

PLANNING REF : 211081
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Arborfield Green Community Centre
: Arborfield, Reading
: RG2 9ND
SUBMITTED BY : Barkham Parish Council
DATE SUBMITTED : 25/08/2021

COMMENTS:

Barkham Parish Council (BPC) very much appreciates that many of the issues raised in its original response to PA 2011081 have been addressed especially:

- 1.Rerouting of the new Greenway to allow a safer crossing on Barkham Ride and away from the heritage assets
- 2.Removal of the heavier screening along BR11, behind the heritage assets and around Windmill Farm Cottage
- 3.Improved access to the site.

These were discussed further at a useful meeting with Mr David Smith on Thu 19 Aug 2021 where several points were clarified and these are summarised in the Appendix.

BPC also notes that provision has been made to assist the farmer of High Barn Farm but, as we do not know the details or his longterm intentions, it would be inappropriate to comment further here. However, BPC urges Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) to continue to seek ways in which the farmer can be supported to maintain his livelihood.

BPC has deep reservations about the management of construction traffic should the solar farm go ahead. The existing congestion on roads approaching the solar farm site will be significantly aggravated during the construction period and more effort is required to manage this.

BPC now understands that managing this additional traffic will be the responsibility of the lead contractor, when appointed, and WBC Highways. BPC requests that these teams take full account of the following comments:

BACKGROUND

Barkham Ride and Barkham Street are narrow roads where buses and family vehicles can only just pass in places. There are tight turns at the Bull roundabout and at the junction of Barkham Street, Barkham Ride and Commonfield Lane. During peak hours traffic builds up in all directions leading to the Bull roundabout and especially down Barkham Street.

SITUATIONS TO AVOID

INCLUDE:

- 1.Delivery vehicles parked on Barkham Ride and Barkham Street awaiting access to site
- 2.Deliveries during peak times
- 3.Delivery vehicles approaching from different directions
- 4.Congestion between solar farm delivery vehicles and other vehicles such as buses.

SOLUTIONS TO AVOID THE ABOVE SITUATIONS INCLUDE:

- 1.Strict and contractual control over delivery times
- 2.Allocation of time slots to avoid queueing
- 3.Provision of a holding area so vehicles can be called in when access is clear
- 4.Oneway system for delivery vehicles by approaching the site from the direction of Finchampstead and departing towards Barkham Street or viceversa
- 5.Minimising size of delivery vehicles by striking a balance between size of vehicles and frequency of deliveries.
- 6.Coordinating delivery times with bus timetables.

Attitudes within the Parish of Barkham continue to be mixed regarding the value and need for the solar farm and the impact it will have on the parish. However, there has been overall general support and BPC asks that the progress that has been made to address residents practical concerns to date continues during the final stages of the debate with a meaningful and obvious attempt to mitigate the problems that the construction traffic will cause.

APPENDIX

Main points clarified during meeting between BPC and Mr D. Smith of WBC on Thu 19 Aug 2021.

- 1.There will be a footpath link from the new Greenway to join BR11. The surface type has yet to be specified it will not be to a full Greenway specification and will be compatible with that of BR11 in its current state. No changes will be made to BR11.
- 2.The link requested by the farmer from High Barn farm to Rooks Nest Farm will follow the existing gated pathway that tracks across the field above the California Way and then turns north through the solar farm to Rooks Nest Farm. This is not a PROW and is for the sole use of the farmer.
- 3.The surface of the section of FP10(A) that runs from the new proposed route of the Greenway to Rooks Nest Wood will be upgraded but not to a full Greenway specification.
- 4.It is still hoped that the crossing on Barkham Ride will be of a Pegasus type but there are technical issues relating to signalling and sightlines. The intention is to achieve the best signalised crossing possible.
- 5.The transformer units will be painted in neutral countryside colours.
- 6.The lead contractor, when appointed, will be responsible for conducting a survey of the site which will include reviewing drainage. Protecting the seasonal fill of the moat will be a requirement.
- 7.The geophysical survey has been completed for four fields and the results forwarded to Historic England and Berkshire Archaeology for analysis. The remaining fields will be completed once the crops have been harvested.

8. Should it be necessary to preserve archaeology in the ground, this will be achieved by mounting the PV cells on concrete pads as opposed to the usual piled foundations. This will not add to the height of the cells.

9 . It has been noted that responses from Historic England and Berkshire Archaeology have not yet been published on the planning webpage. BPC understands these are expected to be uploaded before determination.

10. It was explained that the lead contractor would complete the assessment of the depth of the water table in the area to the east of St James Church to determine if this area of land is suitable for extending the churchyard. Whether it could be used for other church related activities if not suitable for burials would be reviewed further.

11. The planned connection of the solar farm to the substation near the Leathern Bottel PH will be completed in phases and controlled through normal traffic management processes.

12. The application is due to be considered by the WBC planning committee on 08 Sep 2021 and, if approved, construction will begin next year.

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