

ADDITIONAL ITEM

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF PLANNING, PUBLIC PROTECTION AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

ELWY SOLAR ENERGY FARM - DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

APPROVAL TO SUBMIT A LOCAL IMPACT REPORT AND FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS TO THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE

1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 The Elwy Solar Energy Farm Development of National Significance application has been formally accepted by the Planning Inspectorate, who will consider the application on behalf of Welsh Ministers.
- 1.2 Denbighshire County Council is required to submit a Local Impact Report and has been invited to make formal representations on the application.
- 1.3 This report seeks Members approval to submit a Local Impact Report, and to seek a formal resolution on the representations to be made in response to the application.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Applications for Developments of National Significance (DNS) are submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and determined by Welsh Government rather than local planning authorities.
- 2.2 An application for a Solar Park at land at Gwernigron Farm, The Roe, St. Asaph with an export capacity of 62MW has been submitted to Welsh Ministers by Solar Century Holdings Ltd under the Developments of National Significance (Wales) Regulations 2016. The application was formally accepted by the Planning Inspectorate on 22 June 2021.
- 2.3 The Council is now required to submit a Local Impact Report to the Planning Inspectorate. The Council is also invited to submit formal representations on the proposal. The Local Impact Report and any representations must be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by **27 July 2021**.
- 2.4 In accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, Committee approval is required to submit Local Impact Reports and any formal representations on major infrastructure projects.
- 2.5 Members may remember that the proposal was subject to formal pre-application consultation during the summer / autumn of 2020. In response to the developer's pre-application consultation, in November 2020 Planning Committee resolved to *"support in principle the pre-application consultation, subject to the formal application and subject to the local impact report."*

3. THE ELWY SOLAR ENERGY FARM PROPOSAL:

- 3.1 Solar Century (the developer) are proposing a solar energy farm development on land to the north of the A55 and to the west of A525 in St Asaph. The proposed grid connection corridor also forms part of the application; the corridor, crosses through the St Asaph Business Park to the south of the A55 and extends to the existing National Grid substation which is located to the south of Glascoed Road.
- 3.2 The site is approximately 156 hectares in size and the solar energy farm would have an installed capacity of 62MW (megawatts).
- 3.3 The site lies within the St Asaph West, Bodelwyddan and Trefnant Ward Areas.
- 3.4 The **location plan** and **proposed site layout plan** is attached at the front of this report.

3.5 The solar energy farm would comprise of the following elements:

- Photovoltaic (PV) arrays (fixed panels);
- 25 Substations (40ft) positioned around the site;
- Customer Switchgear building;
- Battery Storage Compound;
- Boundary fencing;
- A CCTV system on c.3m poles, located at strategic points around the site;
- Associated access tracks, including a permanent access track and temporary construction only access track;
- The main site access will be into the south-eastern boundary of the site from St Asaph Road (A525). An additional access has been proposed into the eastern site boundary, this access is intended for use during the construction phase only. Some widening works are required at these entrances to allow safe access for construction vehicles;
- Storage container(s) for spare parts etc.;
- Relevant communications and monitoring equipment located in/ on the other structures of the development listed above;
- Underground cable connecting the site with the electricity grid at the Bodelwyddan National Grid substation.

4. LOCAL IMPACT REPORT

- 4.1 It is a formal requirement of the DNS process that any relevant local planning authority must submit a Local Impact Report, giving details of the likely impact of the proposed development on the authority's area.
- 4.2 The Local Impact Report is a written report detailing the likely impact of the proposed development on any part of the authority's area, based on their existing body of local knowledge and robust evidence of local issues, and should list the impacts and their relative importance.
- 4.3 The Local Impact Report is meant to give a factual, objective view of the impacts of the proposed development on the area in question. The impacts should be presented in terms of their positive, neutral and negative effects.
- 4.4 The report is distinct from any representation a local authority may make on the merits of an application. A local authority or individual Councillor may submit a separate representation on the merits of the application.
- 4.5 The Local Impact Report may draw attention to matters raised with the local planning authority by interested parties or community groups, but only if the authority considers those matters to be planning considerations that should be included in the report.
- 4.6 In producing a Local Impact Report, the local authority is not required to carry out its own consultation with the community.
- 4.7 A draft Local Impact Report is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 4.8 Due to the timescales imposed by the Planning Inspectorate and the timing of comments from internal specialist Officers, the Local Impact Report has not been finalised at the time of writing this report.
- 4.9 Approval is therefore sought from Committee to delegate the approval of the final Local Impact Report to Officers, in consultation with the Members. Officers would suggest the final Local Impact Report is issued to the St Asaph West, Bodelwyddan and Trefnant Ward Councillors, Chair of Planning Committee and the Lead Member for Planning prior to its submission to the Planning Inspectorate.

5. FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS

- 5.1 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (Amendment of 2050 Emissions Target) Regulations 2021 has set an amended target of reducing carbon emissions in Wales to net zero by 2050.
- 5.2 Welsh Government have set a target of 70% of electricity consumption in Wales to be generated from renewable energy by 2030.
- 5.3 Denbighshire County Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in July 2019 and aim to become a net carbon zero and ecologically positive council by 2030.
- 5.4 Future Wales, the National Plan 2040 forms part of the adopted development plan for the County.
- 5.5 Future Wales Policy 17 sets out strong support to the principle of developing renewable and low carbon energy from all technologies and at all scales to meet our future energy needs. It states that, in determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon energy development, decision-makers must give significant weight to the need to meet Wales' international commitments and the Welsh Government target to generate 70% of consumed electricity by renewable means by 2030 in order to combat the climate emergency.
- 5.6 Future Wales Policy 18 states proposals for renewable and low carbon energy projects (including repowering) qualifying as Developments of National Significance will be permitted, subject to compliance with the policy criteria.
- 5.7 The proposal would give rise to adverse impacts on the local area, which will be set out in the Local Impact Report. However, in Officers view, the strategic benefits of the scheme in terms of increased renewable energy generation and the contribution it would make to de-carbonise the energy supply network and to combat the climate emergency, would outweigh the adverse impacts identified.
- 5.8 Officers would therefore propose the Council submit representations to raise no objection to the proposal, subject to the conditions to be set out in the Local Impact Report being imposed to ensure localised impacts are mitigated or minimised.

6. RESOLUTION

6.1 Members are requested to consider the following resolutions:

- Delegate approval of the final Local Impact Report to Officers, in consultation with the affected Ward Councillors.
- Submit representations to the Planning Inspectorate to raise no objection to the proposed Elwy Solar Energy Farm, subject to the imposition of conditions set out in the Local Impact Report.

EMLYN JONES

HEAD OF PLANNING, PUBLIC PROTECTION AND COUNTYSIDE SERVICE

Attachments:

Elwy solar energy farm – site location plan
Elwy solar energy farm – proposed site layout plan
Appendix 1 – draft Local Impact Report