

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Tuesday, 1 November 2022 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

T Thorne (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball
R Dodd
J Foster
JI Hutchinson
J Reid
M Robinson
M Swinbank

L Darwin
B Flux
G Hill
J Lang
G Renner-Thompson
G Stewart

OTHER COUNCILLORS

D Bawn

N Oliver

OFFICERS

T Crowe
L Little
D Love
R Murfin

M Patrick

E Sinnamon
K Tipple
T Wood

Solicitor
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Senior Planning Officer
Interim Executive Director of Planning &
Local Services
Principal Highways Development
Management Officer
Development Service Manager
Senior Planner
Principal Planning Officer

Around xxx members of the press and public were present.

27 PROCEDURE AT PLANNING COMMITTEES

The Chair outlined the procedure to be followed at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Wallace and Watson.

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29 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 6 September 2022, as circulated, were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

30 **DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Robinson advised that he was the Ward Member for applications 22/0182/RENE and 21/04298/REM and he lived in Phase 1 of the development at land south west of Glebe Farm, however after taking advice from the Solicitor stated he was happy to sit as a Committee Member.

Councillor Oliver stated that whilst he was not part of the Committee, in the interests of transparency, and following advice from the Monitoring Officer, as he was speaking as Ward Councillor on behalf of residents and Anick Parish Council who had objected and highlighted the risk of flooding, advised that his own property had flooded in 2015.

31 **DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The report requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

The Chair advised that a short break would be held after item 8 on the agenda. He thanked officers for accompanying Members of the Committee on the site visits held in relation to all the applications the previous day advising that they had been well attended and he had found them very useful.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

32 **21/02505/CCMEIA**

**Extraction and processing of 5.8 million tonnes of sand and gravel and the phased restoration of the site to a lake and associated wetlands
Land North East of Anick Grange Haugh, Anick Road, Hexham**

K Tipple, Senior Planning Officer provided a very comprehensive and detailed introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation.

J Halliday addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application. His comments included the following:-

- The site was within the Green Belt and any operation within it must preserve its openness and not conflict with the purposes for which it was included.

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The NPPF included the following purpose for Green Belt “to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns”. This Councils strategic approach to Green Belt specifically states that they will be protected to preserve the setting and special character of Hexham, Corbridge and Morpeth.

- This scheme fails to comply with both national and local policies.
- There was a growing trend to refuse quarry applications in Green Belts with Councillors often voting against the advice of their officers.
- In 1990 there was a similar application related to Anick Grange which was refused on appeal with the Inspector giving two reasons. With a 10 year land bank at that time he could see no present need, the current north east land bank was 15 years. He also said that the Grade II agricultural land of which there was only 3% in Northumberland was a national resource which should be protected. These reasons for refusal were still sound now.
- Wheat was needed rather than sand or gravel and it could be produced with a fraction of the emissions caused by the haulage of minerals. The local family who have farmed the land for generations should be allowed to continue to make their valuable contribution to the Community.
- The application also failed to meet the cornerstone of the NPPF, sustainability. One economic test asked if it is the right type of land in the right place at the right time, this was not, it was in a Green Belt on a flood plain which was known to flood disastrously and the time was not right as there was no present need.
- Asthma was on the increase among the young and parents were worried about the effects of wind borne silica on their children.

M Jordan also spoke in objection to the application and her comments included the following:-

- She was speaking as Chairman of the Corbridge Flood Action Group representing 85 dwellings in the flood zone of Corbridge 2 miles south of this development.
- The report had not addressed the removal of the soak away upstream from this community and the embankments to stop water going into the Tyne not the other way round which had been suggested in the report.
- Following Storm Desmond the Environment Agency (EA) had told residents of the farmers who were allowing their land to be used as soak away for flood communities yet here in Flood Zone 3, they were putting in a massive gravel pit the size of Hallington Reservoir.
- There had been 2 devastating floods downstream of this development. The report stated that it was safe and it had been modelled, however when Storm Desmond happened the model failed and it was said that the river was higher and went in a different direction and that level of rainfall had not been predicted, so modelling could not be relied upon.
- The pit would not even have properly engineered banks and the effect of having tonnes more extra water in the river was already known. Kielder had lowered the water levels following the impact on residents when they were flooded. The equivalent of 4 Olympic swimming pools could come into the river from that site.
- There had been 2 massive 1 in 100 year storm events in 10 years, with 2 metres of water in homes, threats to life, business losses, job losses and displacement. 85 Households had faced these issues and this was a

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- devasting case study right on the doorstep of this development.
- She asked that members refuse the application and uphold the protection that residents had at the current time and keep them safe by keeping their soak away and not increase the risk.

Councillor Oliver addressed the Committee speaking as the local Ward Member representing residents, Sandhoe Parish Council and Councillor Cessford, he also had a message of support from Councillor Fairless-Aitken. His comments included the following:-

- The concerns of local residents could be summarised as the wrong size in the wrong place and an application on the same site was refused following a public inquiry in 1992.
- Paragraph 213 of the NPPF required us to maintain a steady and adequate supply of at least 7 years ensuring that large landbanks bound up in very few sites did not stifle competition, however this was going much further to beyond 2043, three times longer than required and there were already permitted reserves to 2033. The Council's own Aggregates Assessment published in April showed a shortfall to 2036 of only 746,000 tonnes and this application was for nearly 8 times more at £5.8m tonnes.
- The large number of wagons, not spread evenly through the day at the junction between Ferry Road and the A6079 would cause problems. Large waggons from Egger already used that junction and the cumulative effect crossing the traffic coming into Hexham could be dangerous and cause tailbacks onto the A69. Over £26m had just been spent on upgrading the adjacent roundabout on the A69 and a new roundabout installed to serve Lidl, McDonalds and the Travel Lodge. The area was already creaking and would get worse when work started on the Egger expansion site and the new industrial estate site next to that. The road also formed part of the Hadrian's Cycleway or National Route 72 and was already one of the worse sections on that 170 mile route. The opportunity to find a permanent solution to those problems should be found now and a safe pedestrian access from the industrial estates into Hexham should be provided.
- He was pleased that wagons would not be able to go through Corbridge as they would not get through.
- Tourism made a significant contribution to the economy and this site was situated where the valley was most open, was a gateway to Hadrian's Wall and was close to heritage assets at Corbridge and Beaufront Castle and in Hexham.
- If the application was granted then over 90 acres of prime agricultural land would be lost at a time when UK agricultural self-sufficiency was more important than it had been since the second world war.
- Residents of Sandhoe and Anick to the north, and Anick View to the south, would spend the next 25 years looking down on a quarry.
- Residents in Corbridge had their homes and businesses flooded in 2005 and again in 2015 and were understandably wary of the assurances in the report. Clarification was requested as to what would happen to the existing flood embankment which had not worked in 2015 and he questioned if there was a risk that water from the new lake would join from water in the Tyne to worsen a flood event and if the new lake created should be subject to the stricter regulations of the Reservoir Act.
- Issues of harm to health from the dust including the risk of silicosis had been

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raised and whilst it would be a wet working quarry questioned if there would be a risk to local residents.

- Also questioned was if there be an issue of noise nuisance for local residents during the 10.5 hour working day; what was the risk of contamination from quarry activities into the river course and what controls would be in place to ensure that didn't happen; and when quarry operations were complete, who would be responsible for the remediation works, the ongoing conservation costs and how would this be enforced.
- He urged the Committee to refuse permission unless and until they were satisfied that all the concerns had been properly addressed.

K Wood addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. Her comments included the following:-

- Anick Grange had been allocated for sand and gravel extraction by the Council and included in the recently adopted Northumberland Local Plan (NLP). The allocation had been fully considered at the examination in public with a specialist minerals inspector appointed by the Government. He heard directly from residents regarding their concerns and having considered all this he concluded that the site should be allocated. The principle of mineral extraction was therefore established through the Council's own Local Plan.
- Through the environmental impact assessment process, Thompsons had worked to identify all impacts and ensure mitigation was provided within the scheme. This included the impacts of noise and air quality, the visual impact associated with the compound area and the treatment of the lake edges. All operations would be undertaken in accordance with established good practice and an operational management plan and environmental management plan had been designed to be reviewed throughout the life of the site to ensure that site operations and site restoration were carried out in accordance with changing good practice standards.
- The operational capacity at the junction of Ferry Road and Rotary Way had been considered in detail through traffic reports supporting the NLP. The conclusion had been that the vehicle movements associated with mineral extraction would not have an adverse impact on this junction. It had been identified that there would be a need to widen a short section of Ferry Road between the site entrance and the entrance to Egger. This had been included within the application and a condition included requiring Thompsons to undertake this work.
- The flooding risks had been modelled and the EA had not objected to the application and the applicant would continue to talk to the EA to protect properties further downstream.
- Thompson was a respected local firm and local employer who took pride in their sites. They had recently successfully worked and restored Aughton Strother a sand and gravel site on the North Tyne which was originally a very similar site to Anick and was now a large wetland area considered to be of importance for migrating and breeding wildfowl. The intention was to bring all of the experience of successfully operating and restoring this site to Anick Grange to create something that would quickly result in significant biodiversity gains by creating a variety of habitats based on a wetland area and be a positive resource in years to come.
- The character of the haugh land would change in the coming years and not just because of this mineral extraction. The land to the north of the site had

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been removed from the Green Belt and had been allocated for employment purposes in the NLP. The operational and restored lake had the potential to create an open biodiverse landscape that could form the backdrop to this continued development on the edge of Hexham.

- Minerals could only be worked where they were found with Anick Haugh being one such location. It was a site allocated for mineral extraction for which there were no technical consultee objections and it fully complied with the NLP and the NPPF. In the absence of any other material considerations, permission should not be withheld and the NPPF stated that permission should be granted accordingly and asked that Members supported the officer's recommendation.

R Murfin, Interim Executive Director advised that whilst mineral applications were often controversial, Members must consider the views of the technical consultees and give these appropriate weight. On other mineral applications significant weight had been given when the EA objected and had been refused for this reason. In this instance the EA had stated that there would be a marginal net benefit in addressing flood risk from the development of this site. Sustainability was an important factor in planning and with the amount of growth in housing and the aspirations for job creation within the County there was a need for sand and gravel supplies within the County as for this to be transported long distances was fundamentally not sustainable. Mineral extraction in itself in the Green Belt was not inappropriate development and there had been a significant amount of evidence provided to the Inspector on need during the public examination of the NLP. The Inspector had concluded that mineral extraction on this site was justified and it was therefore included in the NLP for this purpose. This did not obligate the Council to grant planning permission as matters of detail need to be considered via the application process.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- The impact of this development on the junction of Ferry Road and Rotary Way had been considered as part of the traffic assessment undertaken. Surveys in 2018 and 2021 had shown that there were in the region of 550 vehicles per hour travelling through the junction at peak times. This development would add a further 5 vehicles during peak times and would not have a detrimental impact on the junction. If Egger did expand their plant there would need to be a further traffic assessment undertaken with additional movements taken into account at that time. A traffic assessment had been undertaken to support the preparation of the NLP which advised that mitigation would be looked at when the employment land allocation at Harwood Meadows was developed. The mitigation required would be dependent on the type of use developed on the site which would in turn influence the type and number of vehicle movements associated with it.
- In response to Members highlighting that information collected from cables on the roads did not give a true picture of how the junction worked as traffic frequently stopped on Rotary Way to allow vehicles to exit Ferry Road, and the possibility of the provision of a slip road directly from the A69, the Committee was advised that the NPPF gave clear guidance that applications could only be refused if it had been identified that there would be a severe impact on the highway and in this instance this would only be

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marginal.

- It was confirmed that both the strategic evidence emerging from the Local Aggregates Assessment and the evaluation underpinning the Local Plan EIP both triangulated with current evidence on the high level of construction activity taking place in the County. This included a 250%+ meeting of Central Government housing targets and a significant amounts of inward investment activity. This had resulted, for example, in the employment land portfolio in county being established at a level representing 600% of that suggested by an analysis of historic trend.
- In relation to there being no requirement for S106 funding to be provided, Members were advised that as the EIA had not identified any harm that was not mitigated via scheme design, then there was nothing to be offset. The benefit of the development had been looked at as part of the NLP with the implied benefit being that of economic benefit through the need for sand and gravel to meet development needs. Any development had the potential to cause impact but this had to be significant and demonstrable in order to be able to refuse an application. As part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Project (LCWIP) the Council was looking to improve the connection from Corbridge to Hexham and it was possible Members would like to look to secure this as part of this Development. As the route had not been agreed, it could be requested that an in principle S106 agreement be added to any permission granted to require contributions either through a financial contribution or in kind towards the provision of the LCWIP scheme.
- Mineral extraction within the Green Belt was not seen as an inappropriate form of development. It was considered that wet sand and gravel extraction and ancillary development did not have the same significant effects on Green Belt openness as crushed rock sites and any impacts would be mitigated by a range of robust environmental conditions including the use of a Site Environmental Management Plan. There would be regular routine monitoring as there was on all mineral sites in the County and work could be stopped if any issues needed to be remedied. Highways conditions would control the number of movements and routing of vehicles.
- This was an area which was known to flood and a large amount of work had been undertaken by the EA on this with their view that this scheme could provide slight mitigation and marginal benefit over the current situation. Members were reminded that there was a need to be consistent in how responses from statutory consultees were treated.
- This scheme provided for phased restoration of the site and therefore if work stopped at some point in the future there would already have been progressive restoration undertaken. Conditions would set out how the restoration would be undertaken and this would be monitored and inventions made if these were needed.
- The site would be phased and therefore the land would remain in agricultural use until required.
- There were 2 EV charging bays to be provided within the car parking area for the site.
- There was some legacy of historic contaminants in the ground water around the site and therefore the EA permit required levels to be checked in the lagoons prior to being placed in restoration and if these were found to be in excess of permitted levels then these would need to be disposed of correctly. As part of the flood mitigation measures the compound was on a

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- raised area and bunds provided for increased protection for the silt lagoons.
- In terms of highways, the biggest pinch point had been identified from the main entrance to Egger to the access point for this development and the road would be widened at this point to allow HGVs to pass. The road further west towards Rotary Way was confirmed as being sufficiently wide for 2 HGVs to pass.

Councillor Hutchinson advised that to stimulate debate he proposed acceptance of the officers recommendation to approve the application as outlined in the report with extra EV charging points to be provided and a S106 agreement be provided requiring contributions either through a financial contribution or in kind towards the provision of the LCWIP scheme. which was seconded by Councillor Robinson. It was requested that as part of the Condition 9 the notice board should also include an email address to allow residents to register any complaints and this amendment to the motion was agreed by the proposer and seconder.

The Committee recognised that this was a difficult application with a large number of objections. However in considering the application Members highlighted the time taken in the development of the NLP and huge amount of work that had gone into this and its subsequent testing, and which had identified that this site was suitable for mineral extraction.

A vote was taken on the proposal as follows:- FOR 11; AGAINST 2; ABSTENTION 1.

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report subject to an amendment to increase the number of electric vehicle charging points, an email address to be included in Condition 9 and subject to a S106 agreement being agreed to confirm contributions either through a financial contribution or in kind towards the Local Cycle Walking and Infrastructure Project the specifics of which to be delegated to the Director of Planning and the Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee to agree.

33 **18/03394/REM**

**Reserved Matters Application relating to 16/00078/OUT - Development of Phase 1 of proposals which include Trunk Road Service Area, Hotel and Innovation Centre plus associated access, parking, landscaping, and other associated infrastructure
Land West of Lancaster Park, Pinewood Drive, Lancaster Park, Morpeth Northumberland**

D Love, Senior Planning Officer introduced the report to the Committee with the aid of a power point presentation. An addendum report had also been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting and had been uploaded on the Council's website. He advised that this was the first of two applications in relation to the reserved matters from outline permission reference 16/00078/OUT. Updates were provided as follows:-

- A response had now been received from Public Protection on the submitted

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Air Quality Assessment (AQA) and requested an additional condition for a construction environment management plan (CEMP). It is proposed to add the standard CEMP condition with the addition of the AQA mitigation requirements as set out by Public Protection.

- Subject to the above amendment, the recommendation should be changed to approval subject to conditions as outlined in the addendum report and additional conditional regarding the CEMP.
- It was clarified that there was to be a restaurant / bar area open to hotel guests and the public, the location of which was shown on the presentation.
- Since the outline application was permitted, the exact boundaries of the Green Belt around Morpeth had been confirmed through the adoption of the Northumberland Local Plan. Following the adoption of the plan, application 18/03394/REM (for service area/innovation centre) was confirmed not to be located in the Green Belt. Most of the housing on application 19/01362/REM was also confirmed to be outwith the Green Belt. However, 25 dwellings were confirmed to be located in the Green Belt, as was much of the country park.
- When the outline application was approved, the housing element located in the Green Belt was considered in the context of Green Belt policy. While, in accordance with national policy, it was considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, however officers and members accepted that harm to the Green Belt and other harm, was clearly outweighed by other considerations, and that therefore the development should be supported as Very Special Circumstances existed.
- The amount and location of the housing in the Green Belt in 19/01362/REM, and the number of jobs supported by 18/03394/REM were broadly aligned with those presented in the outline application. Therefore, given that the applications were largely the realisation of the original outline approval, there was no need to revisit Green Belt considerations including VSC as part of the assessment of these reserved matters applications and therefore members were asked to disregard paragraphs 7.9 to 7.17 of the officer report relating to 19/01362/REM and paragraphs 7.14 to 7.22 of the officer report relating to 18/03394/REM.
- Members were advised that the original approval was gained on the basis that the commercial aspect could only be achieved off the back of the housing development and a number of differences in the original approval and the reserved matters were outlined for Members.
- The phasing of the development would also need to be updated should the Committee be minded to approve the application.

P Burchall addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application. His comments included the following:-

- He represented a group of Lancaster Park residents who opposed development on the safeguarded land.
- The outline planning consent was for a comprehensive development embracing both commercial and residential elements and great emphasis was made that without a proportion of housing being delivered on part of the site it would not be financially viable to deliver the employment and commercial uses in isolation. Yet today the Committee was being asked to consider applications from two different organisations and he questioned how the commercial element be dependent on the residential element.

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- A confidential development viability appraisal was provided for the original outline application however this was now in the public domain and clearly did not support the claim that around 286 jobs would be created.
- This Committee gave outline planning approval six years ago on the grounds that the economic benefits set aside the requirements of the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) with the current Chair of the Committee proposing acceptance solely because of the job creation. It was essential that these commitments were met in full and as this application did not meet those commitments he urged the Committee to reject it.
- Details of reserved matters applications must be in line with the outline approval and these proposals were not. The proposed site arrangement was completely different from that agreed and was alluded to in the officer's presentation. A 60 bedroom hotel with separate restaurant and pub was agreed, this has been reduced to a 40 bedroom hotel with an inclusive small area for restaurant and pub in a completely different location. A single fuel station had been agreed this had been replaced by two fuel outlets, one for HGVs and a one for other vehicles which would require two volatile liquid and gas storage facilities in a different location. An amenity building to include retail, hot food and supporting facilities had previously been agreed, this had now been replaced by a huge amenity centre in a different location and housing a number of fast food takeaway business creating additional litter than the facility initially approved. The building would be large and be intrusive in the countryside setting, was contrary to the MNP vision statement of green and open aspects to all approaches to the town.
- Car parking had been increased by 30%.
- An innovation centre, which swayed the decision in November 2016 was agreed which would provide 149 high grade research and development jobs, this had been replaced by 7 individual industrial units in a different location and with the floor area reduced.
- He advised the Committee 6 years ago that the jobs would not materialise and he had been proved correct. Members must reject the proposals and demand that the application creates the promised jobs and economic benefit otherwise the MNP was valueless.

A Byard, representing Morpeth Town Council (MTC) addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application. Her comments included the following:-

- The original Outline application was consented against the newly made Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan (MNP)
- The Officer's report placed a very significant weight on the economic benefits of the proposal which justified a departure from local planning policies, including policies contained within the MNP. Since the housing element depended on the employment element, including the Innovation Centre, hotel etc, it was believed the two applications should never have been separated.
- It was understood that Outline planning permission had unfortunately been granted but it was requested that Councillors rejected this Reserved Matters application, given that the general employment offer was now greatly reduced and that the 7 office units could not possibly be referred to as an Innovation Centre. An Innovation centre was an incubator for the creation and sharing of new ideas, usually attached to a university or business, which

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enabled the sharing of knowledge between researchers and business experts, industry, government, and academia. A good local example of which was the National Innovation Centre for Data, based in the Helix science district in Newcastle, whose mission was to transfer data skills from their scientists to the UK workforce. This was the sort of Innovation Centre that was expected, providing additional and high-quality employment for Morpeth.

- If councillors were minded to approve this application, it was wished to ensure that those elements of alleged benefit to the community were delivered as promised. MTC therefore strongly objected to any phasing plan which did not put the employment element first, including an actual Innovation Centre, followed by the Country Park, before any houses could be built.

Councillor Bawn addressed the Committee speaking as one of the Ward Councillors for this application. His comments included the following:-

- The application was against the MNP with the original permission considered to be perverse by many people, however this application should be looked at in light of that permission.
- The very special circumstances on which the original application was granted were the provision of a country park, 30% affordable housing; significant employment provision and the need in viability terms to bring forward that employment provision.
- The managed country park was not part of this application and was part of a further application which may or may not be approved; likewise the 30% affordable housing was not part of this application, so therefore could not aid this application.
- Significant employment provision was gone, it was no longer a separate pub and restaurant and would be the equivalent of a breakfast bar. The hotel had gone to 40 bedrooms and would be a barely serviced cheap motorway hotel.
- The cutting edge innovation centre was now 7 standard commercial units which would only support a handful of jobs.
- If housing was needed to make the employment provision viable then why was it not still part of this application. They were clearly not co-dependent.
- This had been sold as an extraordinary development providing hundreds of jobs and what was now coming forward was a dreary and depressingly ordinary development and was a significant departure from both the letter and spirit of the original permission.
- He asked that the Committee reject this proposal and ask the applicant to come back with a scheme which reflected the very special circumstances promised.

J Wyatt addressed the Committee speaking as the agent for Eurogarages, in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- The Officer's report provided a very fair assessment of the application proposals. The applicant together with their project team had worked closely with officers to achieve a form of development that was both acceptable to both parties and accorded with the terms of the outline planning permission.

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- The applicant had also worked with Persimmon Homes in order to ensure that all three development phases would collectively form a single high quality development with appropriate means of access and levels of permeability between each phase.
- The principle of development for a trunk road service area, innovation centre and hotel / bar restaurant had already been established by virtue of the granting of outline consent on the site in November 2016. It was clear from consideration of the reserved matters details for the reasons outlined at paragraphs 7.6 to 7.9 of the report that the application accorded in all respects with the terms of the grant of outline consent.
- The determination of this reserved matters application required consideration of matters relating to appearance, means of access, landscaping layout and scale only. In this regard it was important to emphasise that consideration of each of the issues relating to these reserved matters had raised no objection from any of the Council's statutory consultees including, the Environment Agency, Northumbrian Water and the LLFA in relation to flooding and drainage; Public Protection in relation to residential amenity impact, potential impacts from privacy/overlooking, noise, air and light pollution and ground contamination; the Highways Authority and National Highways in relation to matters of highways; officers in consideration of design form, height, size, scale, materials and site layout; the Council's Ecologist and Natural England regarding any ecological impacts, the Landscape Officer regarding existing landscaping and planting required; and the Police in relation to ensuring the scheme was acceptable in terms of community safety. Subject to conditions, all issues referenced had been addressed to the satisfaction of Officers and had resulted in a scheme that was acceptable in design terms ensuring no unacceptable impact on character, appearance or amenity of the area.
- The layout had been formulated to ensure that the amenity of nearby residents was not unacceptably impacted by the new development and in this regard the nearest dwellings on Pinewood Drive were approximately 88m from the hotel and innovation centre, which would be the closest buildings. A condition requiring a noise assessment prior to first occupation was also included to ensure further that current levels of residential amenity were respected.
- With regard to the innovation centre and job creation, the proposed building would have a floor area of 2050 sqm compared to approximately 2100 sqm stated at outline stage and in accordance with the HCA Employment Densities guide the innovation centre and other development would generate between 123 and 351 full time equivalent jobs on the site.
- This was a well thought out reserved matters application, fully accorded with the provisions of the outline consent, and respected the character and appearance of the area and the amenity of residents in the area. As all matters considered as part of this reserved matters submission were acceptable to officers and statutory consultees, the applicant requested that Members support the officer recommendation and approve the application.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following information was provided:-

- Officers had also been concerned regarding the timing of the reserved matters application from the granting of outline permission and this was one

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of the reasons why the application had taken so long to come back to Committee, however after taking advice it was clarified that all the reserved matters applications had been submitted in time.

- At the point of validation officers had initially considered that the description of the proposed reserved matters scheme did not meet the parameters of the outline scheme. However following work with the applicant officers agreed a revised description which is the subject of this application. Members were reminded that outline applications were always indicative with details of layout appearance scale and landscaping reserved for the reserved matters applications. The addendum report set out the differences in the applications.
- Within the outline permission the job numbers were not conditioned and did not have to be met, however whilst the numbers were different and were to be delivered in a different way they were within parameters of those stated at the outline stage. As set out in the report there was a formula to calculate the number of full time equivalent (FTE) job numbers on employment land.
- The outline application had already passed the sequential test and as there was already outline permission on both sites. This site was included in the adopted NLP and identified for employment uses and housing.
- There was no definition for the use of the 2100 sqm innovation centre on the outline permission. Within the reserved matters application the employment units were for B1 use and were being described as an innovation centre with a floor space of 2050 sqm. In relation to weight Members could give to the differences between the outline permission and the reserved matters application. Officer advice was that the reserved matters description met the parameters of the outline scheme. . Advice was provided that at outline stage very special circumstances had to be demonstrated for the development as it was in the Green Belt. Following the adoption of the NLP this land was now allocated and if a fresh application was to be considered the very special circumstances would not need to be demonstrated. The mixture of development now being proposed on the site was reasonable when compared with the outline, however Members could look at the overall design to ensure that it achieved a quality that they were happy with.
- The indicative number of jobs on the outline application was 256 FTE and the reserved matters application now ranged from 160 – 320 FTE. There was no maximum or minimum number included on the outline permission, however on the reserved matters application the applicant had demonstrated that they would be able to provide jobs within the range. . Within employment land there could be a range of density uses of the floorspace depending on the type of use and intensity of labour required.
- This particular land was identified for employment use and any change to this use would require a further full planning application to be submitted.
- There was no restriction put on the outline permission in relation to the term of innovation centre and was used as inspiration on the type of jobs they wished to attract.
- The time had expired for the applicant to now come forward with any further reserved matters applications in relation to the outline permission, however they could still appeal any decision made today.
- If this application and the following application were agreed, the form of access to the houses would eventually be adopted. Outline consent did not restrict the need for the applications to come in together. However there was a condition seeking a phasing plan. This condition was not yet

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discharged and Members could give some indication as to how that phasing plan could look like.

- The original outline consent required a footpath link through to Lancaster Park (although this is part of the next application) and that would be a 3m multi-use route but was a different route to that taken as part of the site visit. It was proposed to upgrade the route taken for the site visit, however as the field adjacent to the footpath was in third party ownership then the widening of the path could not be requested and whilst it might be the preferred route it was only suitable for walking and not for cycle use.

Councillor Hutchinson in order to stimulate debate proposed acceptance of the revised recommendation to approve the application subject to conditions as outlined in the addendum report and an additional condition regarding the CEMP, which was seconded by Councillor Robinson.

A number of Committee Members expressed their extreme disappointment that the application before the Committee bore no resemblance to what was expected to be provided when the outline permission was originally granted when the Committee and they thought it was going to be something very special. It was a difficult decision and some Members who were not happy with the proposals felt as though they would have no option but to approve the application and questioned if it was refused and appealed if sufficiently robust conditions would be attached. Advice was provided from the Interim Executive Director that Members should not debate the application based on their expectations of what was to be provided at the outline stage as it was considered that the application was within parameters of what was acceptable. Members could however focus on whether the design was of a sufficient place making quality design for the current time that they would be able to support the proposals.

A vote was taken on the proposal to approve the application as follows: FOR 3; AGAINST 11; ABSTAIN 0. The motion therefore fell.

Councillor Reid proposed that the application should be refused as the design was not of a sufficient place making standard for 2022. Its layout, scale and appearance, the design of the development failed to preserve or make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, and the site's surroundings, and failed to create or contribute to a strong sense of place. The development did not demonstrate high quality sustainable design, was not visually attractive, did not incorporate high quality materials and detailing. Also it was considered that it was substantially altered from the approved outline planning application with the exact wording of the reason to be delegated to the Director of Planning and Chair, which was seconded by Councillor Flux. A vote was taken as follows:- FOR 13; AGAINST 1; ABSTAIN 0.

RESOLVED that the application be **REFUSED** with the exact wording of the reason for refusal being delegated to the Director of Planning in conjunction with the Chair.

34 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

During the discussion of the previous item and as the time approached 5.00 pm it

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was proposed, seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED that Standing Orders be suspended to allow the meeting to continue.

35 **19/01362/REM**

Reserved matters application for appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale for proposed 150 residential dwellings (use class C3) including 30% affordable housing, countryside park including car park, pursuant to approved outline planning application 16/00078/OUT (revised description 8th August 2022).

Land West of Lancaster Park, Pinewood Drive, Lancaster Park, Morpeth, Northumberland

Whilst this application was linked to the previous application which had been refused and therefore there was no permission for any access road into the site Members were advised that the application would still need to be determined. An addendum report was circulated and time given for Members to read.

D Love provided an introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation. Updates were provided as follows:-

- An updated response on Air Quality had been received from Public Protection and as such there are no objections on these grounds with an additional requirement under point 12 to condition 33.
- In light of the refusal of the previous application, the recommendation had now changed to refuse the application as there was no legitimate means of access as the access relied on the previous application and the red line boundary did not extend to the St. Leonards junction.
- Since the outline application was permitted, the exact boundaries of the Green Belt around Morpeth had been confirmed through the adoption of the Northumberland Local Plan. Following the adoption of the plan, application 18/03394/REM (for service area/innovation centre) was confirmed not to be located in the Green Belt. Most of the housing on application 19/01362/REM was also confirmed to be outwith the Green Belt. However, 25 dwellings were confirmed to be located in the Green Belt, as was much of the country park. When the outline application was approved, the housing element located in the Green Belt was considered in the context of Green Belt policy. While, in accordance with national policy, it was considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, however officers and members accepted that harm to the Green Belt and other harm, was clearly outweighed by other considerations, and that therefore the development should be supported as Very Special Circumstances existed. The amount and location of the housing in the Green Belt in 19/01362/REM, and the number of jobs supported by 18/03394/REM were broadly aligned with those presented in the outline application. Therefore, given that the applications were largely the realisation of the original outline approval, there was no need to revisit Green Belt considerations including VSC as part of the assessment of these reserved matters applications and therefore members were asked to disregard paragraphs 7.9 to 7.17 of the officer report.

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Peter Burchall addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application. His comments included the following:-

- Residents still objected to the application and it had already been discussed that the outline approval for the housing development had been given because the applicant claimed that without an element of housing the commercial development was not commercially viable.
- Noise was a major issue for the residential development. Day and night time noise levels on the site exceeded the maximum levels recommended by the World Health Organisation. Despite mitigation the maximum noise levels for outdoors would always be exceeded for most of the site and there would be many houses where the maximum levels would be exceeded indoors even with all windows closed.
- Mechanical ventilation would have to be installed in some houses to mitigate noise levels and the NPPF stated that if this was required then the development was not a sustainable one.
- The installation of noise barriers on the northern and western sides of the site would appear oppressive to residents and be an eyesore when viewed from outside the site. No permission had been given for these barriers as they were added after the outline consent had been granted.
- Affordable housing on the site would be the most affected by the excessive noise levels.
- There was only one entrance/exit to the housing development, through the service area and it was questioned where else would residents need to pass through a busy 24 hour commercial site to access their homes.
- The proposed emergency access route had not been approved in detail.
- The development was not sustainable and it did not meet the principles of the NPPF in that "planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which enable and support healthy lifestyles".
- The site was too small for the number of houses proposed. In order to accommodate the housing within the site the village green which had been highlighted as an important feature in the outline consent had been omitted and there was now no place for children to play outdoors.
- He asked the Committee to refuse the application as it was totally without merit.

A Byard addressed the Committee speaking on behalf of Morpeth Town Council in objection to the application. Her comments included the following:-

- The original outline application was consented against the newly made Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan.
- The Officer's report which supported the outline application placed a very significant weight on the economic benefits of the proposal and stated "Having considered the benefits of the proposals in terms of affordable housing provision, job creation, both in the short and longer term, including provision of an Innovation Centre for the research and development sector, it was considered that the economic benefits of the proposals justify a departure from local planning policies, including policies contained within the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan."
- Since the housing element depended on the employment element promised, including Innovation Centre, hotel etc, MTC believed the two applications

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should never have been separated. MTC had further objected that the general employment offer was now greatly reduced and that the 7 office units were nothing like the promised Innovation Centre. The housing element was dependent upon this and was not needed in Morpeth which has seen a surge in housebuilding over the last few years.

- 30% 'affordable rented' and Discount Market Value housing was welcomed but at current Morpeth prices probably remained unaffordable for many working families in Morpeth, whilst there was a desperate need for social housing.
- MTC remained concerned about the impact of the development on Scotch Gill Woods, ancient woodland and a local wildlife site with specific protection under MNP Policy Env5.
- Given all of the above, MTC wished to ensure that those elements of alleged benefit to the community were delivered as promised and therefore strongly object to any phasing plan which did not put the employment element first, including the promised Innovation Centre, followed by the Country Park, before the construction of any housing.

Councillor Bawn addressed the Committee speaking as one of the Local Ward Members on the application advising that he now fully supported the officer recommendation for refusal.

E Alder addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- He reminded members that the application was purely for the residential element and the principle of development had already been determined under the outline approval which was still a lawful consent.
- Today was about the design, appearance and layout of the housing development.
- The application provided 150 new homes as per the outline approval. These would be good quality family homes with 30% affordable housing and in addition there would be a country park which would be of great benefit to the community.
- The applicant had worked hard with officers with the application being submitted for some time in order to reach the point where it had been recommended for approval. Great attention had gone into the design and it met all technical and planning policy requirements both national and local.
- It was a good design and had been looked at in detail with professional opinions provided and would be of a good quality where people would want and choose to live.
- Materials had been carefully selected based on the character of the area with tree lined street scenes with a sense of openness and the scheme linked to both the ancient woodlands and proposed country park.
- The design followed all place making principles and biodiversity, sustainability, ecology etc had all been considered and there were no objections from consultees.
- The scheme would provide the end users with all the needs they required with high speed fibre connectivity, energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions such as gas heat recirculation for water, water recovery systems, PV panels and electric vehicle charging points. There were good transport links and overall the design was of high quality.

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- It had been hoped that the Committee would follow the original recommendation to approve the application, however this had now been changed to refuse for the red line boundary. He thought there was some technical issue with that as for a reserved matters application you did not necessarily need a red line defined and highlighted that the country park was not on the screen. Members were requested to either approve the application or request a deferral so that they could consider all the points given the previous application decision.

The Interim Executive Director advised that Members had a choice to approve/refuse or defer. He requested that if Members were minded to approve the application then they should defer the application in order that technical issues could be addressed. If the Committee wished to refuse then Members could do so for whatever reasons they wished to and highlighted paragraph 7.28 on pages 136 and 137 in respect of the layout of the development.

Councillor Hill left the meeting at this point.

Clarification was provided that Members could refuse the application as there was no access to the site at the current time and that they could consider if there were any other material reasons for refusal. Members were also advised that if this application was refused today then the applicant would have the right to appeal however they could not come back with another reserved matters application as the outline permission would lapse.

Councillor Reid proposed that the application be refused due to layout, scale and appearance, the design of the development which failed to preserve or make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, and the site's surroundings, and that it failed to create or contribute to a strong sense of place. The development did not demonstrate high quality sustainable design, was not visually attractive, did not incorporate high quality materials and detailing. In addition there being no effective and safe access to the development was also proposed as a refusal reason. It was proposed that the wording of the refusal reasons were delegated to Officers in conjunction with the Chair regarding , The proposal was seconded by Councillor Foster.

Whilst 30% affordable housing was very welcome, Members expressed concern that any application approved with that amount of affordable housing invariably came back for a variation to reduce the amount. Advice was provided that no weight could be given to that as a Developer could come back at any time to vary a S106 and whilst this could not be ruled out, it could not be used as a reason to refuse an application.

A vote was taken to refuse the application as outlined above and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the application be **REFUSED** due to to layout, scale and appearance, the design of the development which failed to preserve or make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, and the site's surroundings, and that it failed to create or contribute to a strong sense of place. The development did not demonstrate high quality sustainable design, was not visually attractive, did not incorporate high quality materials and detailing. In

addition there being no effective and safe access to the development was also proposed as a refusal reason. the precise wording delegated to the Director of Planning and Chair of Strategic Planning Committee.

A break was held at this point and the meeting reconvened at 6.30 pm.

36 **21/04298/REM**

**Reserved Matters application for appearance, landscaping, layout and scale for final phases of development comprising of 315 dwellings on approved application 16/04731/OUT
Land South West Of Glebe Farm, Choppington Road, Bedlington, Northumberland**

T Wood, Principal Planning Officer provided an introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation. Updates were provided as follows:-

- An extra condition was required for Highways as follows:-

“Development shall not commence until details of the pedestrian links identified as part of 16/04731/OUT have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall then be carried out in accordance with the approved details to ensure that these links are adequate and implemented in accordance with the details to be approved in consultation with Highways Development Management.
Reason: In the interests of residential amenity and sustainable development, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy TRA 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan.”
- Condition 2 to be updated as follows:-

A) Engineering Layout (Phase 2) QD1837-03-01 from Rev F to Rev H
B) The Impermeable Areas Drawing (Phase 2); QD1837-03-02 - needs to have Rev A added at the end of the drawing number.
C) The Flow Control Manhole plan S40 QD1531-08-02 needs Rev D to be changed to Rev E
D) The Engineering Layout (Phase 2) QD1797-03-01 needs to have Rev B changed to Rev C
E) The Impermeable Areas Drawing (Phase 3) QD-1797-03-02 needs Rev A added to it.
- Condition 3 to be updated as follows:-

“Prior to the occupation of any dwelling, details showing the extent of new hawthorn hedging or other planting to be located on the site where tree Groups 6,5,14 and 4 are identified to be removed, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The new hedging shall then be planted in accordance with these approved details prior to the occupation of any dwellings with boundaries next to any of these groups, unless any other timing is agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and it shall be maintained until established.

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Reason: In the interest of protecting the visual amenity of the site and biodiversity, in accordance with Northumberland Local Plan Policy ENV2.”

- Condition 4 to be updated as follows:-

“Notwithstanding the details contained on the approved planting plans prior to the occupation of any dwelling, details showing further tree planting along the streets, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These trees shall then be planted in accordance with these approved details prior to the occupation of any dwellings, unless any other timing is agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority and the trees shall be maintained until established.

Reason: In the interest of protecting the visual amenity of the site and biodiversity, in accordance with Northumberland Local Plan Policy ENV2.”

- Condition 9 to be updated as follows:-

Need to add 2 more criteria :

- 1) details of working hours
- 2) details of construction delivery/collection hours.

The following to be omitted as it already has a reason for the condition above this.

“Reason: In order to achieve a satisfactory form of development and protect general amenity in accordance with the NPPF and Northumberland Local Plan Policy QOP2.”

The Interim Executive Director advised that changes to the layout and open space had been driven by ground conditions allowing properties to be provided on more stable land and open space provided on land not suitable for housing. The Chair commented that during the site visit it had been seen that the almost complete phase 1 of the development was of a very attractive design.

D Abercrombie & P Arkle addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. Their comments included the following:-

- It was a very thorough report and a lot of hard work had gone into its preparation by officers. Members were thanked for undertaking the site visit and it had been good to hear the comments regarding the design quality. He also highlighted that there were a lot of fantastic tradespeople within the North East, some of whom were from Bedlington.
- The next phase, the reserved matters application before the Committee tonight, would build out and celebrate the success of phase 1. There would be a total of 463 units, 70 of which would be affordable, and this total was well under the cap of 500 which was approved under the outline permission.
- Officers had highlighted the SUDs, the public open spaces, the pedestrian access and that the vast majority of hedges would be retained. Advantage

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had been taken of introducing a slightly different mix on phase 2 with the knowledge gained on phase 1 and the range of house types had been extended further to include 2 and 3 bedroom starter homes.

- Both Companies prided themselves on providing very high quality safe sites and would like to continue as a partnership in the second phase to provide the type of scheme the Committee expected when first granting permission.
- One regret had been the location of the site compound which had incurred a large number of complaints. Lessons had been learned and the applicant would be more sensitive to residents in this respect in the future with the site compound being moved for phase 2 and apologies were provided to the residents.
- At the site visit Members would have been able to observe the size and scale of the open space which was now to be provided in one location, however it was thought this would add to the quality and the images had shown the size and extent including the SUDs ponds.
- The size, range of mix and density reflected that on the adjoining sites and did not represent overdevelopment as some objectors had stated.
- In response to a request to engage more fully with residents it was proposed that a residents forum with existing and future residents would be set up.
- The Committee were asked to support the application.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- The informal footpath between the developments was not an existing Right of Way which made it difficult to request that it be kept. Following the officer highlighting the other access to be provided, it was stated that it could be conditioned that this be made suitable for all uses if required.
- Condition 9 requested that a Construction Method Statement be provided to and agreed by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) which would give details of construction times, site compound location etc and this would need to be adhered to throughout the construction period. Condition 15 of the outline permission had requested a Construction Method Statement which set out the working times for the site and whilst an application had been made to vary these on phase 1 this had been refused. Details of the working times and delivery times for phase 2 would be agreed as part of this application.
- In response to concerns regarding the speed of traffic accessing the site through phase 1 and the proximity of the children's play area it was confirmed that an additional criteria be added to Condition 9 for measures to protect pedestrians during the construction phase.
- An informative would be provided stating what would be expected to be provided in respect of communications with residents through the Construction Method Statement.
- In respect of problems with members of public not being able to access the planning portal to lodge their objections, it was stated that when there were known issues then a message was put on the system to ask for comments to be provided by email.
- An issue highlighted regarding buses would be followed up separately.
- Suitable tree planting would be undertaken.

Councillor Robinson proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve with the conditions as outlined in the report and updated by Officers with

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amended condition relating to the condition of footpaths, and additional criteria to Condition 9 for measures to protect pedestrians during the construction phase and an informative to be added detailing what was expected in terms of communications with residents. This was seconded by Councillor Reid. A vote was taken on this proposal and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report and updated by Officers with amended condition relating to the condition of footpaths, an additional criteria to Condition 9 for measures to protect pedestrians during the construction phase and an informative to be added detailing what was expected in terms of communications with residents.

37 **22/01082/RENE**

**Construction of a solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure
Land East of Burnt House Farm, Netherton Road, Bedlington**

K Tipple, Senior Planning Officer introduced the report with the aid of a power point presentation. It was requested that an additional condition be added to any permission granted in relation to glint and glare as follows:-

“Prior to the installation of any solar photovoltaic panels, the site operator must provide contact details to the Local Planning Authority to be utilised in the event that the glare or glint of light from the development is causing detriment or annoyance within a residential dwelling or school in lawful existence at the time of this permission being granted. Over the lifetime of the development, should a Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) registered Environmental Health Officer determine that glare or glint from the development site is causing detriment to residential or educational amenity, within one month of being notified the operator shall submit to the Local Planning Authority for approval a scheme of mitigation to remedy the glare or glint which has been identified. Thereafter, the approved mitigation shall be installed and retained for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To protect residential and educational amenity from harmful light in accordance with Policy POL 2 of the Northumberland Local Plan.”

J Selwyn, Managing Director of Bluefield Development addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- The site visit undertaken the previous day had been welcome.
- The Bluefield Group was a UK based business which developed, built and operated solar farms in the UK on behalf of the stock market listed Bluefield Solar Income Fund. The Group employed 130 staff including field operative engineers operating from different sites around the Country. The Fund had invested nearly £1billion in solar since its formation in 2013 and currently owned 107 UK solar projects with an aggregate capacity of 750 mw and in peak times in the summer provided 3% of the UK’s energy.
- As the solar farms were owned and operated by the Group they sought to

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develop good relationships with local authorities and residents in those areas.

- Solar power was required due to the climate emergency, cost of living and energy crisis and these were all linked by how energy was generated, supplied and used. There was an urgent requirement to generate electricity from new low cost, low carbon sources. Solar was the lowest cost and quickest to deploy of all energy sources and was currently 1/9th cost of gas and could be deployed in less than 1 or 2 years.
- Solar was already making a difference in this Country and in June this year solar often provided up to 25% of the day time electricity and today an overcast day in November it was providing 8% of the UK's electricity.
- The Government's energy security strategy proposed a 5 fold increase in solar by 2035 and this could only be achieved by deploying solar on both buildings and land. According to the Government's public attitude tracker solar was the most popular form of energy with 85% support across the Country and in a recent poll this had been broken down by wards and in Wansbeck 91% expressed support for solar with 87% stating that the Government should use wind and solar to reduce their energy bill.
- The scheme was welcomed by local people with only 3 comments on the planning portal.
- The location had been chosen due to the requirement for a viable grid connection, a site which was consistent with planning policy and a willing land owner and all 3 had been met at this location. The land was 93% Grade B, which was not the most versatile land being a former open cast mining site and this would be the land back into use for a more sustainable source of energy production. The land was well screened and had an advantageous topography, there were no statutory designations, there was a low impact on heritage, a very good access for construction, a low risk of flooding and it was believed it would have a positive impact on biodiversity and have an impact on local wildlife and would have minimum impact on footpaths.
- It was proposed to continue agricultural use of the land by grazing sheep on the solar farm, which was currently done on 40% of the Group's farms and they were looking to expand on this.
- Once the land was no longer needed for electricity production a bond would be put in place to decommission the solar farm and return the land to agricultural use.
- In relation to food security and the risks from solar farms the Government's food security task force advised that the biggest risk was from climate change with solar farms not identified as a risk. There would be dual benefit on this land by retaining the agricultural use and providing energy production.
- The Group was committed to significant net biodiversity gain and were proposing a net gain of 60% in habitat units and 33% in hedgerow units.
- A unilateral undertaking would be provided committing funds for local projects and had pledged £350,000 for this project and they were working closely with West Bedlington Town Council in this respect.

In response to questions from Members the following information was provided:-

- A S106 agreement was used to help mitigate and offset any dis-amenity or disturbance caused by particular developments. In this instance no

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problems had been identified to stop officers recommending approval without such an agreement. The £350,000 fund for local projects was the Company going above and beyond what was required and reflected its ethical values in giving back to the community. Officers would work with the Company on defining a rational area in which the funds could be spent.

- The timescale for the carbon reduction figures quoted were annual equivalents.
- Details had been submitted in line with the DEFRA biodiversity net gain metric and there were obligations through that and underpinned through the 2021 Environment Act for monitoring of habitats and managed on an ongoing basis. The Biodiversity Management Plan for the site was included in the list of approved documents and was conditioned to ensure that the site was managed for biodiversity over the lifetime of the site, with reports being submitted to the LPA.
- The majority of the equipment was able to be reused or recycled with 99% of the panels able to be recycled and contained no rare metals.
- Whilst the noise of rain on the panels would possibly be audible if you were standing next to them there was quite a separation distance to the nearest residential properties and officers were not aware of any issues with noise at other schemes around the Country. If there were concerns in relation to noise from solar farms then there would be Government guidance.
- In relation to the size of the proposed solar farm this reflected the topography and natural constraints of the site. If the scheme was larger in terms of power output then the scheme would fall to be determined by Government as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).
- Airports were statutory consultees as they used regular, precise routes and carried a large number of passengers, others such as Police and Air Ambulance did not use regular flightpaths and therefore any impact developments might have could not be modelled.

Councillor Robinson proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application in line with the report with the additional condition related to glint and flare as outlined above, which was seconded by Councillor Darwin.

Members considered that this site was of average size for a solar farm and on a well screened site. It was highlighted that panels were designed to absorb and not reflect light and the only noise associated with solar was the noise of the cooling fans for the invertors.

A vote was taken on the proposal to approve the application as outlined with the additional condition in relation to glint and flare and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report and the additional condition related to glint and glare.

38 **22/01153/RENE**

**Construction of solar farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure
Land to the North East of Low Horton Farm, Blyth, Northumberland**

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K Tipple, Senior Planning Officer introduced the report with the aid of a power point presentation. It was requested that an additional condition be added to any permission granted in relation to glint and glare as follows:

“Prior to the installation of any solar photovoltaic panels, the site operator must provide contact details to the Local Planning Authority to be utilised in the event that the glare or glint of light from the development is causing detriment or annoyance within a residential dwelling or school in lawful existence at the time of this permission being granted. Over the lifetime of the development, should a Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) registered Environmental Health Officer determine that glare or glint from the development site is causing detriment to residential or educational amenity, within one month of being notified the operator shall submit to the Local Planning Authority for approval a scheme of mitigation to remedy the glare or glint which has been identified. Thereafter, the approved mitigation shall be installed and retained for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To protect residential and educational amenity from harmful light in accordance with Policy POL 2 of the Northumberland Local Plan.”

J Selwyn, Managing Director of Bluefield Development addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- Power generated from this site would power approximately 15,000 homes with the census showing that there were 16,961 households, so the power generation would be quite close to the number of houses in Blyth.
- The application had generally been well received from the public with only 7 comments received including 3 objectors.
- There were now over 500 solar farms in the UK with the majority of them providing 49.9 mw due to the scale needed to have a viable project with the grid costs and were now being built with no Government subsidy.
- 98.6% Of the land on this site was Grade B, was adjacent to the former New Delaval Colliery and had coal seams running under the site.
- There would be minimum impact to footpaths and the bridleway and good engagement had been undertaken with the British Horse Society to retain access around the edges of the solar farms.
- Construction would be via the A192 and a new permissive footpath would be provided which meant that the footpath would not end at the A189.
- The site belonged to an Estate which had recently acquired land of a similar size which the tenant farmer was to farm. The Estate believed that the solar farm would diversify their income, meet their longer term objectives, provide sustainability and would complement the wind turbine already on the site.
- Sheep would be grazed on the solar farm and the land kept in agricultural use. Biodiversity net gain on this site would be 65.6% in habitat units and 76.1% gain in hedgerow units.
- There had been less engagement with Blyth Town Council, however the Group would still be committed to providing a sum of at least £350,000 for community benefit and were open to having discussions with other parties if they were relevant to the site and in conjunction with the Council.
- The provision of the solar farm would help to address the climate emergency and energy security without threatening food security, would not harm the

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environment but would provide enhanced biodiversity and provide significant funds to the local community.

- There had been a very positive engagement with the Council's Planning Department on both projects and considered that the planning performance arrangements was an excellent way of dealing with these large quite complex projects. The projects had been dealt with very efficiently and in a formal, but logical way engaging with all consultees to address any issues they raised in a timely way.
- They looked forward to continuing to work with the Local Authority and communities on the project and hoped that Members would approve the application.

Interim Executive Director advised that the Government were looking at the way we did planning performance agreements on major schemes following input from developers of various schemes stating that this worked very well, however there was still work to be done in relation to the smaller applications side.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following information was provided:-

- This site was closer to residential properties than the previous application however there were still appropriate separation distances and there was a rail line between, along with existing tree planting and vegetation along the edges which would mitigate any effects.
- No weight would be given in planning terms to whether any land was tenanted or who the landowner was.
- The new permissive right of way was included on the plans in the recommended conditions and would be required to be maintained over the lifetime of the site.

Councillor Darwin proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application in line with the report with the additional condition in relation to glint and glare as outlined above, which was seconded by Councillor Stewart.

It was clarified that what was being granted was for a 40 year permission for this use on the land however the landowner could decide to do something else with the land. The possible use of the community funds outside of Blyth was welcomed and the use of solar power to address the climate emergency highlighted.

A vote was taken on the proposal to approve the application in line with the recommendation as outlined in the report with the additional condition related to glint and glare and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report and additional condition related to glint and glare.

39 APPEALS UPDATE

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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40 **S106 AGREEMENTS UPDATE REPORT**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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