

PLANNING STATEMENT

**FOR THE PLANNING APPLICATION TO INSTALL BIOMASS BOILERS AND
ASSOCIATED WOOD FUEL STORES AND EQUIPMENT WITH IMPROVED HIGHWAY
ACCESS AND LANDSCAPING**

AT

**BIRD GROVE FARM
HILDERSTONE
STAFFORD
ST15 8SL**

Prepared by:

Phil Plant BSc (Hons) MRICS

Rural Planning Consultant
Mid West Planning Ltd
18 Church Street
Shifnal
Shropshire
TF11 9AA

Tel: 01952 276745

www.midwestplanning.co.uk

phil.plant@midwestplanning.co.uk

September 2021



CONTENTS

1.	NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY	3
2.	INTRODUCTION	4
3.	BACKGROUND INFORMATION	4
4.	THE APPLICATION SITE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA	6
5.	PLANNING POLICY	7
6.	CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES AGAINST PLANNING POLICY	8
7.	CONCLUSION	9

1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is written to support the planning application made to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council for the installation of eight biomass boilers with flues and associated wood fuel drying kilns, stores with improvements to the highway access and associated hard and soft landscaping.
- 1.2 The application is made by Mr and Mrs Gellatly owners of Bird Grove farm. The application site is on land forming part of the Bird Grove Farm small holding.
- 1.3 Central government policy is to support diverse small scale generation of energy using renewable energy sources to help reduce the UK carbon footprint, and to improve energy security for the country. The UK objective is to meet our challenging future climate change goal of net zero emissions by 2050.
- 1.4 This statement explains the need for renewable energy generation in the UK and the special circumstances surrounding the application.
- 1.5 It is considered that the proposals meets the United Kingdom Government's objective of generating renewable energy to combat climate change and to ensure the secure supply of energy to the United Kingdom.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The preparation of this report by Mid West Planning Ltd has been commissioned by Mr and Mrs Gellatly.
- 2.2 Bird Grove Farm is a small holding set in approximately 5.7 acres of grazing land. The small holding benefits from a concrete yard and outbuildings and a residential bungalow. The small holding was recently purchased by the applicants who intend to live in the bungalow at Bird Grove farm.
- 2.2 Mr Gellatly operates a forestry business, Gellatly (Stafford) Ltd, which he intends to relocate to Bird Grove Farm.
- 2.3 This report is prepared by Philip Plant BSc (Hons) MRICS of Mid West Planning Limited in accordance with these instructions. Phil Plant is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and has over fifteen years' experience in rural planning matters, advising both private and public sectors.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Mr Mark Gellatly runs a forestry business; Gellatly (Stafford) Ltd. As a business diversification project Mr Gellatly would like to begin the production and supply of kiln dried logs for use in log burners, mainly by householders in the locality. Kiln drying logs reduces the water content in firewood to less than 20% which increases their efficiency in producing heat and decreases the amount of pollutants released into the atmosphere.
- 3.2 In February 2020, the UK government announced plans to phase out the sale of house coal and wet wood for domestic burning. These controls were announced to help reduce air pollution. Sales of wet wood in units of under 2m³ have now been restricted in the UK since February 2021 and wet wood sold in volumes greater than 2m³ needs to be sold with advice on how to dry it before burning.
- 3.3 Following the restrictions on the sales of wet wood, many logs have been imported from outside the UK. Mr Gellatly will produce kiln dried logs in the UK from locally sourced timber for use mainly by local householders.

Guidance on Renewable Energy

- 3.3 On 6 March 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched the planning practice guidance web-based resource. For the first time, planning practice guidance is now available entirely online in a usable and accessible way. Within this on-line guidance there is a section about renewable energy generation; including paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 5-006-20140306 "What technical considerations relating to renewable energy technologies affect their siting?" Particular reference is made here to the need for appropriate transport links for biomass development.

The Need for Renewable Energy to Combat Climate Change

- 3.4 Climate change is well researched and documented. It is widely accepted that there is a need for a huge reduction in worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. In the UK this will be achieved through both the conservation of energy by moving to low

energy appliances and better insulated buildings, and through the production of a range of renewable and low carbon energy.

- 3.5 Whilst the need for renewable and low carbon energy production is accepted, consideration must be given to the type and the location of such production. If the type of renewable energy production is known, the best location must be selected to accommodate such production, and vice-versa; if the site location is known, then the method of production should be selected to mitigate environmental impacts, particularly visual impacts.
- 3.6 The first credible policy to tackle carbon emissions was introduced when the UK Government published its White Paper on Energy ("Our Energy Future – creating a Low Carbon Economy") in 2003, establishing a formal energy policy for the UK for the first time in 20 years. Essentially, the White Paper recognised that a limitation of carbon dioxide (CO₂ – the main gas contributing to global climate change) was going to be necessary. It committed the UK to working towards net zero emissions by 2050. A recurrent theme throughout the document was "cleaner, smarter energy". It also claimed to be based on four pillars: the environment, energy reliability, affordable energy for the poorest and competitive markets.
- 3.7 The White Paper on Energy, in 2007, then set the target that 20% of the UK's energy must come from renewable sources by 2020.
- 3.8 In December 2014, in response to the new agreement reached by UN members to tackle climate change, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change Ed Davey said: *"This is an agreement that unites all nations, unlocking the door to the world's first global climate deal in Paris next year."*

"The talks were tough but the Lima Call for Climate Action shows a will and commitment to respond to the public demand to tackle climate change".

"I am proud the UK has been leading the way - by our laws on low carbon energy and climate, by successfully championing ambitious targets to cut emissions in Europe and with our central role here in Lima".

"The next 12 months will be critical and the UK's leadership will be needed more than ever in the difficult negotiations ahead - but we have to succeed because the threat to our children's future is so serious."

- 3.9 Innovation in energy technologies is essential if the UK is to meet our challenging future climate change goal of net zero emissions by 2050.

Bio-mass Energy

- 3.10 Bio-mass installations have become much more efficient in recent years and now play a very significant role in generating renewable energy around the world. Bio-mass also plays a very important role in securing the United Kingdom's energy supply in a time of global uncertainty. As the renewable heat market grows, we need to make sure support for biomass is sustainable. New sustainability criteria for the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) will make sure biomass meets the Government's carbon and environmental objectives, ensuring that the installation is in line with Staffordshire Moorlands goals for sustainable energy consumption. This will affect domestic and non-domestic RHI participants; producers and traders of

biomass fuels. (Please refer to the document submitted with this application; - "New biomass sustainability requirements for the Renewable Heat Incentive" by DECC).

The Proposed Bio-mass Boilers

- 3.11 The proposal comprises the installation of eight Biomass Boilers, namely, 2 Glenfarrow biomass boilers, a Dragon biomass boiler, a Faci biomass boiler all used for the drying of timber, mainly for the domestic fuel market. Four smaller boilers will be installed in the former agricultural buildings to provide heat to dry the logs stored for sale.
- 3.12 There will be some improvements to the existing highway access arrangements to Bird Grove Farm as a result of this scheme, which will make access by timber lorries possible. The access drive will be widened to 6.1m, with 10m radii, and the northern hedge will be removed and replaced with a new mixed native species hedge set back slightly to improve the visibility splay. The main access gates will be set back 15m from the highway boundary, and the intervening track will be laid in a bound material to prevent stones and debris from tracking onto the highway.

4. THE APPLICATION SITE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

Site Selection

- 4.1 Mr and Mrs Gellatly have recently purchased Bird Grove Farm as it was viewed to be an ideal location for the relocation of Gellatly (Stafford) Ltd forestry business, and the business diversification project to kiln dry logs for re-sale.
- 4.2 The application site is well served with a highway access route that can be improved to accommodate the construction and operational phases of the development for fuel deliveries, and for maintenance purposes. This access will also be used for the bungalow at the property.
- 4.3 These proposals will see the re-use of existing farm buildings for the drying and storage of biomass wood fuel, and for workshop and stores associated with the business.
- 4.4 Bird Grove farm is not over-looked nor does it have any nearby neighbours. It is therefore well located in terms of minimising all potential impacts on local residents.
- 4.5 The applicant has commissioned an ecology report that has assessed the site at present and has proposed on site habitat creation and enhancement measures inducing the establishment of 0.27 ha of lowland meadow and the planting of 127m of new mixed native species hedgerow.
- 4.6 It is also considered that the provision of on-site habitat creation and enhancement measures can be incorporated on the buildings and surrounding mature trees. In order to provide a range of habitats with varying temperatures for roosting, three bat boxes should be attached to the building/ tree trunk and arranged in a south east to south west aspect. Ideally the boxes should be placed at least 3m off the ground. The boxes should be of Woodcrete construction as these are more durable than wooden boxes. Suitable boxes include Schwegler 2F and 2FN models. A planning condition requiring the items specified above to be installed within two months of the date of decision is not considered unreasonable.

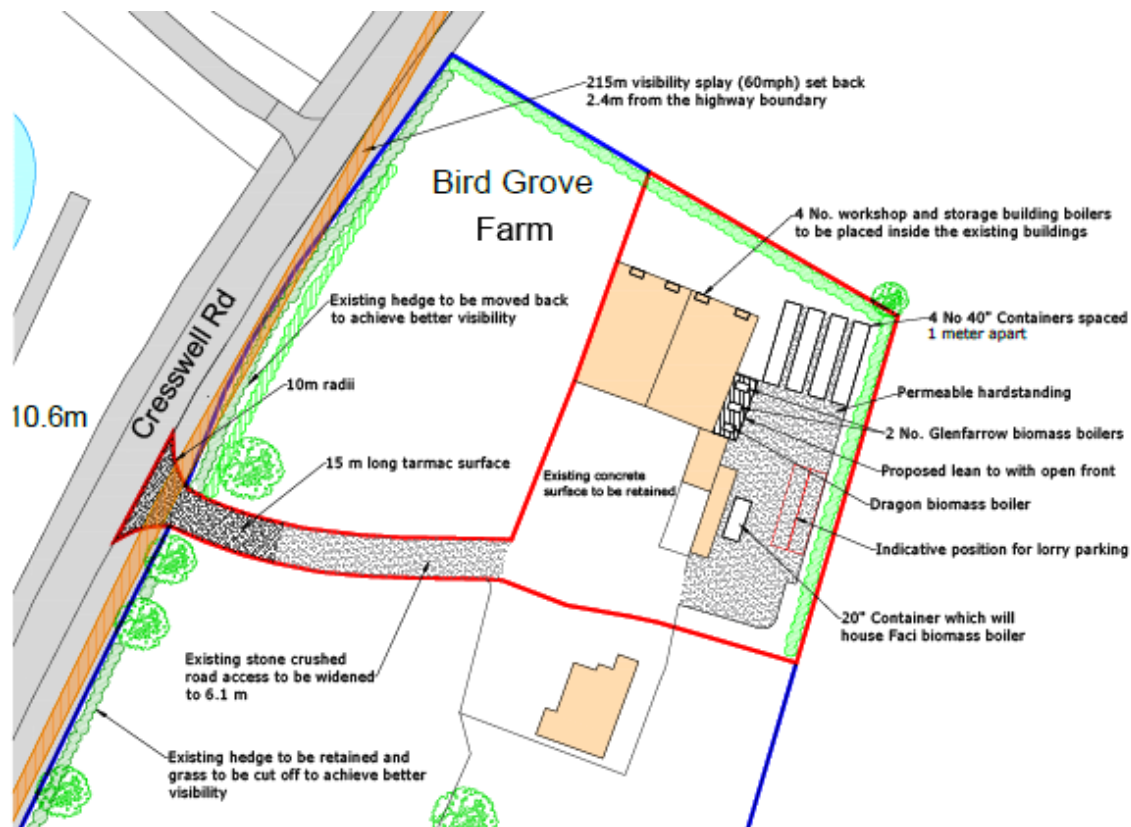


Plate One: The landscaping scheme showing proposed new hedge and tree planting

5. PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in March 2012 and updated on 24 July 2018, 19 February 2019 and 20 July 2021 to streamline planning policy at the national level. At the heart of the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development – the “golden thread” running through the plan making a decision making process. The pursuit of sustainable development includes seeking improvements in the quality of the built environment, natural and historic environment through the gains obtained through the planning system.
- 5.2 National Planning Policy Framework, part 6 “Supporting a prosperous rural economy” ensures that Local Planning Authorities have robust planning policies to support economic growth in rural area to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. The promotion of the development and diversification of farming and other land-based businesses is considered an important part of National Planning Policy.
- 5.3 Section 14; “*Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change*”, is most relevant to this proposal. Para. 152 confirms the role planning plays in securing radical reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. The planning system should encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of

existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

- 5.4 Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should accept the requirement for renewable or low carbon energy without the applicant having to demonstrate it, and adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change in accordance with the provisions of the Climate Change Act 2008.
- 5.5 To help increase the use and supply of renewable energy sources Local Planning Authorities should have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources subject to the minimisation and satisfactory mitigation of potential impacts as a result of such development. De-centralised and small scale renewable and low carbon energy sources are particularly useful in providing diverse and less obtrusive green energy generation.

Local Planning Policy

- 5.10 The Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Local Plan was adopted on 9th September 2020 and sets out the council's vision and strategy for the District until 2033.
- 5.11 Policy SD2 "Renewable/Low-Carbon Energy" is particularly relevant to the proposals because it encourages the use of renewable energy generation providing there are no unacceptable adverse impacts as a result of the development.
- 5.12 Policy SS 10 Other Rural Areas Strategy - The other rural areas comprise the countryside and the green belt outside of the development boundaries of the towns and larger villages and the open countryside surrounding the smaller villages.

2. Sustain the rural economy by:

- Enabling the limited expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified
- Supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises
- Supporting the development of appropriate ICT and new means of communications to enable homeworking and small businesses reliant on e-technology;

6. CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES AGAINST PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy Consideration

- 6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework is positive in its presumption in favour of sustainable development. The proposal represents very sustainable development in terms of not requiring many road journeys once established and in terms of renewable energy production, and in reducing carbon output and global warming effects.
- 6.2 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF supports the sustainable growth of and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas. This proposal will help to maintain

and create jobs and prosperity in rural areas by supporting UK forestry who supply the renewable wood fuel. The installation of this facility will also help to sustain employment levels at Gellatly (Stafford) Ltd by making the rural business more financially viable and secure in the long term through this forestry business diversification project into producing kiln dried logs for re-sale.

Local Planning Policy Considerations

- 6.7 The Staffordshire Moorlands District Local Plan Policy SD2 identifies that renewable and low carbon energy provision can be permitted when any adverse impacts can be addressed satisfactorily. These impacts are identified in the policy as landscape and ecology, including designated areas. The proposals will see the re-use of existing rural agricultural buildings and the erection of a modest lean-to building to house the equipment. 4no. 20 foot and 1no. 40 ft shipping containers will also be brought on to site to store logs and house equipment.
- 6.8 Given that the site is previously developed as a farmyard, and that the proposals, including the modest lean-to extension (30.09m²), are appropriate to a rural forestry operation and the site location, it is considered that the development accords with this policy. Natural screening of the development will be provided by the existing trees and hedges, this screening will be reinforced by new tree and hedge planting as shown in the landscaping plan extract at figure one above, therefore it is unlikely that the proposals will have significant impact on the landscape, ecology or significant negative impact on the historic environment.
- 6.9 These proposals are located to have no effect on the residential amenity of nearby residents. Bird Grove Farm is too far away from its nearest neighbour to have any adverse effect on residential amenity or cause anyone to be over looked by the development.
- 6.10 The development of this small-scale renewable energy facilities is a positive aspect of this proposal. In addition, the positive impact of properly drying wood fuel for use by householders has an environmental benefit in addition to the renewable energy benefits.
- 6.11 The proposal will provide one full time, and one part time job in addition to Mr and Mrs Gellatly which is a benefit to the local workforce and the local rural economy. The wider benefit is the market for locally produced timber, i.e., kiln dried firewood.
- 6.12 The proposals will not lead to significant increases in traffic numbers or lead to additional overnight parking requirements other than for the delivery of wood to the yard once per week and the delivery of fuel to customers using a VW pick-up. The existing concrete parking area and proposed hardstanding for unloading wood delivery lorries, and the highway network is considered acceptable for this scheme.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Whilst the principle of the requirement for energy security, increased renewable and low carbon energy production is well established, planning policies require developers to choose sites that are appropriate for the technology selected. The selection of this site has been carefully considered to minimise impacts of the development on the landscape character, ecology, amenity of nearby residents and to have regard to the capacity and suitability of the highway network.

- 7.2 Overall the scale of this development is extremely small, and unlikely to have a significant impact on the rural location. The site is discretely located, well screened with opportunities for more hedge planting and other ecological enhancement measures.
- 7.3 The proposal represents an efficient use of the farmyard, and reuse of former agricultural buildings at Bird Grove. The additional lean-to proposal to house the biomass boilers is small in scale and discretely located. The shipping containers required for the drying of wood fuel are relatively low in profile and will be screened by the proposed new hedge planting.
- 7.4 In addition, the creation of new job opportunities is welcome in this rural location.

Phil Plant
Mid West Planning

September 2021