

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	242092
Site Address:	Heathlands Farm, The New Farm House, Honey Hill, Crowthorne, Wokingham, RG40 3BG
Expiry Date:	18 December 2024
Site Visit Date:	15 August 2023 (231524)
Proposal: Application to vary condition 9 of planning consent 231524 for the full application for the proposed installation of no. 1,762 Solar Photovoltaic Panels, each panel mounted on no. 4 concrete footings. Condition 9 refers to foundation design and the variation is to vary the foundation design.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Countryside
Archaeological Sites Consultation Zone
Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone (Red)
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area – 5km
Local Plan Update Submitted Sites

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks TB25 – Archaeology
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List WBC Climate Emergency Action Plan

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
242040	Application for submission of details to comply with the following conditions of planning consent 231524 dated 14/12/2023. Condition 4 relates to a boundary fence; 5 to landscaping; 6 to a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP); 7 to a Construction Method Statement, and 8 to	Approved – 30/09/2024

	drainage strategy.	
231524	Full application for the proposed installation of no. 1,762 Solar Photovoltaic Panels, each panel mounted on no. 4 concrete footings.	Conditionally Approved – 14/12/2023

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health: No objection

WBC Drainage: No comment

WBC Highways: No comment

WBC Built Heritage Officer: No objection subject to agreement with Berkshire Archaeology

External

Berkshire Archaeology: No objection subject to condition

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Wokingham Without Parish Council raised no objection.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is a parcel of agricultural land associated with Heathlands Farm. The site is to the immediate south of the main farm buildings and currently hosts 11no. polytunnels which almost span across the whole site with a track road around the perimeter for access.

The adjoining land to the east hosts mobile homes which are occupied by seasonal workers during the summer period only. To the west and south are the other operational fields associated with the farm. The site is well screened from the highway (Honey Hill) due to the surrounding development and mature trees adjacent to the boundary.

Proposal:

This application seeks to vary the wording of condition 9 of planning permission 231524 relating to the foundation design of the approved Photovoltaic (solar) panels. The condition currently reads as:

Foundation design - No development or other operations shall commence on site until a ballasted foundation design with no penetration into the ground for the development hereby permitted has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To safeguard the site's potential likelihood of containing archaeological remains. Relevant Policy: Section 16 of the NPPF (Conserving

and enhancing the historic environment) and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy TB25.

This application seeks to vary the wording of the condition to allow a piled foundation design which would be driven into the ground to a depth of 1.5m. The original condition was agreed to ensure there would be no impact arising from the approved development below ground level and subsequently no need for any archaeological mitigation. An Archaeological Impact Assessment has been submitted in support of the application.

Principle of Development: The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The principle of the site hosting solar panels for renewable energy production has already been established by the grant of permission 231524 dated 14/12/2023. The proposed variation is acceptable in principle subject to the assessment of impact on archaeological assets.

Archaeology:

Policy TB25 of the MDD Local Plan states that where development is likely to affect an area of high archaeological potential or an area which is likely to contain archaeological remains, the presumption is that appropriate measures shall be taken to protect remains by preservation in situ.

The application site does not fall within an identified area of high archaeological potential. However, its southern boundary is in close proximity to Archaeological Site 55 as identified under policy TB25. As such, there is a potential likelihood of containing archaeological remains which could be adversely affected by any proposed works below ground level.

The original application was not supported by any archaeological information, subsequently the initial proposal could not have satisfactorily demonstrated mitigation for any below ground works associated with the installation of the solar panels. As such, a ballasted foundation design with no below ground penetration, with further details to be submitted prior to commencement, was agreed to safeguard the site's likelihood of containing archaeological remains.

The applicant seeks to vary the wording of condition 9 to allow a piled foundation design which would be driven into the ground to a depth of 1.5m. Revised construction details have been submitted alongside an Archaeological Impact Assessment. The assessment concludes that the proposed development has the capacity to disturb previously undisturbed archaeological features, albeit the degree of disturbance would likely be relatively minor.

While disturbance could be relatively minor, the only route to ensure that there would be no harm to any archaeological remains is to carry out an investigation on-site,

which establishes any remains present and informs the level of mitigation required.

Following further discussions with the applicant and Berkshire Archaeology, a phased condition has been agreed which requires an archaeological investigation to be carried out on site, within the methodology to be agreed prior to the investigation. Findings would then need to be submitted as part of a final assessment prior to the solar panels being submitted, with any required mitigation measures proposed.

The agreed condition will ensure any potential harm to archaeological remains is avoided during the installation works and following the first use of the development, in accordance with the NPPF and policy TB25. It is therefore recommended that the wording of condition 9 is varied to facilitate the required investigation and associated reports.

Other:

The proposed amendment does not impact any other material planning considerations related to the approved development. In addition to the variation of condition 9 it is also recommended that the wording of condition 2 is varied to include the drawings submitted under this application. Conditions 4-8 are also varied to reflect the details approved under the Discharge of Conditions application ref 242040.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	16 December 2024
Earliest date for decision:	19 September 2024

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	16/12/24