Horsham District Council

DELEGATED APPLICATIONS - ASSESSMENT SHEET

APPLICATION NO./ADDRESS:
NC/25/0014
Land To The South, South West and North West of Malham Farm, And North West of Oakwood Farm Newpound, Wisborough Green, Billingshurst, West Sussex, RH14 0AP

DESCRIPTION:
Proposed construction, operation and decommissioning of a solar farm and associated infrastructure

SITE AND SURROUNDS
The application site lies to the west of the District boundary, some 800m north of the hamlet of Newpound Common, and just under 2km north of the village of Wisborough Green. The closest part of the site boundary lies some 66m off the district's boundary west of Keepers Cottage, Lower Dairy Cottage and Lower Dairy Barn (Okehurst Road), which are the closest residential properties within Horsham District.

There are a number of public vantage points over the proposed site area, including from Drungewick Lane, the B2133, the Long Distance Path (Wey-South-Path), and a number of PRoW (including 1330/1, 433/1, 2940, 804 and 806). Numerous parcels of designated Ancient Woodland lie adjacent to the application site, and listed buildings have been identified on the plans.

Part of the eastern-most land parcel has been identified as a biodiversity opportunity area to the Mens and buffer associated with Barbastelle flightlines. The eastern area of the blue-line site area alongside the River Arun corridor, is identified as being at risk of surface water flooding (1 in 1000), as well as being within a flood risk 2 and 3 zone.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
The proposal comprises a 20MW solar array within a 41ha site, comprising several field parcels. The solar array would cover an area approximately 25.65ha, with associated land identified for landscape mitigations, woodland edge planting and native hedgerows, skylark plots, a green corridor alongside the long distance path, and associated fixed infrastructure of sub-stations, inverters, DNO, fencing, CCTV poles and cable trenches.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES
The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

REPRESENTATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS RESPONSES
Undertaken by Chichester District Council

HDC Landscape – comments integrated into main body of the report

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Nationally, Chapter 14 of the NPPF deals specifically with climate change and renewable and low carbon energy proposals, setting out that there should be positive local strategies in place that 'maximise the potential for suitable development, and their future re-powering and life extension, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed appropriately (including cumulative landscape and visual

impacts)' (para 165). Local Planning Authorities are directed to 'give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements' (para 167).

The accompanying Planning Practice Guidance to the NPPF sets out planning for renewable and low carbon energy remains important as the ability to 'increase the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon sources will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow down climate change and stimulate investment and new jobs and businesses.' ('Renewable and Low Carbon Energy'; para 001)

The PPG acknowledges that there are no 'hard and fast rules about how suitable areas for renewable energy should be identified'… and that renewable energy developments should be 'acceptable for their proposed location'. However, although the PPG recognises that large scale solar farms can have a negative impact on a rural location, such as undulating landscape, it is stated that well-planned solar farms can be adequately screened to address concerns.

Officers recognise that the location of the site and the proposed parcels would be visible from a number of public vantage points and residential properties adjacent to or close to the site, although it is noted that the proposals show the parcels to be largely visually contained within well-defined existing vegetated boundaries, with a robust planting and mitigatory landscape scheme accompanying the application. The impact on landscape character would change from an area that is predominantly in informal pasture / arable use to one that would appear to have a 'man-made' and engineered character, where the regimented lines of panels and perimeter fences would be imposed on the established field pattern. The introduction of new and reinforced planting and hedgerows is welcomed, and can bring about recognised biodiversity enhancements and benefits, with these enhancements appearing to follow the established hedgerow lines and field boundaries.

Insofar as the likely impact on the landscape character of Horsham District it is noted that the gently undulating landform in this area includes a narrow river valley (River Arun) and a predominantly rural character, with the small, irregular shaped fields retaining vegetated field boundaries. As a result, the existing vegetation, and the intervening landform, is likely to reduce the visual impact arising from the proposed solar farm on public visual receptors within Horsham District. Furthermore, the proposal appears to be supported by a reasonably robust landscape mitigation scheme which includes new transitional woodland edge habitat, native scrub and new hedgerows which aims to form a cohesive habitat found in the Low Weald.

It is for the determining authority to be satisfied that should any temporary diminishment of the landscape character and curtailment of rural views be identified to occur as a result of the proposal, whether these would be limited and therefore site-specific, or if they would adversely impact on the wider landscape character.

The identified benefits arising by way of this proposal involves the increase in renewable energy provision, which results in acknowledged significant longer term effects on climate change, thus potentially leading to a far wider environmental benefit than the identified visual harm to the localised landscape character for the duration of 1-15 years during which the new vegetation would become established.

The proposed solar farm would have a power generating capacity of up to 20MW, generating a significant amount of electricity from a clean, renewable source, and therefore meeting the energy needs of a significant proportion of family homes and businesses. The scheme could make an early and significant contribution to the objective of achieving the UK's Net Zero target. Given this imperative, the benefits of this proposal attract significant weight in mitigating the effects of climate change in the long term. These wider, long-term benefits would therefore need to be balanced against any identified and immediate local impacts.

Recommendation: No objection to Consultation

POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE STATEMENT

Statement pursuant to Article 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received, in order to be able to, where possible, grant permission.

DELEGATED

Case Officer sign/initial Nicola Pettifer Date: 23.04.2025

Authorising Officer sign/initial Adrian Smith Date: 25/04/2025