

## Planning application Ref: 13/01133/F

**Proposal:** Installation of solar panels and associated equipment.

**Location:** Longhill, Shutford OX15 6HE

### Response of the Cotswolds Conservation Board

1. The Cotswolds Conservation Board ('the Board') was established by Parliament in 2004.

The Board has two statutory purposes<sup>1</sup>:

- a) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and
- b) To increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.

In fulfilling these roles, the Board has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of people living in the AONB.

2. The Board notes that the proposed location lies some 300m from the nearest point of the Cotswolds AONB to the east of Epwell.

3. Whilst the site in the application is not in the AONB, National Policy Guidance makes clear that the impact of proposals near to a designated landscape is a material consideration in development control decisions.

The Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) includes

***“Developments outside nationally designated areas which might affect them***

*5.9.12 The duty to have regard to the purposes of nationally designated areas also applies when considering applications for projects outside the boundaries of these areas which may have impacts within them. The aim should be to avoid compromising the purposes of designation and such projects should be designed sensitively given the various siting, operational, and other relevant constraints.”*

The Planning practice guidance for renewable and low carbon energy<sup>2</sup> states:

15. *“In shaping local criteria for inclusion in Local Plans and considering planning applications in the meantime, it is important to be clear that:*

- *proposals in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and in areas close to them where there could be an adverse impact on the protected area, will need careful consideration”*

4. Local Planning policy for renewable energy is set out in the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011:

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<sup>1</sup> Section 87, Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/225689/Planning\\_Practice\\_Guidance\\_for\\_Renewable\\_and\\_Low\\_Carbon\\_Energy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225689/Planning_Practice_Guidance_for_Renewable_and_Low_Carbon_Energy.pdf)

**EN21 PROPOSALS FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY SCHEMES WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT SUCH DEVELOPMENT WOULD NOT CAUSE SIGNIFICANT HARM TO THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT. PROPOSALS WILL BE CONSIDERED AGAINST THE FOLLOWING:**

- (I) LANDSCAPE IMPACT;

The Proposed Submission Cherwell Local Plan includes the following policy:

**Policy ESD 12: Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

The Council will seek to protect the Cotswolds AONB and its setting from potentially damaging and inappropriate development. The Cotswolds AONB Management Plan will be used as supplementary guidance in decision making relevant to the AONB. Only development which supports the local economy, improves access to local services, and increases the opportunity for people to live and work in their local community will be promoted within the AONB.

5. The Board published the statutory Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2008-13 in April 2013.<sup>3</sup>
6. The Management Plan contains the following policies of relevance to this application:

**Landscape Policy LP1:** *That the unique character, tranquillity, and special qualities of the Cotswolds landscape are conserved and enhanced.*

**Natural Resources Policy NRP2:** *Carbon emissions within the AONB are reduced by reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures, encouraging more sustainable patterns of development, and utilising renewable energy generation technologies that are of an appropriate type and scale for their siting.*

A Key issue identified in the Plan is:

*“The surroundings of the AONB are also important to its landscape and scenic beauty. Views out of the AONB and into it from surrounding areas can be very significant in this regard. The Board has published a Position Statement on development in the setting of the Cotswolds AONB.”*

The Position statement referred to can be downloaded at <http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/userfiles/file/consultations/setting-final-headed-6july-2010-revised-oct2010.pdf>

(It should be noted that this statement is being reviewed to take account of the NPPF and Management Plan 2013-18.)

## **Comments**

1. The Board has taken note of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) submitted by the applicant. The Board agrees that views of the site of the proposed development from locations within the AONB are limited by intervening topography and vegetation.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/management\\_plan/conserving.html](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/management_plan/conserving.html)

2. However, the Board considers that from viewpoints 9, 10 and 11 in the LVIA the part of the proposed solar farm being described as in the “middle field” will be visible. It is agreed that the lower section of the proposed array and that to the east of the existing woodland belt on the top of Long Hill will not be visible from these viewpoints.
3. The landscape visible from these viewpoints is noticeably free of any significant built development. The installation of an essentially industrial form of development in this rural area would, as noted in the LVIA, be an adverse impact. Since these views are from locations within the AONB and can therefore be described as “sensitive”, the degree of harm can be considered significant.
4. Given the policy support described above for the protection of views out of the AONB, the Board would object to the proposals as currently submitted. However, were the “middle field” element to be removed, then the Board would have no objection on grounds of adverse impact on the AONB.