

**P/13/0528/FP**

**STUBBINGTON**

SUNSAVE 10 (FAREHAM) LTD

AGENT: PARKER DANN LIMITED

PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR FARM (INCORPORATING SOLAR PANEL ARRAYS & ASSOCIATED TRANSFORMERS & INVERTERS) WITH ASSOCIATED SECURITY FENCING, LANDSCAPING AND GRID CONNECTION (COMPRISING ONE TRANSFORMER BUILDING AND BURIED CABLE)

LAND AT NEULANDS FARM SOUTH OF TANNERS LANE/ WEST OF NEWGATE LANE  
FAREHAM HAMPSHIRE PO14 1AU

***Report By***

Kim Hayler - Ext 2367

***Site Description***

The application site comprises 27.04ha (66 acres) of arable farmland situated south of Tanners Lane and west of Newgate Lane, Fareham. Footpath number 68 runs along the route of Tanners Lane.

The site lies within the countryside and the Fareham/Stubbington Strategic Gap;

HMS Collingwood lies to the north and north east of the application site; the Peel Common Waste Water Treatment Works to the south; Newgate Lane to the east. To the west is a further area of arable farmland before reaching residential properties on Stroud Green Lane and Burnt House Lane. An electricity substation is situated on the south side of HMS Collingwood.

An easement would be retained along the electricity line which crosses the land, together with an easement along the line of a public sewer leading to the Wastewater Treatment works.

A statutory public footpath 74 runs through and adjacent to part of the southern boundary of the site with footpath 71b running adjacent to the east side of the Wastewater Treatment Works. There is also an informal footpath route down the western boundary of the site.

The nearest properties in Stroud Green Lane and Burnt House Lane would be sited between 650m and 700m from the western boundary of the application site. On the eastern, (Newgate Lane side) the nearest residential property would be sited approximately 40 metres from the site.

The land is predominantly flat with vegetation being confined to the boundaries with existing development. In places, at present, the boundary of the development site itself remains undefined as it runs across the otherwise arable land.

***Description of Proposal***

The development of the site involves the construction of ground based arrays of photovoltaic panels for a period of 25 years. Each array would be 12.3m long by 3.3m wide and would be tilted, in relation to the ground at an angle of 15 degrees giving a maximum height of 1.7m. There would be 3649 arrays containing 87,576 modules in a 12 x 2 arrangement. The space between each array, that is the distance from the back of one array to the front of the next, will be 1.5 metres. The zones containing the arrays would be

enclosed by 2.15m high security fencing of wire mesh topped by a single strand of barbed wire to prevent trespass. Native hedgerow would be planted outside of the security fencing.

Across the site 25 inverter and transformer cabinets would be erected. These would be sited in groups of two inverters and one transformer. The inverter cabinets would measure 3.18m (10'5") wide x 1.29m (4'2") long x 2.86m (9'4") high with the transformers being 3.2m (10'5") wide x 2.5m (8'2") long x 2.36 (7'8") high.

At the point of the electricity substation two structures are proposed to facilitate the connection to the national grid. These would measure (client building) 5.7m (18'8") wide x 2.7m (8'10") long x 2.6m (8'8") high and (Inverter/Transformer) 2.56m (8'4") wide x 6.96m (22'8") long x 3.45m (11'3") high.

Cables would be laid in trenches 400mm wide by 700mm deep.

The development would generate approximately 16.875MWp being sufficient to provide the annual electricity requirements of 5,200 households.

The whole site will be sown down to a grass and wildflower mix and grazed by appropriate farm animals to suit the conditions of the site.

Footpath 74 would be upgraded to a 6 metre wide avenue. Native hedgerows would be planted either side of the path screening the arrays and security fencing. Buffer strips would be maintained to the development along newgate Lane and around the boundaries of the Wastewater Treatment plant.

### ***Policies***

The following policies apply to this application:

#### **Approved Fareham Borough Core Strategy**

CS4 - Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

CS5 - Transport Strategy and Infrastructure

CS6 - The Development Strategy

CS12 - Daedalus Airfield Strategic Development Allocation

CS14 - Development Outside Settlements

CS15 - Sustainable Development and Climate Change

CS16 - Natural Resources and Renewable Energy

CS17 - High Quality Design

CS22 - Development in Strategic Gaps

#### **Fareham Borough Local Plan Review**

C18 - Protected Species

DG4 - Site Characteristics

### ***Relevant Planning History***

The following planning history is relevant:

**P/12/0905/FP**

**PHOTOVOLTAIC SOLAR FARM (INCORPORATING SOLAR PANEL**

**ARRAYS AND ASSOCIATED TRANSFORMERS & INVERTERS) WITH  
ASSOCIATED SECURITY FENCING, LANDSCAPING, COMMUNITY  
GREEN SPACE AND GRID CONNECTION (COMPRISING TWO  
TRANSFORMER BUILDINGS)**

WITHDRAWN 13/02/2013

***Representations***

Thirty three objections were received raising the following concerns:

- Loss of view over countryside
- Loss of Green space
- General impact on wildlife
- Premature to the resolution of the Stubbington bypass
- Loss of part of Strategic Gap
- Precedent for subsequent extension over remaining land
- Loss of value to walkers/cyclists/horseriders
- Industrialisation of site
- Precedent for other uses of the site in the future
- Company is not UK owned
- No local employment
- Loss of security for walkers
- Unsuitable land for sheep grazing
- Corridors open to fly-tipping
- Lack of sequential testing
- Adverse impact on Goose foraging and overwintering areas
- Inefficiency of solar panels and lack of long term sustainability
- Toxic fumes from possible fires
- Health concerns
- Glare from panels
- Noise from transformers and inverters
- Poor Drainage
- Insufficient access for emergency
- Safety risks
- Devaluation of property
- Not needed as other sources of energy are available
- No evidence of continued global warming
- Effect on emergency landing areas for aircraft from Daedalus
- Welfare of the sheep?
- Hedgerows will take years to grow

Sixteen letters of support were received raising the following points:

- Applicants have put considerable effort into addressing concerns
- Energy is needed
- Stubbington bypass is not sustainable
- will add to biodiversity which is a local benefit
- Sad to see reduction in area
- Need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels
- Backup of sustainable energy allows reduction in use of power stations and emissions
- Solar panels are not eyesores
- We should be looking after our future generations

- Less visually harmful than the 'new town'

Comments received from The Fareham Society:

- More welcome due to the reduction in the area of the site
- Promise of some community funding is welcome
- Multi user path will require management
- Local residents still claim more winter roosting of birds than is accepted in application
- Otherwise premature to resolving the issue of the Stubbington bypass

### **Consultations**

Director of Planning and Environment (Landscape) -

The previous application was for a far more extensive scheme which would have resulted in significant adverse visual impacts.

The recently submitted amended layout plan demonstrates that the length of footpaths adversely affected will be greatly reduced. The amended scheme is far less extensive than the earlier scheme and any adverse landscape and visual impact will be greatly reduced.

Hampshire County Council - Countryside Services (Rights of Way) -

Countryside Services are happy with the access and traffic management proposals for the public footpaths and are also satisfied with the proposals for the footpaths which run through the solar arrays.

Director of Planning and Environment (Highways) -

This is a substantial proposal to erect an array of photovoltaic (PV) panels and related equipment over a wide area of Newlands Farm for a period of 25 years. Existing rights of way and permitted footpath routes are to be protected. A construction compound is proposed to be laid out in a designated area in the north eastern corner of the site adjacent to Tanners Lane.

The area is accessed from Tanners Lane, a private road with public footpath status, from Newgate Lane to the east, and from a private road, also designated as a public footpath, from Peak Lane to the west.

By its nature, the PV array, when installed, would generate no material traffic except occasional maintenance vehicles. This is in contrast to the construction, and ultimate decommissioning phases in which the applicants have predicted the generation of between 12 and 75 large haulage and delivery vehicles plus ancillary vehicles per week over a 12 week construction phase. This would equate to around 503 lorries in total and a peak average of some 1.8 lorries per hour. The applicants advise that specialist operatives from Germany will be used to install the array panels and equipment. They will be accommodated locally and bussed to the site daily. As such there is unlikely to be any material additional traffic movements beyond the above large construction vehicles, carrying off surplus materials and bringing in the bulk equipment, also from Germany.

It is understood that the applicants have sufficient control over Tanners Lane and the private road to Peak Lane to be able to use these for access. It is also evident that Tanners Lane and the link to Peak Lane are not of sufficient width, at only 3-4m, to accommodate

the free movement of the predicted vehicles. Consequently, the construction site should be accessed using a one-way westbound traffic system between Newgate Lane and Peak Lane, with appropriate signing and traffic management to secure this. A speed limit of 10mph would be applied on all site roads. It is accepted that cyclists and pedestrians/joggers will continue to freely use the access route for two way movement with suitable warning signs erected along the route.

In addition to permanent measures to accommodate pedestrians on the footpath through the array areas, verge stabilisation and repairs will be carried out on the access route to accommodate pedestrians and fluorescent bunting will be installed throughout to distinguish step-off areas. To provide safe visibility, the applicants will also trim back sections of hedgerow along the access route. At the egress to Peak Lane, temporary barriers will be installed to maximise the safety of cyclists and pedestrians using Peak Lane.

A Construction Traffic Management Plan has been agreed for the current proposals.

Subject to securing satisfactory details of all the above matters, no local highway objection to the application is anticipated.

Gosport Borough Council -

This site was the subject of a previous application, P/12/0905/FP, withdrawn in February 2013. The current revised application proposes a solar park using the same type and size of solar panel, but lying only to the north of the Peel Wastewater Treatment Works and to the south of HMS Collingwood, thus covering approximately half the original area.

In our letter to you dated 13th December 2012 we noted the inclusion of plans for a Stubbington Bypass in the Strategic Access to Gosport Study and the Transport for South Hampshire Delivery Plan, post 2012. We objected to the original proposal for the solar farm on the grounds that it would prevent the future delivery of the bypass on any of the potential routes identified in the Stubbington Bypass Route Evaluation Study.

We note the current proposal locates the solar farm over the eastern part of the blue route. You will be aware that funding in the sum of £8.5 million has been secured by the County Council for extensive improvements throughout Newgate Lane to enhance access to Gosport and the Solent Enterprise Zone, and the design has been in progress for some time with a view to commencement of works on the northern part of Newgate Lane in 2014.

Since we raised our objection in December, interest in the Stubbington Bypass as a further means of addressing existing traffic problems in the Stubbington area and providing high quality access to the Solent Enterprise has increased substantially. Support for the scheme has recently been declared by the leaders of Gosport and Fareham Councils. The local MP, Caroline Dineage, is also promoting the scheme with the Transport Minister Norman Baker and the Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin with the aim of securing government funding and bringing delivery forward in the transport programme.

Further, the Hampshire County Council Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment decided on 11th June that the scope of the proposed consultations in respect of the Newgate Lane improvements should be widened to seek the views of residents and other stakeholders on possible routes for the Stubbington bypass and related improvements. (See attached Executive Decision Record, Report and Route Plan). These consultations are programmed from 8th July.

The Borough Council acknowledges that the revised proposals for the solar farm do not prevent the delivery of the bypass. However, it is a very costly scheme and it important that its viability should not be prejudiced at this time by removal of one of the route options and preventing full consideration of all available options. In the light of the increasing support and current activity towards earlier delivery of the bypass, Gosport Borough Council considers that a favourable decision on the proposed solar farm is premature until a decision is made upon the best route.

With reference to our letter of 13th December, the Council would reiterate that the Enterprise Zone at Daedalus is a key delivery area for the Solent LEP and the Government wish to ensure that the EZ is effective in generating jobs and boosting the wider local economy in the Solent area. Providing the necessary infrastructure to support the site in the most cost effective way; mitigate impacts upon Stubbington Village and improve access to Gosport should therefore take priority over the location of the solar farm.

Hampshire County Council (Economy, Transport and Environment Department - Highways Development Planning) -

The highway development planning comments are being provided by your agency engineer in line with the Highway Development Control Agency Agreement. However, I would like to take the opportunity to provide some further comments relating to the County Council's current public consultation on Western Access to Gosport improvements and specifically the route options for a Stubbington bypass.

Three corridor options have been identified for a possible Stubbington bypass route, one of which would pass through the application site. The delivery of the Stubbington bypass has been a long standing aspiration for the County Council and a substantial amount of previous work has been undertaken and is in the process of being updated.

The County Council is committed to delivering improvements on the Newgate Lane corridor in order to meet the short to medium term access needs for the peninsula and in particular the Solent Enterprise Zone. Due to constraints on the existing traffic corridors, a longer term solution to the peninsula's access problems has always considered the need to provide new highway capacity in the form of a Stubbington bypass. However, in view of the increased emphasis on economic growth and job creation for the peninsula, the County Council has brought forward consideration of a Stubbington bypass as a viable project to support economic investment and growth on the Gosport peninsula.

A study is underway to provide an assessment of each route option, to provide updated information on the design standards, traffic impacts and environmental impacts. The results of this study, together with the outcome of the current public consultation, will help inform a decision on the preferred route choice. The scheme will need to attract funding from Government sources for infrastructure investment that supports economic regeneration and job creation.

I would be grateful if you could note the County Council's position with regard to Stubbington bypass and the County Council's intention to engage with the applicant to explore the compatibility of the proposed scheme with the possible route options for the Stubbington bypass.

Natural England -

The application site is approximately 1.5km from Lee-on-the-Solent to Itchen Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and 1km from Portsmouth Harbour SSSI. These SSSI are part of the Solent and Southampton Water, and Portsmouth Harbour Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites.

Natural England advises your authority that the proposal, if undertaken in strict accordance with the details submitted, is not likely to have a significant effect on the interest features for which Portsmouth Harbour SPA/Ramsar and Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar are designated, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, subject to conditions and advice to avoid the clearance of trees and areas of scrub during the bird breeding season, March to August inclusive, unless supervised by an appropriately qualified ecologist, to reduce the likelihood of harm to breeding birds.

SSSI - Natural England is satisfied that, subject to the imposition of conditions and the development being undertaken in strict accordance with the submitted proposals these development proposals will avoid impacts upon the interest features of Portsmouth Harbour SSSI and Lee-on-the-Solent to Itchen Estuary SSSI.

Natural England advises the proposals as presented have the potential to affect species protected under European or UK legislation. Natural England refers you to our Standing Advice on protected species

Director of Planning and Environment (Ecology) -

The application is supported by a Phase 1 Habitats Survey (Extended) (Wildlife Matters, June 2013) and an Environmental Site Management Plan (Vogt Solar, undated). It is recommended that a few points are clarified with the applicants ecologist prior to determination of the application.

The application follows a previous application at the site, and provides revised and additional survey information for a proposal area which has been reduced in size.

Natural England have been consulted on the proposal, and following their advice to the applicant's ecologist prior to and during the resubmission process, and based on the survey work carried out, have advised the LPA (18 July 2013) that the proposal is unlikely to have significant effect on the interest features of the statutory designated sites.

Overall the site is of low ecological interest, it is the boundary areas including rough grassland and trees/woodland that are of most interest. The proposal is to be for a period of twenty five years, after which the site will be decommissioned. It is understood that all works are to take place within the redline and that the works and site will involve no lighting.

Subject to the applicant satisfactorily addressing a number of points, it is recommended that in any consent conditions secure adherence to the measures set out within the Environmental Site Management Plan (and any other details resulting from the clarification provided).

Further information was submitted by the applicant clarifying the points raised as mentioned above.

Lee-on-the-Solent (Daedalus) Airfield Operation Manager -

The landowner of the site (Homes and Community Agency) will comment on the proposal.

Homes & Community Agency (HCA) -

It is welcomed that the proposal has been significantly reduced. However the location of the development still is a cause of concern in the event that aviation activities are to continue from Daedalus and the potential implications and impacts are as follows:

i) A significant reduction of the land available for forced landings particularly in terms of smaller single engine aircraft and gliders;

ii) Reduce the likelihood of the second runway at Daedalus (currently disused) being brought back into active use;

iii) As a result of i and ii above, potentially make the airfield less attractive to users and investors with a consequential impact on financial viability;

iv) Adverse impact on pilots and ground based air traffic controllers as a result of glint and glare.

Solent Local Enterprise Partnership (Solent LEP) -

Solent LEPs bid to Government in 2011 to set up the Solent Enterprise Zone was to create a new cluster of businesses related to advanced manufacturing and technology, focused on the marine, aviation and aerospace sectors. This focus was restated to Government as recently May this year. Solent LEP believes that an operational airfield at Daedalus is essential to delivering this objective given that aviation and aerospace businesses are unlikely to be attracted to a location that does not provide any access to an operational airfield. For that reason, Solent LEP would not want to see any development in the vicinity of the Daedalus airfield that compromises its current or potential future operations.

Solent LEP has been in discussion with the HCA as landowner and other partners in delivering the Enterprise Zone (EZ), about ways of improving and commercialising the airfield: this includes ownership and management, the number of flight movements, the type of user and in the aircraft likely to use the Daedalus airfield. There are plans to licence the airfield in due course. An increase in activity on the airfield is therefore under active discussion and if the EZ were to attract aerospace contractors, it is possible that the nature of the aviation use could change significantly. As a guide, given the concentration of defence-related aerospace businesses in the Solent area, the LEP would actively encourage development of this type of business on the Solent Enterprise Zone.

Solent Local Enterprise Partnership has no expertise to judge whether the proposed Solar Farm would in any way affect or compromise the use of Daedalus airfield. The concern would be that any planning application in the vicinity of Daedalus should not only take account of current airfield operations but potential future flying from the airfield over the long term.

Civil Aviation Authority - No comment

Hampshire County Council (Archaeologist) - No objection



Hampshire Constabulary (Crime Prevention Design Officer) -

As the footpath passes through the solar farm it is fairly straight, to provide for the safety of those using the footpath it is important that there is good visibility along the footpath. Any planting within the six metre wide avenue must not reduce visibility along the footpath or provide a place in which a person might lie in wait.

Director of Regulatory and Democratic Services (Environmental Health) - No objection

Environment Agency - No objection subject to condition requiring compliance with submitted Flood Risk Assessment.

Director of Regulatory and Democratic Services (Contamination) - No objection

Southern Water - No objections subject to conditions.

### ***Planning Considerations - Key Issues***

Members will see from the planning policies which apply to this proposal, and the comments received from consultees and other interested parties that there are a wide range of matters relating to these proposals.

The Officers' comments which follow assess the planning application proposals against national guidance and the relevant policies of the approved Core Strategy, the adopted Fareham Borough Local Plan Review and the Draft Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies.

Where possible the development proposals have been considered under a number of 'theme' headings. These are:

- . The previous planning application
- . The principle of providing renewable energy- national and local planning policy
- . Principle of development in the countryside
- . Previously developed land
- . Strategic gap and visual impact
- . Impact on residential amenity
- . Ecology
- . Impacts upon the operation and safety of aircraft using Daedalus Airfield
- . Stubbington bypass
- . Access during construction
- . Public access on the site
- . Any other issues
- . Conclusion

### **PREVIOUS PLANNING APPLICATION:**

A previous application (P/12/0905/FP refers) for a ground based PV solar farm on land west of Newgate Lane was withdrawn in February this year. The previous application site measured 58 hectares (143 acres) and extended west of the north-south farm track that bisects Newlands Farm.

The previous application was recommended for refusal. There were three matters of concern which related to:

- i) the site coverage and the location of the land to be occupied by the proposed solar panels, security fencing and hedging, would significantly diminish the sense of visual separation of the settlements, particularly when viewed from the well used public footpaths through and around the site. In addition the proposal would alter the character of this area of countryside when viewed from the footpaths to the detriment of the users of the footpaths;
- ii) insufficient information was provided to determine that there would be no significant effect on the integrity of the Solent European Marine Site and protected species;
- iii) the potential impact upon the Solent Enterprise Zone at Daedalus as a result of the reduced availability of land for 'forced landing'.

The current application has been submitted in order to address the concerns of the previous larger application. The site area has been reduced to 27.04 hectares (53.4% reduction) with the PV arrays being sited between HMS Collingwood and the Peel Common Wastewater Treatment Works, eastwards across to Newgate Lane.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF PROVIDING RENEWABLE ENERGY - NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING POLICY:

Members will be aware that in determining planning applications Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that:

If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The National Planning Policy Framework now provides the national guidance base for planning decision making. The framework promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development which should be seen as a golden thread running through decision making. By their nature, proposals for the production of renewable energy contribute towards the aims of sustainability.

One of the core planning principles set out in the framework is to:

"support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy)" (paragraph 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework).

Expanding further from this point the framework states:

"To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources."

Paragraph 97 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that in order to increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources.

and,

"When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should:

not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and 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 also expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas." (paragraph 98 of the National Planning Policy Framework).

It is very clear from the National Planning Policy Framework that the Government's position is that in principle there is strong support for renewable proposals of this type. It is also clear that Local Planning Authorities should not focus on matters such as the need for the renewable energy nor the efficiency of one type of energy over another, but rather, whether or not there are any harmful impacts arising from the development which cannot be mitigated against.

New guidance in the form of the 'Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy' has been published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in July 2013. This guidance amongst other matters provides a lead on what matters need to be considered in relation to large ground mounted PV installations. The guidance sets these out as follows:

- encouraging the effective use of previously developed land, and if a proposal does involve greenfield land, that it allows for continued agricultural use and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays;
- that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use;
- the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety;
- the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;
- the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing;
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset;
- the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges;

- the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect.

The guidance further suggests that important factors in considering sites can be the availability of grid connection and cumulative impact.

The promotion of sustainable development runs through the policies contained within this Council's adopted Core Strategy. One specific policy of the Core Strategy, Policy CS16, which deals with Natural Resources and Renewable Energy states:

New development will be expected to safeguard the use of natural resources by:

- Demonstrating the latest best practice for energy efficiency, passive solar design and water conservation in the construction and use of the buildings;
- Taking measures to reduce carbon emissions, pollution and waste during the construction and operation of new developments through orientation, layout, design and material selection;
- Reducing, reusing and recycling waste on-site;
- Preventing the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 or 3a of the Natural England Agricultural Land Classifications System);
- Protecting mineral resources from permanent development, without first allowing for extraction, which would lead to the sterilisation of the deposit.

Development (1 dwelling or more and 500m<sup>2</sup> or more of non-residential floorspace) will be encouraged to contribute to the Fareham target of 12MW of renewable energy by 2020. Major developments (250 dwellings or more or 5,000 sq.m or more of non-residential floorspace) should aim to maximise on-site renewable energy production and resource efficiency. In such cases, the extent of contribution should be demonstrated, taking account of viability. The generation of energy from renewable or low carbon sources will be permitted unless there are judged to be unacceptable social, environmental or economic impacts.

Based on the submitted evidence, the proposed scheme would in itself exceed the target of 12MW set within Policy CS16.

Having regard to the national planning policy position, Officers acknowledge that there is strong Government support for developments of this type. Similar local support is also found within this Council's approved Core Strategy.

In principle therefore such renewable energy proposals are acceptable. The potential impacts arising from such a proposal on this specific site are discussed in greater depth within the following report.

The Council has commissioned an evidence study in line with the guidance contained within paragraph 97 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This evidence work will inform appropriate policies being developed as part of the Local Plan Part 2 Development Sites and Policies.

## PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE:

The whole of the planning application site is within an area defined as countryside on the adopted Proposals Map.

This particular site has been chosen by the applicant because:

- It is flat;
- It has a good south facing aspect;
- It is located within the UK zone of highest sunshine;
- It has direct link to the national grid;
- Good access during the construction and decommissioning phase;
- The landowner is willing.

Policy CS14 (Development Outside Settlements) of the approved Core Strategy states:

"Built development on land outside the defined settlements will be strictly controlled to protect the countryside and coastline from development which would adversely affect its landscape character, appearance and function. Acceptable forms of development will include that essential for agriculture, forestry, horticulture and required infrastructure..."

Members will see from the six bullet points above that a number of criteria need to be met from the applicant's perspective for a site to be suitable. Whilst solar panels in themselves do not specifically require a countryside location, locating a site of sufficient scale within the urban area, whilst meeting all the other requirements will prove extremely difficult if not unlikely. Members will also be aware that even if such a site did exist within the urban area there would be strong competing interests for other forms of development such as residential and/ or employment development.

In light of the locational requirements of this renewable energy proposal, which also contributes towards the provision of infrastructure, Officers do not believe an objection can be substantiated to the principle of such a development in the countryside.

## PREVIOUSLY DEVELOPED LAND:

In the event of planning permission being granted, concerns have previously been raised as to whether it would make it difficult for this Authority to resist other types of development on the application site.

The question has also been raised over whether the proposal, if granted, would lead to the site being classified as 'previously developed land'.

The applicant is seeking planning permission to use the site for a solar farm for a period of 25 years. If planning permission is granted then a condition could be imposed requiring the use to cease after 25 years and the land to be reinstated to agricultural use.

Whilst such a condition would on the face of it meet the six tests set out within the 'Use of Conditions in Planning' Circular (Circular 11/95), it would of course be open to the applicant to seek permission to extend the period in the future. The solar farm does have a degree of permanence over a lengthy period of time and the site would arguably be defined as previously developed land.

Even if the site was considered to be previously developed land however, this would not override the countryside or strategic gap planning policy allocation which would continue to apply. Any alternative development at the site would need to be fully assessed against the countryside and strategic gap policies along with other relevant national and local planning policies.

In light of this Officers do not believe that granting planning permission for the solar farm would undermine this Authority's planning position if other forms of development were proposed on this site. Likewise granting planning permission here would not set a precedent which would allow solar proposals within other countryside/ strategic gap locations within the Borough. Any other schemes would need to be assessed on their individual merits having regard to any constraints on the sites on which they are proposed.

Officers do not believe an objection to the proposal could be sustained on the basis that it would be difficult in the future to prevent alternative development at the site.

#### STRATEGIC GAP AND VISUAL IMPACT:

Core Strategy Policy CS22 Development in Strategic Gaps states that:

"Development proposals will not be permitted either individually or cumulatively where it significantly affects the integrity of the gap and physical and visual separation of settlements."

Policy CS14 referred to in the 'principle of development in the countryside' section of this report states built development outside defined settlements will be strictly controlled to protect the landscape character, appearance and function of the countryside.

Policy DG4 of the Fareham Borough Local Plan Review states that development will be permitted, provided that it respects views into and out of the site.

Out of the total network of public rights of way on the land between Stubbington and Fareham, one 320 metre stretch (with panels on both sides) would have to pass directly through the solar farm. Footpath 68 runs along Tanners Lane along the southern perimeter of HMS Collingwood, a route already compromised by the presence of HMS Collingwood on its northern side. At the point where Tanners Lane turns to the north, wide, uninterrupted views would be possible towards Stubbington and north to Fareham.

When viewed from the existing footpath network, the open nature of the land emphasises the visual separation of the settlements. In light of the site coverage of the previous application, the sense of visual separation of the settlements would have been significantly diminished. The revised application proposes the siting of arrays between the Wastewater Treatment Works and HMS Collingwood, leaving an extensive visual gap open between Stubbington, Peel Common and Fareham.

It is possible to gain views into the site from parts of Newgate Lane, Stroud Green Lane, Burnt House Lane and from the statutory footpaths in and around the site. Again, however, the reduced area of the site has resulted in the views from Stroud Green Lane and Burnt House Lane now being at a considerable distance which will be considered in detail below.

The visual impact of the proposed development is an important consideration. Officers have assessed visual impact with reference to long and medium views and then views from

within and immediately around the site.

#### Long Distance Views:

Long distance views are regarded by officers as those beyond the immediate roads and public footpaths surrounding the site. The site and the surrounding land is very flat and the arrays would be low. Views from Longfield Avenue to the north and the residential properties with views over the fields are, with the reduced development proposal, no longer affected since the views will remain open past the Wastewater Treatment Works and on to the south. Officers are of the opinion that there are only very limited long distance and oblique views of the site.

#### Medium Distance Views:

Medium distance views are regarded by officers as those from the surrounding roads.

Newgate Lane - The eastern side of the site would be visible to motorists and pedestrians travelling along Newgate Lane. The panels would be sited some 50 - 70 metres back from the road edge, behind a security fence and hedgerow. There is some existing screening along the western side of Newgate Lane, with some gaps. Through these gaps currently there are clear views across the open farmland.

Officers are of the opinion that the views to the west from Newgate Lane would endure some change. A limited number of properties look out in this direction including the Tudor Lodge Care Home. The application identifies an open buffer area between the eastern edge of the proposed arrays and the boundaries of the adjoining properties of between 22m and 80m to the far south of the site.

Stroud Green Lane - The views from Stroud Green Lane towards the western side of the site would endure some minor change, although the panels would now be some 650m - 700m distant as opposed to the previous separation of 180m.

Burnt House Lane - The northern 'arm' of Burnt House Lane would now be sited some 630m from the proposal solar panels in comparison to the previous 400 metres .

#### Views from within and immediately around the site:

There are a number of public footpaths in the vicinity of the site, in particular Footpaths 68, 70, 71a, 71b and 74 (which crosses the site); it is clear that a number of these footpaths are well used.

The applicants have submitted a full 'Landscape and Visual Impact' report. The report affirms that the major visual impacts would be upon the close distance views particularly those experienced by users of the public footpaths, with the impact potentially being lessened by proposed hedgerow planting.

The development proposals incorporate screen planting along the peripheries of the solar arrays and along public footpath 74 although no planting is identified along the eastern boundary to the properties on Newgate Lane where existing mature boundary vegetation exists and there is no public access.

New native hedgerows would be generally permitted to grow to about 2 metres high in order

to soften the visual impact of both the solar panels and the security fencing around them. The hedges would be of mixed indigenous species and would take approximately 5/6 years to establish and fulfil their 'screening function'. During this period of time the panels and security fencing will be seen from the footpaths creating a much less attractive environment than that currently existing.

These new hedge lines would screen the views across the site from the immediately affected footpaths. Objectors have pointed out that the open views across the site are an important part of the enjoyment of the footpaths and that enclosure, whilst screening the solar panel development, would diminish their enjoyment and create an environment where personal security would be an issue.

Landscape character and appearance, including views in and out of the site, are important issues in considering the overall impact of this scheme and, ultimately are important matters to be assessed against Policies CS14 and CS22 of the Core Strategy and Policy DG4 of the Fareham Borough Local Plan Review. Harm to the physical and visual separation of the settlements can be a reason in itself to reject a development proposal within the Strategic Gap having regard for Policy CS22.

In assessing the impact of the proposal Officers have walked each of the definitive footpath routes.

Taking footpath 68 first, this footpath runs along the route of Tanners Lane. To the north of this footpath there is already development associated with Newgate Lane frontage properties and the substantial buildings at HMS Collingwood.

At the north-eastern edge of the application site the PV panels and screen fencing is set some distance away from the footpath. Whilst this would alter the views from the footpath at this point it would not give the feeling of enclosure.

From the pylon located just south of Mermaid Road to the western edge of the application site, a distance of approximately 350 metres, the PV panels would be located close to footpath 68. This change would alter the character of this length of footpath and would lead to a feeling of the footpath being enclosed.

Footpath number 74 runs diagonally through the site of the panels from the Newgate Lane/Tanners Lane junction to the north eastern corner of the Waste Water Treatment Works. The stretch of footpath with panels on either side would measure approximately 320 metres.

The application proposes that a total width of 6 metres would be provided between the screen fencing within which the footpath would run. Users of this section of footpath would experience a considerable change in the character of the path in terms of the reduction in available views and the sense of the footpath being enclosed.

At the point where footpath 74 meets the Waste Water Treatment Works it runs along its northern edge, elevated on a well treed bank. Views from this section of the footpath are screened to an extent and being elevated views would be retained over the top of the PV panels.

The final footpath is number 71b which leaves Newgate Lane close to its junction with the entrance to the Waste Water Treatment Works. At the point where it meets the eastern boundary of the Treatment Works it runs along an elevated well treed bank.



Whilst immediate views from this footpath will be altered the routeing of the footpath in an elevated, treed location for much of its route means that it will not experience loss of views nor enclosure.

In summary Officers have carefully assessed the impact upon public footpaths and the users of those routes. The application site now proposed is substantially smaller than that previously proposed. In turn the number of footpath routes affected is now reduced. The perception of the visual gap between Fareham, Stubbington and Peel Common is retained as a large swathe of fields is now retained in an undeveloped form with footpaths running through them.

The application site now occupies a more discrete area of land situated between HMS Collingwood and the Waste Water Treatment Works. A change in the character of this area of land would occur and the perception of the area when viewed from public footpaths would alter, more substantially in some cases than others.

The harm upon the character of the countryside along with the changes to the views from these public footpaths will need to be balanced against the benefits delivered by the proposals.

#### IMPACT ON RESIDENTIAL AMENITY:

To the east there are several residential properties together with the Tudor Lodge Care Home. These are generally set behind a boundary of mature planting including substantial trees. Along the boundary with these properties the proposed solar arrays would be set in from the boundary by around 22 metres at the northern end of the boundary adjacent to 239 Newgate Lane to 33 metres at 211 Newgate Lane and increasing significantly further to the south. The main outlook from these properties is not in the direction of the solar arrays although there are some habitable windows that do outlook in that direction.

To the west properties in Stroud Green Lane would be sited some 650 - 700 metres from the solar panels, facing east towards the site. Whilst their view will be altered, in light of the distance from these dwellings it is not considered the harm to those residents is such as to justify the refusal of the application.

The properties along the northern part of Burnt House Lane are oriented to the north-south and would not be affected directly in terms of outlook.

Having assessed the impact upon the nearby residential properties, Officers conclude that the proposal would not cause material harm which would justify the refusal of the application.

#### ECOLOGY:

The issues arising can be broadly itemised as:

- (i) the enhancements to the ecological value of the site set out in the planning proposals, and
- (ii) the suitability of the site to be used by Waders and Brent geese for the protection of which the Solent Special Protection Area (SPA) was established.

## Enhancement:

The enhancement measures proposed include native planting in created hedgerows, creation of species-rich grassland, and provision of features such as habitat piles and bird/bat boxes. These are general enhancements that would increase the general biodiversity of the site.

## Waders and Brent Geese:

The previously withdrawn application extended to the west of the current site. Natural England and the Council's Ecology Officer advised that Waders and Brent geese are not confined to the European Union (EU) sites and readily use a range of areas outside the designated site boundaries. The area to the west of the current site had potential to support overwintering birds as a high tide roost and grazing site. Insufficient information had been submitted at that time to fully assess whether there would be any significant effect on birds.

The applicant sought the advice of Natural England and as a result undertook survey work on site during the winter period at the beginning of this year. Low usage of the wider site by wading birds was recorded. In light of this conclusion, together with the fact that development is no longer proposed on the land to the west of the current site, Natural England have advised that the proposal is unlikely to have significant effect on the interest features of the statutory designated sites (in this case Waders and Brent geese).

In conclusion it is considered that the development as now proposed would not have any significant ecological impacts and would result in an overall improvement in biodiversity.

## IMPACTS UPON THE OPERATION AND SAFETY OF AIRCRAFT USING DAEDALUS AIRFIELD:

The issues arising can be broadly itemised as:

- Harm from 'Glint and Glare'
- Reduced availability of land for 'Forced landing'
- Potential impact of the proposed development on the Solent Enterprise Zone

These were issues of significant concern raised during the consideration of the withdrawn application. As a result the Council engaged aviation consultants to consider the issues, and have consulted with them again following the receipt of the latest proposals.

## Glint and Glare:

The applicant has stated that solar panels are designed to absorb rather than to reflect light. In the case of the site the solar panels are designed to reflect only 2% of incoming sunlight. Reflected light from the solar panels will be significantly less than glare from direct sunlight.

They further assert that no evidence could be found from existing solar energy projects around the world of any reported problems of glare from solar panels affecting pilots and therefore concluded that there is no evidence that the Fareham Solar Farm would cause glare that might pose a safety risk to pilots of aircraft operating in the vicinity.

The Council's aviation consultant confirmed that in relation to glint and glare there would appear to be little evidence to suggest that the development would have any significant

impact on the operations at Daedalus. No recorded incidents of pilots suffering any adverse impact due to solar developments near airfields could be found. Additionally research would suggest that, under current guidance and thinking, there should be minimal, if any, impact on the controllers within the Tower.

#### Forced Landings:

The Council's aviation consultant previously concluded that it would appear that the proposed solar farm would significantly reduce the forced landing options for all climb-out profiles on both runway 05 and 35 and, in some cases, potentially deny a realistic forced landing opportunity completely. Whilst this should not affect the licensing of runway 35 it might affect the types of aircraft that operate from the airfield in future.

In considering the revised application the Council's aviation consultant considered the previous reports and responses from both the developer and other interested parties. The report assessed the revised Solar Farm layout against four criteria:

- Take-off and departure from runway 35;
- Take-off and green lane\* departure from runway 05;
- Take-off and traditional climb-straight ahead departure from runway 05;
- Green Lane recovery to land on runways 05 and 35.

(\*a route above largely undeveloped land).

The report concluded:

- 'Aircraft taking-off and departing from runway 35 would not be affected by the solar farm;
- Take off and departing from runway 05, and following the green lane route would not be affected by the solar farm;
- Aircraft taking-off and departing from runway 05 and following the climb-ahead route, would have their forced landing options slightly reduced by the solar farm;
- Aircraft recovering to the airfield from the north, would be able to follow the green lane route without having their land-short options compromised by the solar farm.

To conclude, the latest proposal effectively addresses the concerns the Lee-on-Solent airfield operators published in relation to the earlier proposal (P/12/0605/FP refers).'

#### Potential impact of the proposed development on the Solent Enterprise Zone

The applicant has considered the potential economic impact of any effects of the solar park on the airfield, for example as a result of aircraft operators judging that the restrictions on forced landing options were unacceptable which would prevent them operating from Daedalus.

Restricted forced landing options only affect single-engine aircraft since multi-engine aircraft are designed to continue flying in the event of an engine failure. Commercial operations by multi-engine aircraft would not be affected by any restricted forced landing options that may occur as a result of the solar park development. It is clear that the potential effects of the

revised solar farm proposal on the forced landing options for aircraft operating at the airfield are significantly less than those that may have applied if the previous application had been successful. It is regarded as highly unlikely that any commercial operator, irrespective of aircraft type, would regard the minimal reduction in forced landing field options on take-off from runway 05 as constraining operations so much that it deterred them from bringing aircraft or services to Daedalus.

The Council's aviation consultants have advised that there is no evidence to support the implication that the development of the solar farm would call into question the licensing of runway 17/35. There are no physical safeguarding implications from the development and the vertical extent of the panels will be significantly less than existing development on the approach to runway 35 and climb-out from runway 17. If the Civil Aviation Authority have surveyed the available surface with a view to licensing it they will have taken into account the undershoot and overshoot. As a consequence, despite concerns voiced by the Homes and Community Agency, there is no evidence to demonstrate that the development proposals would impact upon existing or potential users of the Enterprise Zone.

#### STUBBINGTON BYPASS:

At the time of the withdrawn planning application the Council was advised that there were no plans relating to the potential for a Stubbington bypass that were likely to take place within the 25 year life of the proposed development and that the land was not subject to any Highway safeguarding.

Since the previous proposal was withdrawn, further public consultation has been undertaken by Hampshire County Council which has included possible options for a Stubbington bypass due to 'increased emphasis on economic growth and job creation for the (Gosport) peninsula'.

The initial public consultation on the matter ended on the 9th September; the consultation invited early views from residents and businesses on possible routes for the Stubbington bypass and related improvements. The consultation contained three potential routes for the Stubbington bypass. Two of these routes (Red and Green) are not affected by the application proposal, whilst the third (blue) runs through the site. The applicant is currently discussing the compatibility of the blue route with the solar farm proposal with Hampshire County Council. An update will be provided on these discussions at the meeting.

Officers have sought legal advice in relation to the weight that should be given to the potential impact of the proposed solar farm upon one possible route of the Stubbington Bypass.

The potential need for the land to be used for the bypass is capable of being a material planning consideration in terms of the definition of what is a material planning consideration as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Paragraph 41 of the NPPF states 'Local planning authorities should identify and protect, where there is robust evidence, sites and routes which could be critical in developing infrastructure to widen transport choice.' Once a decision on the route is made then paragraph 41 of the National Planning Policy Framework suggests that it should be safeguarded.

One of the key questions raised at this stage is whether or not it would be premature to

permit the development of the site as a solar farm before the route of the Stubbington bypass has been fully determined.

At the time of preparing this report, possible routes for the bypass were the subject of a recently concluded consultation. The County Council as the highway authority, has not submitted comments in respect of this application which indicate that one of the three routes proposed is more preferable than the others. The County Council have furthermore not asked that the planning application should be refused. The funding for the bypass is not currently in place and there is no timetable for its delivery.

Following the conclusion of the initial consultation, the County Council will publish a summary of the responses received in late October. Comments of the interim Peel Common Roundabout proposals will be considered and consultation will be undertaken on more detailed proposals in early 2014. Comments on the Western Access to Gosport will be considered by the County Council alongside the necessary environmental and technical assessment of the proposals including all the potential corridors of interest for a potential Stubbington bypass. Any decision on a preferred corridor will be the subject of future consultation.

On the basis of the currently available information, Officers are of the opinion that the planning application cannot be reasonably refused on the basis of potentially prejudicing a highway scheme which is not formally safeguarded and is in the early stages of consideration.

#### ACCESS DURING CONSTRUCTION:

This issue was a matter of much negotiation between officers and the applicants during the consideration of the withdrawn application. Whilst the location of the proposed construction compound has changed the principle of how the site will be accessed and constructed remains essentially unaltered.

The construction compound will be located at the north east part of the site adjacent to Tanners Lane and the aim is to establish a one way westbound route from Newgate Lane to Peak Lane during the 12 week construction period. As set out in the comments from the Highways Officer it is anticipated that between 12 and 75 large haulage and delivery vehicles plus ancillary vehicles per week over a 12 week construction phase would access the site. This would equate to around 503 lorries in total and a peak average of some 1.8 lorries per hour. Specialist operatives from Germany will be used to install the array panels and equipment. They will be accommodated locally and bussed to the site daily. As such there is unlikely to be any material additional traffic movements beyond the above large construction vehicles, carrying off surplus materials and bringing in the bulk equipment, also from Germany.

Officers are satisfied that subject works being carried out in accordance with the submitted Construction Traffic Management Plan there should be no unacceptably harmful impacts arising from the construction of the proposed development.

#### PUBLIC ACCESS ON THE SITE:

The current application proposes no new paths. The route of public footpath 74 through the site is to be widened to 6 metres with hedgerow planting in front of security fencing on either side.

No objections have been received from Hampshire County Council's Rights of Way Officer or the Hampshire Constabulary's (Crime prevention Design Officer) has raised no objection in principle.

#### OTHER ISSUES:

##### Grade 2 Agricultural land -

The land is classified as Grade 2 agricultural land but as a result of the ability to use the land in and around the arrays for grazing a form of 'dual use' is established that would not sterilise the land nor would there be any long term contamination of the land by the development. The land would be fully reverted back to its agricultural use at the end of the 25 year temporary period should permission be granted. Natural England is responsible for agricultural land classification and has raised no objection on the grounds of loss of agricultural land. Indeed the cessation of monoculture is likely to have a positive impact on the land as well as encouraging biodiversity which is explored further in this report.

##### Electromagnetic Fields -

The development involves the deployment of up to date technology in the production of electricity. Some public concern has arisen over potential health risks associated with electromagnetic fields (EMF) generated by the process of the production of the electricity.

The applicants have provided evidence, which concludes that:

- EMF are produced in the operation of all electronic equipment and appliances in homes and businesses (computers, televisions etc)
- EMF are produced during the production and distribution of electricity
- Solar arrays create direct current which produces a static magnetic field.
- Direct current must be converted to alternating current to be used and this creates power frequency magnetic fields
- The strength of EMF diminishes over distance. In a US example the static magnetic field generated by a solar array, at approximately 1 metre would be only 0.05% of the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) exposure guidelines
- In the same US example the EMF generated by power inverters would be less than 50% of the ICNIRP guideline at 1 metre and at 3 metres (10') and would be no more than comparable common household appliances

The UK Government policy on EMFs is to comply with the ICNIRP 1998 Guideline, in line with EU recommendations.

All of the solar arrays would be set at least 4 metres (13') from any publicly accessible area such as a footpath so that on this basis there is no evidence to suggest that there would be any health consequences arising from the solar panels themselves.

The proposed inverter and transformer buildings are generally located well within the solar array groups and where they are not then they would be set at least 5 metres (16'4") from publicly accessible land so that again there is no evidence that there would be any demonstrable health consequences.

##### Fire Hazard -

Some objectors have raised concern over potential problems which could arise should the solar arrays catch fire. They point to the concerns raised by fire fighting agencies (particularly in the US) in fighting fires on domestic properties with solar panels.

This is not considered to be relevant to the application development since it is understood that the issue has arisen over the fact that, as electricity generating equipment, normal domestic fire fighting techniques cannot be used. However the application development is standalone solar generation equipment so that the conflict would not arise. Furthermore it is understood that the materials used in the production of the solar arrays has an exceptionally high combustion point so that fire risk is minimal.

Some objectors raise concern over the toxicity of materials used in the production of the solar panels. It is not the place for the planning system to make judgement upon such matters which can only be a matter for National control.

The applicants point out that, "Thousands of people live with solar panels on the roofs of their homes, sleeping and living a mere few metres away from the panels for long periods of time with no ill effects"

To conclude there is no evidence available to the Council to suggest that the proposed installations are a significant risk to public health or safety.

Noise -

Representations raise concerns over the potential for noise disturbance arising from the proposed inverter and transformer structures.

The applicants previously confirmed:

"One of the major benefits of solar PV is that once installed it does not create any noise, as there are no moving parts associated with the panels. The only noise generating equipment on site is the transformer/inverter stations and the substations. The noise generated by the transformer/inverter stations is limited to:

At 1 metre: Inverter ca. 72dB; Transformer ca. 50dB"

These levels may be represented as approximating to the sound of a normal conversation at a metre distance. Many Members experienced this noise at first hand from visiting the operational site at Oving during the last application process and will recall that it involves a low level 'hum' which diminishes to an inaudible level within a short distance.

In view of the significant distance of any of the inverters and transformers from any residential properties and from the public footpaths it is not considered that there would be any adverse impact upon either residents or users of the footpaths by noise.

### Conclusion

The preceding report sets out the national and local planning policy position in respect of this renewable energy proposal in the countryside and sets out the relevant material issues to be considered.

In the first part Officers fully acknowledge the strong national and local planning policy support for the principle of renewable energy proposals. In terms of the latest guidance the site is well located with regard to grid connection and does not have any cumulative impact

with other sites. Further, due consideration has been given to factors highlighted in the guidance and the proposed development generally follows the guidance closely. The guidance also stresses the importance of local community involvement. The applicant undertook a public exhibition prior to submission of the application, the details of which are included within a Statement of Community Involvement.

In terms of the impact upon local residents, Officers acknowledge that there will be changes in the appearance of the site when viewed from nearby residential properties, particularly in Newgate Lane. There is a significant increase in distances between a number of residential properties to the west and the arrays. In light of the distances involved in many cases and/or the presence of intervening planting, Officers do not consider the development would materially harm the outlook from nearby properties.

Many representations raise objection to the fact that if the solar farm were constructed it would occupy the land needed to provide the 'Stubbington bypass'. Officers acknowledge that Hampshire County Council is reassessing its position regarding the bypass and has recently undertaken a public consultation on the matter. However, it remains that there is no preferred or safeguarded route for a bypass at this point in time which would justify the refusal of planning permission.

Whilst the proposal would result in the loss of Grade 2 agricultural land, this is reversible and the solar farm in itself would not reduce the quality of the land. Grazing of animals would occur concurrently with the gathering of solar energy resulting in a form of dual use. Natural England raises no objection to the site's removal from full agricultural use over a 25 year period.

Health and noise issues have also been considered, and Officers are satisfied on the basis of the information available, both from the applicants and independently, that no harm would be caused to health nor nuisance caused by noise through the proposed use of the site.

The construction phase of the proposal would require a large number of lorry movements from Newgate Lane to the site and then out through Peak Lane. The Council's highway engineer is satisfied that construction works can be undertaken in such a way that no material harm would be caused to highway safety.

It is acknowledged that the planting of a significant amount of native hedging along with the creation of extensive grassland containing wildflower mix will provide ecological enhancements over the existing farmed land.

Concerns regarding overwintering birds have been addressed by both survey work and by the fact that the site area is significantly reduced. The applicants have confirmed that no evidence has been found of reptiles on the site. Natural England no longer raises objection to the proposals and has confirmed that the development is unlikely to have any significant effect upon the Solent Special Protection Area .

The issue of the impact upon aviation at Daedalus, was of great concern in respect of the previously submitted larger site. The matter of glint and glare has not changed and was not and is not considered to be a supportable objection to the development. The concern over forced landings has been resolved by the substantial reduction in site coverage by solar panels which leaves land available for forced landings within the area to the west of the current site. These matters have been confirmed through independent expert advice



sought by the Council and updated in the light of the new application. There is no evidence that the development would now have any adverse impact upon the future viability of the Enterprise Zone.

The visual impact upon the countryside at this point, along with the change in the character of the land and the views from existing public rights of way will undoubtedly be subject to a degree of change. It is also recognised that the new hedgerow planting around the panels and screen fences will take many years to establish which will also lead to increased visual intrusion in the early years following the construction of the solar farm.

Officers have carefully weighed up the national benefits of providing renewable energy sources, against the harm identified within this report relating to the countryside and the public footpaths. Having considered and balanced all relevant planning issues, Officers believe that the national benefits of contributing towards renewable energy outweighs the areas of harm identified and planning permission should be granted subject to appropriate conditions.

### ***PERMISSION***

Panels and associated fencing infrastructure etc removed and site reinstated to agriculture after 25 years; compliance with Construction Traffic Management Plan; works to Tanners Lane and Stroud Green Lane for construction traffic to be agreed; provision of Construction compound during construction works; reinstatement of construction compound to former state after completion of construction; No obstruction of rights of way during construction; contamination watching brief; development in accordance with Site Environmental Management Plan and Phase I habitat survey; fencing in accordance with approved plans; details of soft landscaping; implementation of agreed landscaping; tree protection; details and provision of interpretation board; development in accordance with Flood Risk Assessment; conditions suggested by Southern Water Services.

### ***Notes for Information***

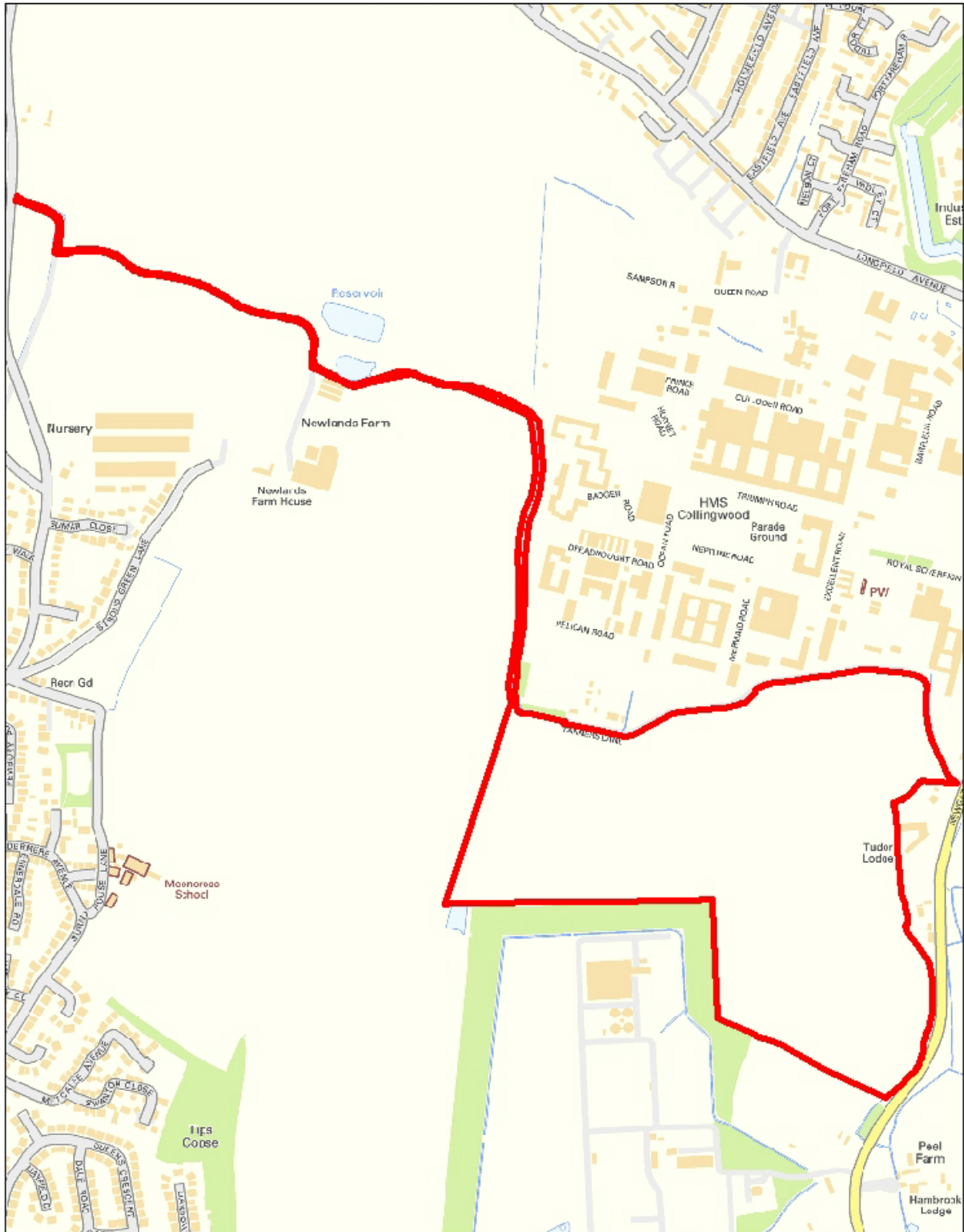
Clearance of trees and areas of scrub should avoid the bird breeding season, March to August inclusive, unless supervised by an appropriately qualified ecologist, to reduce the likelihood of harm to breeding birds.

### ***Background Papers***

P/12/0905/FP

# FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL



Land at Newlands Farm  
Scale 1:8,000



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