

Planning, Principle and Traffic

Planning

Planning policy

Planning policies at all levels strongly support renewable energy proposals unless significant adverse impacts arise that are not outweighed by the environmental benefits.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports the transition to a low carbon future.

At paragraph 97 it states:

“97. 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. They should have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources.”

The site is located within the Green Belt. However, the NPPF recognises that the benefits of renewable energy production can outweigh the objective of the Green Belt. It states:

At paragraph 91 it states:

“91. When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.”

In addition, the development will be temporary and the site will remain in agricultural use.

Impacts on farming output

The proposals would be sited on Grade 3 and 4 agricultural land which is currently understood to be used for pastoral farming. The proposals therefore avoid the use of the highest quality agricultural land (grades 1 and 2) and will not have any impact on the production as pastoral farming as the height of the solar panels allows sheep to continue grazing beneath the panels. The proposals are fully reversible in the future to allow the land to return to agricultural use. The significant amount of renewable energy produced is considered to outweigh any short term reduction in food production.

Principle

Principle of development

A rural location is a suitable location for a solar farm as a large area of land is required to accommodate the panels. There is no policy requirement for the scheme to be located within or adjoining an existing settlement. Moreover, a location within a settlement or even near a settlement is not required because the proposals attract only around a dozen traffic movements per year for maintenance and security, less than a standard arable crop. The proposed development does not therefore require an accessible location and is therefore sustainable despite being located in a relatively rural location. Nevertheless, existing access to the site is available from Eashing Lane and the A3.

Environmental considerations

The panels themselves are physically inert and environmentally benign.

The site is not constrained by public footpaths and is outside other environmental designations such as AONB, County Wildlife site, SSSI, flood zone 2 and 3 and areas of high archaeological potential.

Traffic

Traffic movements

The panels are extremely low maintenance; the grass underneath could be grazed by sheep and the panels wiped down annually. The panels would be monitored remotely via a CCTV link. It is expected that traffic visiting the site would be less than agricultural traffic.

