

5 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 This chapter considers the policy context which is applicable to the development. It includes consideration of the National context regarding the need for renewable energy and overarching policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). It also considers the Local context with regard to the Climate Emergency declared by South Oxfordshire District Council and also adopted Local Development Plan which currently consists of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (Adopted 10 December 2020).

5.2 PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND

National Planning Policy

5.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a material consideration in planning decisions. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is a live, online document that provides further guidance in relation to certain issues raised in the NPPF.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)

5.2.2 The NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in its three dimensions; economic, social and environmental. Central to the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, for decision-taking this means (paragraph 11):

- Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
- Where there are no development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

5.2.3 Paragraph 152 of the NPPF, relating to development proposals affecting the Green Belt outlines that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

5.2.4 Furthermore, Paragraph 153 of the NPPF outlines that, when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

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- 5.2.5 Paragraph 156 of the NPPF states that when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.
- 5.2.6 Paragraph 157 of the NPPF states that the planning system should support transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and should support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 5.2.7 Paragraph 159 of the NPPF states that new renewables development should be planned for in ways that:
- a) *avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure; and*
 - b) *can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation, and design. Any local requirements for the sustainability of buildings should reflect the Government's policy for national technical standards.*
- 5.2.8 Paragraph 162 outlines that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should expect new development to:
- a) *comply with any development plan policies on local requirements for decentralised energy supply unless it can be demonstrated by the applicant, having regard to the type of development involved and its design, that this is not feasible or viable; and*
 - b) *take account of landform, layout and building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption.*
- 5.2.9 Finally, Paragraph 163 states that, when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:
- a) *not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and*
 - b) *approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.*
- 5.2.10 Best and most versatile land is defined within the glossary of the NPPF as "Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification."
- 5.2.11 Paragraph 180 outlines that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- a) *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological*
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value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)

- 5.2.12 Paragraph 208 states that, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposed including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)

- 5.2.13 PPG covers a range of topics and provides further explanation of how policy contained within the NPPF should be delivered. This guidance has been considered in the relevant reports that accompany the planning application, including this ES. The following section highlights those aspects of the PPG which are pertinent to the Proposed Development.

Climate Change

- 5.2.14 The PPG outlines that local planning authorities have a statutory duty to tackle climate change in local plan policies, confirming that tackling climate change is central to achieving sustainable development. The PPG suggests ways that climate change mitigation and adaptation can be achieved, including through making provision through sustainable transport, renewable and low-carbon technologies, low carbon design and other measures to reduce energy consumption in buildings; considering water infrastructure, water availability and water efficiency measures; and multifunctional green infrastructure.

Historic Environment

- 5.2.15 PPG provides further guidance on how 'significance' should be assessed in terms of potential impacts on heritage assets, including in relation to archaeological, architectural and historical interests and the impacts on the setting of heritage assets.
- 5.2.16 The potential impacts of the Proposed Development on the historic environment are assessed in the ES Heritage Chapter.

Natural Environment

- 5.2.17 PPG provides further details on the environmental value of agricultural soils, green infrastructure, biodiversity and geodiversity, ecological networks, biodiversity net gain, the value of trees, and how to undertake landscape character assessments, amongst other topics.
- 5.2.18 PPG (Paragraph 006) notes that green infrastructure can help in achieving the following aims set out in the NPPF:
- Building a strong, competitive economy
 - Achieving well-designed places
 - Promoting healthy and safe communities
 - Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change
 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment"

- 5.2.19 PPG provides advice on how to calculate biodiversity net gain, and how net gain can actually be achieved.
- 5.2.20 The benefits of the Proposed Development in terms of delivering ecological enhancements are considered in the ES Ecology Chapter.

Adopted Policy

- 5.2.21 The Local Development Plan currently consists of The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (Adopted 10 December 2020).

The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035

- 5.2.22 The policies of relevance within the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 to the proposed development are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 – Policies of relevance within the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035

Policy STRAT1 – The Overall Strategy
Policy STRAT4 – Strategic Development
Policy STRAT6 – Green Belt
Policy INF1 – Infrastructure Provision
Policy TRANS2 – Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility
Policy TRANS4 – Transport Assessments, Transport Statements and Travel Plans
Policy TRANS5 – Consideration of Development Proposals
Policy INF4 – Water Resource
Policy ENV1 – Landscape and Countryside
Policy ENV2 – Biodiversity – Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species
Policy ENV3 – Biodiversity
Policy ENV4 – Watercourses
Policy ENV5 – Green Infrastructure in New Developments
Policy ENV6 – Historic Environment
Policy ENV 7 – Listed Buildings
Policy ENV8 – Conservation Areas
Policy ENV9 – Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments
Policy ENV10 – Historic Battlefields, Registered Parks and Gardens and Historic Landscapes
Policy ENV11 – Pollution – Impact from Existing and/or Previous Land Uses on new Development (Potential Receptors of Pollution)
Policy ENV12 – Impact of Development on Human Health, the Natural Environment and/or Local Amenity (Potential Sources of Pollution)
Policy EP4 – Flood Risk
Policy EP5 – Minerals Safeguarding Areas
Policy DES1 – Delivering High Quality Development
Policy DES2 – Enhancing Local Character
Policy DES3 – Design and Access Statements
Policy DES6 – Residential Amenity
Policy DES7 – Efficient Use of Resources
Policy DES8 – Promoting Sustainable Development
Policy DES9 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

Climate Change Emergency

5.2.23 South Oxfordshire District Council declared a Climate Emergency at Full Council in April 2019¹. As part of this, the Council have adopted a new Climate Action Plan that includes what they are seeking to do to tackle climate and ecological emergencies. The climate actions are:

- To become carbon neutral within Council operations by 2025.
- For South Oxfordshire to be a carbon neutral district by 2030.

¹ <http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/documents/g2439/Printed%20minutes%20Thursday%2011-Apr-2019%2018.00%20Council.pdf?T=1>
