



Google earth

miles
km



18 DEC 2011

11/1924



PLANNING STATEMENT

In Support of
Planning Application
For
The Installation of Solar Photovoltaic Panels & Associated
Works to Create a Solar Park at Enstone Airfield.
For
Lomond Holdings Limited.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

- 1.1 This is the latest in a series of applications that have been submitted for Solar Parks in West Oxfordshire in the last 12 months. Planning Permissions have been forthcoming in respect of two sites in the District. The first permission issued on 9th May 2011, involves a proposal at Wychwood Solar Farm, Milton Road, Shipton under Wychwood. (11/0305/P/FP) Following shortly after this on 27th June 2011, permission was given for another Solar Farm on part of a former World War II airfield at Kencot Hill Farm near Burford. (11/0412/P/FP) These permissions serve to illustrate the District Council's commitment to promote the provision of renewable energy within its area.
- 1.2 The applicant company, Lomond Holdings Limited, owns the bulk of the undeveloped land at Enstone Airfield to the south of and including Runway 1 to the extent outlined in blue on the site location plan. The bulk of the adjoining Enstone Business Park is owned and operated by a sister company Leven Holdings Limited. The main runway and the small area to the north have been occupied by the Oxfordshire Sport Flying Club under a lease, which expired this year. The impending expiration of the lease and the start of the preparation and commencement of consultations in respect of the West Oxfordshire District Council Local Development Framework caused the Company to review the future of its holdings and a Planning Development Brief was commissioned to help guide them on the future development potential of the area. In addition to the possibilities of further development, the Brief pointed out the potential for accommodating renewable energy schemes within the airfield area.
- 1.3 The company has been exploring the possibilities of a renewable energy facility on the airfield site and engaged consultants to advise them further. As a result this has led to the current application, where the technical and background planning advice has been provided by their consultants, Renewable Energy Tariffs Limited, trading under the name of Ownergy
- 1.4 It should be noted that Ownergy were the consultants who provided the technical and background advice for the application for the Wychwood Solar Farm referred to above. Their involvement in that application served them to be aware of the constraints and the local and national

policies and the issues involved that need to be addressed in such an application. Their submitted report, which forms the basis of this application, refers to the fact that they have also been involved in a similar enterprise at Westcott Solar Park which has been installed on a former runway at an airfield near Aylesbury.

- 1.5 This statement does not intend to duplicate the already well rehearsed background to renewable energy issues set out in the Ownergy report but seeks to set the context of the appropriate policy considerations to the particular locational characteristics of this site in relation to its landscape setting to illustrate that the proposal will not harm any of the material planning considerations involved. To this extent the application will rely upon the Landscape Appraisal carried out as part of the Planning Brief for the whole area of the airfield and which provided the background for the recent application for employment land. A copy of the Landscape Appraisal Map has been provided with this statement and will be enlarged upon in the following sections which evaluate the physical and policy context of the site as a suitable location for the proposed Solar Park.

1. POLICY APPRAISAL.

- 2.1 The local policy context is set by the saved policies of the outgoing West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 as referred to in the Ownergy report specifically under NE12. It is therefore necessary to test this proposal against the criteria set out within this policy and any other relevant policies in the Local Plan.
- 2.2 Policy NE12 states that proposals for the development of renewable energy schemes will be permitted if all the following criteria are met. The first of these is that: **“there would not be an unacceptable level of impact upon the environment and resources of the area.”** This calls for an examination of local environmental issues, especially the area's landscape character and amenity, which in turn brings into play Policy NE1 for safeguarding the countryside for its own sake and more specifically Policy NE3, which protects local landscape character as defined in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment. These issues will be examined in detail in the appraisal section of this statement. The

second criterion is designed to ensure that “**an unacceptable level of nuisance by reason of noise, safety, shadow flicker, electromagnetic interference or reflected light will not be created.**”

The nature of the proposal does not involve the first four issues and light reflection is dealt with comprehensively in the Ownergy report. The policy then refers to cases within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The application site is not within this or any other special designation. As the proposal involves development on a metalled runway no ecological issues arise.

- 2.3 A further material policy consideration involves the Council’s emerging Core Strategy for its Local Development Framework. Core Strategy 19 deals with Renewable and Low Energy Development where in principle such development will be supported where it can be located to minimise any adverse impacts on issues such as the landscape.
- 2.4 In terms of National Planning Policies on renewable energy the Ownergy report refers to and quotes from PPS22, the government’s commitment to the promotion of *renewable energy resources*, where local planning authorities should specifically encourage such schemes through positively expressed policies in local development documents as is the case in West Oxfordshire.
- 2.5 The government’s Draft National Planning Policy Framework is also a material planning consideration where the section on climate change sets out the objective that planning should fully support the transition to *a low carbon economy and give active support to the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure*. More specifically, paragraph 153 advises that when determining applications, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development and approve applications for renewable and low carbon energy developments if its impacts are acceptable.

2. EVALUATION OF PROPOSAL’S IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE.

- 3.1 It has been established that there is a policy presumption in favour of renewable energy developments of this nature. It is also clear from the information provided that this development does not affect any wider environmental issues involving biodiversity. The site is reached

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via the existing access serving the Enstone airfield complex with a direct approach along runway 2 and the Ownery report confirms that traffic generated by this development will be minimal. The report has also pointed out the contribution the development will make to the national and local sustainable energy supply. The remaining issue to be considered therefore is any possible impact there may be on the local landscape, bearing in mind the low profile nature of the development involved.

3.2 To assess this we must first address the character of the local landscape as required by Policy NE3. The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment was published in 1998 and places the Enstone area within the Landscape Character Area described as the Enstone Uplands. The airfield area itself is defined as a sub-area in its own right where the guidelines refer to the;

- ***“brown-field site of Enstone Airfield, potentially more tolerant of development but prominent plateau location and rural context are limiting factors;***
- ***Any development of these sites should be set within a strong landscape infrastructure to minimise landscape and visual impacts;”***

In terms of “Enhancement Priorities” the guidelines refer to the need to;

- ***“improve the qualities of the boundaries around Enstone Airfield by new planting and improved management, to reduce impact of intrusive structures, fencing and land uses;***
- ***Plant blocks and belts of trees in strategic locations around the airfield site, e.g. along roadsides, to reduce the visual prominence of buildings;”***

3.3 Since the further development of the former wartime airfield for employment and other uses commenced in the early 1970s planning controls have ensured that such development has been accompanied by comprehensive landscaping schemes. The first block of substantial

structure planting was carried out in the mid 1970s and further extensive planting was added to the airfield environs when the Feed Mill and the Chicken Farm complex were developed in the 1980s. Since that time with the grant aid then available from the Council and the Forestry Commission, other land owners of different parts of the airfield have been encouraged to carry out extensive planting schemes, which have resulted in more recent tree belts and plantations on the south eastern boundaries and on airfield land north of the main runway.

- 3.4 In the 13 years since the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment was published much of this planting has reached a significant level of maturity to provide a relatively well contained area in landscape terms. The recent Landscape Appraisal carried out for the applicant's submitted with this application shows the extent of the various plantations and tree belts within and in the vicinity of the airfield area. Within this context the application area is located on the western section of the main runway that lies to the west of the intersection with Runway 2, which is on a north west / south east alignment. Most of the area of runway to be developed is within a dip below the 170 contour line as shown on the plan.
- 3.5 The Plan also shows that the southern and western bounds of the airfield are well screened with continuous planting belts, which allow no views to be obtained of the airfield area from the frontages of the B.4040 and the B.4022. There are only two points from the surroundings that allow views into the airfield area, which are shown on the Appraisal Map. View Point 1 is from the B.4022 where there is a gap on the north west corner of the outfield of the airfield at a point when the road passes the existing plantation as it travels southwards. The area of runway involved cannot be seen from this viewpoint as it is obscured by the landscaping surrounding the Chicken Farm and the large plantation shown within the vision cone. The view as shown on the accompanying photograph is a general distant view of the employment complex, which is about a mile in distance, where the Feed Mill and other tall structures can be made out such as the

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airfield windsock and an aerial mast. The second view point is from the B 4030 at a point to the south east of the airfield. The application site is entirely obscured from this direction.

3.6 From this landscape assessment it is clear that the development proposed will have no impact on the local landscape and therefore will have no affect on the visual amenities or rural character of the area.

3. CONCLUSION.

4.1 I am therefore confident in reaching the conclusion that the development proposed meets all the criteria set out in the various national and local planning policies governing such matters and that the proposal merits the support of the local planning authority.

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**Mark Chattoe Dip. TP.
29th November 2011.**

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APPRAISAL VIEW POINTS 16 DEC 2011

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VIEW POINT 1 From North West



VIEW POINT 2 From South East

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**PROPOSED SOLAR PARK
WEST PART OF ENSTONE AIRFIELD
ECOLOGICAL ALERTS SITE 32/X/09 & BARN OWLS
NEST BUFFER.**

1. CONTEXT

- 1.1 To respond to the request for an assessment of the impact of the proposed development on plant and wildlife interests as highlighted in the heading it is necessary to put the application site into its context in relation to these interests.**
- 1.2 The site itself consists of a hardstanding forming part of the main runway of the Enstone Airfield. The runway has been used by the Oxfordshire Sport Flying club as an active runway for the past 25 years for light aircraft. The applicant company is not in favour of renewing the lease due to the intention to implement this alternative use subject to planning permission.**
- 1.3 In the current circumstances therefore the site does not provide a habitat for any plants or wildlife nor does it serve as an area suitable for foraging of any kind. It is not in the interests of the operators of the airfield or its users to encourage wild life in the vicinity of the runway due to the danger of bird strike. For this reason the margins of the runway are maintained to ensure that they do not provide a habitat for wild life.**
- 1.4 Beyond this margin to the south of the runway is an extensive area of cropped grassland. To the north of the application site is a parallel grass runway operated by another Company, which again is not conducive to a wildlife habitat. To the north west is the chicken production facility and beyond this in the north are a number of tree**

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plantations with an old established tree plantation forming the northern boundary of the airfield area. Some of these details are shown on the attached Google earth aerial photograph.

- 1.5 There is a great deal of activity on the northern sector of the airfield which has a number of farm buildings workshops and hangers. There is also a motocross circuit to the north of the site.

2. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT ON THESE ISSUES.

- 2.1 In comparison with the existing use the proposed use is entirely inactive and will by definition have much less effect on *wildlife or ecological interests*. The presence of the solar panels will not therefore interfere with present wildlife habitats and will probably be more beneficial in providing a quieter environment. Certainly it is not likely to interfere with or disturb the nesting area of any barn owl in the locality or make any change to the ecology of the area

- 2.2 It is possible to conclude therefore that an examination of the advice given by Natural England in relation to their flow charts and check lists that the form of development proposed does not impinge upon any wildlife or ecological interests.

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Mark Chattoe Dip. TP.
14th December 2012
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