



REPORT FOR DECISION

Item No:- ME22/

Committee:-	Planning Committee
Date:-	9 th July 2024
Author:-	Martin Hammond, Clerk
Report Title:-	Kettering Energy Park
Wards Affected:-	None – outside area

1. Purpose of Report

To consider a request from the authors of the letter reproduced below for the Town Council to become a signatory to it.

2. Recommendations

Members' views are requested

3. Information

3.1. The Town Council has been asked to sign the open letter below, which was prepared and sent by a number of parish councils to NNC in May 2024, opposing the proposals for the Kettering Energy Park. The authors' stated intention is to "link together our often disparate communities to stand against yet more wanton destruction of this most beautiful part of Northamptonshire".

3.2. The letter was signed by 8 parish and town councils .

3.3 The text of the letter is:-

We are once again writing an open letter as concerned Town and Parish Councils, representing over 17,600 residents. We would like to express our strong objection to the revised Kettering Energy Park Master Plan development by First Renewables Ltd.

The new revisions presented at the public meeting in Finedon and on the First Renewables web site have done nothing to alter the concerns and objections of our constituents. This development clearly does not have the support of local residents, nor local councillors and MPs, and would be a disaster for the local area.

We strongly urge the Council to consider our concerns below and ensure they meet their obligations under Policy 26 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (NNJCS) before lending its support to this development.

Policy 26 of the NNJCS explicitly emphasises the importance of ensuring that any proposed developments are sustainable, environmentally friendly, and meet the needs of the local population. The Kettering Energy Park fails to align with these core principles, as it poses significant risks to our natural resources, wildlife habitats, and the delicate ecological balance of the area. The revisions proposed by the developer do nothing to alter its failure to align with those core principles.

The proposed site sits in open countryside adjoining the Nene Valley from which it will be highly visible. There are no confirmed customers wishing to locate to this development, so it is entirely speculative, financially motivated and contrary to sustainable development. The reduction in height from 30 meters to 25 meters is insignificant given the location is on one of the highest points in North Northamptonshire making it the most visible site in the county. The UK Warehousing Association reports that the average warehouse height in the UK has risen from 11 meters to 14 meters, 25 meters is double this height.

Many recent reports including the Climate Change Committee's 2022 report to Parliament note that action is needed to support a modal shift away from car travel if the UK is to meet its net zero carbon status by 2050. The location of this site being in open countryside with no public transport links contradicts this.

The scale of the site would see the potential for over 11000 vehicle movements per day and the resulting significant increase in traffic through Finedon at the A510/A6 roundabout would bring the town to a standstill at certain times of the day. The road network through all surrounding villages would see a significant increase in volumes resulting in a negative impact on air pollution, noise, congestion and quality of life.

The wind farm and the electricity they generate are not owned or controlled by the proposer, therefore any claims regarding the use of generated power from the wind farm to power the developments are misleading and incorrect. This fundamentally calls into question the whole basis of the proposal and is a constraint to delivery of the Master Plan. The consented solar farm which has yet to be built does not have the capacity to provide renewable energy on a 24-hr x 365-day basis and so any development would be reliant upon the import of electricity from the National Grid, in direct conflict with the Joint Core Strategy and the marketed purpose of an Energy Park.

As part of the revisions there has been much made of the reduction in area of the warehouse footprint, but little is made of the offsetting increase in Hydroponics and/or Advanced agriculture. This increase will undoubtedly require more energy and 24/7 lighting which will significantly increase the light pollution in the area.

The farmland on the Burton Wold is categorised as a combination of best and most versatile land and good grade 3b land and should be conserved in accordance with the National Planning Policy framework paragraph 180. In fact, we all take pride in local businesses like Weetabix promoting this land and the high-quality local produce it delivers. It is unacceptable to be ripping this land up and reducing food security further.

This is a beautiful area close to Burton Latimer and is the last bit of open countryside that the residents of Burton Latimer can access directly. The site is home to a number of at risk and endangered species (including those protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act) whose rearing, nesting, and feeding areas would be irrevocable destroyed by the development, causing a direct threat to survival, and leading to local extinction. The areas assigned for biodiversity net gains will in no way offset the damage caused by this development and to Dear Scott, achieve this the developer will in all likelihood end up buying statutory biodiversity credits which whilst achieving a paper gain will in fact result in a loss to the local population.

Considering these issues, we believe that the Kettering Energy Park is not in the best interest of our communities. We implore the Council to reconsider this development and instead focus on alternative renewable energy solutions that are in harmony with the local environment and enjoy the backing of the people they will impact.

We request that the Council does not support this development. It is imperative that the Council upholds Policy 26 and prioritises the long-term well-being of its constituents over short-sighted development proposals which would appear to be more about additional warehousing than green energy.

We urge you to act in the best interest of the local electorate and ensure that our collective voices are heard and respected. Let us work together to find sustainable solutions that protect our environment and enhance the quality of life for current and future generations in our communities.

Signed

Cranford St Johns Parish Council

Grafton Underwood Parish Council

Little Addington Parish Council

Titchmarsh Parish Council

Woodford Parish Council

Finedon Town Council

Burton Latimer Town Council

Great Addington Parish Council

4. Kettering Town Council responses

4.1. The Town Council's two responses to the emerging proposals, which are at a pre-application stage, are set out below. The area of Burton Wold to which the proposals relate has been allocated for an energy park within the Joint Core Spatial plan for some years, and were originally mooted in the 2000s, but have been slow to come forward.

4.2. The first response was to the original developer proposals in May 2023

The committee considered the draft masterplan proposals submitted by the prospective developers of Kettering energy park, which was the subject of consultation.

Members welcomed the introduction of new renewable energy provision at or near Burton Wold and the concept of using the energy generated there to power new development in the immediate vicinity. They welcomed the prospect of new jobs in the area, particularly if they were "green collar" jobs.

Aspects of renewable energy which would not be helpful was any biomass which relied on burning imported wood pellets.

Members were also concerned about :-

- *Access to the site – although recognising that the intended access was from J11 of the A14 measures to ensure that traffic did not use the A6 and particularly did not have to access the site through Finedon were vital; at the very least some upgrading of the highway infrastructure at Finedon would otherwise be essential . The A510 between the site entrance and J11 also needed a significant upgrade*
- *The size and scale of employment buildings on site – no assurances had been given in the masterplan about building size and scale and how they would fit into the topography of the site without becoming very intrusive. The masterplan should aim to place limits on the height and footprint of buildings and the developer should work to assume the site was not just another logistics hub.*

4.3. In May 2024, the Council responded to the developer's second and more detailed pre-application consultation as follows:-

The Committee welcomed the change in massing for the proposed buildings on site. This more detailed iteration of the proposed development however has flagged up a number of other issues which need to be addressed, either in the masterplan or when detailed applications are brought forward.

Access and movement

- *The plan does not do enough to enhance bus services onto the site – no bus stops are shown on site and it is far from clear what bus service provision has been considered and discussed with providers*
- *Given the width of the A6 Burton Latimer bypass, it should be possible to create a cycle lane along its length which would simplify cycle access*
- *The proposals fail to properly address the impact of non HGV traffic on Finedon and our earlier comments remain*
- *The masterplan should acknowledge the need to ensure highway improvements between the site and Junction 11 on the A14.*

Agricultural

- *The development involves the loss of productive agricultural land and is unspecific about its replacement with new agricultural techniques and facilities, in the sense that it is not clear if the new will replace the old in terms of output.*
- *It is not clear how continuing agricultural use of the land can co-exist with solar farms – this could be described better*

On site design and operation

- *The masterplan gives targets about bio-diversity without committing to them. These should be hardened up so that they form a commitment not an aspiration, which is how they currently read.*
- *It is not clear what the fuel source is for the combined heat and power system. It would be better if a commitment could be made not to bring fossil fuels onto the site. Can the system rely on on-site energy generation to function?*
- *It is also not clear where the water is coming from to support hydrogen production*
- *There is a lack of detail about how battery storage is to be managed on site, to reduce fire risks*
- *It is not clear how sewage is to be managed on site and AW's capacity to handle it*

5. Climate Change Implications

The proposals are intended in part to increase the generation of energy by sustainable means, and to ensure the new associated development is supplied by locally generated sustainable energy at least to some degree. The eventual outcome will of course depend on a number of moving factors.

6. Other Policy Implications

The Council's policy is to support the economic vitality of Kettering, which more jobs in this location would help. The authors of the letter are opposed to the environmental impact of the proposals.

Background Papers

Letter above and KTC responses to the pre-application consultations

