

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Tuesday, 7 November 2023 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

T Thorne (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball	L Darwin
R Dodd	B Flux
J Foster	G Hill
Jl Hutchinson	J Lang
M Robinson	G Stewart
M Swinbank	A Wallace
A Watson	

OFFICERS

D Hadden	Solicitor
G Halliday	Consultant Planner
D Love	Senior Planning Officer
J Sharp	Senior Planning Officer
E Sinnamon	Head of Planning

Around 15 members of the press and public were present.

33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors Reid and Renner-Thompson.

34 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 3 October 2023, as circulated, were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

35 DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The report outlined the procedure to be followed and 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.

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Construction of a solar farm and battery energy storage facility (BESS) together with all associated work, equipment and necessary infrastructure.**Land South of Broadway House Farm, Church Lane, Bedlington**

An introduction to the report was provided by G Halliday, Consultant Planner with the aid of a power point presentation. An addendum report had been circulated and uploaded to the website in advance of the meeting which provided details of new guidance and an additional condition to be added to any permission granted.

Councillor A Hogg from West Bedlington Town Council addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- The developer had discussed this application with the Town Council over a number of meetings and had listened to the concerns of residents regarding construction traffic using Church Lane. This had been addressed via the provision of the temporary construction route off Hartford Road, which was welcomed by residents in the area.
- The Town Council supported the environmental gain and increased biodiversity of the site as a result of this application and a reduction in the towns overall carbon footprint.
- The Town Council also welcomed any community gain from this application.
- The Town Council was grateful that the applicant had considered the views of residents and the Town Council and he asked that the application be supported.

Jonathan Selwyn, Managing Director of Bluefield Renewable Developments addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following information:-

- The Bluefield Group was a UK based business developing, building and operating solar farms on behalf of the stock market listed Bluefield Solar Income Fund. The group had over 150 staff based in London and Bristol with field operators across the Country. The Fund had invested over £1m in solar energy since 2013 and owned over 110 solar and battery projects, providing up to 3% of the daytime electricity generated.
- The owner of the land had been contacted some years ago by Bluefield regarding the building of a solar and battery storage facility, but had decided to go with a different developer. Following this Committee's approval of two other projects last year the landowner contacted Bluefield asking them to take over the project which had already secured a grid connection.
- This was agreed as it was an ideal site for solar and battery storage as it was consistent with planning policy, was a well screened site with good topography, a supportive landowner and a secured grid connection and was not used for food production.
- It was a site of substantial former open cast coal mining and consultations had taken place with the Coal Authority to ensure that the construction of the infrastructure was not close to the previous high walls of the open cast site. There were no rights of ways or statutory designations over the land

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and the project had been designed to enhance existing wildlife habitat and biodiversity of the site.

- A good construction access had been secured which meant that traffic did not need to go down Church Lane and the site was at low risk of flooding.
- There were only two objections, with no objections from any statutory consultees.
- The solar farm would offset 8,700 tonnes of CO₂ and provide electricity for approximately 13,000 homes per annum. Existing hedgerows would be strengthened and new ones planted and management of wildlife habitats. Wildflower meadows would also be developed and sheep would be able to be grazed on the land.
- The site could easily be decommissioned and a bond had been established with the landowner and conditions attached to the permission with the majority of equipment being recyclable.
- It was a good site and it was felt that the development would not harm but enhance the biodiversity and provide a significant community benefit. Members were asked to support the officer recommendation and approve the application.

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

- The provision of community benefits was not a consideration that could be taken into account in the appraisal or determination of the planning application and could not be secured through a S106 agreement as it was not necessary to make the development acceptable. It was a commitment the developer had made with discussions already being held with the Town Council. The net gain in biodiversity was also something that was not required, however the developer had also offered to provide this.
- The weight of the West Bedlington Town Council Neighbourhood Plan was very limited as it was not yet made. The land involved was totally in the ownership of the farmer and whilst the Neighbourhood Plan might state that it could be green space, there was no public right of way or no right of access to the land with extensive public land such as the golf course and park in the area.
- Officers were confident that with all construction traffic using the new construction access that there would be no increase in traffic on Church Lane.
- The five year time frame had been proposed as it was thought it could take up to five years to get the necessary Government licences etc for the site go on stream.
- Officers would discuss with the Planning Policy team whether it would be beneficial to prepare a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on solar farms through the Local Plan Working Group which would set out additional guidance on solar farm developments. It was noted however, that the provision of a SPD was a very resource intensive process. Community benefit of the type proposed here by the developer was not a material planning consideration and should not be taken into account in determining the planning application.

Councillor Robinson proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application with the conditions in the report and the additional condition in the addendum report which was seconded by Councillor Darwin.

Members considered that this form of renewable energy, particularly on this site was less obtrusive than other types and following a vote it was unanimously:

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report with the additional condition outlined in the addendum report.

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22/03576/RENE

Change of use of agricultural land and construction of solar PV panels, associated electrical infrastructure, small operational and battery energy storage buildings, security fencing, CCTV, access tracks, landscaping, and other ancillary works.

**Land Southwest of Quotient Sciences, South of Taylor Drive, Alnwick, Northumberland
NE66 2DH**

D Love, Senior Planning Officer provided an introduction to the report with the aid of a power point presentation. An addendum report had been circulated to Members and uploaded to the website in advance of the meeting. The addendum advised of changes to conditions and the recommendation following responses from National Highways and the County Archaeologist.

It was clarified that National Highways now had no objection to the application subject to additional conditions which had also been agreed by the Developer.

Councillor Swinbank proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application with the conditions as outlined in the addendum report which was seconded by Councillor Hutchinson.

Members highlighted that the purpose of solar panels was to absorb light rather than reflect it and that the application site was within an urban service area of Alnwick rather than in a rural location and in this context would fit in well.

In relation to a suggestion that an informative be added asking for the applicant to consider using the site as an educational resource for schools to visit and learn how the technology worked, Members were advised that this was not an appropriate use of an informative, however a conversation would be held with the applicant in respect of this suggestion.

A vote was taken and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons outlined in the report and conditions as set out in the addendum report.

23/01677/CCD**Demolition of existing buildings and construction of new secondary school with playing pitch provision, access, parking and landscaping
James Calvert Spence College Upper School, Acklington Road, Amble, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 0NG**

Members were advised that a joint introduction would be provided by J Sharp, Senior Planning Officer for both this application and 23/01680/CCD as they were very much intertwined, however separate votes would be required on each application.

A power point presentation was shown and updates were provided as follows:-

- On application 23/01680/CCD (Middle School site) Condition 18 in relation to dust management and the submission of a dust management plan had been recommended by the Public Protection team. This had now been submitted and Public Protection were happy with the content and the condition could therefore be amended to a compliance condition. The same condition (condition 16) had been included on application 23/01677/CCD (High School site), however the information had not been submitted in relation to that part of the site so that condition remained as per the report.
- Condition 34 on application 23/01677/CCD which had been requested by Northumbrian Water to secure details of foul and surface water drainage, an updated plan had now been received and Northumbrian Water had advised that they were happy and the condition could now fall away as the appropriate plan was secured by the approved plans condition.

Jen Patterson, Associate Director of DPP speaking on behalf of Northumberland County Council (NCC), the applicant. Her comments included the following information:-

- The replacement James Calvert Spence College (JCSC) and associated outdoor sport and play facilities and the repurposing of James Calvert Middle School (JCMS) building for two schools, Amble Primary School and Barndale Special School for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), would provide much needed improved education facilities for local children. These type of development were supported by Planning Policy at both local and national levels.
- NCC had identified the clear need to overhaul the education provision in the area and these developments would enable the provision of the highest education facilities and would support the move to two-tier education within the Amble area.
- The proposals would bring a number of significant benefits to the local community through the provision of new high quality enhanced teaching and learning environments. The SEND provision would accommodate pupils with Special Educational Needs including those with autism, social and emotional mental health, speech language and communication and moderate learning difficulties. There was currently no such specialist

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provision within the Coquet Partnership and all students who needed to attend a special school currently had to travel outside of the catchment. Barndale School would address this gap in provision and would benefit families in the locality.

- The development would also bring community benefits as the indoor and outdoor facilities at JCSC would be made available by a community use agreement, supporting the health and wellbeing of local residents who would benefit from the facilities.
- The developments would have acceptable impacts on residential amenity and the development would maintain highway safety in the area.
- The Committee were asked to support the recommendations and approve both applications.

Neil Rogers, Headteacher at JCSC also addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following information:-

- He asked that the Committee follow the recommendations and approve the applications for much needed new schools for the Coquet Partnerships.
- Amble and the surrounding villages had a lot of new housing already built with even more assented and as the population continued to grow it brought new families into the area who required educational facilities fit for the modern age.
- The current building was finished in the early 1980's and had not had much investment since that time. What was thought of as good educational provision at then had not stood the test of time and the children of the area deserved better.
- JCSC must be one of the last secondary schools which still stood as it had been built without any expansion or new build and it was about time this changed. Now was the perfect time to do this as all schools within the Coquet Partnership underwent transformation from first middle and high into primary and secondary, and to make sure that the schools remained good, as judged by Ofsted, and offered children the best life chances with enhanced facilities.
- The design was the right one for all who would use the community school and the significant input that himself and the senior team at the school had been afforded in the design of the school ensured that he was confident that it would deliver both now and in the future for the young people. The additional playing fields provided by annexing the land adjacent to South Avenue not only provided a seamless transition for the pupils but would also provide, in the longer term, additional sports facilities for both pupils and the community.
- The design of the building allowed for enhanced learning facilities and had significantly improved sixth form facilities with community access to specialist rooms for lifelong learners.
- He asked that Members support the recommendations and approve the applications as these would be of huge benefit to residents in the Coquet area.

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

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- A standard school perimeter green fence for safety would be around the entire site.
- Whilst the loss of the running track had been raised as an issue by members of the public and the running community and it would have been good to replace, it was not something that the Governing Body for Athletics, NCC Sports Development Team or Sport England had objected to. It had not been determined during discussions that it was the right place for a track and as it could not be managed effectively by the school, it had not been included. It was clarified there was no loss of playing areas available for either school or community use.
- The existing car park at the High School was to be retained with a new car park also provided at the Middle School. Highways had not objected to the application. There was a condition regarding the use of the MUGA and a community use strategy would be agreed. How the car parks would be used outside of school time was not part of this application but discussions would continue with Highways Development Management with a Car Parking Management strategy to be agreed.
- Public Protection would have taken into account details of the consents already in place in relation to the extended hours to be used for floodlights and had raised no objections. Floodlights now had low light spill and it would have been concluded that there would be no harm to residential amenity due to distances between property.
- In relation to the question of a Council policy that all new Council buildings would be net carbon zero as was described as part of the Astley High School application, whilst the application had made considerable reference to sustainability, a condition had requested further details of sustainability and construction techniques to be submitted. There were other regulatory schemes which also pick up climate change needs during construction such as Building Regulations. Feedback would be provided to the Education Team for applications coming forward to ensure that more information was provided on the green credentials of the building.
- The modular building had been part of a previous planning application as it had been required to be in place prior to the new intake of pupils.
- If Members were concerned regarding the use of the outside play areas until 11pm this could be something that was looked at to bring it in line with the use of the indoor space until 10 pm.

Councillor Stewart proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application as outlined in the report with the amendment to conditions as above which was seconded by Councillor Hutchinson.

Members highlighted that there was no loss of playing areas and that Sports England had not objected to the application. It was clarified that there would be a lot of controls on the use of the outdoor space through the Community Use Agreement the provision of which was a condition of any permission granted. It was also stated that the provision of net zero carbon buildings would assist schools with their budgets.

A vote was taken on the proposal to approve the application and it was unanimously:

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RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report and as amended above.

- 39 **23/01680/CCD**
Demolition of former caretakers cottage and existing outbuildings, external alterations and extensions to the existing buildings, amended access and parking arrangements and associated landscaping
James Calvert Spence College, South Avenue, Amble, Morpeth
Northumberland NE65 0ND

The introduction to the report, public speaking and questions were as above.

Councillor Flux moved the recommendation to approve the application in line with the report with the amendment to conditions as outlined above which was seconded by Councillor Hutchinson. A vote was taken and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report and as amended above.

- 40 **PLANNING APPEALS UPDATE**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

- 41 **S106 AGREEMENTS UPDATE REPORT**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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