

**Application Referred to Broads Authority for Consultation – to be determined
by Broadland District Council and North Norfolk District Council**

Parish	Belaugh		
Reference	BA/2012/0335/NEIGHB BA/2012/0336/NEIGHB	Target date	14 November 2012
Location	Land off Belaugh Road, Hoveton, Norwich		
Proposal	Installation of 12mw solar farm		
Applicant	Trafford Estate Solar Park Limited		
Recommendation	Comments are endorsed		
Reason for Referral to Committee	Potential to impact on Broads		

1 Description of Site and Proposals

- 1.1 The site covers a total area of approximately 29ha with approximately 22ha falling within Broadland District Council's jurisdiction and approximately 7ha falling into North Norfolk District Council's jurisdiction. The site is situated approximately 300m to the north of the Broads Authority's boundary.
- 1.2 This site is situated approximately 0.5km to the west of Hoveton and approximately 0.5km to the northeast of Belaugh. The B1354 Belaugh Road runs south of the site. The Bure Valley Railway Station is located to the southeast of the site with the railway line running close to the eastern boundary of the site. The associated Aylsham to Wroxham Bure Valley footpath runs alongside the railway. A public footpath runs north-south through the centre of the site.
- 1.3 The site comprises five rectangular fields which are currently in arable production. The field boundaries are defined by hedges which include hedge trees of various ages and sizes. The southern boundary of the site, adjacent to Belaugh Road, is defined by a scrubby hedge. The western two fields roll back gently to a shallow valley towards the west, whilst the eastern fields slope quite sharply to the south eastern corner of the site.
- 1.4 The proposal is seeking consent for a solar farm which comprises the installation of approximately 57,420 photovoltaic panels laid out in arrays of

rows running east to west across the site. Each individual panel will be 990mm long, 1,640mm wide and 40mm deep. The panels will be mounted in rows of four, one above the other, on aluminium frames. The solar panels will be installed at approximately 25 degrees from the horizontal, facing south. The height of any installation will be 3m above ground level with the height of individual frames being modified to respond to specific ground topography within the site. The rows of aluminium frames will be approximately 5.2m apart and will be offset from the site boundary by 7m. Approximately 32% of the site will be covered by panels. The land under the panels will be grazed by sheep.

- 1.5 The development will also require the installation of 14 transformer enclosures which will measure 7.8m by 3m with a maximum height of 2.8m and will be colour coordinated in accordance with the landscape. They will be situated around the site at the ends of the rows of panels.
- 1.6 The site will be secured by 2.4m high welded mesh fencing, coloured green, which will be erected 5m from the boundary hedgerows and 3m from any internal hedgerows. Fencing will be erected on either side of the public footpath that crosses the site thereby preserving the use of this public footpath throughout the lifetime of the development. CCTV cameras mounted on 5m high, green coloured, camera poles will be erected around the site.
- 1.7 Access to the site will be taken off Belaugh Road. The entrance into the site will be from the southwestern corner of the westernmost field and the exit will be from the southwestern corner of the fourth field from the west.
- 1.8 Additional boundary planting will be carried out where necessary.
- 1.9 The proposed solar farm is a temporary structure with a lifespan of 30 years. Following the cessation of energy generation at the site, the development will be decommissioned and all plant and machinery will be removed from the site.

2 Assessment

- 2.1 In terms of the assessment of this development proposal the focus of the comments will be on: the impact that the development may have on the landscape setting of the Broads; ensuring that the ecological and biodiversity value of the Broads is not compromised and if possible enhanced; protecting the heritage value of the Conservation Area in Belaugh; and ensuring opportunities for improving public access to the countryside are maximised.

2.2 *Landscape*

The Character Area within the Broads Landscape Character Area Assessment which is closest to the subject site is The Bure Valley Wroxham to Fleet Dyke South Walsham Local Character Area. The topography of the Bure Valley within this area directs views upwards from the valley bottom therefore skylines are defined largely by carr woodland in the valley floor and lower valley sides. Limited views of the site from the southern side of the river valley may be possible however there is very limited public access in this area

and this is not therefore considered to be an issue. At higher vantage points skylines towards the site from the Broads Authority's area tend to be composed predominantly of hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees lying on the boundaries of arable fields. The application site also comprises arable fields defined by hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees which contribute to the skyline of the Broads area and these should therefore be retained as part of the development.

Although lying outside the Broads Authority's Executive Area the B1354 is a main vehicular link between two important Broad's villages – Belaugh and Hoveton. The road is heavily trafficked by locals and visitors and provides a 'gateway' to the Broads area. Although there is a hedgerow along part of the southern site boundary, adjacent to this road, the hedge is not extensive enough to filter views of the proposal from the road and should be fully reinstated to increase screening.

In principle there are no landscape objections to the scheme as views of the development from within the Broads Authority's area will be extremely limited. However it is recommended that the points set out above are forwarded to the decision making Authorities to ensure that the quality of the landscape setting of the Broads area is protected and enhanced.

2.3 *Ecologically and Biodiversity*

The planning application has been supported by an ecological survey and report which concludes that there are no significant ecological impacts or constraints that would prevent this development proceeding. The report recommends enhancements and the commitment to a management plan for the site. This report has been reviewed by the Broads Authority's Ecologists who agree with the findings of the ecological survey and consider that it has provided sufficient information with which to assess the impact of this proposal.

It is recommended that a robust package of mitigation and biodiversity enhancement is required as part of the delivery of the development which will be complementary to the existing high biodiversity within many areas of the Trafford Estate and will enhance the benefits yielded from the land during the thirty year operation of the solar farm. It is recommended that the following measures are undertaken:

- A Method Statement should be prepared to include working methods to avoid any adverse impacts on breeding birds on the site.
- Materials and equipment should not be stored on the grass margins of the site.
- A thirty year Management Plan should be written and adhered to for the grassland, trees and hedgerows on the site. Actions in the Plan should include; significant areas of planting including seeding of wild flowers and grasses; aftercare and well timed management to retain areas of open wildflower rich grassland; planting up the gaps in the hedges; careful and well timed tree management to avoid the bird breeding season and any impact on bats.

- Bat and bird boxes should be installed on the site.

It is concluded that if the recommendations set out above are adhered to there will be no significant ecological impacts, and therefore constraints, which would prevent the development being carried out as proposed.

2.4 *Heritage Value*

The village of Belaugh is situated approximately 0.5km to the southwest of this site. Part of this village has been designated as a Conservation Area which benefits from an up to date appraisal document. Part of the village, which is included within the Conservation Area designation, is situated within the Broads Authority's Executive Area. The northern extremity of the Conservation Area is closest to the site. However as a result of the topography of the area there is little intervisibility between the site and the Conservation Area and as such the impact on the Conservation Area itself arising from the proposed development will not be significant.

The site will be visible when approaching or leaving the Conservation Area via the B1354 Belaugh Road. Given the distance between the Conservation Area and the application site and the existing and proposed screening between the two, it is difficult to argue that the wider setting of the Conservation Area will be adversely affected by the proposed development.

It is therefore recommended that Broadland District Council and North Norfolk District Council be advised that the Broads Authority considers that the proposed development will not have a significant detrimental effect on the Conservation Area that falls within the Broads Authority's Executive Area or on its wider setting. However as the decision making Authorities they need to ensure that this proposal is considered fully against the relevant tests within the National Planning Policy Framework which require any development to be judged against the impact it has on the heritage asset as a whole, in this case the Belaugh Conservation Area.

2.5 *Access to the Countryside*

The site is situated between Belaugh and Hoveton and close to the Bure Valley Railway. The Public Footpath that currently bisects the site from north to south already provides a link into the Bure Valley Path. Belaugh Parish Council have advised that there is an informal Permissive Path running along the southern edge of the application site immediately behind the roadside hedge, which is the subject of an informal agreement between Belaugh Parish Council and Trafford Estate, although no mention of this has been included in the application details.

The details provided with the application state that the security fencing will be erected 5m from boundary hedgerows and 3m from internal hedgerows. There will therefore be plenty of space around the perimeter of the development to accommodate public footpaths. This application therefore presents an opportunity to deliver one of the objectives of the Broads Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) – Objective B5 which is the formal establishment of a public path linking Belaugh and Hoveton. The route

identified in the Broads RoWIP runs along the southern edge of the application site immediately behind the roadside hedge. The proposed path would provide a safe pedestrian route linking Belaugh and Hoveton Station and, by linking with the existing Public Footpath which already crosses the site, provide improved public access to the Bure Valley Path. The establishment of the route would meet two of the aims of the draft Broads Integrated Access Strategy namely linking recreational access to public transport routes, visitor hubs and facilities and improving links to visitor attractions.

Currently the site is in agricultural use but the proposed development presents the opportunity for establishing a formal public access route, ideally a Public Footpath, along the southern boundary of the site, in agreement with the applicant and Norfolk County Council.

3 Conclusion

- 3.1 It is acknowledged that this planning application is seeking consent for a development which will deliver a significant renewable source of energy. However the scale of the proposal and its proximity to the Broads Authority's Executive Area means that there is the potential for the scheme to have a detrimental impact on the setting of the Broads.
- 3.2 The possible effects of the scheme on the landscape setting of the Broads, the biodiversity value of the site and the wider area and the Belaugh Conservation Area have all been fully assessed. It is concluded that given the distance between the site and the boundary of the Broads Authority's Executive Area and the topography in this area that the scheme is unlikely to have any detrimental effect on the Broads area. The imposition of relevant planning conditions on any consent that may be granted, as recommended above, should help to ensure that there is no detrimental effect on the Broads area. The opportunity for a Public Right of Way to be created along the southern boundary of the site in accordance with the objectives for the Broads Authority's Rights of Way Improvement Plan should not be missed.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1 That the above comments are agreed as the views of the Broads Authority and are forward to Broadland District Council and North Norfolk District Council.

Background papers: Application Files BA/2012/0335/NEIGHB and BA/2012/0336/NEIGHB

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List of Appendices: APPENDIX 1 - Location Plan

APPENDIX 1

BA/2012/0335/NEIGHB & BA/2012/0336/NEIGHB - Land Off Belaugh Road, Hoveton, Norwich
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