

UTT/14/2545/FUL (Little Bardfield)

(MAJOR)

PROPOSAL: Site security system for monitoring The Hydes solar park comprising 23 No. wooden poles and CCTV cameras (retrospective).

LOCATION: Hydes Farm, Thaxted

APPLICANT: Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd.

EXPIRY DATE: 10 December 2014

CASE OFFICER: Clive Theobald

1. NOTATION

1.1 Outside Development Limits.

2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

2.1 The site is situated at Hydes Farm to the south of the Thaxted to Bardfield Road and comprises an approved solar farm in the advanced stage of construction on former arable farmland comprising 18.65 ha. The site is accessed by a long private farm drive from Bardfield Road and is traced by public footpaths along its north-west and north-east boundaries and a public bridleway which leads southwards from the south-west corner of the site down to Bustard Green. The development site comprises a relatively flat plateau beyond a ridge and is open in character with drainage ditches.

3. PROPOSAL

3.1 This retrospective application relates to the erection of 23 No. CCTV cameras which have recently been installed on the top of 3 metre high timber poles at 70 metre space intervals around the perimeter of the site inside stock perimeter fencing to form a site security system for the solar park during commissioning and once operational. The cameras installed are light grey in colour, are set at a slightly inward angle along the site boundaries for trespass detection and are motion sensor activated. The CCTV system installed does not involve any form of external lighting.

4. APPLICANT'S CASE

4.1 The application is accompanied by a Design and Access Statement, which states the following:

“On 9 May 2014, planning permission was granted for an 18.65 hectare solar park at The Hydes (UTT/14/0621/FUL). The original planning application stated “*Low level infrared CCTV cameras will be mounted on transformer/inverter housings and support framework of the PV arrays*”. However, upon taking over the development of The Hydes Solar Park, Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd has found that this would be insufficient to cover and protect the full extent of the solar park area. The changes to the location and number of transformers/inverters covered by a subsequent Non-Material Amendment application (UTT/14/1952/NMA) means the system would not meet operational and insurance requirements”. In order to detect any unauthorised

access and to ensure that the solar park would be fully insurable against theft and damages, CCTV monitoring which is able to cover the full perimeter of the site will be required both during construction and for the life of the solar park. The cameras are directed into the solar farm to avoid impinging on the privacy of nearby properties. They employ motion sensor and infrared technology so no lighting is required. It is considered that the CCTV cameras would not be intrusive in the landscape and new hedges along the eastern and western boundaries will be planted as part of the Landscape Strategy of planning permission UTT/14/0621/FUL. This landscaping is expected to sufficiently mitigate any effects associated with the wider development, including the cameras associated with this application. The installation of CCTV cameras around the perimeter of The Hydes Solar Park will not result in a significant increase in vehicles accessing the site. All vehicle access will be by way of the farm track from Bardfield Road to the north. A maintenance check will be carried out approximately once a year, which will require a van (able to carry a ladder) accessing the site. Additional maintenance visits may be required if a CCTV camera is malfunctioning. However, such incidents are expected to be rare”.

5. RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

5.1 Planning permission was granted by the Council in 2013 for the construction of an 18.65ha solar renewable energy scheme with associated equipment and works at Hydes Farm when the principle of the solar park was considered acceptable subject to appropriate planning conditions, including those to protect rural amenity (UTT/13/2207/FUL). Revised solar scheme for the site approved in May 2014 where these revisions related to the relocation of the sub-station, adjustment of the route of the grid connection and change in design of the inverter and transformer housings (UTT/14/0621/FUL). Conditions 2, 5 and 6 of UTT/14/0621/FUL relating to submission and approval of landscaping details, external colour specification of plant and equipment and also details of boundary treatment discharged in July 2014 (UTT/14/1737/DOC). Non-material amendment to UTT/14/0621/FUL relating to the increase in number of solar panels by 1.27% from 41,472 to 42,000 and decrease in side elevation height, change from single substation into group of 3 no. buildings, change from 5 no. large containers to 3 no., groupings of 2 no. inverters, transformer and small junction box, together with new internal road layout approved in August 2014 (UTT/14/1952/NMA).

6. POLICIES

6.1 National Policies

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Government advice:

- DCLG - “Planning practice guidance for renewable and low carbon energy” (July 2013)
- DE&CC - “UK Solar PV Strategy Part 1: Roadmap to a Brighter Future (Oct 2013)
- DE&CC – “UK Solar PV Strategy: Part 2: Delivering a Brighter Future (April 2014)

6.2 Uttlesford District Local Plan 2005

- ULP Policy S7 - The Countryside
- ULP Policy GEN2 – Design

6.3 Uttlesford District DRAFT Local Plan (Pre-Submission Document, April 2014)

- Policy SP9 - Protection of the Countryside
- Policy C1 - Protection of Landscape Character
- Policy DES1 – Design

7. PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS

7.1 Comments not received.

8. CONSULTATIONS

Natural England

8.1 Based upon the information provided, Natural England advises the Council that the proposal is unlikely to affect any statutorily protected sites or landscapes.

9. REPRESENTATIONS

9.1 3 representations received. Neighbour notification expired 1 October 2014. Advertisement expired 9 October 2014. Site notice expired 9 October 2014.

- The wooden poles for the CCTV cameras have been erected prior to the outcome of the current application;
- Was the CCTV security system now proposed specifically excluded from the original application for the solar park to avoid a prejudicial outcome for that previous application?;
- The security system would be significantly higher than the highest point on the proposed solar park site and will be visible from much further away;
- There are other ways in which the applicant/operator could secure the site which would not involve 23 No. cameras on tall poles. Other security systems would be more expensive, although the applicant/operator should have considered this;
- Would wish to see a continuous hedge line planted around the site and not “*Simple Perimeter Hedge Planting*” as set out in the applicant’s “Land and Visual Appraisal” document which was included in application UTT/14/0621/FUL for the solar farm in order to reduce the impact of CCTV.

10. APPRAISAL

The issues to consider in the determination of this application are:

A Design / countryside protection (NPPF, ULP Policies GEN2 and S7).

A Design / Countryside protection (NPPF, ULP Policies GEN2 and S7).

10.1 Planning permission was granted by the Council in 2013 and again on revision in May 2014 for a 18.65ha solar park at this greenfield site location when it was considered that the scheme accorded with relevant government advice on renewable energy and would not by reason of its selected location, site layout and design cause demonstrable harm to the particular rural character and amenities of the area when assessed against the countryside protection aims of ULP Policy S7 of the adopted local plan subject to the imposition of various planning conditions to help mitigate against its visual impact within the local landscape.

- 10.2 It is stated in the current application that it was the intentions of the original applicant to install low height level infra-red site security CCTV cameras on the PV solar array frames and plant apparatus further within the site, although the subsequent taking over of development of the site by Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd and subsequent approved amendments to the scheme has meant that this original security system has been considered insufficient to cover and protect the full extent of the solar park area, hence the revised CCTV arrangements now proposed. It should be noted that no specific mention was made to the type of security system proposed for the site in the officer report for UTT/13/2207/FUL, although reference was made to the DCLG document "Planning practice guidance for renewable and low carbon energy" (July 2013) where it is stated at paragraphs 26-28 of that document that a number of factors are needed to be considered by LPA's when considering solar farms, including the need for and impact of security measures, such as lighting and fencing.
- 10.3 Given the statement made by the applicant, there would appear to be a well-reasoned case for the revised CCTV site security system as now proposed to ensure that both operational and insurance requirements are met and where a failure to install the revised system could jeopardise the commercial viability of the approved solar scheme in view of the substantial cost associated with the project. It therefore falls to be considered whether (i) the system as already installed at the site by reason of the perimeter positioning, size and cumulative number of the CCTV cameras proposed would be detrimental to rural character when read against the backdrop of the solar farm at this relatively remote rural location (ULP Policy S7) and (ii) the degree to which the CCTV security system by reason of its perimeter positioning would be intrusive to walkers of the two public footpaths (Nos.10 and 11) which trace the north-west and north-east boundaries of the site respectively (ULP Policy GEN2) .
- 10.4 As previously described, the proposal involves 23 No. light grey CCTV cameras installed on 3 metre high timber poles at approximately 70 metre space intervals around the perimeter of the solar park site. The cameras/poles are small in size specification and would stand immediately behind 1.5 metre high continuous site perimeter stock proof fencing as recently approved under the discharge of condition process for revised application UTT/14/0621/FUL for the solar park scheme, whilst continuous native hedgerow planting would be planted outside this fencing along the north-west and south-east boundaries of the site, together with new tree planting to the northern corner of the site to reduce the impact of the solar park on Markswood Farm to the north as also approved by way of discharge of condition for the same application.
- 10.5 The previous applicant's Design & Access Statement accompanying the application for UTT/14/0621/FUL states at paragraph 5.7.5 that:

"Simple field hedging on the edge of the site and to a height of around 2.5m could readily screen the more vulnerable views to the proposal. This would be entirely in keeping with the character of the area and in fact would reinstate old field hedge lines to the enhancement of the local landscape character. It is suggested that field hedging be included along the north-west edge of the site field and the south-east edge. Hedge planting to the north-west edge will provide screening and a further degree of separation from the development for Markswood Farm. Hedge planting to the south-east edge will provide screening of the solar farm from the nearest road likely to give any view of the development. This is a short section of the Dunmow Road just south of Oxen End around 1km to the south-east. During establishment, any specimen tree failures will be replaced and any significant sections of hedge failure will be replanted until a continuous and consistent hedge is achieved. The maturing hedge will be pruned back each year by half the length of that year's growth to encourage a dense structure until the desired height of 2.5m has been achieved. Thereafter, it will be

pruned each year to maintain that height within reasonable tolerances. A fully detailed planting scheme with specification and maintenance plan will be submitted for approval pursuant to an appropriately worded planning condition”.

- 10.6 The approved planting to be carried out to these site boundaries would be a specified native field mix planted as a double staggered row. Whilst it is accepted that this planting would take several years to properly establish, it would nonetheless once established and if allowed to grow to a yearly pruned height of 2.5 metres help to screen most of the height of the perimeter timber CCTV support poles, but not the cameras themselves, for the operational period of the solar farm. Whilst the 23 No. cameras would therefore be visible from outside of the site, their presence (and the timber poles until they are screened by the perimeter hedging) would not be unduly harmful to the visual amenities of the countryside at this rural location when viewed against the constructed solar array installation itself across this 18.65 ha site where they have the appearance of a series of small telegraph poles with small apparatus when viewed from a distance, such as from Bustard Green which lies on lower ground terrain to the south. The proposal would not therefore by reason of the design of the revised site security arrangements be contrary to the countryside protection aims of ULP Policy S7 (ULP Policy GEN2).
- 10.7 As previously stated, the perimeter CCTV cameras would be set at a slight angle pointing into the site along the site boundaries approximately 70 metres apart from each other and would be motion sensor activated when and if any movement occurred on the inside of the site boundaries. The operator has confirmed to the Council that the cameras would not in any circumstances be set at an angle where they would be pointing outside of the site boundaries where they could otherwise interfere with the privacy of walkers of the adjacent public footpaths, adding that this would not be necessary in any event for the normal security operations of the site.
- 10.8 Whilst acknowledging that the CCTV site security system as proposed has been designed to protect the operations of a commercial installation and is not intended to deter or detect crime in the public interest, ULP Policy GEN2 states that development will not be permitted unless amongst other things it helps to reduce the potential for crime. The proposal would therefore comply with this policy in this respect where trespass may possibly be an issue, hence the security requirement, subject to the imposition of a condition requiring the cameras to be inward facing only during operation to avoid any potential privacy issues for walkers using the adjacent public footpaths.

11. CONCLUSION

The following is a summary of the main reasons for the recommendation:

- A The revised CCTV site security system as already installed for this approved and constructed solar park would not have a significantly detrimental impact on rural amenity and would not give rise to privacy issues for walkers of the adjacent public footpaths for the reasons stated where the revised security arrangements have been identified as being an operational and insurance requirement by the applicant. The proposal would therefore comply with ULP Policies GEN2 and S7 of the adopted local plan.

RECOMMENDATION – CONDITIONAL APPROVAL

Conditions

1. The CCTV cameras as installed shall be positioned so that they are inward facing only from the site boundaries to serve their intended security purpose whilst operational and shall not under any circumstances be outward facing during operations beyond the site boundaries.

REASON: To protect the privacy of users of the adjacent public footpaths nos.10 and 11, Little Bardfield in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

2. No sources of external lighting shall be erected as part of the perimeter site security system hereby permitted without the prior written agreement of the local planning authority.

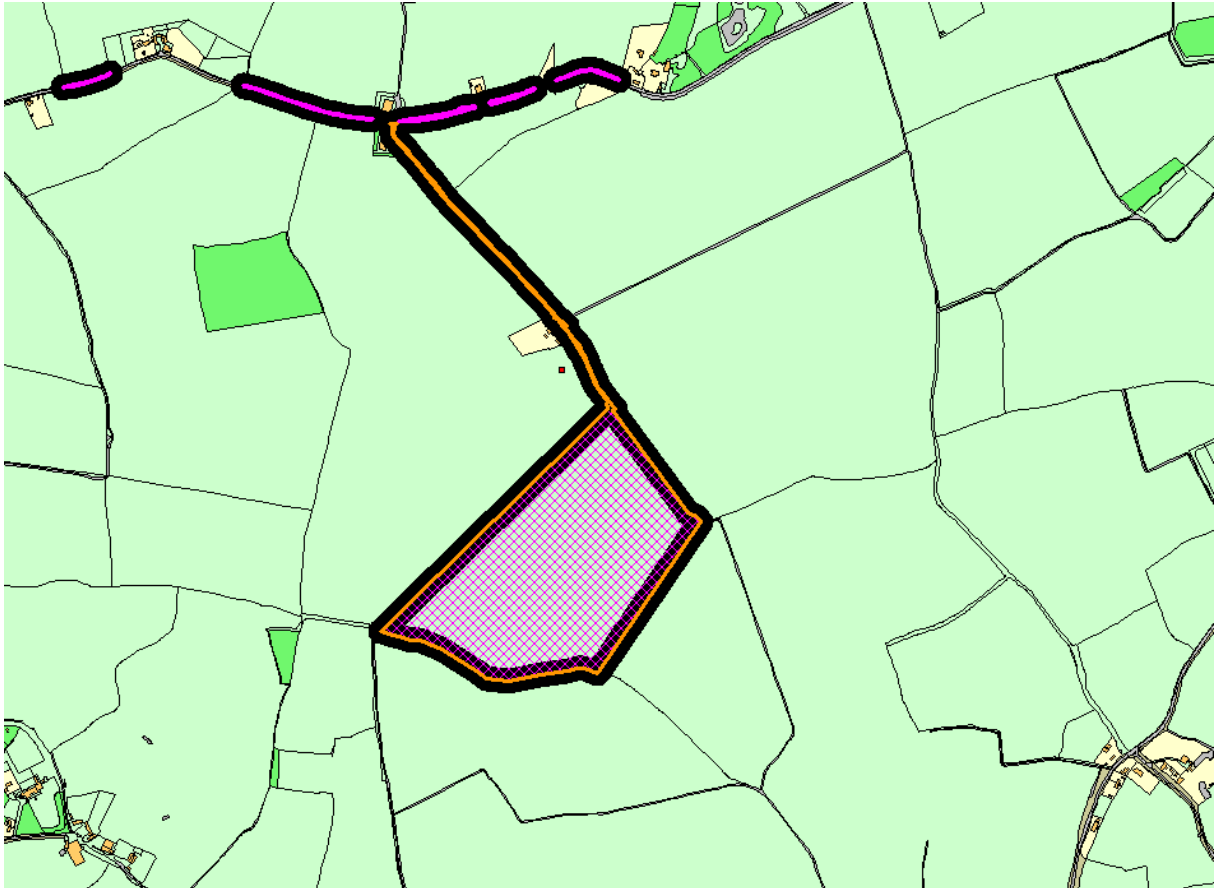
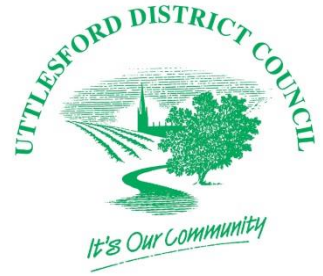
REASON: To avoid light pollution at this rural location and to minimise the environmental impact of the proposal on neighbouring residential properties in accordance with ULP Policies S7, GEN2 and GEN5 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

3. The CCTV cameras shall be dismantled and permanently removed from the site upon the cessation of solar farm activities at this site.

REASON: To safeguard the character and appearance of the countryside in accordance with ULP Policy S7 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

Application No.: UTT/14/2542/FUL

Address: The Hydes Thaxted



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Organisation: Uttlesford District Council

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