

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING 12th September 2023

Agenda Item Planning Application 23/00258/FUL Installation of solar photovoltaic park north of Vicarage Lane Diddington

The Planning Committee, at its meeting on 29th August, decided that this application, both in terms of its detail, and in order to determine whether it had any ongoing policy implications, should be referred to the Full Council.

The proposal is for solar arrays capable of generating up to 35 MW of electricity which, together with supporting infrastructure, will cover some 45 hectares of land bordering the A1 on its West side. The supporting papers are extensive, both in number and length, and it would be difficult for anyone to summarise them adequately.

I have been unable to find any specific policies regarding Solar Installations either in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 or in the Buckden Neighbourhood Development Plan 2020 – 2036.

LP 35 in the HLP sets bigger hurdles for wind generation than for solar or water, and although these latter two are not mentioned by name, the policy does require that it must be demonstrated “that all potential adverse impacts are or can be made acceptable”. At the time of writing this it appears that the Government may be considering relaxing its opposition to onshore wind turbines.

In the BNDP we have set out in Section 14 an aim “to preserve the rural setting of the village and to ensure that access to the countryside and important rural views and open areas are maintained”.

Following consultation by HDC on its Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper looking at the new DLP, the Parish Council responded to all the questions relevant to Buckden. One response is particularly relevant to this application.

In answer to the question “How can opportunities for renewable forms of energy generation such as wind and solar power be promoted across the district balancing any impacts on the local landscape and communities?” BPC responded by saying “We believe that wind power is more efficient than solar power, is less intrusive and takes less valuable agricultural land and that solar power should be restricted to roofs, industrial sites and brownfield sites. A good example are the solar panels provided at the Park and Ride sites. We note that no mention is made of hydro power, particularly from the Great Ouse.”

These comments were influenced by information provided by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England which emphasises the need to protect agricultural land from this Industrial Development, points out the inefficiency of solar panels (even suggesting that floating panels are much more efficient because of the cooling) and indicates the shift in the public’s attitude. When GNL Strategic, acting on behalf of the applicants, met with the Parish Council on 23rd November 2021, attitudes towards these sites were substantially different to what they are today. The suggestion that a thorough programme of public consultation was undertaken which showed local support for the scheme resulted from just

35 responses. The other element of the application worth noting is that this is stated to be “temporary”, although very few people would consider 30 years to be temporary.

It is not the purpose of this report to advance my personal views, which I will give at the meeting, but to try to set out some of the context.

This country clearly needs to increase renewable energy but it needs to be of the right type in the right place.

We have to consider whether we wish to limit our comments to this particular application or to establish a broader policy towards renewable energy proposals.

This can take the form of recommending approval, with or without conditions, recommending refusal with clear reasons, and then determining whether this is part of an ongoing policy which may need further refinement.

Peter Clark

Chairman BPC Planning Committee