OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00891/FUL **Full Planning Application**

Proposal: **Change of use to operational land, extension to existing substation alongside fencing and associated works.**

Location: **Land At Eastern Edge Of Little Staughton Solar Farm Little Staughton Airfield Little Staughton**

Applicant: **n/a**

Grid Ref: **514380 262088**

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The site covers approximately 15005 sqm and is accessed from the eastern side of Kimbolton Road to the south of Hail Weston. The site is currently surrounded by open fields with access track, however the site forms part of a wider surrounding site which has extant permission for the installation of solar farm (generating up to 50MW) comprising the provision of photovoltaic panels, inverters, switchgear housings and transformer stations together with hardstanding, landscaping, access alterations, fencing and associated works (HDC reference 22/01813/FUL, approved in December 2024).

In terms of constraints, the proposal site is in the open countryside and is not within the immediate setting of heritage assets (the nearest is Bassmead Manor Farmhouse, a G2* listed building located approximately 980m south west), nor is the site within Flood Zones 2 and 3.

The designated County Wildlife Site (CWS) of High Wood Ancient Woodland sits to the east within close proximity (approximately 39 metres) to the proposal site.

Public Footpath No.6, Hail Weston, runs along the access to the site.

Planning permission is sought for the change of use to operational land, extension to existing substation alongside fencing and associated works. The submitted Planning, Design and Access Statement puts forward that “to ensure that UK Power Networks have an express planning permission for the use of the site as operational land, and to ensure that UK Power Networks retain their permitted development rights under Schedule 2, Class 15 of the GPDO, a full planning application has been submitted separately for the proposed substation extension.” (paragraph 1.7).

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (12 December 2024) (NPPF 2023) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;

* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.
For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)
LP5: Flood Risk
LP10: The Countryside
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP35: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

Supplementary Planning Documents/ Guidance
- Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017)
- Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
- Developer Contributions: Updates Costs 2019/2020
- Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment (2022)
- Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2017
- Huntingdonshire Tree Guidance Note 3

Neighbourhood Plans - None relevant. The proposal is not within the Great Staughton Neighbourhood Plan area, although it is recognised that parts of the wider solar farm is within the Great Staughton Neighbourhood Plan area.

PLANNING HISTORY

22/01813/FUL - Installation of solar farm (generating up to 50MW) comprising the provision of photovoltaic panels, inverters, switchgear housings and transformer stations together with hardstanding, landscaping, access alterations, fencing and associated works - APPROVED 4.12.24.

CONSULTEES

Detailed consultee comments can be found on the Local Planning Authority (LPA) public access website. The consultations below have been summarised where it is not stated that they are in full.
Hail Weston Parish Council: No response.

Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) - we have no comments to make. We expect the surface water drainage details to come forward with the condition imposed on 22/01813/FUL.

Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Team - Initial comments queried the extent of subsurface works through the access road portion of the scheme. On 14th August 2025, the agent confirmed by email to the LPA that there are no alterations or new cabling proposed to the existing access road as part of the application proposals. Subsequent comments from County Archaeology were received on 15th August 2025 confirming that they have no comment or recommendations for the scheme.

Cambridgeshire County Council Local Highway Authority: Following a review of the documents provided to the Highway Authority, I have noted that the site is accessed by an existing private access road from the B645 Kimbolton Road, Hail Weston. The site is remote from the public highway and the effect of the proposed development upon the public highway should be minimal. The Local Highway Authority raises no objections to the proposed development.

Huntingdonshire District Council Environmental Health Team: No objections. Full comments: We have no objections to this proposal with regard to environmental health matters.

Cambridgeshire County Council Rights of Way Officer: Public Footpath No.6, Hail Weston, runs along the access to the site. Whilst the Definitive Map Team has no objection to this proposal, the footpath must remain open and unobstructed at all times. Informatives are recommended.

Wildlife Trust: No response.

Bedford Borough Council: No response.

National Grid: No response.

Cadent Gas: No response.

REPRESENTATIONS

No third party representations have been received for this proposal at the time of determination.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

When determining planning applications, it is necessary to establish what weight should be given to each plan's policies in order to come to a decision. The following legislation, government policy and guidance outline how this should be done.

As set out within the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 38(6)) and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 70(2)) in dealing with planning applications the Local Planning Authority shall have regard to have provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. This is reiterated within paragraph 48 of the NPPF (2024). The development plan is defined in Section 38(3)(b) of the 2004 Act as "the development plan documents (taken as a whole) that have been adopted or approved in that area".

In Huntingdonshire the Development Plan consists of:
o Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (2019)
o Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)
o St Neots Neighbourhood Plan (2016)
o Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017)
o Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan (2018)
o Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan (2019)
o Bury Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
o Buckden Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
o Grafham and Ellington Neighbourhood Plan (2022)
o Great Gransden Neighbourhood Plan (2023)
o The Stukeleys Neighbourhood Plan (2023)
o Sawtry Neighbourhood Plan (2023)

The statutory term 'material considerations' has been broadly construed to include any consideration relevant in the circumstances which bears on the use or development of the land: Cala Homes (South) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Anor [2011] EWHC 97 (Admin); [2011] 1 P. & C.R. 22, per Lindblom J. Whilst accepting that the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan, paragraph 2 confirms that it is a material consideration and significant weight is given to this in determining applications.

The main matters for consideration are:

- The Principle of Development
- Design and Visual Amenity
- Impact upon Residential Amenity
- Flood Risk, Surface Water and Drainage
- Highway Safety, Parking Provision and Access
- Biodiversity
- Trees
- Other Matters - Archaeology

*Principle of Development

The Local Planning Authority, under planning reference 22/01813/FUL approved the installation of a solar farm (generating up to 50MW) comprising the provision of photovoltaic panels, inverters, switchgear housings and transformer stations together with hardstanding, landscaping, access alterations, fencing and associated works.

Part of this 22/01813/FUL approval related to a substation extension and this current application, brought forward due to the need for additional electrical capacity on the site while the site is not currently operational, seeks planning approval to extend this substation and erect associated fencing and ancillary works and a change of use of the land for the distribution or supply of electricity.

The relevant local policies to be applied to this application in terms of the principle of development are LP10 (The Countryside), LP22 (Local Services and Community Facilities) and LP35 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy).

It is accepted that the previous 22/01813/FUL application comprised this site within its red line boundary and approved a solar farm including a substation. This current proposal seeks only to extend the existing and approved substation and ancillary works and do not conflict with this extant permission. Therefore, it is considered that the principle of development of the site as energy infrastructure is already established and that the proposal is acceptable in accordance with Local Plan policies LP10, LP22 and LP35 subject to other material considerations as outlined below.

* Design and Visual Amenity

Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 state that developments should respond positively to their context, draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings and contribute positively to the area's character and identity. This is also reflected in the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

The site is located within the Southern Wolds Landscape Character area, which is characterised as a relatively gentle topography, including the broad valleys of the River Kym and the Ellington Brook.

The proposed development comprises the integration of new infrastructure to the south of the existing substation, alongside the change of the use of the land to operational land for the distribution or supply of electricity, erection of palisade fencing and ancillary works. This would comprise of an area measuring circa 4m x 11m containing bus bars enclosed by a 2.4m palisade fence to match the existing. The proposed development would integrate new infrastructure to the south of the existing substation and change the use of the land to operational for the distribution or supple of electricity. The installation of the new equipment would facilitate the solar farm to connect to the national grid and to deliver up to 50MW of electrical capacity.

The approved and existing building sits within an open site surrounded by open land, with an ancient woodland serving as a visual buffer between the site and Kimbolton Road, which is approximately 2.5 kilometres to the east.

The proposal is a modest subservient addition in the context of the existing building and given the separation distance between the site and Kimbolton Road would not be overtly visible from the public realm or visitors to the site. As such, the character and appearance of the site would not be detrimentally harmed by this proposal and would not be incongruous when viewed against the wider solar farm.

It is not considered that the proposal will have a harmful impact upon the rural character of the area. Accordingly, the proposal is in accordance with Policies LP10, LP11 and LP12 of the Local Plan to 2036, the National Design Guide and the NPPF (2024) in this regard and would not conflict with the Southern Wolds Landscape Character area.

*Amenity

Residential Amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

It is acknowledged that the proposal abuts open countryside on all sides and is approximately 1 kilometre southeast from the nearest residential use at Wood Farm, Kimbolton Road, Hail Weston. Given this proximity, there are no significant concerns regarding noise, overbearing, overshadowing, loss of light or any other environmental impacts that would warrant a refusal of the application.

Impact to Public Right of Way

Public Footpath No.6, Hail Weston, runs along the access to the site.

The Cambridgeshire County Definitive Maps Team have reviewed the proposals and raise no concerns regarding the impact of the development on the Public Right of Way subject to informatives applied to any permission given to the proposals. Officers agree that these informatives would help safeguard user amenity of the Public Right of Way and its recommended to append these informatives to any consent given to the application.

Overall, it is considered that a high standard of amenity would be provided for all users of the development and maintained for neighbours. The development is considered acceptable in terms of overshadowing, overlooking, overbearing impact, loss of privacy, loss of light and would not have a significant detrimental impact upon residential amenity. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 and paragraph 135(f) of the NPPF (2024).

*Flood Risk

The proposal site is wholly in Flood Zone 1. Local Plan Policy LP5 as well as national policy requires proposals to consider flood risks to users on and off the site. Given the low flood risk and minor scale of development, officers are satisfied that full impacts of surface water drainage will be undertaken as part of the condition requirements of planning approval 22/01813/FUL which covers the wider site and the site under this current application. The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)aligns with officer view.

Therefore, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on both flood risk and surface water and therefore accords with Policies LP5, LP6 and LP15 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework in this regard.

* Highway Safety, Parking Provision and Access

Policy LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates access for emergency vehicles and service vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles. Paragraph 116 of the NPPF (2024) states that development should only be prevented or refused on Highway Safety Grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Vehicular access to the proposed development will be from Kimbolton Road (the B645) via an access and access track approximately 2.5 km from the site.

Cambridgeshire County Council as the Local Highways Authority have reviewed the proposals and confirmed that given this distance from the highway there were no significant concerns relating to highway safety. Additionally, the proposals are considered by officers to be relatively minor and would not detrimentally impact vehicular movement or pedestrian routes on or to the site.

Having regard to the above, it is considered that a safe means of access could be achieved and that the traffic generated by the proposal would not have a severe impact upon the highway network. Therefore, in accordance with the NPPF (2024), the development should not be refused on transport grounds. The proposal is considered to comply with policy LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 (2019).

* Biodiversity

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF (2024) states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type, and location of development.

This application has been accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), which concludes that the site has biodiversity constraints associated with its rural location, including dormouse, great crested newt connectivity and badger foraging, although much of the PEA relates to green infrastructure in the wider solar farm site. Mitigation measures are proposed, relating to bats, breeding birds, Great Crested Newts, Badgers and other mammals within section 4.4 which are considered proportionate to the scale of development. A condition would be imposed on any planning permission granted to ensure the development is carried out in strict accordance with those measures as detailed within the PEA. While Local Plan Policy LP30 requires biodiversity enhancement, in this case given much of the site boundary is an access track and the proposal relates to an extension of an existing substation (previously developed land) it is considered that enhancements can be secured by Biodiversity Net Gain legislative requirements as set out below.

As well as the above qualifying new development is subject to Biodiversity Net Gain legislation pursuant to the Environment Act 2021. This means that a 10% statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) would be required, following the hierarchy of onsite provision; mixture of on-site and off-site provision; and the last resort of statutory biodiversity credits unless it can be demonstrated that the development would be exempt. Given the size of the site, it is acknowledged that a 10% BNG is required in this instance.

The application has been accompanied by a Biodiversity Net Gain Report. The submitted report in part 5 concludes that the development proposal would result in a 0.04% net loss in habitat units. As the shortfall cannot be delivered on-site given the developed nature of the current site, a condition would be imposed on any planning permission granted to ensure off-site credits will be provided.

Overall, subject to the imposition of conditions on any planning permission granted, the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Policy LP30 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Trees and Hedgerows

Policy LP31 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that the potential for adverse impacts on trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows has been investigated and that a proposal will only be supported where it seeks to conserve and enhance any existing tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of value that would be affected by the proposed development.

While the site is within close proximity to an ancient woodland, the scale, location and nature of the proposal would not detrimentally impact any root protection areas of these trees, nor would the proposal impact any hedges or hedgerows. Therefore the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Policy LP31 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and paragraph 180 b) of the NPPF (2024) in this regard.

*Other Matters - Archaeology

Policy LP34 states that great weight and importance is given to the conservation of heritage assets and their settings, including archaeology.

The Historic Environment (HE) Team at Cambridgeshire County Council were consulted on the application as the proposed development lies within a wider area of archaeological potential. The HE Team initially raised concern as their records indicated that the development site is situated in an area of archaeological potential, specifically the access road which runs through three areas of cropmarks indicating Iron Age to Roman settlement activity (CHER ref. MCB19079, MCB19076 and MCB18721) and queried the extent of subsurface works through the access road portion of the scheme. After the applicant verified that no sub-surface disturbance will be seen across the trackway area as part of this application, the HE Team confirmed that they had no objection to the proposal or recommended conditions.

Subsequently, the proposal is considered to accord with Policy LP34 of the Local Plan.

There are no other material planning considerations which have a significant bearing on the determination of this application.

*Conclusion
The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as it:
* Is of an appropriate scale and design
* Would not have a harmful impact upon the character and appearance of the area;
*Would not have a harmful impact upon any designated heritage assets;
* Would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the amenity of neighbours and users of the Public Right of Way;
* Would allow for sufficient parking provision and vehicle movement; and
* There are no other material planning considerations which lead to the conclusion that the proposal is unacceptable.

CONTACT OFFICER:
Enquiries about this report to **Marie Roseaman**