

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **7<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2018**

**REPORT BY:** **CHIEF OFFICER (PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY)**

**SUBJECT:** **FULL APPLICATION – INSTALLATION OF A ROOF-MOUNTED SOLAR ARRAY AT ASTON WPS, CHURCH LANE, ASTON**

**APPLICATION NUMBER:** **058806**

**APPLICANT:** **DWR CYMRU WELSH WATER**

**SITE:** **ASTON WPS, CHURCH LANE, ASTON**

**APPLICATION VALID DATE:** **10<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018**

**LOCAL MEMBERS:** **COUNCILLOR MS H. BROWN**  
**COUNCILLOR G. HARDCASTLE**

**TOWN/COMMUNITY COUNCIL:** **HAWARDEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

**REASON FOR COMMITTEE:** **MEMBERS REQUEST**

**SITE VISIT:** **YES**

**1.00 SUMMARY**

- 1.01 This application is for the installation of a roof mounted solar array at the existing Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water Pumping Station at Aston, Church Lane, Aston. The main issues to be considered are the principle of the development, the effects upon the landscape, the highway, aircraft and wildlife implications, the effects upon the adjacent listed building, the effects upon the amenities of the adjoining properties and the health and safety implications. All these issues are considered acceptable and have significant environmental benefits and is thus to be welcomed.

**2.00 RECOMMENDATION: TO GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION, SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:-**

- 2.01
1. Time limit on commencement.
  2. In accord with approved details.
  3. Submission and approval of construction traffic management plan.

**3.00 CONSULTATIONS**

3.01 Local Member

Councillor Ms H. Brown

Refers this application to Planning Committee and also request a site visit for the reasons of access, glint and glare, visual impact, health impact statement requested and proximity to resident's homes.

Councillor G. Hardcastle

Refers this application to Planning Committee and also request a site visit for the reasons of access, glint and glare, visual impact, health impact statement requested and proximity to resident's homes.

Hawarden Community Council

Objection – Concerns expressed – No site notices erected, impact to local resident's health, visual impact to area, closeness to Hawarden Airport and effect of glare to air traffic.

Head of Highways (DC)

Recommends that any permission to include a suggested condition.

Head of Public Protection

No adverse comments to make regarding this proposal. At 68 dBA within the existing plant room the inverters will not be audible at the nearest properties so their amenity will not be significantly detrimentally affected.

Environment – Highways – Rights of Way

Public Footpath 25 abuts the site but is unaffected by the development. The path must be protected and free from interference from the construction.

Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

No archaeological implications for the development at this location.

Natural Resources Wales

Does not object to the proposal. In our opinion, the proposal is not likely to adversely affect any protected species.

### Airbus

The proposed development does not conflict with safeguarding criteria. Therefore have no aerodrome safeguarding objection to the proposal.

## **4.00 PUBLICITY**

### 4.01 Site Notice & Neighbour Notification

12 letters of objection received. The grounds of objection are summarised as follows:-

- Location is very close to residential properties and elevated significantly panels will be an eyesore compared to current landscaped grass.
- Potential issue with reflection from panels into adjacent property windows.
- Potential electrical noise from solar inverters which are not silent and located to residential properties.
- Scale of panels is massive. Produce a very considerable energy surplus to run the water management function at the site. Would modify the status usage of site to that of a commercial electricity generating station. Turn it into an 'industrial' location.
- Set a precedent for any future applications.
- Too many vehicles using this section of Old Aston Hill making a danger to pedestrians and drivers.
- Church Lane in poor state. Rural, single road with a dangerous junction – how will it manage with extra construction traffic?
- Has surface water run off been assured to prevent collapse and flooding?
- Detrimental impact of glare on aircraft safety.
- Impact of vibration onto residential properties.
- Impact upon local wildlife. There is a protected pond in the field approximately 25 m away.
- Whenever work is carried out on the reservoir there is a problem with rats.

## **5.00 SITE HISTORY**

### 5.01 02/1857

Construction of extension to covered, treated water service reservoir. Granted 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1993.

## **6.00 PLANNING POLICIES**

### 6.01 Flintshire Unitary Development Plan

STR1 – New Development.

STR7 – Natural Environment.

STR8 – Built Development.  
GEN1 – General Requirements for Development.  
GEN3 – Development in the Open Countryside.  
D1 – Design Quality, Location & Layout.  
D2 – Design.  
D3 – Landscaping.  
L1 – Landscape Character.  
WB1 – Species Protection.  
HE2 – Development Affecting Listed Buildings & Their Settings.  
AC12 – Airport Safeguarding Zone.  
AC13 – Access & Traffic Impact.  
EWP1 – Sustainable Energy Generation.  
EWP5 – Other Forms of Renewable Energy Generation.  
EWP12 – Pollution.  
EWP 13 – Nuisance.

SPGN No. 3 – Landscaping.

SPGN No. 8 – Nature Conservation & Development.

#### National

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 9 November 2016.

Technical Advice Note 5, Nature Conservation & Planning (2009).

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 8: Renewable Energy (2005).

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12: Design (2016).

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 23: Economic Development (2014).

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24: The Historic Environment (2017).

In terms of the National Planning Policy Context, it is clear that there is a positive approach taken by the Welsh Government to renewable energy having regard to the issue of global warming and climate change. The clear message of both Planning Policy Wales and the Flintshire Unitary Development Plan is that renewable energy proposals should be permitted unless there are unacceptable impacts on landscape, nature conservation, amenity etc.

## **7.00 PLANNING APPRAISAL**

### **7.01 Site Description & Proposals**

The site comprises of the grassed roof of buried tanks of the Dwr Cymru Welsh Water Aston Water Pumping Station, Church Lane, Aston.

7.02 The roof is currently approximately 3.7 m above ground level with grass banks upon all four sides. There are existing steel cabinets located on the roof which are approximately 0.5 m and 1 m in height.

7.03 Approximately 20 m to the west of the site lie the rear boundaries of the properties that are situated in a row on this part of old Aston Hill and 30 m on the opposite side of Church Lane to the north lie other residential properties. To the south and east lies agricultural land.

- 7.04 The proposals involve the erection of a 357/KW/R solar array, covering 4025 m<sup>2</sup> of the roof of the WPS land comprises of 1050 panels. The highest point of the array will be 0.30 m and will be at an angle of 15°. There will also be ballast blocks placed underneath the panels. The inverters will be placed within the existing plant room on site under the solar array. It will have an operational life of approximately 25 years.
- 7.05 The baseload of the site means a minimum of 77% of the power will be consumed on site. The additional capacity will depend on weather conditions, time of day and DCWW operational requirements. The system has been designed for the energy to be consumed on site as much as possible as it is not financially viable to install systems that are supplying the grid.
- 7.06 Issues  
The main issues to be considered within the determination of this application are the principle of the development in planning policy terms, the effects upon the character and appearance of the area, the highway, aircraft and wildlife implications, the effects upon the setting of listed building the effects upon the amenities of the adjoining residents and the health & safety implications.
- 7.07 Principle of Development  
The site lies outside of the settlement boundary of Ewloe and within open countryside as defined by the Adopted Flintshire Unitary Development Plan. Due to this location and the nature of the proposals policies GEN3, EWP1 – Sustainable Energy Generation and EWP5 – Other Forms of Renewable Energy Generation (Other than Wind Turbines) apply.
- 7.08 Policy GEN3 relates to development in the open countryside and in criterion (J) allows other development which his appropriate to the open countryside and where it is essential to have an open countryside location rather than being sited elsewhere.
- 7.09 For the reasons detailed below the proposals are considered appropriate to the open countryside and are required in this location as the Aston WPS is located here.
- 7.10 Both policies EWP1 and EWP5 provide a presumption in favour of renewable energy schemes such as solar, subject to them meeting the details matters of them not having an unacceptable effect on their surroundings in terms of landscape, highways, aircraft safety, nature conservation, setting of listed buildings and amenities of adjoining residents.
- 7.11 Given the above, it is considered that the development is acceptable in principle in planning policy terms.

- 7.12 Visual Appearance & Character of the Area  
The solar array will cover a large area and will be placed upon the grass roof of the tanks which is approximately 3.7 m in height. However, each panel will only be 0.299 m in height, 0.99 m in length, 0.04 m deep, at a shallow angle of 15° within rows 0.5 m apart. There are existing structures located on the roof and existing built development in close proximity to the site.
- 7.13 Given the above, it is considered that the proposals will not have a significant increased detrimental impact upon the character and appearance of the area in this location.
- 7.14 Highways  
Access to the solar array will make use of the existing access into the WPS from Church Lane.
- 7.15 Once operational it is anticipated that there will be 2-3 visits to the site per year for works including cleaning the panels, maintenance and ad hoc checks. Therefore visits during the operational phase will be light with small vans or cars being used would not significantly affect the local road network.
- 7.16 During the construction phase there will be a greater volume of traffic using the access and network. However, both the access and network is considered adequate for the delivery of components into the site for the development without any need for upgrading works. These increased traffic movements to the site will be short term and considered not to significantly adversely affect the network or those using it.
- 7.17 Given the above, the Head of Highways Development Control raises no objection to the proposals subject to a construction management plan being submitted and approved prior to any works being undertaken should planning permission be granted.
- 7.18 Aircraft Safety  
AIRBUS have been consulted in the interests of establishing whether the proposals would give rise to adverse effects upon Aerodrome Safeguarding at Hawarden Airport as a consequence of glint and glare. AIRBUS have assessed the development against the safeguarding criteria and have identified that it does not conflict with safeguarding criteria and as a result they have no safeguarding objection.
- 7.19 Ecology  
The solar array will utilise an area of intensively maintained amenity grassland. The ground conditions offer little opportunity in terms of flora with low habitat value. On site conditions are not noted to be favourable to protected or sensitive species with no recorded on site designation. During the construction period, good practice guidance

will be followed to minimise impact and displacement effects.

- 7.20 Given the above and with no vegetation removal, site clearance or levelling works required it is considered that the proposals will not have a significant detrimental impact to the biodiversity or ecology local to the area or within the wider impact.
- 7.21 Surface Water Drainage  
On site ground conditions will negate the need to install further tracks throughout the array, with run-off remaining possible. Rainfall or snow falling on the solar panels will run off directly to the ground and infiltrate the permeable ground beneath or run-off to the nearby drain.
- 7.22 Given the above it is considered that the array will not significantly detrimentally effect the drainage on the site. In addition, no vegetation or earthworks are to be removed as part of the development further limiting on site impact.
- 7.23 Impact upon Listed Building & Settings  
The nearest listed building to the site is that of the Church of the Holy Spirit which is Grade II and located approximately 100 m to the north. Between the site and the listed building is part of the Church Road and properties along this part.
- 7.24 Given the distance, intervening uses, and nature, size and position of the proposals it is considered that they will not have an adverse impact on the listed building's special architectural or historic character and appearance and the setting.
- 7.25 Amenities of Adjoining Occupiers  
The properties most likely to be affected by the proposal 'lie within a row to the west of the site on Old Aston Hill and those on Church Lane to the north. Those on the western side are located approximately 30 m away and those to the north 35 m away.
- 7.26 The railings will be anodised aluminium and all the panels Q-Cell with an anti-glare finish. The inverters will be located within the existing plant room onsite underneath the solar array.
- 7.27 The majority of the properties upon the western side of the proposed have this rear boundary as hedgerows or fences. What they will see of the proposals will be from their first floor windows and will be the side elevation of the panels 0.299 m high, 0.992 m in length, 0.041 m deep at angle of 15° and within rows 0.5 m apart.
- 7.28 The inverters will be placed within the existing plant room on site under the solar array and have a noise output of 68 dBA.
- 7.29 The properties to the north lie on the opposite side of Church Road and the front of them face the road and then the walling/hedgerow of

the northern boundary of the site, there again, the view they will have of the proposals will be from their front first floor windows and will see the rear elevation of the panels. Given the above distance away of the proposals, their size and nature, it is considered that there will not be a significant detrimental impact upon the amenities of the adjoining residents in terms of obtrusiveness, glint, glare and noise.

7.30 Other Matters

Health & Safety

The Health & Safety Executive lists the potential risks from solar energy as exposure to toxic chemicals and metals (e.g., cadmium – a known carcinogen) during solar panel manufacture, disposal and recycling, falls from height during installation of panels on roofs and manual handling issues. Given that the proposals involve no manufacture on site and are ground based, there are no operational risks relating to the operation of the panels.

7.31 As of April 2018 there were over 840,000 UK homes with photovoltaic panels installed, largely thanks to the stimulation of the market by the Government led Feed-in-Tariff scheme. Solar arrays have been installed on a commercial scale in schools, hospitals and care homes. It is unlikely the Government would back a scheme with any operational risks in such highly sensitive locations. This site does not represent a sensitive location/

7.32 In contrast Public Health England's report on the effect of air pollutions states "Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) estimated that long term exposure to air pollution had an effect equivalent to 29,000 deaths a year in the UK in 2008". Fossil Fuels are a major contributor to air pollution, part of the incentive to transition to a low-carbon economy is to reduce the health impact of energy production. This proposal assists in the transition to a low carbon economy.

**8.00 CONCLUSION**

8.01 It is considered for the reasons above that the proposals will have a positive benefit upon the environment and are thus to be welcomed.

8.02 Other Considerations

The Council has had due regard to its duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and considered that there would be no significant or unacceptable increase in crime and disorder as a result of the recommended decision.

8.03 The Council has acted in accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998 including Article 8 of the Convention and in a manner which is necessary in a democratic society in furtherance of the legitimate aims of the Act and the Convention.

8.04 The Council has had due regard to its public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010.

8.05 The Council has had due regard to its duty under Section 3 of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and considered that there would be no significant or unacceptable impact upon the achievement of wellbeing objectives as a result of the recommended decision.

**LIST OF BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Planning Application & Supporting Documents

National & Local Planning Policy

Responses to Consultation

Responses to Publicity

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