

**PLANNING  
COMMITTEE**

12<sup>th</sup> September 2024

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**Planning Application 24/00387/FUL**

**Proposed underground cable to connect Feckenham Greener Grid Park (approved under 21/00195/FUL) to Feckenham Substation**

**Land South Of, Astwood Lane, Feckenham, Redditch, Worcestershire, B96 6HP**

**Applicant: Statkraft UK Ltd**  
**Ward: Astwood Bank And Feckenham Ward**

**(see additional papers for site plan)**

The case officer of this application is Mr Paul Lester, Planning Officer (DM), who can be contacted on Tel: 01527 881323 Email: paul.lester@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk for more information.

**Background**

Planning permission 21/00195/FUL was granted on 21st January 2022 (following approval at Redditch Planning Committee) for the construction and operation of Greener Grid Park (GGP) comprising energy storage and grid balancing equipment, along with associated infrastructure, landscaping and access at land south of Astwood Lane, immediately east of the substation. Commencement of development has not taken place.

The development is designed to support the flexible operation of the National Grid and decarbonisation of electricity supply. The development will store, import, and export electricity but will not generate any additional electricity nor have any direct on-site emissions of CO<sup>2</sup> during normal operations.

Details of the approved GGP layout are included in the committee presentation.

**Site Description**

The site comprises 0.98ha of land to the south of Astwood Lane. The approved Greener Grid Park (GGP) is located on at land south of Astwood Lane, immediately east of the Feckenham National Grid Substation. The proposed cable route runs from the substation and connects into the high voltage yard of the approved GGP, located on the western portion of the GGP.

The surrounding area is primarily agricultural, with cultivated fields and grazing land to the north, south and east of the site. The metal pylons and overhead cables associated with the Substation, which are approximately 50m in height, extend into the surrounding area.

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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The village of Feckenham is approximately 1 km to the west of the site. The nearest residential properties are Salt Way Farm and Mutton Hall, which lie approximately 350 m to the south and 500 m to the northeast.

While the site is in near Feckenham, it is not in the Feckenham Parish administrative area.

### **Proposal Description**

The proposed development comprises of an underground cable which would connect the GGP into the substation. A 10-metre buffer area has been included either side of the indicative cable route shown on Drawing 15777-026, with the final location of the cable route to fall within this buffer area following further design work and assessment of ground conditions prior to construction start.

Cross sectional drawings of the indicative cable route have been provided within Drawing 15777-023, showing the depths to be adopted for the construction of the Proposed Development at different locations throughout the site.

Vehicular access to the site would be obtained via the proposed access for the GGP, utilising this site access from the Astwood Lane. It is therefore proposed this access will be constructed prior to the construction of the proposed development.

The construction phase of the proposed development would last for approximately 5-months.

### **Relevant Policies:**

#### **Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4**

Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Policy 2: Settlement Hierarchy

Policy 5: Effective and Efficient use of Land

Policy 8: Green Belt

Policy 11: Green Infrastructure

Policy 15: Climate Change

Policy 16: Natural Environment

Policy 17: Flood Risk Management

Policy 18: Sustainable Water Management

Policy 19: Sustainable Travel and Accessibility

Policy 20: Transport Requirements for New Development

Policy 22: Road Hierarchy

Policy 36: Historic Environment

Policy 39: Built Environment

Policy 40: High Quality Design and Safer Communities

# **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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## **Others**

NPPF National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

NPPG National Planning Practice Guidance

Redditch High Quality Design SPD

Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (January 2024)

National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure (Revised January 2024)

## **Relevant Planning History**

21/00195/FUL	Construction of a Greener Grid Park comprising energy storage and grid balancing equipment, along with associated infrastructure, landscaping and access.	Approved	21.01.2022
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## **Consultations**

### **Hereford & Worcester Fire And Rescue**

No comments received to date, a further update regarding the Hereford & Worcester Fire And Rescue consultee response will be provided as part of a written update.

### **Arboricultural Officer**

No objection subject to conditions

- Tree Fencing
- Root Protection Areas

### **Western Power Distribution**

No Comments Received To Date

### **Worcestershire Archive And Archaeological Service**

No objection subject to conditions relating to:

- The submission of a programme of archaeological work
- Written scheme of investigation

### **North Worcestershire Water Management**

No objection

### **WRS - Contaminated Land**

WRS have reviewed this application we have no adverse comments to make.

### **Natural England**

No objection

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation sites or landscapes.

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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### **Ecology (Thompson Environmental Consultants – Redditch BC appointed ecology consultant)**

No objection

They confirm that Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is in scope for this development and approves the BNG documents submitted with the application. The development should comply with Tetra Tech Great Crested Newt Survey Report and Tetra Tech Ecological Appraisal.

### **Public Consultation Response**

101 neighbour letters sent 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024 (expired 19<sup>th</sup> May 2024)

3 neighbours have objected, their objections can be summarised as follows:

- Object to the Greener Grid Park
- Impact on Green Belt
- Impact on ecology/wildlife
- Fire Safety
- Traffic impact during construction phase

### **Feckenham Parish Council (Neighbouring Parish)**

Members are aware that the complete objection can be viewed on public access by using this link <https://publicaccess.bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk/online-applications/> but the Parish Council summary is listed below:

1. The actual need for the Statkraft main site is now highly questionable, and by 2023 Fire Safety standards, the existing specification is unsafe. We also highlight the significant adverse environmental impact caused by the thousands of tons of waste of Lithium Batteries over the facility's lifetime, which has not been addressed. The UK now has a huge excess of BESS developers who have agreed connections to the National Grid, and Statkraft's 49.9MW scheme could easily be located elsewhere at a location which did not harm the Green Belt or endanger the aspiration to achieve Net-Zero by 2050.
2. This relatively small cable installation is not a "Stand Alone Application". It needs to be considered in the known context of the other energy projects being proposed locally: Roundhill 50MW Solar/BESS and its two cable applications, Immersa 200MW BESS and its cable, and Innove 400MW BESS and its cable. We think the waste implications in (1) and the cumulative impact of ALL these schemes must be considered together and not as isolated projects. We therefore ask the Planning Officer to consider asking Statkraft to provide a full EIA assessment to encompass ALL its schemes.
3. The environmental impact and Great Crested Newt mitigation needs should be considered in the context of ALL the local energy schemes together, not just this small

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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cable application in isolation. The environmental harm of developing all these sites is likely to be far greater than the effects the applicant describes in this small cable scheme, particularly if future construction happens simultaneously or sequentially over a long period of time. We request Natural England and the Council's ecologist review these issues independently.

4. The forecasted construction times for this cable scheme appear to be wildly inconsistent with the quoted figures in the three other live planning applications. We ask the Highways Officer to review all these figures together and advise accordingly.
5. If planning consent is granted, we ask for conditions to be added to safeguard restitution and repair of public highways at Statkraft's expense and, if possible, a condition to ensure all contractors and projects work together to minimise transport and highway disruption i.e. that a suitable Construction Management Plan be agreed upon.

### **Assessment of Proposal**

#### **Need for the Development**

The proposed development comprises of an indicative cable route and 10-metre construction zone either side of the indicative cable route. The Proposed Development therefore forms part of the GGP, required to ensure the connectivity of the GGP with the Substation, therefore ensuring the GGP can operate. The wider need for the GGP was established in the previous application and approved through Planning Permission reference 21/00195/FUL, the committee report concluded that *“the supporting information and consultation responses indicate that subject to appropriate mitigation and planning conditions, the development should not give rise to unacceptable green belt, amenity, landscape, highway or environmental impacts. The matters raised in objection to the application have been considered in preparing this report and where appropriate are addressed by the proposed planning conditions. The proposed conditions would ensure that the development does not give rise to unacceptable impacts on the amenity of those that live in the area”*.

#### **Principle of Development**

The application site lies outside of any defined settlement. Under the locational strategy for the Borough, set out in Policy 2 Settlement Hierarchy, development is in the first instance directed to the existing urban areas and defined rural settlements. It would need to be demonstrated that a rural location was essential for the development, or the proposal would conflict with the locational strategy. Furthermore, the site is in the Green Belt where development is strictly controlled. It is these matters which determine whether the principle of development in this location and for the proposed purpose is acceptable.

# **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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## **Green Belt**

The proposal seeks to install an electricity grid connection between the approved Green Grid Park and Feckenham substation comprising the installation of underground cable.

The purpose of the Greener Grid facility is to support the flexible operation of the National Grid and decarbonisation of electricity supply. The development will store, import, and export electricity.

Central Government has published a number of reports and findings which support the need for such energy infrastructure. The application is for an essential element to the approved development.

The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Paragraph 155 of the NPPF states certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These include:

### b) engineering operations

The proposal would be located entirely underground. This is therefore considered an engineering operation which would preserve openness and would not conflict with the purposes of including land within Green Belt. The electricity grid connection does not amount to inappropriate development as it falls within the above exception and it is therefore considered acceptable in principle within the Green Belt location.

The principle of the development is considered acceptable.

## **Landscape and Arboricultural Impact**

When in operation the connection would not be visible, this in view of the cable being underground. Surface infrastructure would be very limited (inspection covers, etc.). It follows that there would be no long term landscape impacts associated with the proposal.

During the construction stage there would be equipment associated with the works visible in the landscape. However, as the works would be temporary, undertaken by a contractor, and managed by a robust Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), this impact would not amount to a sustainable reason for refusing planning permission.

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Report prepared by Advanced Arboriculture Ltd. The Arboricultural Report has assumed the installation method for the Proposed Development would include open trenching, with an indicative development area requiring 10 m wayleave either side of the location of the cable. The Arboricultural Report therefore concludes the proposed works would allow the retention of all key trees

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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and hedgerow that were surveyed, resulting in a negligible risk of any harm as a result of works. This has been reviewed by the tree officer, who has confirmed that they have no objection to a small removal of hedgerow and agrees with the report that proposed cable route will cause minimal disturbance to the existing trees and shrubs on the site. Overall, they have no objection subject to tree protection conditions.

### **Ecology Impact**

Section 15 of the NPPF states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. As well as promoting the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species.

In line with Policy 16, appropriate mitigation measures must be implemented to ensure protection of the natural environment, with benefits from development to biodiversity captured.

The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by Tetra Tech. It identifies that the proposed development would have negligible impacts on statutory designated sites due to the intervening distance of these receptors from the Site, both during the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. The PEA concluded that due to the electrical towers within the Substation and potential for Schedule 1 bird species, it is recommended works commence out with the nesting season (March – June) for these species. Additionally, further pre-commencement checks will be required using precautionary working measures for species where suitable habitat is present. Assuming these measures can be adopted, it is anticipated the design of the proposed development would remain compliant with current local and national biodiversity planning policy. Implementation of these mitigation measures will ensure that there are no adverse ecological impacts from the proposed development.

A Great Crested Newt (GCN) Survey Report has been submitted. A total of two waterbodies were assessed for their potential to support the European protected species great crested newt. The site was surveyed this has confirmed that GCN are present off site but within 500 m of the site boundary in Waterbody 2. The population is considered to be a small based on a peak count of 10 individuals. The desk study showed records of GCN within this waterbody, as well as records within 2km to the south west and within 500 m to the south east. Further assessment of site and future surveys are required prior to application to Natural England for a European protected species (EPS) licence for GCN.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has now become mandatory for all relevant applications since the 2nd April 2024. This application was submitted after this date and therefore subject to the mandatory BNG requirements.

A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been submitted. Habitats are assigned a value based on their intrinsic biodiversity value or 'distinctiveness', which is predefined for each

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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habitat within the metric. This value is then multiplied based on the size, condition and geographical location of the habitat in order to ascertain its absolute value in 'biodiversity units'. Separate calculations are used within the metric for area, based habitats, linear habitats (such as hedgerows) and watercourses (including ditches and streams). These units are non-transferable and must therefore be considered individually for each project or development. Collectively, they are referred to as 'biodiversity units'. In terms of Biodiversity Net Gain, the proposal would result in an overall biodiversity net gain in habitats and hedgerows over and above the 10% legislative requirement (net gain of approximately 0.33 habitat units (+11.09%) and a net gain of approximately 0.19 hedgerow units (+14.18%)).

The views of the Councils appointed Ecological Consultant and no objection from Natural England are noted and the reports and accompanying plans are considered well-presented and give a clear explanation of likely impacts on ecological features and of proposed mitigation measures.

### **Flooding and Drainage**

The application is accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy prepared by Motion. This has been reviewed by North Worcestershire Water Management, who conclude the following. The proposed development site is situated in the catchment of the Doe Bank Brook. The site falls within flood zone 1 and it is not considered that there is any significant fluvial flood risk to the site. The EA's flood mapping indicates that there is some risk of surface water flooding across the site, but this is mostly low risk. NWWM have no objection to the development and do not consider that a drainage condition is necessary in this case.

### **Archaeological**

Worcestershire Archive and Archaeological Service they note that a conditional programme of archaeological investigation was recommended and conditioned in relation to the Greener Grid Energy Park (21/00195/FUL) due to the potential for below ground archaeological features and deposits, as indicated by the submitted Desk Based Assessment.

Worcestershire Archive and Archaeological Service recommend, given the potential for below ground archaeological remains, that the archaeological investigation is extended to the area of the cable route, in the pasture field, to the south of the area of the proposed Greener Grid Park. Both areas could be evaluated and reported on concurrently, essentially treated as a single site. There would be no requirement to archaeologically investigate the length of the cable route in the area of Feckenham Substation.

### **Other Matters**

The objection comments received by Feckenham Parish Council are noted. This follows their objection to the GGP. Firstly, as outlined above, the GGP already has planning



## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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permission, approved by the planning committee under planning reference 21/00195/FUL. It is not the purpose of this application to reassess the merits of that proposal, nor is it to assess the merits of the other planning application currently being considered by Redditch Borough Council (Construction of a battery energy storage compound, fencing, CCTV, access and associated infrastructure at Land At Astwood Lane, Feckenham 23/00417/FUL) or a scheme that has not been submitted to the Council at this time.

The ecology information submitted to support this application has been fully assessed and this is outlined in the Ecology Impact section of the report. This is proportionate to the scale of the development proposed and is acceptable subject to conditions. Any future planning application on an adjacent site will have to similarly consider all ecological matters as well as any cumulative impact with proposals that have planning permission.

The proposed development will use the approved access under the GGP. That cannot be started until the new access has been provided and a condition survey of the highways to be used by construction traffic has been carried out in association with the Highways Authority. For completeness, the conditions applied to the GGP permission have been included in the proposed conditions outlined below. The construction phase of the proposed development would last for approximately 5-months. Due to the nature of the works associated with the proposed development, traffic volumes are not anticipated to increase significantly from that already proposed as part of the GGP. NPPF paragraph 115 sets out that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. Subject to the mitigation measures already agreed and conditioned for the GGP and replicated for this application any disruption during construction would be temporary and relative to existing levels of traffic, such effects cannot reasonably be described as severe.

Inevitably, and as with any construction operation, there may be some inconvenience and potentially some disturbance to residents in the locality. However, such inconvenience or disturbance would be short-lived and for the duration of the works only, and so it would not amount to a sustainable reason for refusing planning permission. A condition is recommended requiring the works to be carried out in accordance with a Construction Environmental Management Plan. When operational, the development would not give rise to any amenity issues.

### **Conclusion**

The proposed development would facilitate the connection of the consented Green Grid Park to the National Grid. The Applicant has taken measures to ensure that the impact of the cabling route would be minimised along its route. The general principle of development is considered to be acceptable. All material planning considerations have been assessed against the adopted Development Plan and national guidance and has not identified any harm that would warrant refusal of the application and as a result the application is recommended for approval, subject to the conditions set out below.

# **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That having regard to the development plan and to all other material considerations, planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:**

### **Conditions:**

- 1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of the grant of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of Section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans, drawings and documents:

15777-020 FECKENHAM GREENER GRID PARK CABLE ROUTE SITE LOCATION  
PLAN 1-2500 R2

15777-021 FECKENHAM GREENER GRID PARK CABLE ROUTE BLOCK PLAN 1-500  
R1

15777-023 FECKENHAM GREENER GRID PARK CABLE ROUTE CABLE CROSS  
SECTION 1-25 R1

15777-025 FECKENHAM GREENER GRID PARK CABLE ROUTE PROPOSED SITE  
PLAN R2

Reason: To provide certainty to the extent of the development hereby approved in the interests of proper planning

- 3) No development shall take place until a programme of archaeological work including a Written Scheme of Investigation, has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. The scheme shall include an assessment of significance and research questions; and:
  - a) The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording.
  - b) The programme for post investigation assessment.
  - c) Provision to be made for analysis of the site investigation and recording.
  - d) Provision to be made for publication and dissemination of the analysis and records of the site investigation
  - e) Provision to be made for archive deposition of the analysis and records of the site investigation
  - f) Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the Written Scheme of Investigation.

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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Reason: In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 211 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 4) The development shall not be occupied until the site investigation and post investigation assessment has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation approved under condition (4) and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition has been secured.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 211 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5) Prior to the commencement of any works on site including any site clearance, demolition, excavations or import of machinery or materials, the trees or hedgerows which are shown as retained on the approved plans both on or adjacent to the application site or any within a distance of influence of any ground or development work on any adjoining land shall be protected with fencing around the root protection areas. This fencing shall be constructed in accordance with the guidance in the British Standard BS5837:2012 and shall remain as erected until the development has been completed.

Reason: In order to protect the trees which form an important part of the amenity of the site.

- 6) All retained trees and their Root Protection Areas must be protected during clearance and construction phase in accordance with BS5837:2012, using suitable protective fencing and/or ground protection as appropriate. No storage of plant/materials within the Root Protection Areas of any retained trees. This fencing and /or ground protection shall be constructed in accordance with the guidance in the British Standard BS5837:2012 and shall remain as erected until the development has been completed.

Reason: In order to protect the trees which form an important part of the amenity of the site.

- 7) The development shall be completed in strict accordance with the recommendations for further survey and mitigation works outlined in Section 4 of the Tetra Tech Great Crested Newt Survey Report and Section 4 of the Tetra Tech Ecological Appraisal (unless varied by a European Protected Species (EPS) licence issued by Natural England). All the recommendations shall be implemented in full according to the timescales laid out in the recommendations, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and thereafter permanently maintained for the stated purposes of biodiversity conservation.

Reason: To enhance biodiversity in accordance with Borough of Redditch Local Plan Policy 16, paragraphs 180, 185 and 186 of the National Planning Policy

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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Framework and in order for the Council to comply with Part 3 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

- 8) No development shall commence until a Biodiversity Management and Monitoring Plan to ensure that there is a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity within a 30 year period as a result of the development has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Biodiversity Management and Monitoring Plan shall include 30 year objectives, management responsibilities, maintenance schedules and a methodology to ensure the submission of monitoring reports. Monitoring reports will be submitted to the Council during years 2, 5, 7, 10, 20 and 30 from commencement of development unless otherwise stated in the Biodiversity Management and Monitoring Plan, demonstrating how the BNG is progressing towards achieving its objectives, evidence of arrangements and any rectifying measures needed.

Reason: In the interests of ensuring measurable net gains to biodiversity and in accordance with Borough of Redditch Local Plan Policy 16, the National Planning Policy Framework and The Environment Act 2021.

- 9) The landscaping scheme shall be undertaken in strict accordance with the Post Development Plan: Cable by Tetra Tech and shall be undertaken in the first planting season following the completion of the construction works for the underground cable. Any trees or plants which within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the local planning authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To safeguard the visual amenities of the area and to increase the biodiversity of the site, to mitigate any impact from the development.

- 10) The development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until the access, parking and turning facilities have been provided as shown on drawing 3419-DR-P-0004 Rev 1 and 3419-DR-P-0001 Rev 16.

Reason: To ensure conformity with submitted details.

- 11) The development hereby approved shall not commence until the visibility splays shown on drawing 3419-DR-P-0004 Rev 1 have been provided. The splays shall at all times be maintained free of level obstruction exceeding a height of 0.6m above adjacent carriageway.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety.

- 12) The development hereby approved shall not commence until a Construction Environmental Management Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include but not be limited to the following:

- a. Measures to ensure that vehicles leaving the site do not deposit mud or other detritus on the public highway.
- b. Details of site operative parking areas, material storage areas and the location of site operatives facilities (offices, toilets etc).
- c. The hours that delivery vehicles will be permitted to arrive and depart, and arrangements for unloading and manoeuvring.
- d. Details of any temporary construction accesses and their reinstatement.
- e. A highway condition survey, timescale for re-inspections, and details of any reinstatement.
- f. Details of the proposed routes for the Abnormal Loads and HGV's.
- g. Details of any temporary improvements to the highway.

The measures set out in the approved Plan shall be carried out and complied with in full during the construction of the development hereby approved. Site operatives' parking, material storage and the positioning of operatives' facilities shall only take place on the site in locations approved by in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure the provision of adequate on-site facilities and in the interests of highway safety and public amenity.

- 13) The development hereby approved shall not commence until a condition survey of the highways to be used by construction traffic has been carried out in association with the Highways Authority. The methodology of the survey shall be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and Highways Authority and shall assess the existing state of the highway.

No building or use hereby permitted shall be occupied or the use commenced until a second condition survey has been submitted for the written approval of the Local Planning Authority, which shall identify defects attributable to the traffic ensuing from the development. Any necessary remedial works shall be completed at the developer's expense in accordance with a scheme to be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any damage to the adopted highway sustained throughout the development process can be identified and subsequently remedied at the expense of the developer.

# PLANNING COMMITTEE

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## **Procedural matters**

This application is being reported to the Planning Committee because following discussions with the Assistant Director for Planning and Leisure Services the Planning Officer considers that the application should be considered by Committee.