falls within the Wicken Fen Vision Project area.

### Principle of Development

It is acknowledged that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) lends support to proposals for renewable energy developments if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. The NPPF also states that such developments should contribute to and enhance the natural environment. Furthermore, that opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.

The National Trust has a duty to protect and care for special places so people and nature can thrive, but climate change poses one of the greatest risks to them. We believe in the need to grow renewable energy and reduce dependence on fossil fuels. Accordingly, we do not object to the principle of this proposal.

We consider that schemes should be holistically designed to take account of effects on the environment including wildlife and landscape. However, we understand that in order to reduce carbon emissions and meet the country's net zero targets, this could result in some effects to landscape and places of significance, but these should be minimised or avoided where possible.

### Landscape and Visual Impact

The proposed solar panels will undoubtedly have a visual impact on the landscape. They will be seen from some areas of Wicken Fen in the short term (first three years). In order to mitigate this in the longer term a reed-fringed ditch is proposed along the boundaries of the development. We are of the opinion that the reeds would not grow to a height of 3 metres (as set out in the application) and would not achieve screening from elevated positions along the lode banks. However, we do consider that this is an appropriate boundary treatment for the character of the area. It will provide the most interest and will involve re-wetting of some areas of the development which can only be of further benefit to the soils. We also acknowledge that the site sits within a flat landscape and within the context of some existing energy infrastructure. We believe the visual impact of this development needs to be balanced against other material considerations, as set out below.

### Biodiversity, Habitats and Soils

Given the nature of the development and distance from the statutorily designated areas of Wicken Fen we are of the opinion that the development is unlikely to impact on the SSSI or SAC features.

At this particular site we consider that the proposed use would be more beneficial for biodiversity, wildlife and soils than intensive agriculture. The proposals will create/enhance habitats that reflect some SSSI features (ie Lowland ditch systems, S4 - *Phragmites australis* swamp and reed-beds). There could be further ways to further improve the biodiversity on the site, such as choosing an appropriate seed mix for the grassland sown underneath the panels and the management of this grass so that it is not mown or grazed so closely. We would be happy to discuss this with the developer.

We do have some concern about aquatic invertebrates and birds and there is little consideration of the impacts of ground mounted solar panels on these species in the submitted documents. However, we are aware that published research and evidence on this issue is limited. Birds and invertebrates can travel a significant

distance and are of importance at Wicken Fen. Existing reviews state that concerns are most likely when they are located in or close to protected areas, notably where the polarising effect of solar panels may induce drinking behaviour in some bird taxa, where the birds mistake the panels for water, or close to water features where development could pose risks to aquatic invertebrates; solar panels have the capacity to reflect polarised light, which can attract polarotactic insects, which has the potential to impact their reproductive biology. The behavioural and habitat requirements of these species should be taken into consideration and we are of the opinion that further advice on this should be sought from Natural England.

Recognising the void in evidence regarding the impact of solar farms on biodiversity we consider there is a research opportunity with the proposed development and would be happy to work with the developer by advising on a monitoring approach to investigate bird and invertebrate behaviours, soil quality/loss and carbon capture (pre and post construction).

#### Wicken Fen Vision Area

In 1999, the National Trust launched the Wicken Fen Vision. This is a 100-year plan to create a diverse landscape for wildlife and people over an area of 53 square kilometres. Less than 1% of original fen survives in East Anglia, of which Wicken Fen is a fragment. Having grown to 358 hectares, the nature reserve was too small and isolated to guarantee the survival of all of its rare and numerous species, and under pressure from the increasing numbers of people seeking its peace and tranquillity. Hence the development of the Wicken Fen Vision.

After 20 years the need for the Vision is greater than ever before with demands on our environment continuing to increase. The Wicken Fen Vision will deliver on a landscape scale to give nature the space it needs. To create an extensive landscape for wildlife that is sustainable and adaptable we intend to extend the Wicken Fen nature reserve allowing wildlife to thrive and move across a Fen landscape.

This proposal removes scope to include this land wholly for nature within the Wicken Fen Vision. However, in the interim, it does present biodiversity gain and will prevent the soils losses found under intensive production. The land will remain within Vision Area, and the National Trust would like to be consulted on the restoration plan for when this land use ceases. We would be grateful if we could be named as a consultee within a condition to secure a restoration plan.

#### Conclusion

We acknowledge the benefits of this development in tackling climate change. We also appreciate the need to balance the benefits of the development in terms of soils and habitats by taking land out of intensive arable production in this location with the visual impact of the solar panels on the landscape.

Therefore, we do not object to the principle of the development and, on balance, we consider that with the mitigation set out in the application, the benefits would outweigh the harm. However, we are keen to secure the following:

- The National Trust are named as a consultee in a condition to secure a restoration plan when the solar farm ceases to operate;
- A commitment from the developer to the research opportunities outlined above.

We would be grateful if the above points could be taken into consideration.”

**Cambs Wildlife Trust - 18 May 2020**

States:

“This professional ecological advice has been provided in accordance with the Service Level Agreement held with East Cambridgeshire District Council.

I have had an initial look through the Environmental Statement, ecological sections and the Design and Access Statement. The ecological survey effort appears appropriate for the nature of the proposal, as do the species protection and mitigation measures. However, before I comment further I would like a copy of the original spreadsheet on which the biodiversity net gain calculation was made, as I have concerns that the summary figures for net gain presented in Table 4.1 of appendix 7.2a (40% net gain) may not marry with the proposed species mixes being proposed within the Design and Access statement. I would still expect a net gain to be achievable through this development, but this does need to be double checked.

If after my review of the net gain assessment there is still sufficient net gain, then all ecological mitigation and enhancement measures will need to be secured through preparation and implementation of a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan that covers the construction period and the whole operational life of the solar farm. This must be approved prior to construction and will need to be secured through the use of appropriately worded planning conditions and / or s106 planning agreement.

I hope these comments are of help to you. If you have any queries regarding this advice, please don't hesitate to contact me. I will comment further once I am in receipt of the excel version of the biodiversity net gain calculator.”

**Cambs Wildlife Trust - 22 May 2020**

States:

“I am in receipt of the original Biodiversity Net Gain calculation and I can confirm that I agree with the assessment of net gain. Therefore from a biodiversity perspective should all the proposed ecological mitigation and enhancement measures be secured and delivered through appropriately worded planning conditions then the application can be determined.”

**Natural England - 20 May 2020**

States:

“SUMMARY OF NATURAL ENGLAND'S ADVICE - NO OBJECTION

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites or landscapes...

**Soils and Land Quality**

Based on the information available to us we consider this application may impact on 'best and most versatile agricultural land' (paragraph 170 and 171 of the National Planning Policy Framework refers). We consider that the proposed development is unlikely to lead to significant long term loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, as a resource for future generations. This is because the solar panels would be secured to the ground by steel piles with limited soil disturbance and could be



removed in the future with no permanent loss of agricultural land quality likely to occur, provided the development is undertaken to high standards. Although some components of the development, such as construction of a sub-station, may permanently affect agricultural land this would be limited to small areas...

We would also advise your authority to apply conditions to secure appropriate agricultural land management and/or biodiversity enhancement during the lifetime of the development, and to require the site to be decommissioned and restored to its former condition when planning permission expires.

#### Sites of Special Scientific Interest Impact Risk Zones

The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 requires local planning authorities to consult Natural England on "Development in or likely to affect a Site of Special Scientific Interest" (Schedule 4, w). Our SSSI Impact Risk Zones are a GIS dataset designed to be used during the planning application validation process to help local planning authorities decide when to consult Natural England on developments likely to affect a SSSI. The dataset and user guidance can be accessed from the data.gov.uk website"

#### **Natural England - 2 June 2020**

States:

"Natural England has previously commented on this proposal and made comments to the authority in our letter reference 316946, dated 20 May 2020.

The advice provided in our previous response applies equally to this amendment although we made no objection to the original proposal.

The proposed amendments to the original application are unlikely to have significantly different impacts on the natural environment than the original proposal.

Should the proposal be amended in a way which significantly affects its impact on the natural environment then, in accordance with Section 4 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Natural England should be consulted again. Before sending us the amended consultation, please assess whether the changes proposed will materially affect any of the advice we have previously offered. If they are unlikely to do so, please do not re-consult us."

#### **Design Out Crime Officers - 20 May 2020**

States:

"Thank you for the opportunity to review the proposed development. I have reviewed relevant documents and drawings and fully supportive of the security measures being considered. This should ensure community safety and vulnerability to crime is being addressed. This area does attract rural crime especially poaching and I have made our rural crime team and Countryside Watch aware of this application. No objections but if the applicant would like site specific site security advice in the future more than happy to be involved.

No further comments at this stage."

#### **Local Highways Authority - 26 May 2020**

States:

“Whilst I would not normally comment on ESF application I have reviewed the access arrangement and I would not have any objections.

The development will be accessed from existing access with the highway through a power station. Once constructed there will be minimum amounts of traffic generated from this site.”

**Local Highways Authority – 13 July 2020**

States:

“As far as can be determined access to this site will be from the drove which will have no impact on highways safety. The route the construction vehicles take will be determined by construction management plan which should be conditioned accordingly.”

**Environment Agency - 28 May 2020**

States:

**“FLOOD RISK**

We have reviewed the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) details within the Planning and Design and Access Statement submitted and find the details acceptable. However, to reduce the risk of flooding to the development and future occupants in extreme events, your authority may wish to consider applying a condition to any subsequent permission to ensure the implementation of proposed mitigation measures.

The proposed development will only meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework if the measures outlined in the FRA details within the Planning and Design and Access Statement, by Axis, ref: Proposed Development of a Solar Farm and Ancillary Development on Land to the West of Burwell Substation, East Cambridgeshire, dated April 2020 are implemented in full unless otherwise agreed by the planning authority. The mitigation measures shall be fully implemented prior to occupation or in accordance with the timing/phasing arrangements embodied within the scheme, or within any other period as may subsequently be agreed, in writing, by the local planning authority.

We do not need to be consulted on any matters related to this condition. It should be noted that the submitted FRA states that:

The Inverter-Transformer Stations would be raised 600mm above ground level to provide flood resilience.

**Advice to LPA**

With regard to the second part of the Exception Test, your Authority must be satisfied with regards to the safety of people (including those with restricted mobility), the ability of such people to reach places of safety, including safe refuges within buildings, and the ability of the emergency services to access such buildings to rescue and evacuate those people.

In all circumstances where flood warning and evacuation are significant measures in contributing to managing flood risk, we expect local planning authority to formally consider the emergency planning and rescue implications of new development in making their decisions.

We strongly recommend that your Emergency Planner is consulted on the above issues.”

**Lead Local Flood Authority - 25 June 2020**

States:

“At present we are unable to support the application for the following reason:

1. No assessment of surface water runoff as a result of the development has been made. Whilst it is broadly accepted that solar farms do not respond in the same way as impermeable surfaces, they can lead to localised channelling of rainfall, particularly on sloping sites. This has the potential to increase flood risk downstream.

Options such as the inclusion of a French drain at the base of each row to intercept flows, inclusion of a swale(s) at the lowest parts of the site and designing panels with horizontal slots across the surface area should be considered as measures to manage surface water.”

**Lead Local Flood Authority – 10 July 2020**

We have reviewed the clarification presented in email by Axis PED and they confirmed the following:

- Gaps will be incorporated within the panel surface to distribute the water more evenly than if it were a solid panel.
- The site is generally flat with only a gentle slope. 5m wide reed bed channels will be incorporated to intercept surface water. The total area of reed bed is proposed to be 18,000m<sup>2</sup> around the solar farm

Based on these, as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) we **can remove our objection** to the proposed development. It is felt that management of the reed bed and surface of the land can be dealt with by a suitably worded condition for landscape management.

**The Ely Group of Internal Drainage Board - 26 May 2020**

States:

“This application for development is within the Swaffham Internal Drainage District. The Board has met with the consulting engineer for the application to discuss surface water disposal, as well as the impact on the Board's Main Drain network. The Board has no concerns in relation to the surface water disposal from the site and providing the site is constructed as agreed and the necessary consents are obtained, the Board has no objections to this application.”

**Historic England - 1 June 2020**

States:

“On the basis of the information available to date, we do not wish to offer any comments. We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation adviser”

**Conservation Officer – 13 July 2020**

States:

“The closest concentrations of designated heritage assets to the site are in Burwell +800m to the east and Reach 1km to the south. AOC Archaeology’s heritage impact assessment states: ‘An assessment of potential setting impacts of the proposed development on the surrounding designated assets found that there is unlikely to be any intervisibility between the Site and the majority of the surrounding designated heritage assets (Sites 1-7, 10, 102, 104-106) and as such no impact or harm is anticipated (7.3.4).’ Given the separation distances, the nature of the topography and the height of the PV arrays, this seems a fair conclusion.

Recommendation: no objection”

### **Environmental Health – 7 July 2020**

States:

“I have read the Noise chapter of the Environmental Statement which covers the potential noise emitted from the site once it is up and running and I have no issues to raise with this (but if permission is granted I would like to discuss a suitable wording for a condition to control noise emissions from the site).

My main concern is with the construction/installation phase and I want to ensure that if this application is granted there is as much control over the development/ construction phase as possible in order to mitigate noise.

The Description and Construction Method chapter of the Environmental Statement confirms that piling will be required to install the panel arrays and goes on to outline their desired Construction Hours in points 4.3.5 and 4.3.6. It is my opinion that these times are too relaxed and I would therefore suggest the following two sets of construction times –

The standard hours below to control construction times and deliveries during the construction phase:

07:30 – 18:00 each day Monday – Friday  
07:30 – 13:00 on Saturdays and  
None on Sundays or Bank Holidays

And the times below specifically to control ground piling:

09:00 – 17:00 each day Monday – Friday  
None on Saturdays, Sundays or Bank Holiday

I would also request that a piling method statement be produced and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) before work takes place.

I would also advise that prior to any work commencing on site a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) shall be submitted and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) regarding mitigation measures for the control of pollution (including, but not limited to noise, dust and lighting etc) during the construction phase. The CEMP shall be adhered to at all times during the construction phase, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

The Description and Construction Method chapter of the Environmental Statement states that the only external lighting will be located above access doors and activated by motion sensors which I have no issue with. I would however suggest a condition which states no external lighting is to be installed without prior written confirmation from the LPA.

No other points to raise at this time but happy to discuss any of this in greater detail if required.”

**National Grid – 16 July 2020**

States:

“National Grid understands that Phillip Roden (Axis), planning agent acting on behalf of AGR for planning application ref (20/00557/ESF) has advised that the Local Planning Authority (EADC) has sought confirmation of the following points:

a) A grid connection is available to the applicant.

National Grid response:

Information in relation to project grid connections is formally captured on the Transmission Entry Capacity or TEC Register, accessible through the NGENSO website - <https://www.nationalgrideso.com/connections/registers-reports-and-guidance>. This is publicly available information, and the LPA should refer to this.

b) That the connection works to the substation will be done under National Grid’s Permitted Development Rights.

National Grid response:

To connect Burwell Solar Farm into National Grid’s existing Burwell 400kV Substation will require the installation of a new electricity transformer and cable connection. These connection works are Permitted Development under Schedule 2, Part 15, Class B of the General Permitted Development Order (2015), and National Grid will be submitting a letter to East Cambridgeshire District Council to that effect in the very near future. This letter will include a plan clearly showing, for information, National Grid’s proposed works. It should, however, be noted that the cable from Burwell Solar Farm to the new electricity transformer will be owned by the customer (AGR) and therefore it will be the customer’s responsibility to obtain any necessary permissions or consents for that cable.”

**Cambridgeshire Archaeology – 17 July 2020**

States:

“I confirm that an archaeological programme commencing with trench based evaluation is required for this scheme: to be undertaken post consent.

The Environment Statement presents a very useful deposit model gained from the recommended borehole survey, which indicates the survival of fen peat

overlying the chalk marl substrate at depths of between c. 80cm and 1m - though inconsistently across the site. The date of the peat has not been ascertained in this survey, or has the potential for preserved dryland soils pre-dating the prehistoric formation of the fen. These objectives and that of finding if archaeological remains are stratified in the deposit sequence/present at all, is to be established by the evaluation.

The ES also presents archaeological and historic environment data from a search area around the site that provides the context for past human occupation evidence by period. It's not necessary to repeat that here and we endorse the summaries of the desk-based and borehole assessment work.

We do not object to this development but advise that a suitable archaeological condition is attached to any planning consent awarded for the scheme. It will allow a programme of archaeological work, commencing with an evaluation to take place and may lead to a second, detailed stage of investigation should significant archaeological evidence be found. No works are required to mitigate the impact of the scheme on the setting of scheduled monuments and other designated schemes, which are considered at too great a distance for concern by your other historic environment advisers (Historic England and ECDC Conservation Officer)."

Recommends specific wording for a pre-commencement condition.

**Cadent Gas Ltd** - No Comments Received

**Planning Casework Unit** - No Comments Received

**Minerals and Waste Development Control Team** - No Comments Received

**Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** - No Comments Received

5.2 Neighbours – 428 neighbouring properties were notified and the responses received are summarised below. Site notices were put up on the 4 June 2020 and a notice put in the press on the 21 June 2020. A full copy of the responses are available on the Council's website.

31 Kingfisher Drive, Burwell – Questions what the deer fencing is for as surely the ditches and hedges will be enough.

The Granary, 4A Heath Road, Swaffham Prior – Support the need for solar energy and seeks suitable landscaping (for ecology, reduce glare and landscape reasons).

Concludes "I am neutral on the project but would strongly urge the requirement of visual screening to protect the visual impact on the wider fen view".

Hythe House 3 The Hythe, Reach – States the proposal is large but necessary. Wants to ensure biodiversity is protected.

81A North Street, Burwell – Sees the proposal as a positive step in making the area more sustainable, but wants to ensure biodiversity is enhanced.

45 North Street, Burwell – Does not feel a new large solar farm is appropriate. Prefers if the land is used as part of Wicken Fen or grazing land.

10 Murton Close, Burwell – Does not object to the development. However, wants to ensure how the solar farm is constructed and the hours of operation (including when piling can be done).

The Hawthorns, 33 Burwell Road, Reach – Raises concern in regards to the character of the fen landscape and glare. However, concludes that if needed would only be acceptable if a hedge surrounded the site, including biodiversity benefits.

(additional comments) Wants to ensure pile driving is controlled to protect residential amenity.

(additional comments) Raises the concern of piling during construction. Seeks hedging to prevent glare and protect the landscape. Biodiversity needs to be considered.

The Red Barn, Chapel Lane, Reach – Objects, as would like to see the site screened by hedging that would also allow biodiversity gain.

(additional comments following amendments) Maintains objections, due to visual impact.

29 Burwell Road, Reach – Objects on the loss of high quality agricultural land, impact on Devil's Dyke, glare, impact on the Wicken Fen Vision, impact on Reach, noise pollution from construction works, loss of fen landscape and lack of community consultation.

Newhall Farm, Weirs Drove, Burwell – Objects to the proposal due to loss of high quality agricultural land, glare, harm to character of the area and harm to biodiversity.

The Wilds, Burwell Road, Reach – Objects on the grounds of glare/glint, that the area is so flat you can see the spire of Ely Cathedral, aviation safety, harm to biodiversity including migrating birds and construction noise.

Questions if there will be landscaping.

Manor House, 10 Chapel Lane, Reach – Solar development needs to be considered strategically. The site will use up Grade 2 agricultural land. Solar energy gathers electricity at the wrong time of day and different technology should be considered.

6 Hythe Close, Burwell – Raises concerns in regards that Burwell already has one working solar farm and one under construction. Combined with the construction piling noise believes Burwell has done its bit.

That this proposal might have been confused with duct laying associated with the ongoing construction work.

Thinks the proposal is too close to Burwell, which is done to save the developer money.

All construction traffic should use Reach Road and Hythe Lane, as well as timing piling is allowed should be controlled by condition if the application is approved. In addition the development must benefit wildlife if approved.

(Additional comments) Believes many people in Burwell are unaware of this application and does not believe consultation was adequate.

Also wants to ensure the loss of agricultural land is carefully considered.

Raises harm to the rural character area.

Would prefer more hedges and less reed beds, in order to increase biodiversity.

Hythe Farm House, Hythe Lane, Burwell – Objects to the development due to the loss of high quality agricultural land. The proposal will only allow low intensity grazing by sheep.

Energy should be created via solar panels on roofs and batteries.

Submitted Petition – (14 addresses) Loss of agricultural land, which can be used for electrical generation if needed.

7A Hythe Lane, Burwell – Objects to the development on the grounds of already several solar farms in the area, further industrialises Burwell because of the substation, impact upon the character of recreational walkways/cycleways, loss of landscape, loss of agricultural land, landscape will take too long to grow, trees should be used to obscure substation, noise pollution and development should be used to prevent travellers using the lanes.

75 Lower Road, Burwell – Raises concern in regards to construction noise and seeks it to be controlled.

Durleston, Hythe Lane, Burwell – Objects to the proposal on grounds that construction noise will be detrimental to their amenity.

11 The Avenue Burwell – Objects to the proposal due to the harm to the rural character surrounding Burwell.

Already a site under construction that is harming landscape and creating detrimental noise pollution.

Loss of top quality agricultural land.



2 Hythe Close, Burwell – Objects in regards to the impact construction will cause (noise, traffic, impact on roads), loss of high quality agricultural land and harm to landscape. Seeks replacement trees and use of additional hedgerows.

71 Low Road, Burwell – Objects on the grounds that the village is at saturation point for solar farms. Nothing visually appealing from solar farms and raises concern over loss of agricultural land.

Promotes wind turbines as these would be more in character with the local area.

Raises noise concerns from the construction of solar farm and the damage to the enjoyment of recreational routes.

8 Lime Close, Burwell – Objects to the proposal on the following grounds:

- If the agricultural land is not required anymore should become fen land, which will help combat climate change and promote biodiversity.
- Pile driving is detrimental to residential amenity.
- Impact from construction traffic.
- Impact upon walkers and cyclists.

## 6.0 The Planning Policy Context

### 6.1 East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015

GROWTH 2	Locational Strategy
GROWTH 3	Infrastructure requirements
GROWTH 5	Presumption in favour of sustainable development
ENV 1	Landscape and settlement character
ENV 2	Design
ENV 4	Energy efficiency and renewable energy in construction
ENV 6	Renewable energy development
ENV 7	Biodiversity and geology
ENV 8	Flood risk
ENV 9	Pollution
ENV 11	Conservation Areas
ENV 12	Listed Buildings
ENV 14	Sites of archaeological interest
COM 5	Strategic green infrastructure
COM 7	Transport impact
COM 8	Parking provision

### 6.2 Supplementary Planning Documents

Design Guide  
Contaminated Land  
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water  
Renewable Energy Development (Commercial Scale)

### 6.3 National Planning Policy Framework 2019

- 2 Achieving sustainable development
- 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 9 Promoting sustainable transport
- 11 Making effective use of land
- 12 Achieving well-designed places
- 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- 16 Conserving & enhancing the historic environment

6.4 Planning Practice Guidance  
067 Reference ID: 7-067-20140306

## 7.0 PLANNING COMMENTS

### 7.1 Environmental Statement

7.2 The application was screened under planning reference 19/01576/SCREEN where it was concluded that:

“It is considered that with the significant amount of energy farm developments having taken and potentially taking place in the locality there will be a cumulative significant impact upon the visual character of the area and the amount of high quality farmland being used. “

7.3 Loss of agricultural land and cumulative impact have been also been raised through the consultation process.

7.4 It is generally considered that by 2050 the world will have a homo sapien (humans) population of around 9 to 10 billion (currently around 7.5 billion). There is substantial scientific argument that we can currently feed 10 billion people, though not necessarily sustainably. Starvation is, therefore, currently down to greed and bad management of food production/storage/distribution and not down to lack of agricultural land.

7.5 The site is 79.9 hectares (179.4 acres) of agricultural land with 44.7 (110.5 acres) hectares being grade 2 and 35.2 hectares (87 acres) being grade 3a. Grade 2 agricultural land is considered as very good and grade 3a is considered of good quality. The loss of grade 2 should always be carefully considered due to it having only minor limitations that will affect food production.

7.6 The developer has argued that if the site remains intensive arable production it is likely that the organic matter in the topsoil will continue to degrade by oxidation (this releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere) and will lower the quality of the agricultural land in the long term.

7.7 The proposal will lead to the loss of approximately 3 hectares (3.7%) (7.4 acres) of agricultural land due to proposed buildings, access track and landscaping and an additional temporary loss of around 1.13 hectares (2.8 acres) due to the compound and cables. During the operation phase of the proposal, a large proportion of the land will still be able to be used for grazing land for sheep. This gives the potential to increase the organic matter in the topsoil over the 40 year operation time frame,

due to increased faecal matter being created on site. Where the proposed buildings are going may result in small areas of the site long term being downgraded.

- 7.8 The developer within Chapter 6 of its Environmental Statement states that when considering all of the proposed local solar farms, the loss of East Cambridgeshire's best and most versatile agricultural land would be around 0.6%.
- 7.9 The proposal will not lead to the permanent long term loss of arable farmland (though a small area of the land might reduce in agricultural quality), the majority of the site will still be able to be used as grazing land and this area could improve in agricultural quality in 40 years. With the site still being able to be used for low intensive farming and the long term improvement; it is considered the proposal will lead to a low level detrimental impact (in regards to Environmental Impact) short-medium term with long term benefits (post 40 years). It is also noted that no planning permission is needed to change land from arable to pastoral farming.
- 7.10 In regards to potential significant effect upon the rural character of the area, the continued amount of solar farms (both potentially, approved and operational) in the local area could have a substantial impact to how people experience the countryside in this area of East Cambridgeshire.
- 7.11 While the site will be described as having a Fen character, due to its flat nature and openness, there is very little fen landscape left within Cambridgeshire. Since the 1600s the Fen landscape has been eroded, with now less than 1% of the original fen surviving. The fen landscape is, therefore, now one of modern agricultural management. Wicken Fen is both a good example of remaining fen land and local to the site. This natural fen landscape has a feeling of more enclosure due to reeds that are approximately 2m in height that run adjacent to the footpaths.
- 7.12 If Wicken Fen was to expand from 358 hectares to 5500 hectares by 2099 this would for instance have a significant impact upon the perceived fen landscape, as well as leading to a substantial loss of agricultural land. It is important to note that significant impact does not necessarily mean significant harm. The developer is taking cues from the Wicken landscape in its proposal and this will have a significant impact upon the local landscape, especially those travelling along the lanes of Hightown and Newham Drovers.
- 7.13 The solar/energy farms within the area (defined by 6km) are:
- Sunnica a 500MW scheme (still at pre-application stages with the Local Planning Authorities) with the nearest part of the solar panels/batteries are approximately 5.75km to the east.
  - 20/00522/FUM (application still under consideration) is a 48 hectare site located between Soham and Wicken and seeks to generate up to 28MW. Developer refers to this site as Bracks Farm and is located 2.75km to the north of their proposed development.
  - To the north of Bracks Farm is an existing 12MW Solar Farm (Triangle Farm).
  - To the west of Bracks Farm is a potential 37.5MW solar farm at North Angle Farm.

- Goosehall Solar Farm 39.5MW (15/00723/ESF) is currently under construction and located 535m to the north of the proposed site.
- There is also a solar farm south of Burwell on Heath Road (approx. 4km from proposed development) and another solar farm to the south of Stretham (approx. 6km from proposed development).

- 7.14 The developer has argued that the schemes to the north of A1132/ north of Wicken, which include the developments around Bracks and Triangle Farm would be located on the opposite side of the ridge that Wicken is located on. On this basis the cumulative impacts would not be significant, though those cycling or walking a long distance could encounter all the solar farms by virtue of existing cycle ways and footpaths.
- 7.15 The Goosehall Farm solar farm and this proposed development are likely to be jointly seen from the Burwell Lode and Little Fen Drove in the short term, thus creating a landscape more defined by solar development than agricultural fields. The case officer agrees with the developer that the short term impact would be significant on this basis. However, once landscape on both sites has established the main impact from the solar developments would be substantially lessened. It is agreed with that within 5 years the impact on the landscape will no longer be significant. It is noted that planting of hedges and trees does not require permission from the Local Planning Authority; nonetheless, careful landscaping for this proposed scheme is required to prevent the loss of fen character.
- 7.16 The Sunnica scheme (excluding the cabling and improvements to Burwell National Grid Substation) is located a significant distance from the proposed scheme. It is extremely unlikely there will be a cumulative visual impact with this proposed development, as substantial amounts of agricultural land will remain as a buffer. However, any additional solar farms between this proposal and Sunnica should consider this same potential cumulative impact.
- 7.17 It is considered that the Stretham and Heath Road Burwell solar farms, due to their distance and location, will unlikely have any cumulative impact on the character of the area/landscape.
- 7.18 It should also be noted that each of these solar farms have a slightly different landscape setting and some are/can be screened easier behind tree rows and hedges.
- 7.19 However, it can be concluded that while the short term impact from this solar farm will be high, the harm will be low-moderate due to the use of reed beds and other landscaping in the longer term. This issue will be covered in more depth in the visual impact section below.
- 7.20 It is considered that the medium to long term cumulative impacts on the landscape and farm land will not lead to significant harm.
- 7.21 Principle of Development

7.22 On the 27 June 2019 the United Kingdom (UK) passed legislation requiring the Government to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 100% compared to 1990 levels to ensure that the net zero target will be met by 2050 .

7.23 The developer's documentation provides evidence that since 1990 UK GDP has increased by 67%, while UK emissions have reduced by 42% by 2016. The developer has also argued that electricity demand will approximately double by 2050; due to increased population size, transition to electrical vehicles, hydrogen production and no longer using natural gas to heat houses. They continue to argue that by 2030 between 9.6 and 16.3 gigawatts of solar power will be required in order to meet zero carbon by 2050. This requires between 192-326 solar farms of similar scale to that proposed (50MW) or between 19-36 Sunnica sized developments (500MW).

It should be noted that:  
1 million watts or 1000 kw = 1 megawatt  
1 megawatt can power around 650 houses  
1 gigawatt = 1000 megawatts

7.24 The NPPF makes it clear that it seeks to facilitate sustainable development, which is defined by "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It goes on to state in paragraph 154: "When determining planning application for renewable or 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."

7.25 Policy ENV6 of the Adopted Local Plan states:

"Proposals for renewable energy and associated infrastructure will be supported, unless their wider environmental, social and economic benefits would be outweighed by significant adverse effects that cannot be remediated and made acceptable in relation to:

- The local environmental and visual landscape impact.
- Impact on the character and appearance of the streetscape/buildings.
- Key views, in particular those of Ely Cathedral.
- Protected species.
- Residential amenity.
- Safeguarding areas from nearby airfields; and
- Heritage assets

Renewable energy proposals which affect sites of international, national and local nature importance or other irreplaceable habitats will be determined against the relevant sections of Policy ENV7.

The visual and amenity impacts of proposed structures will be assessed on their merits, both individually and cumulatively.

Provision should be made for the removal of facilities and reinstatement of the site, should they cease to operate.”

7.26 The Council’s Renewable Energy SPD states:

“In summary proposals for renewable energy generation will be considered on their merits, on a case by case basis. The Council will take account of any environmental, economic or social benefits...The Council will refuse planning permission for commercial scale renewable energy schemes where it is considered that there are significant adverse impacts which outweigh the wider benefits of renewable energy development identified above. The Council will also consider to what extent any adverse impacts can be mitigated through the design and siting of proposals or by applying appropriate planning conditions. The views of local communities, residents, parish and town councils, community groups and all elected representatives relating to commercial scale renewable energy schemes will also be given significant weight in the determination of planning applications.”

7.27 On the 21 October 2019 East Cambridgeshire District Council declared a climate emergency, with the Leader of the Council stating:

“We acknowledge that the Council has a significant role to play in protecting and improving the environment for future generations and so we made the decision to amend our own climate change motion to formally declare a climate emergency.”

We are proud of the work we already do as a Council to reduce our impact on the environment and we welcome the opportunity to join over 200 other Councils across the UK who are also working to fight climate change. On behalf of our residents, we as a Council will be taking the appropriate actions. The most ambitious piece of work already underway by the Council is the development of a joint bid with Cambridgeshire County Council to Innovate UK to design an energy system to deliver net zero carbon emissions from energy use in East Cambridgeshire by 2050; the project focuses on shifting transport, gas and oil use to electricity and to grow the electricity network to cater for the change. “

7.28 This follows a year after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated the world had 12 years to ensure global temperatures do not rise by more than 1.5C. Going beyond a rise of 1.5C will have a significant effect on the world’s liveability. It has also stated that if there is not a 45% reduction in CO2 levels from 2010 levels by 2030 the 2050 target will not be met.

7.29 The requirements of the Climate Emergency will require a complete change on how humans respond to the Earth; as either the rapid change to climate caused by humans will create a more hostile/unpredictable climate or humans will have to

radically change their diet (in both senses of the definition: food/activities) and provide a continuous fight against climate change.

- 7.30 In short scientists advise that if climate change is not substantially tackled by 2030 it will be the cause of the death of large numbers of the species that inhabit the world including humans. The International Committee of the Red Cross consider there to be 250,000 more deaths in the human population each year between 2030-2050, including from malnutrition, due to climate change.
- 7.31 In regards to principle it is concluded that a solar farm in this location is acceptable in principle due to the clear policy guidance at both national and district level; in addition to the clear international requirements to tackle climate change. The benefits of renewable solar energy is considered to be granted very substantial weight. The proposal will help to ensure the Council meets the 2050 target by providing renewable energy early that will be up and running prior to 2030. In order to reasonably argue for this application to be refused it would need to be demonstrated that significant and demonstrable harm either individually or cumulatively, which cannot be mitigated against would be caused by the proposal and that is not considered to be the case.
- 7.32 The additional benefits and harm, alongside the assessment in accordance with policy ENV6 of the Local Plan which specifically relates to renewable energy development are covered in the remainder of the report.
- 7.33 Visual Impact
- 7.34 The Environmental Statement includes a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), which was undertaken by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute with over 13 years' experience.
- 7.35 The solar panels measure 3m above ground level, in addition there are 'shipping container' style buildings that measure 3.2m above ground level (this includes a 0.6m base). It is proposed that the site will be surrounded by 2m high deer fencing, with the developer also providing a mix of hedges and reed beds in order to screen their development.
- 7.36 The viewpoints/photomontages 2 and 9-11 submitted with the application demonstrate where the impact is likely to be greatest as this is adjacent to the site.
- 7.37 Viewpoint 2 is taken on Hightown Drove looking north-north-west towards the proposed solar farm located to the right hand side. The existing view is one of open agricultural countryside, with sparse planting, row of electrical pylons and Burwell Substation located to the right. In year 1 the solar panels can be clearly seen and while the pylons still dominate the vertical view the solar panels have a substantial impact upon the rural character of the area. By year 5 the landscape remains substantially changed, though this is now due to 2m high hedges. It should be noted that many fields are surrounded by hedgerows and planting does not require planning permission. While the top of the proposed development can still be seen, this has very little impact upon the character of the area. The harm to the character of the area above that which can be achieved outside of planning is minimal. The

existing pylons and Burwell substation remain the most dominant features in the landscape.

- 7.38 Viewpoint 11 is taken on Hightown Drove further north-west and immediately adjacent to the proposed solar farm. The existing view again is one of a flat agricultural landscape with sparse tree planting. Though the pylons have reduced in scale to much more modest wooden structures. In year 1 the solar panels will be clearly in view, with them being approximately 10m away from the edge of the Drove. In year 5 the reeds will have grown up and that gives the right hand side of the Drove the appearance more like Wicken Fen or a true fen landscape, with the development likely to be completely obscured. The left hand side remains open agricultural landscape. While the proposal will have a significant impact upon the character of this local area; it is not necessarily harmful. The use of reeds returns the land/vegetation to a more natural state and could be argued to improve the landscape.
- 7.39 Viewpoint 9 is taken on Newham Drove looking southeast towards Burwell. The existing view is defined as the transition from the open fields into the wooded settlement of Burwell; Burwell Substation and large electron pylons can also be clearly seen. The closer trees and hedges are around the small field in the centre of the solar farm that is outside of the site area. In year 1 the proposed solar farm will block a large proportion of the wooded landscape that marks this entrance into the settlement of Burwell. However, by year 5 the reeds will have grown and this could be seen to have a positive impact on the character of the area by better demonstrating the historic transition between the fens and the settlement built on the higher ground. Therefore, while in year 1 there will be a medium-high level of harm; by year 5 it could be argued there will be a positive impact to the character of the area.
- 7.40 Viewpoint 10 is taken on Newham Drove looking northwest. The existing view is still primarily of the open countryside, though the separate wooded/hedged field is seen to the left of the Drove. In year 1 those traveling along the Drove will feel like they are within the Solar Farm and on this basis the harm to the character of the area is high. However, by year 5 while the openness of the countryside is gone it is also true that the solar panels are obscured by the proposed landscaping. Taking into account that planting could be carried out at any time without requiring planning permission and is not development, the long term harm in planning terms is considered to be minor.
- 7.41 It is considered overall that the short term (first year) impact to Newham and Hightown Drove will lead to moderate – high level of harm. However, 5 years after the development is completed, while the change will be significant, the level of harm at worst will be low. The introduction of reed beds will grant a similar feel to the character of Wicken Fen and thus could be argued as an improvement.
- 7.42 Viewpoints 1, 4, 6 and 7 provide medium distance (still within 1km) views of the site. Viewpoint 1 is located from a footpath to the north of Burwell Lode that looks southwards towards the proposed development. The solar panels will be seen at year 1 and will have a low-medium impact upon the character of the area. At year 5 the impact upon the character of the area is minimal.



- 7.43 Viewpoint 4 is located to the south of the site on a public byway that runs along the north edge of Reach. Only an existing view is provided, where the pylons and National Grid Substation are the most dominant built features in the landscape, though large barn structures can be seen in the distance. With the distance from the site and the relatively low level of the proposed development (approx. 3m high); the impact from this distance is considered to be low in both the short and longer term.
- 7.44 Viewpoint 6 is located to the west (and slightly to the south) of the site and is on the Lodes Way (edge of Hightown Drove). The existing view is again one of open flat agricultural land with a mix of smaller electron pylons and large metal pylons defining the view. In the distance the substation can again be seen along with the mature trees around Burwell; finally the large agricultural style barn can be seen to the north of the site. The impact from this distance is considered to be low in both the short and longer term.
- 7.45 Viewpoint 7 is located to the northwest of the site on the edge of National Trust landholding. The existing view is defined by flat agricultural land, with a row of the large pylons crossing the landscape; the wooded landscape of Burwell and the National Grid Substation are located in the distance. In year 1 with the solar panels extending across the entire view, it is considered that the harm is medium-high. However, again by year 5 the panels are almost entirely obscured by the proposed planting and the pylons again become the main focus. The long term harm to the landscape is, therefore, considered to be low.
- 7.46 It is considered overall that the impact from the proposal on viewpoints 1, 4, 6 and 7 will be minimal over the lifetime of the development.
- 7.47 Viewpoint 3 is taken from Devil's Ditch (just over 1km to the south), located on the eastern edge of Reach. The existing view overlooks rows of trees and hedges, as well as some existing agricultural buildings. The large metal pylons are less dominant and the National Grid Substation is obscured by the planting. While no proposed photomontages have been provided, it is very likely you will be able to see the solar panels during the early stages of the development. However, once the proposed landscape has established the solar farm is unlikely to be noticeable.
- 7.48 Viewpoint 5 is approximately 2.3km to the southwest of the site. While there is still predominantly open agricultural land, the existing sparse planting and distance from the proposed development will mean there is little impact upon the rural landscape from this distance.
- 7.49 Viewpoint 8 is located to the northwest of the site on the edge of Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve (approximately 2.4km away from the site). While the landscape is predominantly open countryside, there are agricultural buildings dotted across the landscape. The impact the proposed solar farm will have on this view is likely to be minimal.
- 7.50 It is, therefore, considered that the longer distance views of the proposed development are likely to be minimal even prior to suggested landscaping establishing around the site.

- 7.51 A resident has promoted the use of wind turbines. Firstly this Council has no policy on where wind turbines should be located (as required by the NPPF). In addition, to create 49MW you would be looking at around 6 wind turbines of 200m in total height. To put into perspective 30 St Mary Axe (The Gherkin, London) measures 180m tall and Ely Cathedral is stated at 66m tall. Alternatively, you could seek 3 wind turbines of 300m in total height to produce the same amount of power. It is understood that a traditional UK pylon is approximately 50m tall. Hedging and reed beds would not be able to obscure and reduce the impact of wind turbines.
- 7.52 Overall, while the proposal in the short term will have a large negative impact to those traveling through/next to the site, the long term impact will help restore the fen landscape and this can be argued as a positive. The long distance views of this landscape are unlikely to be noticeably effected. It is on the basis that once the landscape has established at worse the proposal will have minor harm and at best will help restore part of the original fen landscape; it is on the basis that the proposal is considered to meet with policies ENV1, ENV2 and ENV6 of the Adopted Local Plan.
- 7.53 Ecology
- 7.54 The current site has relatively low level of biodiversity potential, as the site is predominantly open fields with very little vegetation. The proposal seeks to provide additional hedges and ditches as well as allowing for a richer grass mix on the site. This will be approximately 1,340m of hedging and 18,000 sqm (5m wide) reed beds. This will provide both a richer landscape for wildlife and return the area to more of a natural state (provision of reed beds).
- 7.55 The National Trust state:  
“At this particular site we consider that the proposed use would be more beneficial for biodiversity, wildlife and soils than intensive agriculture. The proposals will create/enhance habitats that reflect some SSSI features (ie Lowland ditch systems, S4 - Phragmites australis swamp and reed-beds). There could be further ways to further improve the biodiversity on the site, such as choosing an appropriate seed mix for the grassland sown underneath the panels and the management of this grass so that it is not mown or grazed so closely.”
- 7.56 It is also noted that Cambs Wildlife Trust and Natural England have no objects to this proposal, subject to conditions to ensure biodiversity net gain and ongoing management.
- 7.57 Concerns have been raised though consultation regarding birds mistaking solar panels for water. In a separate application the Case Officer raised this concern and was told by ecologists that this does not happen; the National Trust who raised this concern do also state there is little evidence to back this up.
- 7.58 National Trust have also raised insects confusing solar panels for water and laying eggs on the panels, though again there appears little evidence for this. However, any biodiversity mitigation scheme should include regular access by ecologists, this could include the National Trust, to enable them to learn the impact of solar farms on biodiversity and their subsequent findings made public for future reference.

- 7.59 Any land animals migrating across the landscape would be required to navigate around the solar farm, as the proposed deer fencing will form an effective barrier. However, there would still be routes for these animals to take and on this basis it is unlikely there would be noticeable harm to these species.
- 7.60 Taking into account that three professional bodies that specialise in biodiversity are not raising objections to this proposal; there is no evidence to suggest that the application should be refused on these grounds. It is also considered based on this specialist knowledge that the proposal is very likely to provide a significant benefit in regards to biodiversity in the local area. On this basis the application meets with the requirements of policies ENV6 and ENV 7 of the Adopted Local Plan, subject to a condition ensuring biodiversity measures are brought forward.
- 7.61 Residential Amenity
- 7.62 It is considered due to the nature of the proposal that while it is operational, the proposal will have very limited impact upon residential amenity.
- 7.63 It is noted that the construction of solar farms can lead to substantial impact upon the amenity of surrounding residents; demonstrated by peoples' concerns in regards to Goosehall Farm solar farm. While visiting the site the Case Officer noted the noise from piling from the construction of Goosehall Farm; it is fully understood why this would be a substantial irritation to the residents of Burwell, though did not believe it was detrimental enough to warrant refusal or outright preventing any additional solar farms to be approved.
- 7.64 On this basis it is considered reasonable to both condition when general construction/deliveries take place and a tighter time frame of when piling can be undertaken; on this basis the comments from the Environmental Health Officer are supported. This should grant a balance between allowing the solar farm to be constructed, while providing protection to the local residents. In addition the case officer supports the Environmental Health Officer in removing rights to install additional external lights and the requirement for a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). It should be noted that while the CEMP can help minimise the impact of construction, the site remains connected by country lanes with the villages and there is unlikely any route that can be taken that will avoid residential streets. It must also be noted that conditions provide controls on the site and are far more difficult to impose or enforce for off-site impacts. So while a CEMP can require a preferred route for heavy good vehicles, the Council's Enforcement Team cannot easily monitor if this is being complied with or enforce as we cannot control the use of the public highway.
- 7.65 It is considered that subject to suitable conditions the proposal will be acceptable in regards to policies ENV2 and ENV6 of the Adopted Local Plan.
- 7.66 Impact on Aviation
- 7.67 It is noted that the Ministry of Defence, National Air Traffic Services Ltd and Cambridge Airport Ltd raise no objections to this proposal. There is no reason to believe that these experts in their field have assessed the development incorrectly.

On this basis, the proposal will not have any detrimental impact upon aviation in the local area in accordance with policy ENV6 of the Adopted Local Plan.

7.68 Glint/Glare

7.69 A Glint and Glare Assessment was carried out by Pager Power, who state they have undertaken over 450 assessments.

7.70 With the flatness of the landscape, the relative low height (3m) of the solar panels and the proposed landscaping (approx. 2m high, though could reasonably taller) any glint or glare impacts will be relatively minimal. It is also accepted that with Burwell having lines of mature trees, it is likely existing vegetation will protect residents from any glare or glint. It is also noted Reach has mature trees along its northern boundary that again should help protect from glint/glare.

7.71 Historic Environment

7.72 It is noted that one resident has raised concern that the proposal will impact upon the setting of the Ely Cathedral's spire. However, it is considered that the proposal will have no impact upon the setting of Ely Cathedral and its tower. It should be noted that Historic England and the Council's Conservation Officer have not objected.

7.73 On behalf of the Case Officer, a Senior Planning Officer checked the views from Burwell Castle and considered that the proposal will have no impact from views from the mound due to the existing vegetation (mature trees, including Priory Wood).

7.74 The proposal is considered to comply with policies ENV6, ENV11 and ENV12 of the Adopted Local Plan.

7.75 It is noted County Council's Historic Environment Team has not objected, subject to a pre-commencement condition. It is considered reasonable to add a pre-commencement archaeological condition, as the site is on the edge of the settlement of Burwell and given its size could hold important archaeological finds. Subject to this recommended condition it is considered that the proposal will be in accordance with policies ENV6 and ENV14 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015

7.76 Highways

7.77 The site is accessed by Newham Drove and Hightown Drove, both these roads connect onto Weirs Drove. All of these roads would be described as single track lanes.

7.78 The Local Highways Authority has raised no objections to this proposal, subject to a construction management plan. This view is agreed with, as while this proposal will very likely cause disturbance to the local highway network during construction due to its location and access routes, its long term impact on the highway network is negligible. A condition requiring a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is already recommended.

- 7.79 The proposal is considered to meet with the requirements of policies COM7 and COM8 of the Adopted Local Plan, subject to a CEMP condition.
- 7.80 Flood Risk and Drainage
- 7.81 The site is within Floodzone 2 and 3 (defended), as is the Burwell Electrical Substation. The middle of the site is within Flood Zone 1. The developer has raised their vulnerable parts of the development by at least 0.6m (Control and Storage buildings for example sit on 0.6m concrete plinth) and the solar panels are raised by 0.8m above ground level.
- 7.82 The developer has assessed the proposal as a less vulnerable use, which is appropriate in flood zone 2 and 3. The developer is relying on the low employment on the site and that the risk to human life on this ground is very low. However, the Case Officer considers the proposal to fit more comfortably within Essential Infrastructure that is still acceptable subject to an exception test to ensure: "In Flood Zone 3a essential infrastructure should be designed and constructed to remain operational and safe in times of flood" (Planning Guidance 067 Reference ID: 7-067-20140306).
- 7.83 The developer responded to this on the 16 July 2020, which can be viewed on the Council's website. The developer argues that solar farms can be considered as either essential infrastructure or less vulnerable. The developer also places emphasis that the site is in a defended flood zone, which while true is not accepted by the Case Officer as an argument in accordance with National Policy. The proposal should be considered on purely the basis of Flood Zone 2 and 3; with no reliance of defences as advised by the Environment Agency.
- 7.84 However, even if the proposal is considered under the high risk category of essential infrastructure the proposal is still considered to be acceptable. It is accepted there is a significant need for renewable energy that goes beyond the need for the provision of a couple of solar farms in the area and this is a wider substantial benefit to the community that outweighs the flood risk.
- 7.85 There is also an argument that creating solar farms (clean energy) and by meeting the 2050 target will reduce the future risk of both severe droughts and floods.
- 7.86 The developer has provided a Sequential Analysis that can be read on pages 51-55 in their Planning Statement, which goes through the constraints (such as biodiversity and heritage) of seeking to find suitable sites. While this is aimed at seeking to protect high quality farm land it also demonstrates the difficulty of finding sites for solar farms of just under 50MW that need to be located closer to a substation.
- 7.87 The developer has also looked at a site in Upware and found this site unsuitable due to its closeness to a SSSI.
- 7.88 It is also noted that The Goosehall Solar Farm is in an undefended Flood Zone 3, which passed the Sequential Test due to the limited amount of sites a circa 50MW solar farm could be located on. This remains the case as there are very limited

opportunities within the north of the district to place a 80 hectares (197.7 acres) solar farm; many sites in Flood Zone 1 are allocated for employment or housing and placing solar farms in these locations will prevent homes and businesses being created locally.

- 7.89 The proposal is adjacent to the National Grid Substation, which means there will be minimal work required in order to connect into the National Grid and will also help to improve the efficiency of the solar farm.
- 7.90 This site also benefits from a relatively large proportion of Grade 3a Agricultural land. In this district it is very difficult to build on land that is not Grade 1 or Grade 2 Agricultural land, due to the high proportion of this land in East Cambridgeshire. The other local area of lower (not Grade 1 or 2) quality agricultural land is the area of land between Soham and Wicken that already has existing and proposed solar farms on.
- 7.91 It is considered on this basis it is considered that the sequential test has been met.
- 7.92 In addition it is noted that the siting of equipment and the use of concrete plinths minimises risk making the development safe for its lifetime, without increasing flood risk elsewhere. Finally the Environment Agency have accepted the proposal based on the submitted layout and elevation plans. It is considered that the proposal has complied with both the sequential and exception tests.
- 7.93 The proposal is seeking to include new reed beds, which includes a ditch. This will likely have a substantial positive impact on drainage on the site. Conditions are recommended to both ensure suitable drainage on the site, as well as the management of the site for the lifetime of the development. On this basis the proposal is considered to comply with the comments of the Lead Local Flood Authority.
- 7.94 The proposal is considered to comply with ENV8 of the Adopted Local Plan, the Flood and Water SPD, as well as the requirements of the NPPF.
- 7.95 Other Material Matters
- 7.96 It is considered that the Local Planning Authority by placing site notices, a press notice, consulting the Parish Councils of Burwell and Reach as well as consulting 431 residents has consulted widely on this application. It is also noted that this application has been discussed on the Burwell Community Facebook Page that has 8,300 members. The concern from a neighbour stating that the Council had not sufficiently consulted widely enough is considered to hold no weight.
- 7.97 Planning Balance
- 7.98 Impact on Landscape/Character
- 7.99 The proposal will change the local landscape from one of predominantly open fields to one of solar panels in the short term. Substantial harm is predicted during the construction period and the first year of operation. The closer to the site the higher harm.

- 7.100 Once the landscape has established the wide open space will remain lost. However, landscaping could be achieved without planning permission and the addition of 5m wide reed beds will help restore a more natural landscape (pre 1600s). This can be argued as a positive to the local area. On this basis the proposal complies with policies ENV1, ENV2 and ENV6 of Adopted Local Plan.
- 7.101 Impact on Ely Cathedral
- 7.102 The proposal is not considered to have any noticeable impact upon the setting of Ely Cathedral, as backed by Historic England and the Conservation Officer. It will also have no impact on any other heritage assets, subject to an archaeological condition. The proposal complies with policies ENV6, ENV11, ENV12 and ENV14 of the Adopted Local Plan.
- 7.103 Protected Species and Biodiversity
- 7.104 The site is close to Wicken Fen. However, The National Trust, Cambs Wildlife Trust and Natural England have no objections to this proposal subject to conditions to ensure biodiversity enhancement. The proposal complies with policies ENV6 and ENV7 of the Adopted Local Plan.
- 7.105 Residential Amenity
- 7.106 The operation of the solar farm will have hardly any impact upon residential amenity. The construction of the solar farm could cause substantial disturbance and on this basis it is recommended that conditions are used to control construction hours (including specific hours for piling) and the requirement for a Construction Environmental Management Plan. On this basis, the proposal meets policies ENV2, ENV6 and ENV9 of the Adopted Local Plan.
- 7.107 Safeguarding Aviation
- 7.108 The National Air Traffic Services Ltd, Cambridge Airport Ltd and Defence Infrastructure Organisation Safeguarding have not raised any objections to this proposal. On this basis it is considered that the proposal meets with this requirement under Policy ENV6 of the Adopted Local Plan.
- 7.109 Flood Risk/Drainage
- 7.110 It is considered that the proposal has complied with the requirements of sequential and essential test in regards to flood risk. In addition, subject to a drainage condition this will lead to a net benefit of surface water drainage.
- 7.111 The proposal is considered to comply with ENV8 of the Adopted Local Plan, as well as the requirements of the NPPF.
- 7.112 Loss of Agricultural Land
- 7.113 The proposal will lead to the loss of intensive farming land for 40 years, though this could be achieved without planning permission as the farmer could decide to graze

animals or leave the land fallow. It is also accepted that the loss of this farmland is a small proportion of the district's farmland, even when considering all the approved and proposed solar farms. In addition it is accepted that the farmland on the whole is likely to be improved in 40 years, as it is allowed to recover from intense farming practices. So while there is short term minor harm to food production, this is outweighed by long term positives.

7.114 Cumulative Development on Landscape

7.115 It is considered that the cumulative impacts are not great enough to harm the landscape in the long term and warrant the refusal of this application.

7.116 Sustainability Requirement

7.117 From international, national and local area perspective the need to substantially increase our renewable energy within the next decade is imperative. The creation of this solar farm in area already benefiting from a National Grid Substation connection point is a significant benefit in preparing the Country for the next 30 years for the 2050 target.

7.118 Post 40 Years

7.119 A condition is recommended to ensure that the Council controls the restoration of the land at the end of the operational life of the solar farm.

7.120 Final Thought/Recommendation

7.121 With the need to create energy from sustainable methods, allowing continued economic growth, the transition to electric cars and the reduction in using natural gas to heat properties places a significant requirement on the planning system to allow renewable energy schemes. With this scheme also highly likely improving biodiversity and drainage on the site; as well as long term benefits to agricultural land quality. The merits of the scheme far outweigh any short term harm identified.

7.122 The proposal is considered to comply with the adopted Local Plan, Renewable Energy Development SPD and National Policy (NPPF).

7.123 On this basis it is recommended that the application is approved, subject to the recommended conditions.

8.0 COSTS

8.1 An appeal can be lodged against a refusal of planning permission or a condition imposed upon a planning permission. If a local planning authority is found to have acted unreasonably and this has incurred costs for the applicant (referred to as appellant through the appeal process) then a cost award can be made against the Council.

8.2 Unreasonable behaviour can be either procedural ie relating to the way a matter has been dealt with or substantive ie relating to the issues at appeal and whether a



local planning authority has been able to provide evidence to justify a refusal reason or a condition.

8.3 Members do not have to follow an officer recommendation indeed they can legitimately decide to give a different weight to a material consideration than officers. However, it is often these cases where an appellant submits a claim for costs. The Committee therefore needs to consider and document its reasons for going against an officer recommendation very carefully.

8.4 In this case Members' attention is particularly drawn to the following points:

- No objections from statutory bodies
- East Cambridgeshire has declared a climate emergency.
- Generally accepted that substantial improvements to sustainability is required by 2050.

9.0 APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix 1 – Recommendation Conditions

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<u>Background Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Contact Officer(s)</u>
20/00557/ESF	Andrew Phillips Room No. 011 The Grange Ely	Andrew Phillips Planning Team Leader 01353 665555 andrew.phillips@ea stcambs.gov.uk

National Planning Policy Framework -

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 -

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Local%20Plan%20April%202015%20-%20front%20cover%20and%20inside%20front%20cover.pdf>

## APPENDIX 1 - 20/00557/ESF Conditions

- 1 Development shall be carried out in accordance with the drawings and documents listed below

Plan Reference	Version No	Date Received
2573-01-SK008		16th June 2020
2573-01-01	B	16th June 2020
2573--01-02	A	16th June 2020
2573-01-03	F	16th June 2020
2573--01-14	A	16th June 2020
2573-01-04	B	1st May 2020
2573-01-05	A	1st May 2020
2573-01-06	A	1st May 2020
2573-01-07	A	1st May 2020
2573-01-08	A	1st May 2020
2573-01-11	C	1st May 2020
2573-01-12		1st May 2020
2573-01-13		1st May 2020

- 1 Reason: To define the scope and extent of this permission.
- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be commenced within 3 years of the date of this permission.
- 2 Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended.
- 3 This permission is for a limited period only, expiring 40 years from the date of this decision or 6 months after the solar panels on site are no longer being used for the production of energy. After this date, the site shall be reinstated in accordance with a scheme to be submitted and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the expiration of this permission.
- 3 Reason: The application has been assessed and determined on this basis.
- 4 Prior to first occupation or commencement of use a full schedule of all soft landscape works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The schedule shall include, planting plans, a written specification; schedules of plants noting species, plant sizes, proposed numbers/densities; and a detailed implementation programme. It shall also indicate all existing trees and hedgerows on the land and details of any to be retained. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the end of the first planting season following occupation of the development. If within a period of 15 years from the date of the planting, or replacement planting, any tree or plant (including retained existing trees/hedgerows) is removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies, another tree or plant of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted at the same place, unless the Local Planning Authority gives its written consent to any variation.

- 4 Reason: To assimilate the development into its surroundings, in accordance with policies ENV1 and ENV2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015.
- 5 Prior to the commencement of use of the development, a scheme for the maintenance of the soft landscaping for the lifetime of the development, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All works shall be maintained in accordance with the agreed scheme. The scheme shall include the following:
  - i) methods for the proposed maintenance regime;
  - ii) detailed schedule;
  - iii) details of who will be responsible for the continuing implementation
  - iv) details of any phasing arrangements
- 5 Reason: To ensure the longevity of the landscaping scheme and benefit to biodiversity, in accordance with policy ENV1, ENV2 and ENV7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015.
- 6 The, hereby approved, solar farm shall only export up to 49.995MWe of renewable electricity to the National Grid during peak operation.
- 6 Reason: The application has been assessed and determined on this basis.
- 7 No development shall commence until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has implemented a programme of archaeological work which has been secured in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) which has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. For land that is included within the WSI, no development shall take place other than under the provisions of the agreed WSI that shall include:
  - a) the statement of significance and research objectives;
  - b) The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording and the nomination of a competent person(s) or organisation to undertake the agreed works;
  - c) The timetable for the field investigation as part of the development programme;
  - d) The programme and timetable for the analysis, publication & dissemination, and deposition of resulting material
- 7 Reason: To ensure that any archaeological remains are suitably recorded in accordance with policy ENV14 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015. The condition is pre-commencement as it would be unreasonable to require applicants to undertake this work prior to consent being granted.
- 8 Construction times and deliveries, with the exception of fit-out and excluding piling, shall be limited to the following hours:

07:30 - 18:00 each day Monday - Friday  
07:30 - 13:00 on Saturdays and  
None on Sundays, Public or Bank Holidays

Any piling construction work is limited to:

09:00 - 17:00 each day Monday - Friday  
None on Saturdays, Sundays, Public or Bank Holiday

- 8 Reason: To safeguard the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers, in accordance with policy ENV2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015.
- 9 Prior to any work commencing on the site a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority regarding mitigation measures for noise, dust and lighting during the construction phase. These shall include, but not be limited to, other aspects such as access points for deliveries and site vehicles, and proposed phasing/timescales of development etc. The CEMP shall be adhered to at all times during all phases.
- 9 Reason: To safeguard the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers, suitable highway management and water management during construction in accordance with policies ENV2, ENV8 and COM7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015. The condition is pre-commencement as it would be unreasonable to require applicants to undertake this work prior to consent being granted.
- 10 Prior to first use a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan, including biodiversity improvements in accordance with the applicants Biodiversity Net Gain calculations submitted with this application, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The Landscape and Ecology Management Plan shall be implemented prior to the first use of the hereby approved development and thereafter maintained for the lifetime of the development.
- 10 Reason: To protect and enhance species in accordance with policies ENV1, ENV2 and ENV7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015.
- 11 No development shall take place until a scheme to dispose of surface water has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme(s) shall be implemented prior to first use of the development.
- 11 Reason: To prevent the increased risk of flooding and to improve and protect water quality, in accordance with policies ENV2 and ENV8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015. The condition is pre-commencement as it would be unreasonable to require applicants to undertake this work prior to consent being granted and the details need to be agreed before construction begins.
- 12 No external lights shall be erected within the site (either freestanding or building-mounted) other than those expressly authorised within this application.
- 12 Reason: To safeguard the character and appearance of the area, in accordance with policy ENV2 and ENV6 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015.
- 13 No above ground construction shall commence until full details of hard landscape works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with an implementation

programme submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to first occupation.

- 13 Reason: To safeguard the character and appearance of the area, in accordance with policy ENV2 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015.