OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00485/FUL **Full Planning Application**

Proposal: **Installation of ultra-rapid charging hubs and associated infrastructure at an existing car park**

Location: **Land West Of 2 Stukeley Road Retail Park Huntingdon**

Applicant:

Grid Ref: **523240 272741**

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

This application seeks approval for the installation of ultra-rapid charging hubs and associated infrastructure at an existing car park off Stukeley Road, Huntingdon. The proposal would involve the reconfiguration of the section of car park replacing 13 existing car parking spaces with six dedicated EV charging spaces and the installation of ancillary infrastructure, including a 1,500kVA compact substation and a Schneider feeder pillar.

The application comprises an existing car park for Stukeley Park within the settlement of Huntingdon. The proposed ultra-rapid charging hubs would be located in the north-west corner of the southern section of the car park. The Shopping Park contains various commercial uses and across Stukely Road to the west is an area of open green space, along with a row of residential development to the south. The application site is located on land within Flood Zone 3.

This application has been accompanied by a Planning Statement.

It is worth noting that the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order has been updated to include more provisions around renewable energy. Schedule 2, Part 2 Class E - relates to the installation, alteration or replacement, within an area lawfully used for off-street parking, of an up stand with an electrical outlet mounted on it for recharging electrical vehicles. It is therefore considered that the proposed charging ports would fall under permitted development, but the associated substation and fencing would not and therefore still require planning permission.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) 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 May 2019

LP1: Amount of Development
LP2: Strategy for Development
LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
LP5: Flood Risk
LP6: Waste Water Management
LP7: Spatial Planning Areas
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP16: Sustainable Travel
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP25: Housing Mix
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows

Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2026 - adopted September 2019

TC2: Public Realm
BE1: Design and Landscaping
BE2: Local Distinctiveness and Aesthetics
TT1: Sustainable Transport

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:

Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017)
Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022)
Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2017
Huntingdonshire Transport Strategy (2023)
Huntingdonshire Tree Strategy (2020)

The National Design Guide (2021)

* C1 - Understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context
* I1 - Respond to existing local character and identity
* I2 - Well-designed, high quality and attractive
* B2 - Appropriate building types and forms
*M3 - Well-considered parking, servicing and utilities infrastructure for all users
* N3 - Support rich and varied biodiversity
* H1 - Healthy, comfortable and safe internal and external environment
* H2 - Well-related to external amenity and public spaces

* H3 - Attention to detail: storage, waste, servicing and utilities

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no relevant planning history at the application site, although there have been a number of applications of the wider retail park site.

CONSULTATIONS

Huntingdon Town Council - Recommends approval on the basis of Policy TT1 from the Neighbourhood Plan as it supports sustainable travel.

Cambridgeshire County Council Highway Authority - No objections to the proposed development.

Huntingdonshire District Council Arboricultural Officer - Recommends refusal due to a lack of Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Method Statements and Tree Survey.

Huntingdonshire District Council Environmental Health - No objections to the proposed development.

REPRESENTATIONS

No third party representations were received during the course of the application.

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 & Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)
o St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2029
o Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017)
o Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan (2018)
o Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan (2019)
o Bury Village Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
o Buckden Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
o Grafham and Ellington Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036 (2022)
o Great Gransden Neighbourhood Plan 2021 to 2036 (2023)
o The Stukeleys Neighbourhood Plan 2022 to 2036 (2023)
o Sawtry Village Neighbourhood Plan 2022 to 2036 (2023)
o Great Staughton Neighbourhood Plan 2021 to 2036 (2025)

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 issues to consider are:

o The Principle of Development
o Design and Visual Amenity
o Residential Amenity
o Highway Safety
o Flood Risk and Surface Water
o Biodiversity
o Trees

*The Principle of the Development

The application site is located within the built-up area of Huntingdon, which the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 identifies as a Spatial Planning Area. As such, Policy LP7 (Spatial Planning Areas) is considered relevant in this instance.

The proposal involves the installation of an electric vehicle charging hub and associated infrastructure at the Stukeley Retail Park, Huntingdon.

There is no direct reference to this form of development within Policy LP7 of the adopted Local Plan, however, Policy LP2 aims to achieve sustainable development and provides support for climate change adaptation whilst Policies LP16 and LP17 support sustainable travel. Given the proposal seeks approval for development to support the use of electric vehicles, it is considered to support sustainable modes of transport.

Policy TT1 of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2026 states that development proposals will be supported where they demonstrate how opportunities for the use of sustainable modes of transport are maximised.

As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in principle in accordance with Policy LP16 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan and Policy TT1 of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan subject to all other planning matters being addressed.

*Design, Visual Amenity and Impact Upon the Character of the Area

Policy LP11 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context. Policy LP12 states that new development will be expected to be well designed and that a proposal will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it contributes positively to the area's character and identity and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings and landscape. This is also reflected in the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

This application seeks approval for the installation of ultra-rapid charging hubs and associated infrastructure at an existing car park off Stukeley Road, Huntingdon. The proposal would involve the reconfiguration of the section of car park replacing 13 existing car parking spaces with six dedicated EV charging spaces (one of which will be a wider accessibility bay). These spaces will be served by 3 Alpatronic 400kWCharge points which will be protected by two X-Last bollards located on each side of the charger. The front two bollards on all charging hubs will be illuminated for visibility at night. The application also includes the installation of ancillary infrastructure,

including a 1,500kVA compact substation and a Schneider feeder pillar. The substation and ancillary equipment will be located to the north of the EV bays, replacing three existing bays, adjacent to a patch of existing landscaping.

The proposed substation would measure a total height of 2.4m and would be enclosed by a 2m high double palisade fence that would be extend 7.17m by 5.89m. The dominant character of the commercial development on the east side of Stukeley Road is that of buildings set back from the public highway with soft landscaping along the boundary to visually soften the streetscene.

The substation would be located in the north-west corner of the car park - set back from the public highway by approximately 8.5m with low-level hedging and sporadic mature trees situated between the two. The proposed substation would be located in a visually prominent corner and would not be well-related to existing built development on site. While the existing soft landscaping would provide some screening, the proposal is considered to result in visual harm to the streetscene. Furthermore, as discussed in the following sections of this report, the Local Planning Authority are not able to satisfy themselves that the proposal would not have any impact on existing mature trees that contribute positively to the softening of the landscape and are of visual value.

Due to the scale of the proposed substation and associated fencing, the proposal would be visually prominent in the streetscene and would result in visual harm to the dominant character and appearance of the site, the streetscene of Stukeley Road and the surrounding area.

It is worth noting that the proposed electric vehicle charging bays and charging hubs (which are classed as permitted development) are considered to be of an acceptable scale and design.

Overall, the proposed development would result in visual harm to the character and appearance of the streetscene and surrounding area and is therefore considered to be contrary to Policies LP11 and LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, Policies BE1 and BE2 of the adopted Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*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.

Given the scale and location of the proposed development with no nearby residential properties, the proposal is not considered to result in any detrimental impacts on residential amenity.

As such, the proposed is deemed to be in accordance with Policy LP14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Highway Safety

Policies LP16 and 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.

Policy TT1 of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2026 supports development proposals where they demonstrate how opportunities for the use of sustainable modes of transport are maximised.

The proposal would involve the reconfiguration of a section of car park replacing 13 existing car parking spaces with six dedicated EV charging spaces. The Local Planning Authority are satisfied

that the loss of existing car parking spaces would not result in any highway safety concerns given the number of spaces that would be retained. Furthermore, the proposal would improve public access to electric vehicle charging.

It is also worth noting that the proposal would not result in any changes to the existing access arrangements.

As such, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in terms of highway safety and therefore would be in accordance with Policies LP16 and LP17 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, Policy TT1 of the Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan and Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Flood Risk

The application site is located on land within Flood Zones 1, 2 and 3 in accordance with Environment Agency mapping and the Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024). The proposed substation would be located partially within Flood Zone 3 with the remaining development in Flood Zone 1.

Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that applications for some minor development and changes of use should not be subject to the sequential or exception tests but should still meet the requirements for site-specific flood risk assessments. Policy LP5 of the adopted Local Plan also states that on a site that is at risk of flooding from any form, a site-specific flood risk assessment should be provided.

The application has been accompanied by a Planning Statement, which includes a Flood Risk Management section. This states that safety measures will be put in place should a surface water flooding event occur including the substation and ancillary equipment being raised to the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) minimum requirement to account for any flooding within the area. These mitigation strategies and safety measures will ensure that there is no risk to public safety presented by the development and this can be conditioned on any approval.

The proposal does not represent a material change in use of the site and car parks/EV charging are considered to be a Less vulnerable use within Annex 3: Flood risk vulnerability classification of the NPPF. Accordingly the associated flood risk is considered to be acceptable in this instance and the proposal would be in accordance with Policies LP5 and LP15 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*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.

The proposal would not result in the loss of any habitat or impact on any notable habitats due to the scale and nature of the proposal as well as the urban location within an existing car park. Furthermore, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that the proposed development would fall within the de minimis threshold exempt from the requirements of Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain.

As such, the proposal is broadly 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

Policy LP31 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 states 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. Loss, threat or damage to any tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of visual, heritage or nature conservation value will only be acceptable where it is addressed firstly by seeking to avoid the impact, then to minimise the impact and finally where appropriate to including mitigation measures; or there are sound arboricultural reasons to support the proposal.

The application site is not located within a Conservation Area nor are there any Tree Preservation Orders in place. However, there are a number of high value trees along the south-west boundary of the site that contribute significantly to the arboricultural landscape. The proposed development would be in close proximity to these trees, however, the application has not been accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Method Statement or a Tree Survey.

Huntingdonshire Arboricultural Officer has been consulted on the proposal and states that the proposal could be located anywhere within the retail park, but is likely to significantly impact several of the mature trees at the front of the site. Installing extensive equipment underneath the mature crowns of trees creates issues of management that is likely to result in the degradation of the trees and could lead to pressure for removal. The trees are important for screening, softening of the landscape, rainfall interception, shading and ecology and would be a significant loss to the locale should they decline due to the proposed works. An impact assessment is therefore required, and the design, location and construction method amended where necessary to avoid the Root Protections Areas of each tree.

The applicant has been asked to provide this information but has not done so.

As such, the Local Planning Authority are currently not able to satisfy themselves that the proposal would not result in unjustifiable harm to the existing, mature trees or that the development would not result in the loss of any trees of value. Accordingly, the proposed development would be contrary to Policy LP31 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and the National Planning Policy Framework in this regard.

*Conclusion

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Whilst it is recognised that the proposal would provide additional rapid charging facilities, which are important to meeting the future needs of the transport network within Huntingdon and encouraging sustainable travel modes, it is considered that the location proposed, as well as the scale of the proposed substation, would result in visual harm to the character and appearance of the streetscene and surrounding area. Furthermore, due to the lack of sufficient information, the Local Planning Authority are not able to demonstrate that the proposal would be acceptable in relation to impact on existing mature trees.

Accordingly, on balance, the proposal is considered to be contrary to Policies LP11, LP12 and LP31 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036, Policies BE1 and BE2 of the adopted Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework in this regard.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
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