

APPLICATION NO	PA/2015/1165
APPLICANT	JFD Hargreaves Ltd
DEVELOPMENT	Planning permission for installation of ground-mounted PV (solar) panels
LOCATION	Frogmore Farm, Thornton Road, Thornton Curtis
PARISH	THORNTON CURTIS
WARD	Ferry
CASE OFFICER	Ann Scott
SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION	Grant permission subject to conditions
REASONS FOR REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE	Call in at the discretion of the Head of Development Management

POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): The NPPF encourages sustainable development. Section 10 requires decision-makers to consider climate change, flooding and coastal change. Section 11 requires decision-makers to consider conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Planning Practice Guidance (2014) and Written Ministerial Statement (18 June 2015) apply.

North Lincolnshire Local Plan: Policies DS1 (General Requirements), DS21 (Renewable Energy), DS11 (Polluting Activities), DS13 (Groundwater Protection and Land Drainage), DS14 (Surface Water Drainage), DS16 (Flood Risk), RD2 (Development in the Open Countryside), RD7 (Agriculture, Forestry and Farm Diversification), T1 (Location of Development), T2 (Access to Development), LC5 (Species Protection), LC7 (Landscape Protection), LC12 (Protection of Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows) and HE9 (Archaeological Evaluation).

North Lincolnshire Core Strategy: Policies CS1 (Spatial Strategy for North Lincolnshire), CS2 (Delivering More Sustainable Development), CS3 (Development Limits), CS5 (Delivering Quality Design in North Lincolnshire), CS6 (Historic Environment), CS17 (Biodiversity) and CS18 (Sustainable Resource Use and Climate Change).

Supplementary Planning Document: Planning for Renewable Energy Development states that solar farms are becoming increasingly commonplace in the UK, particularly in southern and central England. This document sets out the planning considerations in respect of environmental impacts, cumulative impacts and policy considerations.

Draft SPG – Planning for Photovoltaic Development

CONSULTATIONS

Environmental Health: No objections:

Highways: No objections but suggest a condition requiring a traffic management plan in relation to construction and delivery vehicles to be submitted and agreed.

NATS: The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with their safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL") has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.

Robin Hood Airport: No objections.

Environment Agency: No comments.

Historic Environment Record: No objections.

Ecology: No objections but suggest a condition in relation to securing the implementation of the submitted biodiversity plan.

PARISH COUNCIL

No comments.

PUBLICITY

Neighbouring properties have been notified.

ASSESSMENT

The application proposes the installation of 414 ground-mounted PV solar panels on approximately 0.1 hectares of land immediately adjacent to Frogmore Farm, Thornton Curtis. The PV solar panels will generate 107.64kWp and will be located on land immediately to the east of the farm buildings, in an existing field which is presently grade 2 agricultural land. The panels will be mounted and arranged in nine 23.46 metre east-west rows. The mounting system will allow the panels to be angled at 30 degrees facing south-south-east to allow the array to maximise the capture of solar radiation. The panels will rise to a maximum height of 1.7 metres and a minimum of 0.6 metres above ground. The mounting system piles will extend to a maximum depth of 1.8 metres. A trenched cable will link the panels to the farm and will provide the grid connection.

The proposed solar PV panels will provide power to the grain-drying operation of the farm and will provide a green source of energy. Any excess power produced will be exported to the grid. The site will be well screened by existing vegetation and hedgerows which will provide screening to the west. Similarly the site is screened to the north, east and south by existing hedgerows and topography, which will reduce the visual impact from distant views. The development site lies adjacent to the buildings which comprise Frogmore Farm, The farm is well screened by existing vegetation which in turn will provide screening to the west for the proposed PV panels.

The solar panels are coated with a non-reflective coating. This will give the PV cells a blue appearance and the mounting system and frame will have a dull metallic appearance.

Access to the site will be via the existing farm access onto the A1077, through Frogmore Farm, and the existing field access.

Highways

The construction of the solar farm will last approximately two weeks or 10 working days. The applicants have submitted a construction phase traffic management plan. Highways have no objections to the proposal but suggest that a more detailed traffic management plan should be submitted by way of a planning condition in order to ensure that the construction phase is not detrimental to highway safety.

Other issues

The site is situated on grade 2 agricultural land and this is normally the type of land which should be reserved for agricultural use only. However this proposal is directly linked to the agricultural use of the farm in order to meet the farm's energy needs, providing green electricity to use for the drying of grain and the general needs of the farm, and is therefore a form of rural diversification which is considered an appropriate use in the open countryside. The proposal is for the supply of the existing farm and is therefore considered to be appropriate in this instance. Section 10 of the NPPF relates to the consideration of development in relation to climate change which is a key factor in the consideration of sustainable development.

The council has drawn up a draft document in relation to development involving photo voltaic solar panels. This document broadly follows the aims and objectives of the NPPF but does state that any proposal for a solar PV array which involves the use of agricultural land, in line with the NPPF and the ministerial statement (March 2015), should avoid the best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) with lower quality land (Grades 3b, 4 or 5) being used. Figure 1 of the document sets out the steps that should be undertaken by a developer when considering locating a large-scale solar photovoltaic development on agricultural land. Developers will be required to demonstrate that there is a need for the solar PV array to be located on agricultural land and that land being used is of poorer quality. Furthermore, proposals should allow for complementary use of the land around the solar PV array for agricultural purposes, for example grazing, or biodiversity enhancement/habitat creation.

Developers should also specify an end date for the solar PV array in order to demonstrate its temporary nature. The contents of the draft document have been noted but it is considered that in this instance, as the proposal is directly related to the use of the energy generation for the farm, its relocation on a lower grade of agricultural land is not possible. Due to the limited nature of the proposal its impact is considered to be minimal. The benefit of the provision of green energy on a limited amount of agricultural land outweighs the harm caused by the loss of a relatively small area of higher grade agricultural land. In addition the surrounding land can still be used for agricultural use without detriment to the solar PV panels.

The proposal is not considered to adversely affect any archaeological or heritage assets and there are no objections to the proposal from NATs or Robin Hood Airport. The parish council does not object to the application, nor does the Environmental Protection team.

Ecology

The council's ecologist considers a condition should be imposed in order to secure the implementation of the submitted biodiversity plan. This plan states that the proposal will result in approximately 0.1 hectares of land being removed from intensive agricultural production for the duration of its use for a PV solar installation in connection with the farm, reducing the volume of fertiliser and pesticide applied to the land. The applicant proposes sowing the areas beneath the panels with a species rich grass mix to include a mix of nectar and pollen-rich grasses which will increase plant and invertebrate biodiversity. The areas around the pv panels will create a part shaded/part unshaded environment which will be beneficial to a range of invertebrates as a habitat and food source. No hedgerows or trees will be disturbed as a result of the development and, before construction, a walk-over of the site will be carried out to ensure that there are no ground-nesting birds affected by the development. The applicant has indicated that the site is situated within a Natural England SSSI impact zone, but the development is for a solar scheme which is less than 5 hectares.

Conclusions

The proposed development will provide the applicant's farming enterprise with a source of renewable energy to match existing on-site demand; in particular the peak output will match the peak on-site requirement for energy which is more sustainable than importing energy from the national grid as at present. The proposal will reduce the carbon footprint of the farming enterprise which primarily produces root crops, cereals and oil seeds and needs energy to process the products for market. The impact of the development is acceptable and in accordance with the relevant national and local planning policies and guidance. The application is in accord with the policies set out above in the North Lincolnshire Core Strategy and the North Lincolnshire Local Plan, together with any supplementary planning guidance. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION Grant permission subject to the following conditions:

1.

The development must be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason

To comply with section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2.

If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to be operational for a continuous period of 12 months, it shall be dismantled and removed from the site, the site shall be restored in accordance with details to be submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority no later than 2 months from the said period of 12 months.

Reason

To prevent the retention of development that is not being used for its intended purpose, in the interests of visual amenity, in accordance with policies RD2 and DS1 of the North Lincolnshire Local Plan.

3.

The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Q50729-001-03 Rev 03, site location plan, elevations, Drawing index B, Block Plan, received on 14 September 2015.

Reason

For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

4.

No development shall take place until a construction phase traffic management plan showing details of all associated traffic movements, including delivery vehicles and staff/construction movements, any abnormal load movements, contractor parking and welfare facilities, storage of materials and traffic management requirements on the adjacent highway, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Once approved the plan shall be implemented, reviewed and updated as necessary throughout the construction period.

Reason

In the interests of highway safety and to comply with policies T2 and T19 of the North Lincolnshire Local Plan.

5.

Prior to the operation of the installed solar panels, the applicant or their successor in title shall submit a biodiversity management plan to be agreed in writing with the local planning authority. The plan shall include:

- (i) details of measures to avoid harm to nesting birds during construction and ongoing management;
- (ii) details of pollen and nectar-rich habitats to be created to include patches of bare ground and sheep's fescue grass (*Festuca ovina*);
- (iii) proposed timings for the above works.

Reason

To protect and enhance features of recognised nature conservation importance in accordance with policy CS17 of the North Lincolnshire Core Strategy.

6.

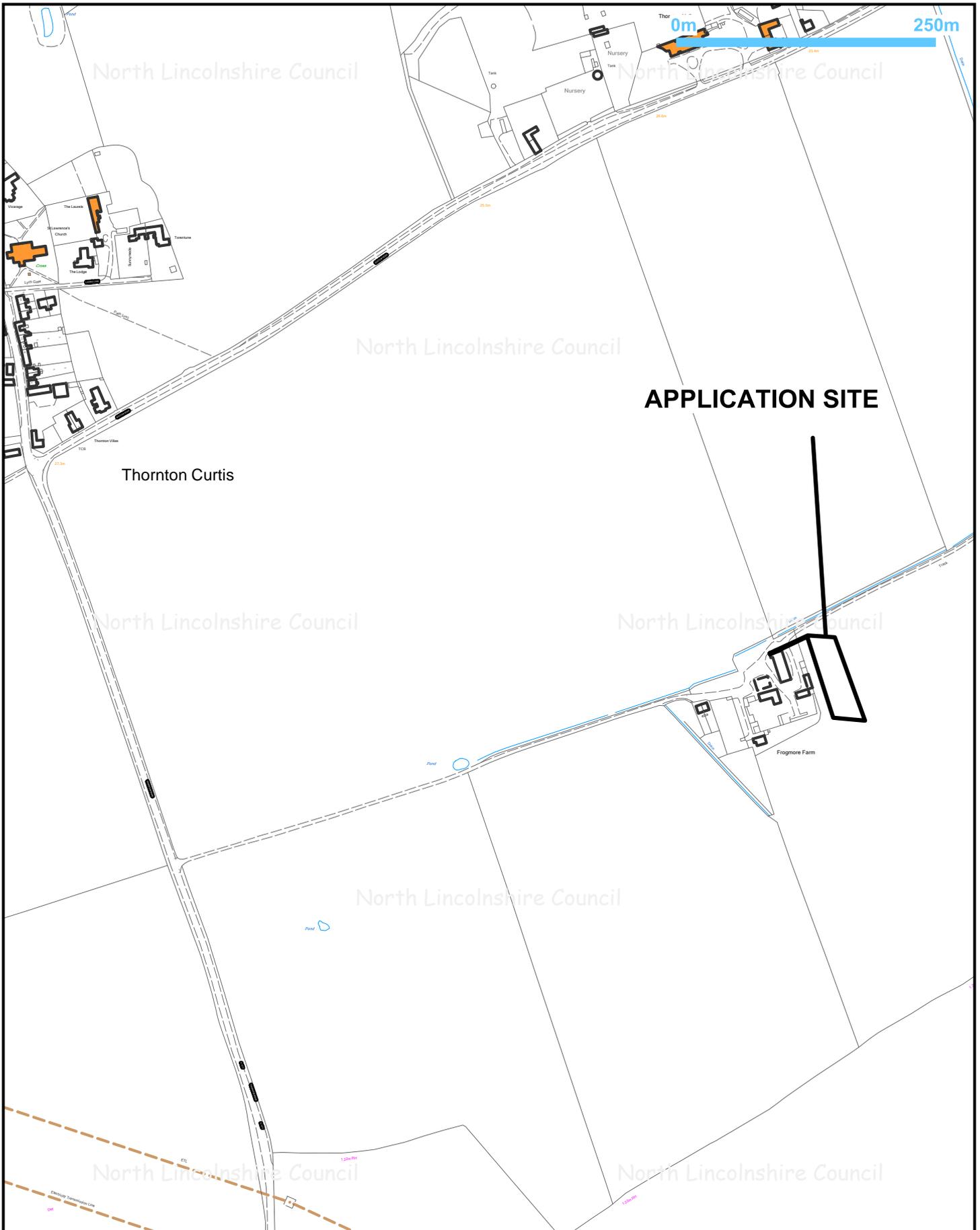
The biodiversity management plan shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and timings, and the approved features shall be retained thereafter, unless otherwise approved in writing by the local planning authority. Prior to completion of the approved development, the applicant or their successor in title shall submit a report to the local planning authority providing evidence of compliance with the biodiversity management plan.

Reason

To protect and enhance features of recognised nature conservation importance in accordance with policy CS17 of the North Lincolnshire Core Strategy.

Informative

In determining this application, the council, as local planning authority, has taken account of the guidance in paragraphs 186 and 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework in order to seek to secure sustainable development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area.



Title: PA/2015/1165			
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PA/2015/1165 Proposed Layout - Not to scale

