

## 20/00180/PREAPP Preapplication

### Development of a Solar Photovoltaic Farm and Associated Infrastructure on Land at Chosley Farm, Bidden Road, North Warnborough, RG29 1BW

#### Comment by Whitewater Valley Preservation Society

The Whitewater Valley Preservation Society would like to underline its previous comments on the EIA screening opinion, providing further policy weight, particularly on the countryside and landscape impacts.

The following extracts are drawn from the pre-application (20/00180/PREAPP) report.

#### *1. Countryside visual and Landscape Impacts*

The solar voltaic farm would introduce built development on a greenfield site over a significant area, as shown on the site layout plan.

The impacts upon the countryside and landscape would therefore be an important consideration in any future application to which the following (summarised) policies would apply:

- Hart Local Plan 2032 (HLP32) Policy NBE2 Landscape - development must respect and wherever possible enhance the special characteristics, value or visual amenity of the District's landscapes. This should be done with reference to the Hart District Landscape Character Assessment (a) visual amenity and scenic quality of the landscape (b) and other identified criteria.
- Odiham & North Warnborough Neighbour Plan (ONWNP) Policy 5(v-vi) - development shall seek to retain existing mature hedging and established trees and to enhance landscaping to provide for biodiversity. Views out towards the countryside should be considered and where possible retained or enhanced.
- ONWNP Policy 12(ii) - development should not adversely affect the distinctive character of open landscapes or harm public views or vistas.
- Hart Local Plan 1996-2006 (HLP96) Saved Policy GEN1(v) - proposals should include for the provision or enhancement of the Districts landscape and natural resources.
- HLP96 Saved Policy CON23 - development that would seriously detract from the amenity and consequent recreational value of public rights of way by reducing their rural character or detracting from significant views will not be permitted.

The Hart District Landscape Assessment (para. 5.33) refers to the landscape character as:

*"Overall, the open, rolling chalk scenery of the Hart Downs is of high visual quality and presents a striking contrast with the more muted lowland landscapes further north. Of*

*particular scenic value are those areas which have retained a predominantly pastoral character and a stronger structure of hedgerows and woodland blocks, which provide shelter, visual containment and add diversity to the landscape. However, other areas have a denuded, exposed character as a result of conversion to arable farmland which has led to field enlargement, loss of hedgerows and trees and greater intrusion of power lines and development. The Odiham airfield is particularly prominent and detracts from local landscape quality."*

The NPPF provides guidance on conserving and enhancing the natural environment (Section 15), including recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside (para 170b).

Any future application should be accompanied by a comprehensive landscape and visual impact assessment that considers the impacts from key receptors. This should include public rights of way, highways and existing residential properties. It should take into account all potential visual impacts, including solar glare.

The site has a sloping topography and various glimpsed and open views into it. Key receptors would likely include, but not be limited to: Alton Road (particularly the more open views when moving north), Bidden Road, the public rights of way crossing the north parts of the site, Chosley Farm, properties on the west side of RAF Odiham, heritage assets (see following section) and Greywell Fen SSSI.

### *Design and Heritage*

Relevant design and heritage policies include HLP32 Policies NBE8 Historic Environment; NBE9 Design; NBE10 Renewable and Local Carbon Energy; NBE11 Pollution, and; I2 Green Infrastructure, HLP96 Policy GEN1 General Policy for Development, and ONWNP Policies 5 General Design Principles; 6 Odiham Conservation Area; 7 North Warnborough Conservation Area, and; 12 The Natural Environment.

The provisions of NPPF Section 12 'Achieving well-designed places' should also inform any scheme, as should the Government's National Design Guide (MHCLG, October 2019).

In heritage terms, the conservation areas of North Warnborough, Odiham and Greywell are located to the north east, east and north west of the site respectively. There are also listed buildings in North Warnborough (immediately north of the site), RAF Odiham and Greywell.

Any potential impacts on the significance of these heritage assets from development within their settings (if applicable) should be considered in accordance with the guidance in the NPPF (paras. 189-196). Any such assessment should be proportionate to the assets importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact upon significance.

A number of archaeology points (x5) are identified on the site to the south and east of Chosley Farm. These should be investigated and considered in the context of the above policies and guidance.

## *2. Ecology and Biodiversity*

As identified above, the site is close to the Greywell Fen SSSI. It is also a greenfield site.

Any proposal should not result in the loss of habitat and the applicant should consider how the proposal would deliver a quantifiable net gain for biodiversity. Relevant ecological surveys and a biodiversity calculation should be undertaken and provided with any future planning application.

The north east part of the application site has the potential to contribute to the ecological enhancement of the Greywell Fen SSSI and we would encourage you to liaise with the Hampshire Wildlife Trust in this regard.

The provisions of HLP32 Policy NBE4 and ONWNP Policies 5(v) and 12(i) in relation to any relevant protected species and biodiversity impacts are relevant. The NPPF (para. 170) and Policy NBE4 seek a net gain in biodiversity.

Any impacts on trees, woodland, hedgerows of amenity value would be considered with reference to HLP32 Policy NBE2(d), HLP96 Policy CON8 and ONWNP Policy 5(v).

## *3. Public Rights of Way*

ONWNP Policy 12(iii) Public rights of way should be protected and/or enhanced.