AGENDA ITEM 6

SMD/2014/0432 **PROPOSED 14.3 HECTARE 6.98MWp SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC ARRAY AT MONEYSTONE QUARRY, EAVES LANE, NR WHISTON AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SOLAR BUSINESS COMPANY.**

Parish: Kingsley | Registration: 28/06/2014
Case Officer: Mr. A Swithenbank | Grid Reference: SK045/569

THE APPLICATION

The proposal is a full major application for an 11.7 hectare solar panel development within a 14.3ha site in former quarry land. The development would principally comprise fixed rows of frame mounted solar panels over two areas totalling 11.7ha and capable of generating an estimated 6.98MW hours of renewable energy per annum, internal service roads, perimeter fencing, CCTV, two substation cabins, five transformer stations and underground cabling.

The solar farm would be spread over two parcels of land, one to the north and one to the south of Eaves Lane and would occupy parts of the land formerly used for the extraction of silica sand. In an amendment to the application a third land parcel (Area B) included in the application as first submitted is no longer proposed to be developed with solar panels and would be restored in accordance with the Minerals Planning Authority approved post-quarry restoration scheme.

The solar panels would be laid out in arrays running east to west across the site and mounted on frames. The frames would be supported by posts driven into the ground or secured by concrete ballasts depending on the ground stability. The panels would be angled at 20% to the horizontal (11.3 degrees), the lowest part being approximately 1m from the ground and the highest part being approximately 3m from the ground. Each panel is about 1m wide and 1.65m in length. There would be about 2m of space between the lines of solar panel arrays. A 2m high deer fence would surround the sites, with CCTV cameras installed at intervals on the top of the timber posts of the fencing. Five transformer cabins would be constructed each about 2.5m high, 8m long and 3m wide. They would be enclosed by a 2m high metal palisade security fence. Two substation buildings would be required, the dimensions of which would be 2.5m high, 12m long and 4m wide for the larger building and 2.5m high by 4.5m by 2.5 metres.

An existing internal service road would link the solar farm either side of Eaves Lane using a short tunnel developed during the quarrying era. The existing main access road south off Eaves Lane, formerly serving the quarry site, would form the access to the proposed solar farm.

The applicant envisages a three month construction period and an operational life for the solar farm of approximately 25 years. The applicant indicates that the solar farm would generate about 6.98 Mega Watt hours of renewable electricity per annum which is about equivalent to the annual power consumption of 1,680 households based on 4,158kWh per annum domestic electricity consumption in the Staffordshire Moorlands (DECC, 2012).

The application includes a commitment to compensate for the loss of ecology that would otherwise be forthcoming under the latest approved restoration plans. The application

envisages that after the estimated 25 year lifespan of the solar farm, the site would be returned to an ecological interest to reflect the wider site's biodiversity objectives.

The Council formally screened the proposed development prior to the submission of the application to consider whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was necessary. The Council concluded that a formal EIA was not required to accompany the planning application. Instead the following documents accompany the plans and drawings of the proposal:

- Statement of Community Involvement;
- Ecological Assessment;
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Heritage Statement;
- Construction (Traffic) Method Statement;
- Flood Risk Assessment;
- Design and Access Statement;
- Planning Support Statement.

SITE LOCATION / DESCRIPTION

The solar farm would be spread over two parcels of land, one to the north and one to the south of Eaves Lane and would occupy some 11.7 hectares of the 14.3ha red edged site within the quarry land formerly used for the extraction of silica sand. The whole area used for such extraction is estimated to have been about 70 hectares. The northern and southern parts of the site are linked via a tunnel under Eaves Lane. The quarrying has dug out the land either side of Eaves Lane. All mineral extraction in the quarry has now ceased.

The applicant's planning statement refers to the northern location as area D, and the southern location, as area E. For consistency of referencing this report will use the same letters for these areas.

The northern area D comprises sections of semi improved grassland, pioneer grassland and short perennial/ ephemeral habitats, but the current site condition of area D is not compliant with the approved quarry restoration scheme. The area is relatively level with a slight central depression. To the south of Eaves Lane Area E slopes at a slight gradient down from north to south. No post-quarry restoration has taken place here and the majority of the land has recently been re-modelled and is currently bare sand. The south easterly part of Area E was the location of the main quarry buildings comprising offices, laboratories and processing plants. Some of these have already been demolished whilst others remain.

The immediate surroundings of each area in the planning application are contained by either broadleaved woodland or other areas of the former quarry, although it needs to be noted that the approved County Council Minerals restoration plan requires, in parts, some removal and/or thinning of trees, elsewhere some additional planting, and current site appearance won't in all cases remain as presently seen. The land beyond the immediate surroundings of the application site comprises a combination of undulating farmland used for grazing / mowing and extensive areas of woodland generally sloping towards the Churnet. The River Churnet runs along a north-west south-east axis in the

valley bottom about half a kilometre from the southern most part of the application site. Dense woodland and changes in levels avoid inter-visibility between the two. Indeed, views of the application site from the immediate surroundings and the wider countryside are very limited by the local undulating topography and the extent and location of woodland, including extensive woodland beyond the site.

The nearest properties to the application site are Crow Trees Farm, off Eaves Lane and those in the hamlet of Moneystone. The former is some 200m from the edge of Area E and the nearest property of the hamlet is circa 100m from the edge of Area D. The villages of Oakamoor and Whiston are respectively about 1 and 1.5 kilometres from the application site. Eaves Lane links the two settlements with Whiston to the north west and Oakamoor to the south east.

Views from these properties and the villages to the application site in the summer are judged likely to be very limited and in many cases non existent. Likely views during the winter months into the application site will be more open as a result of leaf fall but would be filtered.

The country road of Eaves Lane runs east-west between D to the north and area E to the south with a band of woodland trees running both sides of the road in this location. Another country road, Blakeley Lane runs north-south from Eaves Lane through Moneystone to the east of area D. A number of public footpaths (PROW's) exist in the countryside surrounding the application site. Apart from one PROW which crosses the access road to the proposed solar farm, no PROW's cross the application site. Construction vehicles comprising HGV's would access the site only through Whiston from the west. This route was used for HGV's when the quarry was operating.

Again views from these surrounding public highways would be very limited during summer months. The likelihood of views of the application site from the surrounding public highways during the winter months would clearly be greater.

SITE AND PLANNING HISTORY

Quarrying of land in and around areas D of the application site appears to go back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with area E being first used for mineral extraction much later in the 1960's. By the mid 2000's the whole application site and much of its surroundings were used for quarrying.

The main minerals planning permission - granted by the minerals planning authority, Staffordshire County Council - which covers the application site and beyond was for silica sand workings and progressive restoration (ref SM.96/935) dated 15th May 1998.

A 30 hectare extension to the quarry for the extraction of silica sandstone over a 12 year period with progressive restoration was refused planning permission in 2006. (ref SMD/2006/0669).

Laver Leisure acquired the site from the then operators Sibelco (UK) in July 2010.

On 5th September 2013 the Council issued its screening opinion on an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in connection with this proposed development. The Council concluded that given the scale and nature of the development an EIA was not required.

A recently revised restoration plan (ref SM.96/935/122 M D4) was approved by the County Council on 13th March 2014.

The proposed development was the subject of pre-application community consultation during May and June 2014.

CONSULTATIONS

Kingsley Parish Council: Comments: no detail of water management has been included. This breaches conditions of the restoration plan. Consider the development therefore inappropriate. High risk and impact on visual aspect of landscape. No local employment would be created. Would jeopardise movement towards AONB status.

Oakamoor Parish Council: Objection: substantial landscape visual impact will degrade the vista visible from multitude of locations including public footpaths locally and from distance - particularly west of the location instead of the long awaited quarry restoration; whilst AONB status not yet granted the same basic considerations should be applied; goes against SMDC CS policy SS7 on grounds that the proposal would minimise and reduce landscape and biodiversity rather than restore and enhance; conflicts with agreed approved quarry restoration plan; noise during construction; vulnerability to or risk of theft would put the wider area at risk; NPPF states that minerals winning does not make this a brown field site; a most inappropriate location.

Local Highway Authority: No objections subject to conditions, including the need for the development to adhere to the traffic plan during the likely 3 month construction period as set out in the applicants Construction (Traffic) Method Statement.

Local Minerals Planning Authority (MPA): Initially a holding objection was submitted until the applicant produced sufficient evidence to support an assessment as to the extent to which the proposal may sterilise underlying minerals or minerals within the Area of Search. This point has subsequently been resolved and on 22 October 2014 a letter from the MPA was received which formally withdrew this objection. In addition the MPA has indicated that the applicant should address concerns over the impact of the proposal on the implementation of the approved restoration scheme and aftercare works and explain any proposals to mitigate the effects on the approved restoration and aftercare scheme.

Staffordshire County Council Environmental Advice Team:
Ecology: Initially commented that insufficient survey information or ecological assessment had been carried out to inform impact appraisal; justification for the proposed compensation for loss of approved restoration habitats is lacking; the compensation proposed is not adequate to offset impacts nor has it been shown to be technically feasible. A holding objection was received from the County Council on 22 October 2014 pending the satisfactory resolution of the biodiversity offsetting (compensation) scheme.

The position of the County Council on ecology at the time of report publication is that subject to appropriate agreed conditions the objection will be withdrawn. Required conditions will relate to the provision of new habitat in lieu of that lost due to the development. Two principal means to achieve this have been identified: (a) within the blue edged land of the application site at the cost of the applicant; (b) off-site funded by a set figure offered of £17,000 at the outset and £1,000 per annum thereafter. The applicant also proposes (c) that land within the developed area be managed, so far as practicable, to benefit grassland ecology. The in-blue-edge land will be subject to agreement with the landowner's licensee. It is though understood that the landowner is in a position to vary the terms and the condition can be worded subject to this. The off-site land has yet to be confirmed. The County Ecologist states she is confident of being able to do so but points out that the true actual costs will not be known until the site is found. Measures in the developed area equate to enhancement and should be subject to a monitoring condition.

Landscape: The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) concludes that the proposal will be visible from a variety of receptors and there is a risk that development would give rise to detrimental landscape and visual impacts. In view of the high quality landscapes that surround the site a corresponding high level of mitigation should be achieved to ensure these landscapes are not degraded. The approved restoration plan would re-established a quality landscape structure across the site. This re-establishment will remain within the control of the minerals planning authority where not directly affected by this planning application. Proposals should be informed by landscape character and quality and seek to provide visual mitigation for proposed structures and fencing. There is concern that in some cases the restoration would involve thinning of tree areas which therefore shouldn't be relied on necessarily to screen the site as currently.

Historic Environment: Bearing in mind the past activity across the site and the low potential of archaeological potential, archaeological mitigation is not warranted in this instance.

Conservation Officer: This proposal should not impact on any surrounding built heritage.

Ecology and Landscape Officer: The proposal would prevent the post quarrying restoration scheme being implemented and alternative sites for grassland ecology improvement are proposed from elsewhere in the former Sibelco land holding. These areas alone would not be sufficient to fully compensate for the solar development and it is proposed that the shortfall be met by an off-site programme on land to be indentified. A condition and agreement would be needed to facilitate this but in principle the approach is considered acceptable. Great Crested Newt populations recorded from the quarry site need to be considered and can be covered by condition.

The landscape impacts are overall judged low to moderate. The removal of the higher elevated Area B in the amended proposal has eliminated the more visually prominent part of the development. The visual landscape impacts need to be judged against the quarry restored state and the perimeter trees critical to the successful screening would remain. The restoration scheme includes thinning to trees on the eastern margin of Area D. However this area is a rising embankment which Area D sits below and the topography therefore largely precludes views in. Residential properties in the hamlet of Moneystone may have some views from upstairs windows but the visual impact could

not be judged intrusive. It is likely that there would be short range visibility of Area E particularly from the public footpath through Crow Trees Farm but these views would again be substantially screened by the existing retained tree belt, albeit slightly less effectively in winter time. The views would tend to be of the rear or side of the panel runs with the surfaces angled away. There is limited scope for views of the site from the south and south west and typically only at distance of c.2km or more. The visual impact of areas D and E would at most be slight.

Trees and Woodlands Officer: The solar farm panel arrays would sit in previously worked areas of the former quarry where there is no substantial structural vegetation features which would be affected by the proposed development. Panel arrays within the site would be kept back from the fringing mature woodland belts along the eastern and southern boundaries of the application site to avoid shading, and construction would therefore automatically avoid impact on tree roots through provision of suitable stand-off distances. Intermittent fence post holes for boundary deer fencing would not cause significant harm to these fringing woodlands. Over the operational lifetime of the solar farm, individual trees within the woodlands may occasionally die or fall, but would be expected to be replaced by successors through natural regeneration so this would have no significant impact on the screening function of these woodlands.

The generally darker and more recessive colouring of the panel arrays, intervening grass/meadow seeded areas and associated structures, compared to the current bright patches of silica sand, would lead to a generally low visual impact where glimpsed through filtering woodland and tree belts from surrounding viewpoints at close range. From longer range, the effect of the visibility of the low height structures receding significantly with increasing distance would create a slight to negligible visual impact.

Environmental Health: No objections subject to conditions regarding timing of construction and demolition works, noise levels from fixed plant and machinery, and dust from construction and demolition works, consideration of potential for glare.

Planning Policy: There is 'in principle' support in local and national policy for the provision of more renewable energy projects. There is no need for site selection justification or the justification of the renewable energy selected. However, permission should only be granted if the range, and cumulative impacts, of negative amenity impacts are outweighed by the scheme's benefits.

Severn Trent Water: No objection subject to condition on the need to have drainage plans for the disposal of surface water and foul sewage submitted to and approved by the local planning authority prior to the commencement of development and for these approved plans to be implemented.

Environment Agency : Initial objection due to insufficient information to demonstrate that the risk of pollution to 'controlled waters' is acceptable subsequently withdrawn. Conditions needed. The EA is now satisfied that there are generic remedial options available to deal with the risks to controlled waters posed by contamination at this site. However, further details will be required in order to ensure that risks are appropriately addressed prior to development commencing. The Local Planning Authority must decide whether to obtain such information prior to determining the application or as a condition of the permission. Should the local planning authority decide to obtain the necessary information under condition we would request that this condition is applied.

Churnet Valley Conservation Society: Objection because the proposals are prejudicial to the approved restoration scheme and safeguarding future options for the winning, processing and transportation of nationally important mineral reserves. (A letter has been sent to the Minerals Planning Authority by the CVCS raising a number of issues about its position on the latter – subsequently addressed by MPA).

REPRESENTATIONS

Expiry of:-
Press Notice: 11th August 2014
Site Notice: 25th August 2014

Nine letters of objection have been received stating the following reasons:

- Solar Farms only sustainable if large subsidies are maintained and this seems less likely now. The Government has already decided that solar farms are a failure and are stopping the subsidy.
- It is untrue to say (As per 6.1.7 of Supporting statement) that proposed solar farm will bring benefits to local homes and businesses by renewable energy generation - electricity produced is the most expensive available - no reference to local employment in the application. Why go ahead with these plans if there will be no benefit to the local people?
- Benefits of green energy to avoid global warming are not proven.
- Should be implementing the restoration plan - condition 35 of Staffordshire County Council application SM96/935.
- Vast array of solar panels would be visible from High Shutt, Lockwood Road - Kingsley Holt, Light Oaks- Cheadle, parts of A52 on Kingsley Moor and about 50% of Whiston Parish, and many public rights of way in the Churnet Valley. The 2 metre deer fence would be obtrusive from many locations in the Whiston ward. These visual impacts would be harmful and no provision is made for their mitigation.
- Fence will be a barrier to movement of the larger fauna over a much larger area than necessary
- Application does not comply with Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Spatial Objective 2 and Policies SS1, SS6 and SS7, and the Churnet Valley Masterplan..
- This industrial proposal would harm the objective embraced by Staffordshire Moorlands of obtaining recognition for the Churnet Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- No mention of a Water Management Plan to avoid flooding and possible pollution of the valley below.
- There has been no proper management of the water from the quarry's lagoons in keeping with the modified restoration plan.
- The proposal puts to one side the policy to protect the strategic resources of high quality silica sand. National Plans to safeguard strategic reserves of silica sand are being put in place and therefore this proposal is totally inappropriate.
- Solar Farm will take away valuable land for wildlife given they cast large amounts of shade, unless the solar panel density is low.
- The northern part of the proposal is at the rear of houses in the hamlet of Moneystone and will be an eyesore as well as spoil the landscape, damage the vegetation, and disturb animals and birdlife.

- The road structure will not be able to cope with the heavy plant needed to construct the solar farm. HGV's would breach weight restrictions commencing at a the point of Whiston Eaves Lane and turning to Dusty Stile Farm and risk damage to historic trees.
- Proposal is not sustainable and therefore not compliant with the NPPF, the Localism Act 2011, the SMDC Core Strategy and the Churnet Valley Masterplan.
- Until Laver Leisure have fulfilled their current restoration objectives, no application for this site should be considered.
- The flora and fauna of the site will be compromised by the introduction of solar array panels.
- Application fails to take account of the ecological damage caused and offers insufficient proposals to adequately mitigate the damage.
- No Environmental Impact Assessment has been submitted and it should have been under the terms of Schedule 2 & 3 of the EIA Regulations.
- Any potential energy benefit generated by the scheme is heavily outweighed by the significant negative harm to the landscape and natural environment.
- The current owner should comply with a long standing responsibility to return the quarry to farmland and wildlife habitat.
- Local people were promised that in compensation for the years of suffering the land use as a quarry that the site would be returned to a visually attractive landscape for the public to enjoy.
- There are no proposals to deal with 'end of life' costs of removal and restoration of the site without cost to the public purse in conflict with the NPPF.
- There is no need for more renewable energy projects and this proposal does not fit with the planning 'need' requirement.
- Solar panels are constructed of high levels of long term toxic materials, the leakage of which would cause an unacceptable risk to flora and fauna.
- The applicant has provided no evidence that the representations made by those people who have expressed a view are available for public inspection as part of the planning file.
- Not all representations have been filed or placed on the planning portal by the Council.
- The reflection of light from the Solar Panels would visible impact on the Churnet Valley and its stunning landscape.

PLANNING POLICIES

Core Strategy:

- SS1 Development Principles
- SS1a Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- SS6c Other Rural Areas Strategy
- SS7 Churnet Valley Area Strategy
- SD1 Sustainable Use of Resources
- SD2 Renewable/Low Carbon Energy
- SD4 Pollution and Flood Risk
- DC1 Design Considerations
- DC2 The Historic Environment
- DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting

- C3 Green Infrastructure.
- R1 Rural Diversification
- NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources

Churnet Valley Masterplan - Supplementary Planning Document
- Moneystone Quarry Opportunity Site: Paragraph 7.6.5
- Natural Environment: Paragraph 8.1
- Green Infrastructure: Paragraph 8.6

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Mineral Local Plan (SSoTMLP):
- Saved Policy 5: Development within Mineral Consultation Areas.

Staffordshire Minerals Local Plan (Emerging Document):
- Policy 3 - Minerals Safeguarding Areas

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are:
- Paragraphs 1 - 17
- Section 3 Supporting a prosperous rural economy
- Section 7 Requiring good design
- Section 10 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 11 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 12 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
- Section 13 Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals
- Paragraphs 186 - 219

National Planning Practice Guidance
- Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

OFFICER COMMENT

Main Issues

1. The main issues in respect of this solar farm proposal are:
- Principle of the proposed development;
- Loss of ecological interest;
- Impacts on the surrounding area in terms of landscape character and visual amenity for people in the area;
- Impact on minerals;
- Renewable energy generation;
- Planning balance of harm against benefits.

Principle

2. Policy SD2 - Renewable/Low Carbon Energy of the SMCS promotes the development small and large scale stand alone renewable or low carbon energy schemes subject, in this case, to the following considerations:

- the scale and nature of a proposal's impacts on the landscape, particularly having regard to the Landscape Character Assessment;
- the degree to which the developer has demonstrated any environmental / economic / social benefits of a scheme as well as how any environmental or social costs have been minimised (e.g. visual, noise or smell);
- the impact on designated sites of European, national and local biodiversity and geological importance in accordance with policy NE1;
- the impact on the amenity of local residents and other interests of acknowledged importance, including the historic environment;
- the degree to which individual proposals reflect current local evidence regarding the feasibility of different types of renewable or low carbon energy at different locations across the District.

3. This same broad thrust of support for schemes like this proposal, subject to the acceptability of their impacts, is given in the NPPF at paragraph 98. This paragraph specifically states that local planning authorities should approve these type of developments if the impacts are or can be made acceptable (unless material considerations indicate otherwise). There is therefore no objection in principle to this proposed development.

The scale and nature of impacts on the landscape: landscape character.

4. Relevant impacts are those on the fabric, character and quality of the landscape taking into account the extent to which the development may become a significant or defining characteristic. The Council's Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008) places the location partly within the Dissected Sandstone Highland Fringe and partly within the Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys Landscape Character Types. The site falls within areas 1b and 3a of the Churnet Valley Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment. The Staffordshire County Council landscape assessment: Planning for Landscape Change (2001) considered the quality of these two areas to be either high or very high and of highest landscape sensitivity. The area overall must therefore be considered to have low or limited capacity to absorb developments into the landscape successfully. The proposal itself would be a significant and unusual development at odds with the landscape features which characterise the area. The geometric and continuous lines of uniformly finished high technology panels set at a height of between one and three metres above ground will be an alien feature in the landscape. The presence of substation cabins and 2 metre high fencing would add to the incongruous nature of the proposal in the landscape. There is clearly harm to the landscape character of the application site and this would be the case for most solar farms in the countryside. However, the topographically relatively self-contained nature of the application site per se suggests its overall impact on the landscape character of the area would be much less harmful than might otherwise be expected.

The scale and nature of impacts on the landscape: visual impacts.

5. This is the degree to which the development may become a feature in particular views, or sequences of views, and how people are likely to be affected by these impacts. In the summer, the extensive broadleaved woodland and tree belts around the application site and the local topography would make the solar farm a largely

unobserved feature from public vantage points and local residences. In the winter there will be relatively close up views from two public footpaths, Little Eaves Farm, Crow Trees Farm and Eaves Lane and the solar farm would be seen as a noticeable feature in these views. These views are at a distance of generally over 200 metres, at a relatively shallow angle and often seen through groups of trees, albeit without their leaves at this time.

6. The applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment concludes that no more than a moderate adverse visual impact is likely from the development of the solar farm. This assessment was made in relation to the initial proposal before the elimination of a third area (B) which was more prominent than D and E. The issues remaining relate to securing the maintenance of boundary tree-scapes where critical to the successful concealment of the development and consideration of greater winter visibility. Although generally outside of the application red edge the perimeter trees are a required component of the Minerals Authority approved restoration plan and thereby secured. Apart from workers and visitors to the remaining Sibelco laboratories adjacent to Area E, people seeing the other views of the solar farm are unlikely to pick it out as a noticeable feature in the landscape.

Impact on amenity of local residents and the historic environment.

7. The operational solar farm is unlikely to have any significant impacts on the amenity of local residents with no noise concerns and limited scope for visibility of the development from residential properties. The applicant indicates that the generation of noise and vibration from the proposal is limited and the Council's Environmental Health Officer has no objection to the proposal subject to certain safeguards during construction. The applicant also considers that the potential for glint and glare is limited - the panels are designed to maximise efficiency by reducing light reflection and maximising light absorption. The Council's Conservation Officer and Staffordshire County Council have no objections to the proposal impacts on the historic environment.

Impact on ecology

8. There are no adverse impacts likely on statutory and non statutory designated sites which are generally remote from the application site. Great Crested Newts are known from land adjoining and safeguards by way of condition would be appropriate. Approval of this proposal would mean that the approved quarry restoration plan for the creation of species-rich grassland in area D and for similar over a low fertility substrate in area E would not be achieved. It is understood that this restoration was due by 31st March 2014. The area of lost habitat is calculated at 11.7 hectares. The applicant has identified areas of habitat improvement elsewhere within the quarry ownership in lieu of the developed solar site and proposes to fund off-site grassland habitat restoration at the rate of £1,000 per annum for the lifetime of the development with an up-front funding of £17,000 in order to make up the shortfall. These measures can be secured by a condition (see condition 6). Significant work towards the detail required has already been supplied. The compensation need not be assessed on a like-for-like area basis but may be assessed by a scoring index attributing more detailed values other than basic land area.

Impact on Minerals

9. The Mineral Planning Authority has resolved concerns about the restrictions the development could impose on future mineral extraction and no longer objects on this count.

Severn Trent Water and Environment Agency

10. Conditions are needed in respect of groundwater protection. Given that matters raised can be dealt with by condition this presents an appropriate response.

Overall Balance and Conclusions

11. Both the development plan and national planning policy support the principle of solar farms as a means of providing for renewable energy and contributing to the reduction in climate change through reductions in CO_2 emissions.

12. The 6.98 MW hours p.a. of renewable energy provided for by this proposal equating to the consumption of 1,680 households and the resultant reduction of about 80,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions carries very significant weight in the determination of this application.

13. Against this significant benefit the main costs are considered to be:

- a slight to moderate adverse effect to the overall landscape character of the area, notwithstanding that within the area of the development itself the impact would be more marked;
- a slight to moderate adverse visual impact on parts of the nearby public footpaths and local receptors with longer range impacts reduced to slight by the removal of area B;
- a significant loss of biodiversity on the application site compared to the quarry restoration scheme.

14. There is no appropriate mitigation to the adverse impact on landscape character, but it is relatively limited and, significantly, with the estimated lifespan of the solar farm of 25 years, it is not irreversible. The identified visual impact is considered tolerable, already benefitting from the screening effects of established existing perimeter tree belts, and greatly aided by the containing topography. Furthermore additional tree planting required by the approved quarry restoration scheme will assist in mitigating the impact of the proposed solar farm, notwithstanding that in some locations thinning is planned. In conclusion Policies SD2 and DC3 in particular apply and are not wholly met but it is a matter of balance to conclude in favour of the development based on limited landscape impacts and very significant renewable energy production. Considered against the range of anticipated possibilities referenced in the relevant sections of the Churnet Valley Masterplan and the guidelines therein the proposal is judged appropriate in that context being low profile with few or no wider area impacts and being well contained and screened. For example, subject to impact, new leisure development, in particular low impact holiday lodge development is given as a potential future use along with potential for a complementary renewable energy scheme.

15. The measures outlined in paragraph 8 above are considered appropriate compensation in lieu of the lost habitat which would otherwise have been created under the quarry restoration scheme. Policies SD2 and NE1 (points 5 and 6) in particular apply. It is again a matter of balance to conclude in favour of the development but again given the very significant renewable energy production and given the commitments to mitigate the impacts through off-site compensatory habitat provision (to be governed through conditions) the balance in favour is judged appropriate.

16. Therefore in conclusion and on balance, in consideration of the above as summarised at paragraphs 11 to 15 the application is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

Planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 51 of the Town and Country Planning, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the application forms and details submitted including the following approved plans: SBC1000/17/01; SBC1000/17/02 Rev.1; SBC1000/17/03 Rev.0; SBC1000/17/04 Rev.0 SBC1000/17/05 Rev.0; SBC1000/17/06 Rev.0; and SBC1000/17/07 Rev.1.
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans in the interests of proper planning.

3. No development approved by this planning permission shall take place until a remediation strategy that includes the following components to deal with the risks associated with contamination of the site have each been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority:

a) a preliminary risk assessment which has identified:
- i) all previous uses;
- ii) potential contaminants associated with those uses;
- iii) a conceptual model of the site indicating sources, pathways and receptors;
- iv) potentially unacceptable risks arising from contamination at the site;

b) a site investigation scheme, based on (a) to provide information for a detailed assessment of the risk to all receptors that may be affected, including those off site;

c) the results of the site investigation and the detailed risk assessment referred to in (b) and, based on these, an options appraisal and remediation strategy giving full details of the remediation measures required and how they are to be undertaken;

d) a verification plan providing details of the data that will be collected in order to demonstrate that the works set out in the remediation strategy in (c) are complete and identifying any requirements for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action.

Any changes to these components require the express written consent of the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.
Reason: To prevent pollution of the natural environment

4. No occupation of any part of the permitted development shall take place until a verification report demonstrating completion of works set out in the approved remediation strategy and the effectiveness of the remediation has been submitted to and approved, in writing, by the local planning authority. The report shall include results of sampling and monitoring carried out in accordance with the approved verification plan to demonstrate that the site remediation criteria have been met. It shall also include any plan (a "long-term monitoring and maintenance plan") for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action, as identified in the verification plan. The long-term monitoring and maintenance plan shall be implemented as approved.
Reason: To ensure that any remedial works required as an outcome of the site investigation and risk assessment are completed to a satisfactory standard.

5. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until such time as a scheme to dispose of surface water has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.
Reason: To ensure there is no detrimental impact on water quality in the River Churnet as a result of surface water run-off from this site; to ensure the site is provided with a satisfactory means of drainage and to reduce the risk of creating or exacerbating a flooding problem.

6. No development shall take place until a scheme ("the offsetting scheme") for the offsetting of biodiversity impacts at the site has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
The offsetting scheme shall include:

- The areas of land identified on Figures 1A, 1B and 1C of fprc's Habitat Creation and Management Strategy and Biodiversity Offsetting Report (November 2014).
- A methodology for the identification of a further area of land outwith the application site capable of delivering commensurate habitat compensation;
- Details of the offset works to be carried out on the land and land outwith the application site identified in accordance with the above methodology ;
- The provision of arrangements and legal rights to secure the delivery of the offsetting measures including a timetable for their delivery; and
- A management and monitoring plan to include for the provision and maintenance of the offsetting measures for the life of the development within the red edge, within the blue edge and off-site land areas.

The written approval of the Local Planning Authority shall not be issued before the arrangements necessary to secure delivery of the off-setting measures have been completed and evidence of the arrangements has been provided to the Local Planning Authority. The offsetting scheme shall be implemented in full accordance with the requirements of the approved scheme.
Reason: To ensure a sustainable development safeguarding of biodiversity in compliance with the NPPF.

7. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until the proposed temporary construction road and set down area have been provided in accordance with the approved plans.
Reason: To comply with the policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and to comply with Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan 2014 Policy T1.

8. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until wheel cleaning facilities have been installed on site in accordance with details to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved facility shall thereafter be utilised by all heavy goods vehicles for the full period of construction works.
Reason: To comply with the policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and to comply with Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan 2014 Policy T1.

9. The development hereby permitted shall be undertaken in accordance with the construction traffic plan detailed in the construction method statement for the full period of construction works.
Reason: To comply with the policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and to comply with Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan 2014 Policy T1.

10. The details of size, form and position of all security cameras, detectors or other associated security apparatus shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for written approval prior to installation and shall be erected only in accordance with the details as approved.
Reason: In the interests of appropriate control of the development.

11. The operational life of the development shall be for a maximum period of 25 years from the date construction is complete or energy production is begun whichever is the earlier and written notification of this date shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than 1 calendar month after that event.
Reason: To ensure that the period of existence of the approved development is limited to an appropriate time frame.

12. Within 6 months of the expiry of this permission, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the development including panels, support structures and any other ancillary equipment, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details for the restoration of the site. Unless otherwise agreed, the scheme of decommissioning and site restoration shall be implemented within 12 months of the date of its agreement by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: In the interests of the amenity of the area.

13. If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to operate for a continuous period of 6 months then, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the development including panels and any other ancillary equipment, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority within 3 months of the end of the cessation period. The scheme shall include details for the restoration of the site. Unless otherwise agreed, the scheme of decommissioning and site restoration shall be implemented within 12 months of the date of its agreement by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the amenity of the area.

Informatives

Environment Agency

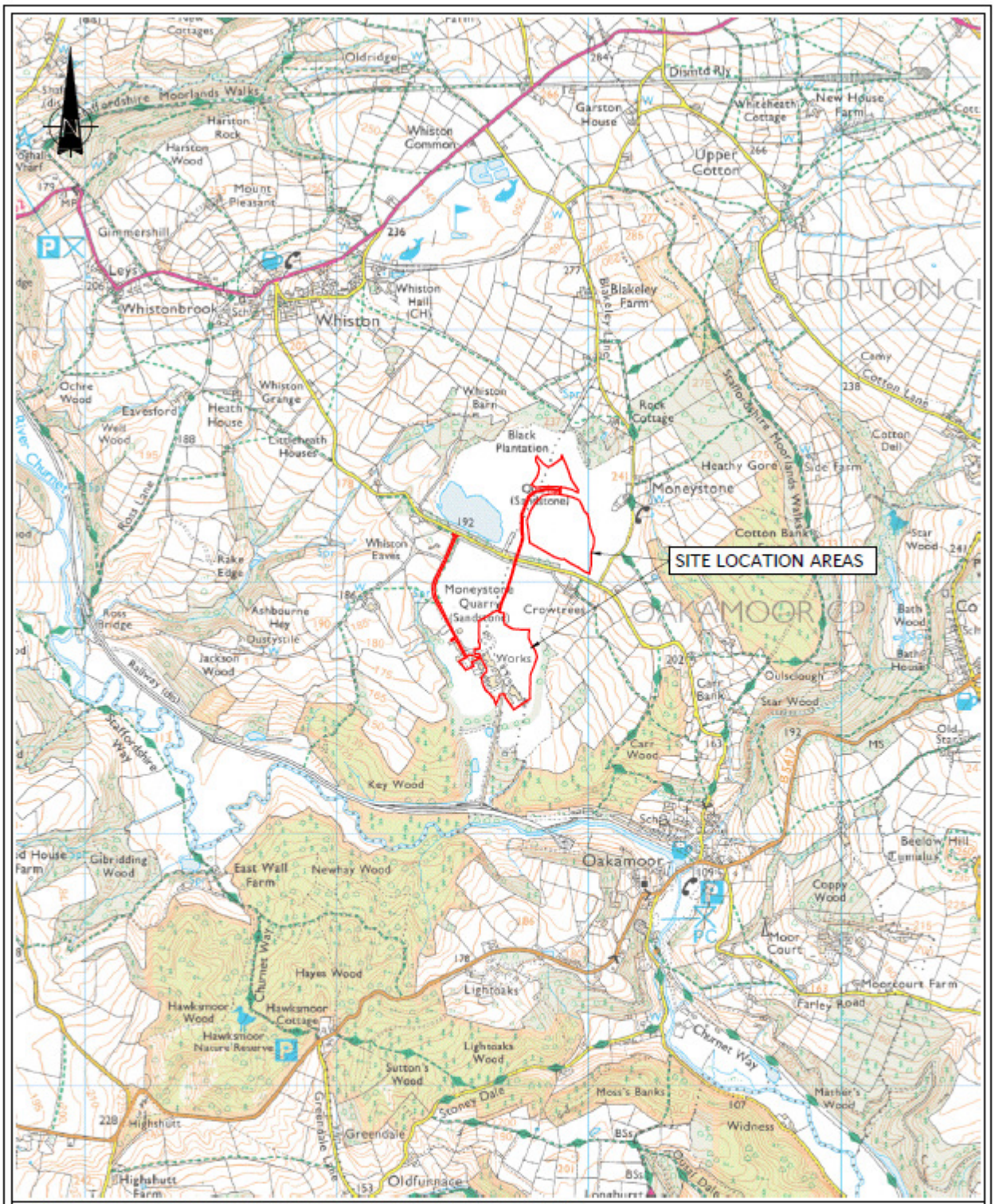
1. Recommend that developers should:

a. Follow the risk management framework provided in CLR11, Model Procedures for the Management of Land Contamination, when dealing with land affected by contamination.

b. Refer to the Environment Agency document 'Guiding principles for land contamination' for the type of information that we required in order to assess risks to controlled waters from the site. The Local Authority can advise on risk to other receptors, such as human health.

c. Refer to our website at www.gov.uk/environment-agency for more information.

2. Surface water run-off should be controlled as near to its source as possible through a sustainable drainage approach to surface water management (SUDS). SUDS are an approach to managing surface water run-off which seeks to mimic natural drainage systems and retain water on or near the site as opposed to traditional drainage approaches which involve piping water off site as quickly as possible. SUDS involve a range of techniques including soakaways, infiltration trenches, permeable pavements, grassed swales, green roofs, ponds and wetlands. SUDS offer significant advantages over conventional piped drainage systems in reducing flood risk by attenuating the rate and quantity of surface water run-off from a site, promoting groundwater recharge absorbing diffuse pollutants and improving water quality. Ponds, reedbeds and seasonally flooded grasslands can be particularly attractive features within public open spaces. The variety of SUDS techniques available means that virtually any development should be able to include a scheme based around these principles and provide multiple benefits, reducing costs and maintenance needs.



The Solar Building COMPANY LIMITED

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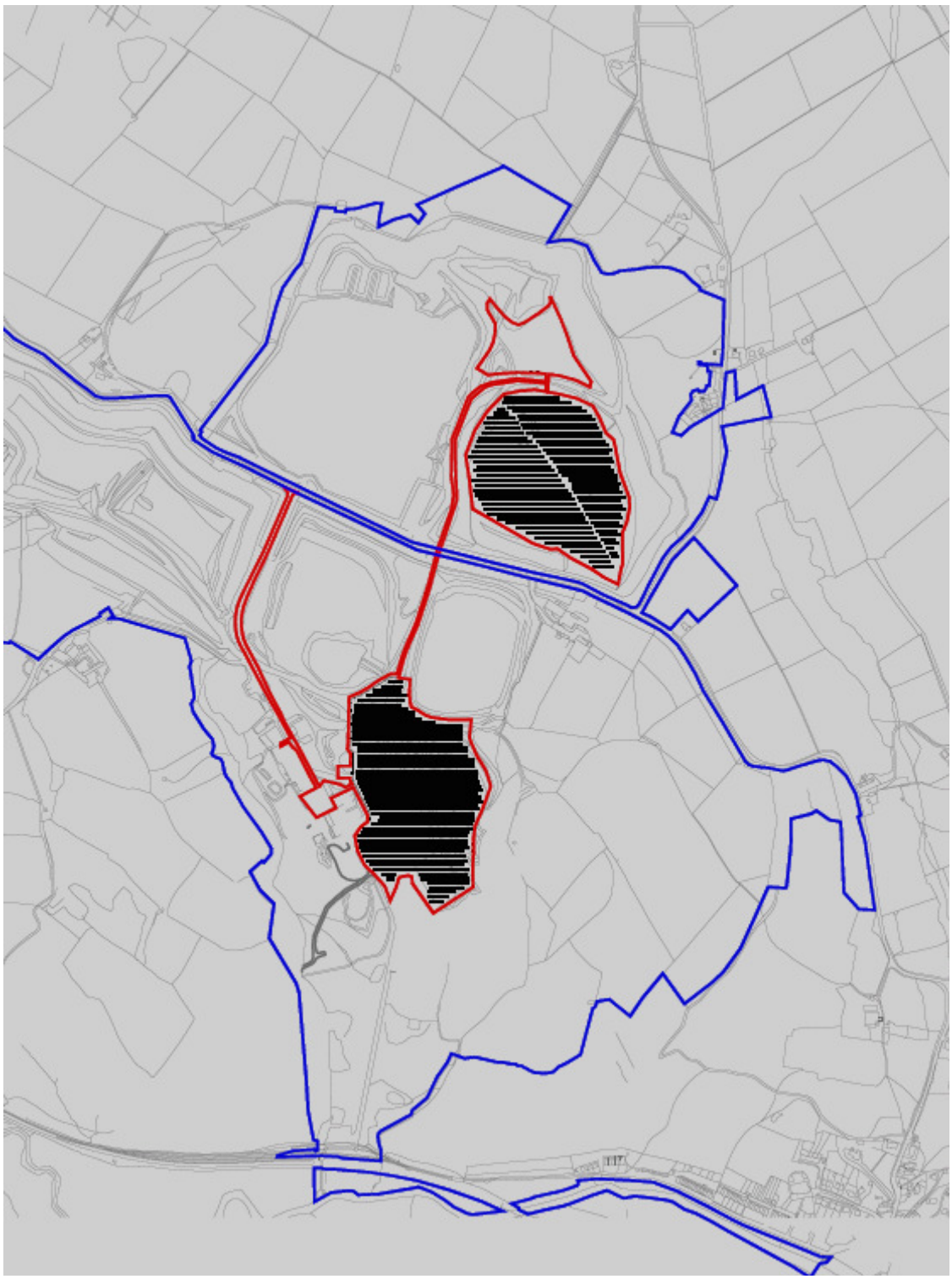
JOB TITLE: MONEYSTONE QUARRY SOLAR FARM

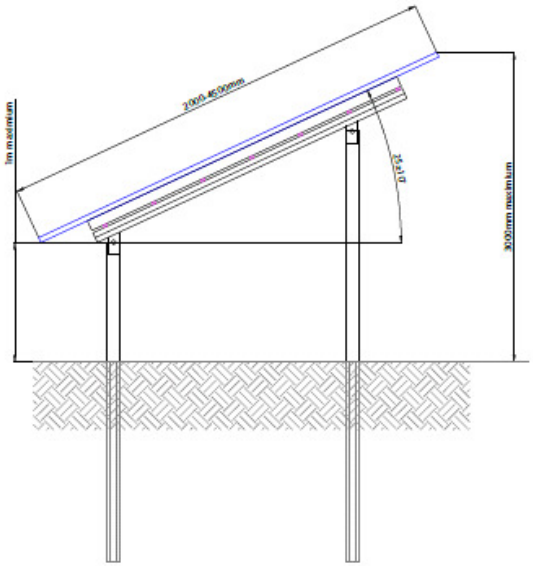
DRAWING TITLE: SITE LOCATION PLAN

REV	DESCRIPTION	DATE	BY

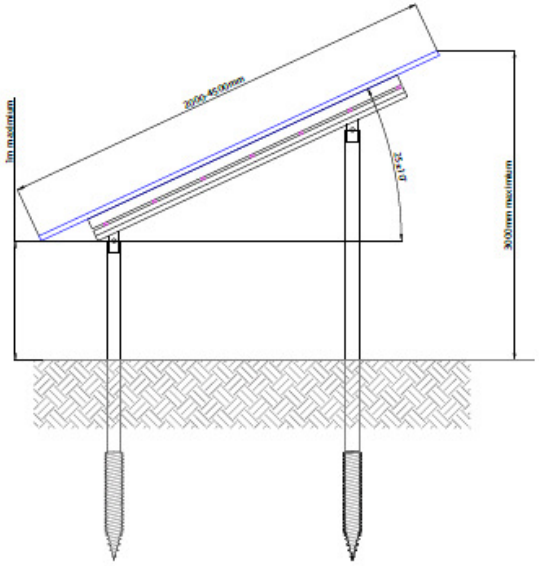
DRAWN	DATE	APPROVED	DATE
S.T	18/6/2014	J.C	18/6/2014

SCALE	SHEET	DRAWING NUMBER
1:20,000	A4	SBC1000/17/01

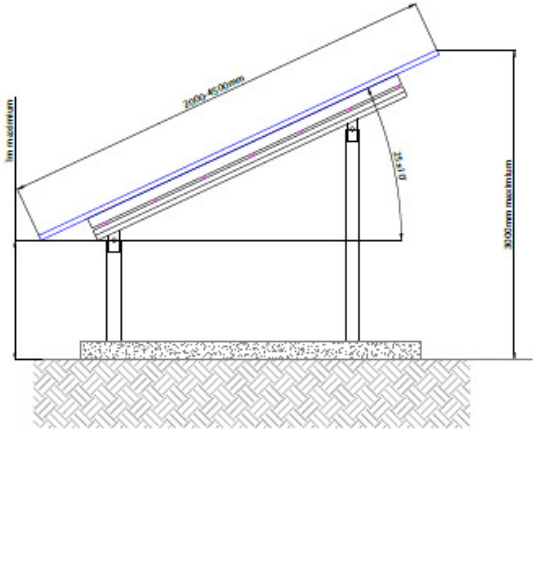




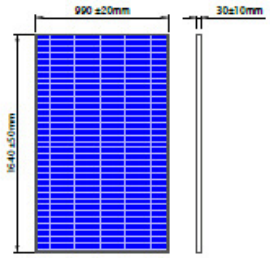
SIDE VIEW OF PV PANEL
GROUND ROD INSTALLATION



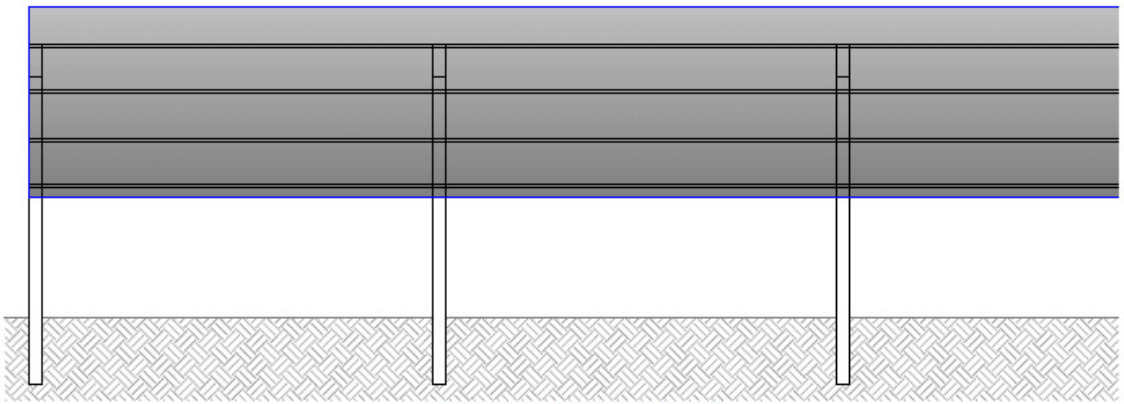
SIDE VIEW OF PV PANEL
GROUND SCREW INSTALLATION



SIDE VIEW OF PV PANEL
CONCRETE SLEEPER INSTALLATION



INDIVIDUAL PV PANEL DIMENSIONS



REAR VIEW OF PV PANEL INSTALLATION

SMD/2014/0432 **ADDENDUM REPORT: PROPOSED 14.3 HECTARE 6.98MWp SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC ARRAY AT MONEYSTONE QUARRY, EAVES LANE, NR WHISTON AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SOLAR BUSINESS COMPANY.**

Parishes: Kingsley / Oakamoor | Registration: 28/06/2014
Case Officer: Mr. A Swithenbank | Grid Reference: SK045/569

OFFICER COMMENTS

1. The Committee deferred its determination of this application at its meeting on 27th November 2014 to enable additional information to be obtained addressing the outstanding objection from Staffordshire County Council.

2. Meanwhile the applicant has opted to vary some details of the application. The nature of the application is essentially the same and the site red edge is unaltered but the scale of the development is reduced in that the amounts and density of panels is less and the overall predicted power output is 5MWp where previously it was to have been 6.98MWp. The details are now as shown on submitted drawing SBC1031/1/01v Site Layout received 11th February 2015. The detail of the panels remains as in drawing SBC1000/17/03 showing that the angle of inclination of the panels is 25 degrees from the horizontal. As previously there is to be a single HV Sub-station and Switchgear cabin just off the west edge of the southern panel area (Area E) measuring 12m x 4m x 2.5m high as shown in drawing SBC1000/17/06. Each developed area of panels would also have its own hub of plant cabins on a reduced scale compared with the original application occupying an area approximately 15m x 4m and approximately 3m high. The applicant requests that the final construction details of this apparatus be made the subject of a controlling condition.

3. The reduced development density within the site red edge allows both an increased spacing between the panel rows and broader undeveloped areas to the margins of the site areas. There is therefore a reduced requirement for compensatory off-site biodiversity enhancement and greater scope for biodiversity to be provided for within the site. An additional 18 page Framework Document for the restoration and management of the grassland habitats at this site has been submitted along with a supporting document evidencing how, under certain management controls, Solar Farm developments can support grassland biodiversity. The Method Statement and Management Strategy (September 2014) has been revised and up-dated accordingly (Revision C ref PH/10.02.15). This specifies the locations of off-site compensatory habitat management work to take place within the application blue edged land in two areas as located in Figure 1 and shown in greater detail in figures 1b and 1c respectively.

4. The Staffordshire County Council Ecologist has stated in an e-mail of 12th February 2015 at 19.30 that, subject to comments to be controlled by condition and subject to the County Council Landscape Officer also being in agreement, "I am satisfied that biodiversity issues will have been adequately addressed so as to maintain the benefits and compensation for mineral extraction that were included in the approved Moneystone Quarry restoration scheme and would not object to the application". The County

Landscape Officer confirmed "no landscape concerns" in an e-mail dated 16th February 2015. In an earlier e-mail of the 12th February 2015 the County Ecologist commented that, "the Framework Document is excellent and forms a good basis for a more detailed establishment, management and monitoring plan that could be required by condition". A final version was provided on the 13th February 2015 and the County Ecologist commented in an e-mail of later that day that she was "happy with this". Subject to conditions therefore it is now clear that the County Council has no outstanding objection to the application.

5. The additional requirements suggested by the County Ecologist are:
   - that a Construction Method Statement to include Reasonable Avoidance Measures in respect of Great Crested Newts (as appendix 1 proposes to include) be required by condition;
   - a condition for submission and implementation of a finalised habitat restoration, management and monitoring plan that includes a provision for regular reporting to and liaison with the LPA (it is anticipated that site meetings would be provided for as part of this).

Further Representations

6. Representations have continued to be received additional to those reported at the November meeting. Four of these received on the 18th December quoting this application reference raise issues entirely concerned with application SMD/2014/0682 and have been copied to that application file. Tenants of one of the farms within the site blue edge have written to state that they have not given agreement for any off-setting on their land. Query has been raised about the significance of low and high voltage outputs referred to in the application details.

7. In response it can be noted that neither of the two off-setting sites now proposed are within the Crowtrees Farm land. The output usage of electricity generated is not material to the merits of the application in terms of renewable energy generation. NPPF Paragraph 98 specifically states that LPAs should not require applicants for renewable energy schemes to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

Planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 51 of the Town and Country Planning, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the application forms and details submitted including the following approved plans: SBC1031/1/01v; and SBC1000/17/03 Rev.0.
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans in the interests of proper planning.

3. No development approved by this planning permission shall take place until a remediation strategy that includes the following components to deal with the risks associated with contamination of the site have each been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority:

a) a preliminary risk assessment which has identified:

i) all previous uses;
ii) potential contaminants associated with those uses;
iii) a conceptual model of the site indicating sources, pathways and receptors;
iv) potentially unacceptable risks arising from contamination at the site;

b) a site investigation scheme, based on (a) to provide information for a detailed assessment of the risk to all receptors that may be affected, including those off site;

c) the results of the site investigation and the detailed risk assessment referred to in (b) and, based on these, an options appraisal and remediation strategy giving full details of the remediation measures required and how they are to be undertaken;

d) a verification plan providing details of the data that will be collected in order to demonstrate that the works set out in the remediation strategy in (c) are complete and identifying any requirements for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action.

Any changes to these components require the express written consent of the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.
Reason: To prevent pollution of the natural environment

4. No occupation of any part of the permitted development shall take place until a verification report demonstrating completion of works set out in the approved remediation strategy and the effectiveness of the remediation has been submitted to and approved, in writing, by the local planning authority. The report shall include results of sampling and monitoring carried out in accordance with the approved verification plan to demonstrate that the site remediation criteria have been met. It shall also include any plan (a "long-term monitoring and maintenance plan") for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action, as identified in the verification plan. The long-term monitoring and maintenance plan shall be implemented as approved.
Reason: To ensure that any remedial works required as an outcome of the site investigation and risk assessment are completed to a satisfactory standard.

5. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until such time as a scheme to dispose of surface water has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority. The scheme shall be implemented as approved.
Reason: To ensure there is no detrimental impact on water quality in the River Churnet as a result of surface water run-off from this site; to ensure the site is provided with a satisfactory means of drainage and to reduce the risk of creating or exacerbating a flooding problem.

6. Prior to the commencement of development a Construction Method Statement to include Reasonable Avoidance Measures to safeguard Great Crested Newts shall be submitted to the LPA for its written approval and the construction of the development shall progress in accordance with the Method Statement as subsequently approved.

Reason: To ensure an appropriate level of safeguard for Great Crested Newts.

7. Prior to the commencement of development a finalised version of the habitat establishment, management and monitoring plan shall be submitted to the LPA for its written approval and the approved development shall be implemented in accordance with the plan as subsequently approved.
Reason: To ensure a sustainable development safeguarding of biodiversity in compliance with the Development Plan and NPPF.

8. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until the proposed temporary construction road and set down area have been provided in accordance with the approved plans.
Reason: To comply with the policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and to comply with Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan 2014 Policy T1.

9. The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until wheel cleaning facilities have been installed on site in accordance with details to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved facility shall thereafter be utilised by all heavy goods vehicles for the full period of construction works.
Reason: To comply with the policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and to comply with Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan 2014 Policy T1.

10. The development hereby permitted shall be undertaken in accordance with the construction traffic plan detailed in the construction method statement for the full period of construction works.
Reason: To comply with the policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and to comply with Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan 2014 Policy T1.

11. The details of size, form and position of all substation, inverter and transformer plant cabins and associated apparatus shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for written approval prior to installation and shall be erected only in accordance with the details as approved.
Reason: In the interests of appropriate control of the development.

12. The details of size, form and position of all security cameras, detectors or other associated security apparatus shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for written approval prior to installation and shall be erected only in accordance with the details as approved.
Reason: In the interests of appropriate control of the development.

13. The operational life of the development shall be for a maximum period of 25 years from the date construction is complete or energy production is begun whichever is the earlier and written notification of this date shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than 1 calendar month after that event.
Reason: To ensure that the period of existence of the approved development is limited to an appropriate time frame.

14. Within 6 months of the expiry of this permission, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the development including panels, support structures and any other ancillary equipment, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details for the restoration of the site. Unless otherwise agreed, the scheme of decommissioning and site restoration shall be implemented within 12 months of the date of its agreement by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: In the interests of the amenity of the area.

15. If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to operate for a continuous period of 6 months then, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the development including panels and any other ancillary equipment, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority within 3 months of the end of the cessation period. The scheme shall include details for the restoration of the site. Unless otherwise agreed, the scheme of decommissioning and site restoration shall be implemented within 12 months of the date of its agreement by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: In the interests of the amenity of the area.

Informatives

Environment Agency

1. Recommend that developers should:

   a. Follow the risk management framework provided in CLR11, Model Procedures for the Management of Land Contamination, when dealing with land affected by contamination.

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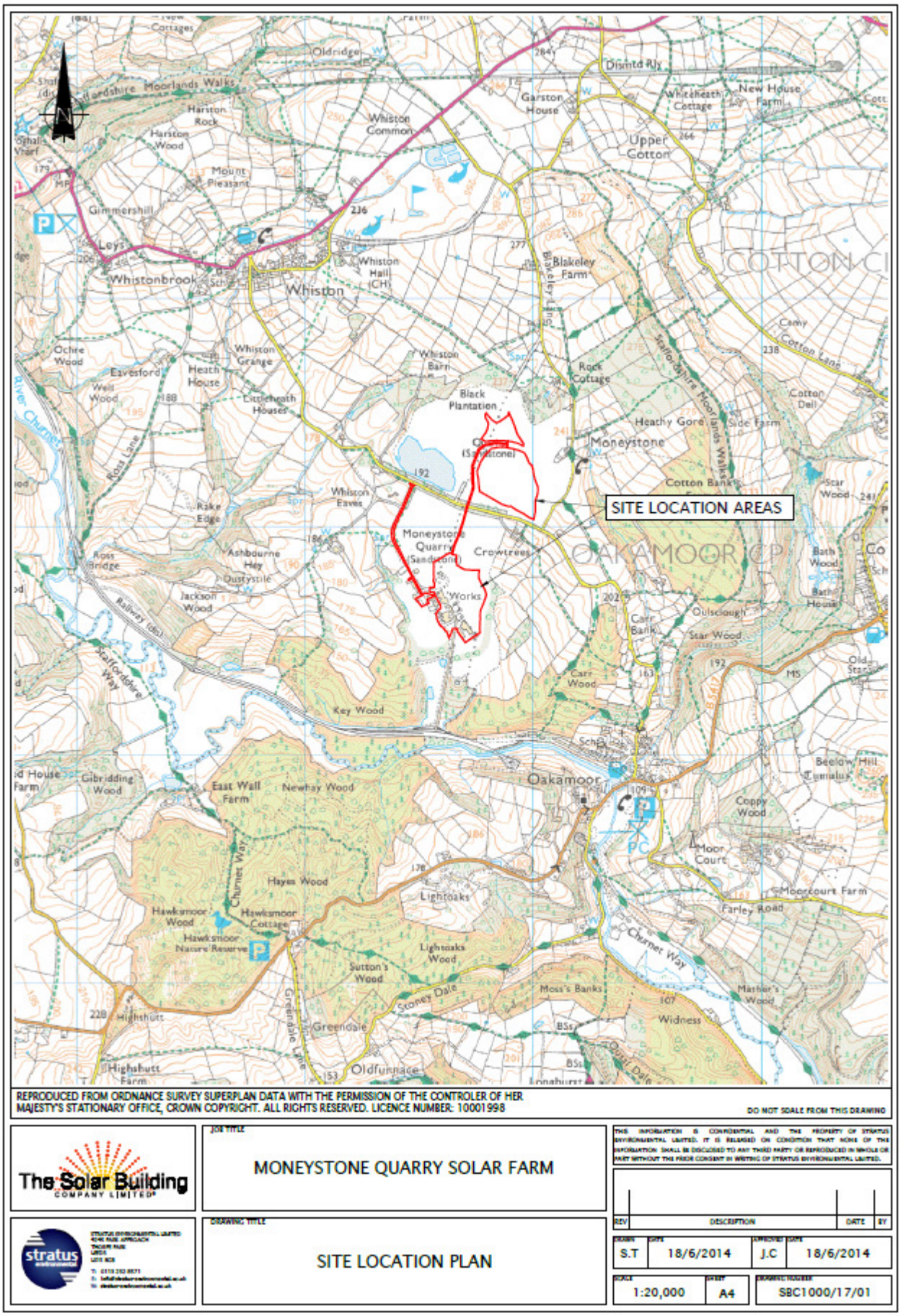

The Solar Building COMPANY LIMITED

JOB TITLE: MONEYSTONE QUARRY SOLAR FARM

DRAWING TITLE: SITE LOCATION PLAN

REV	DESCRIPTION	DATE	BY

DRAWN	DATE	APPROVED	DATE
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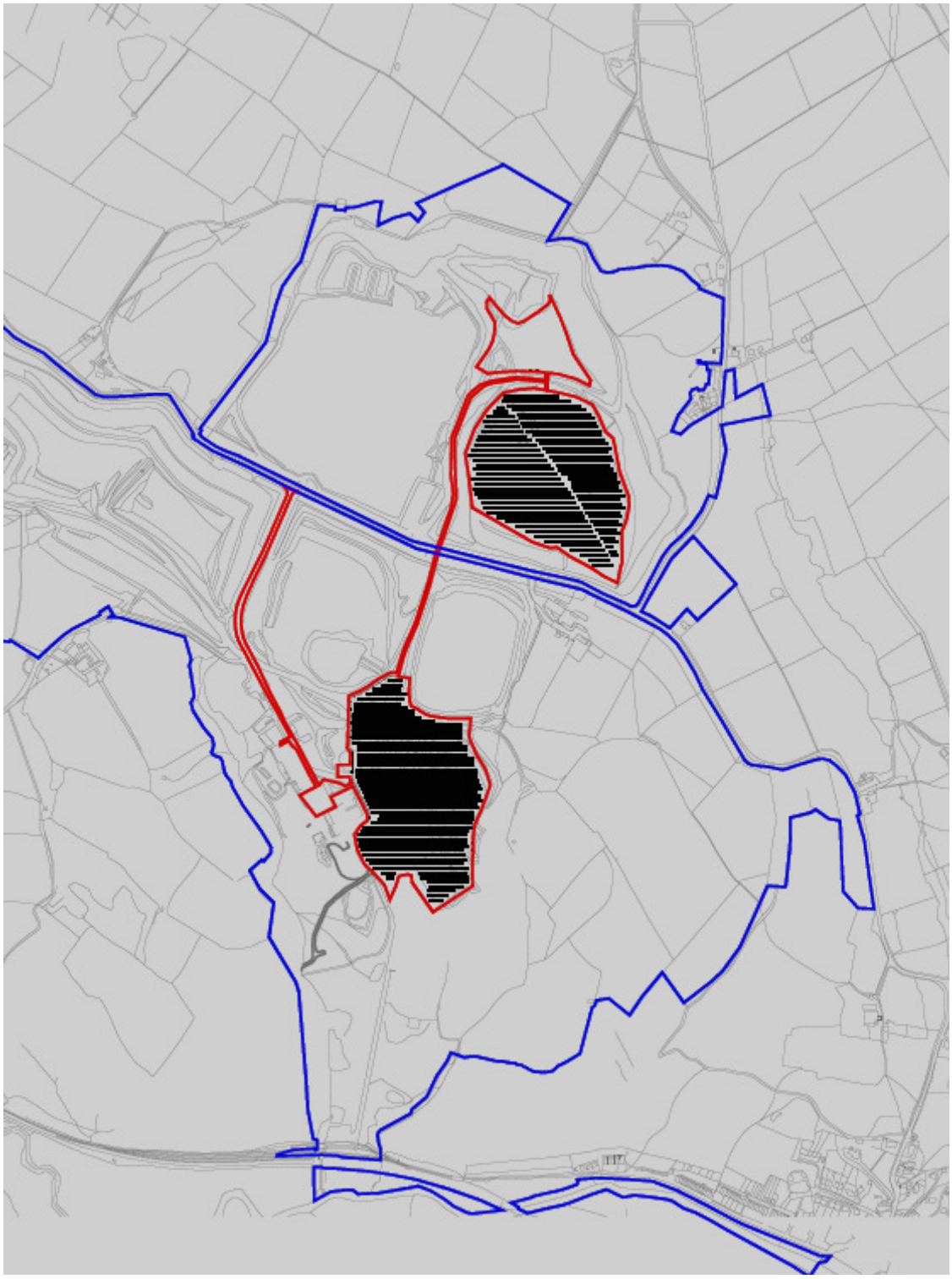

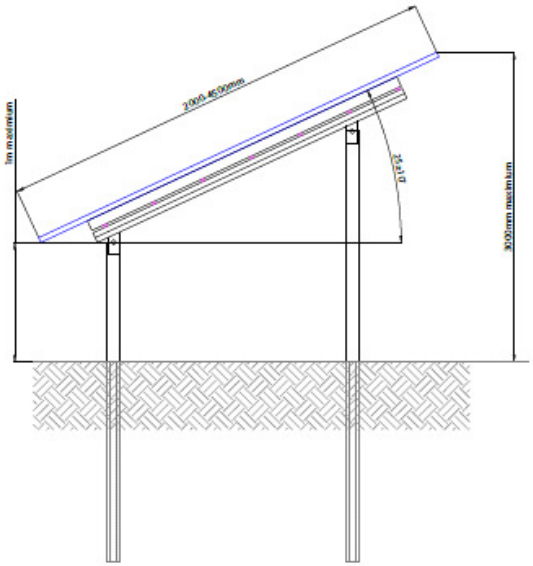

SIDE VIEW OF PV PANEL
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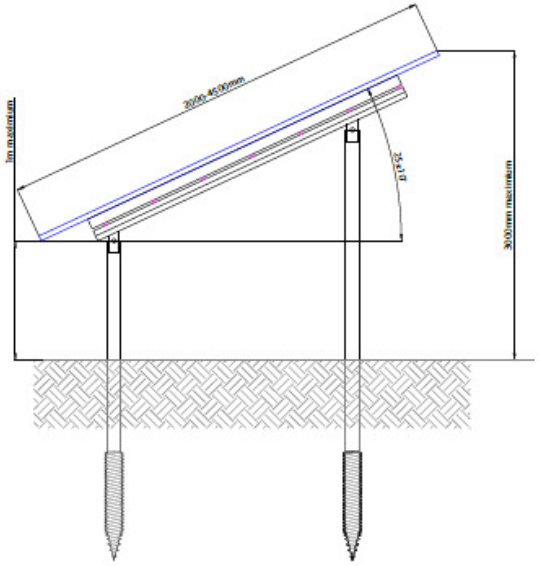

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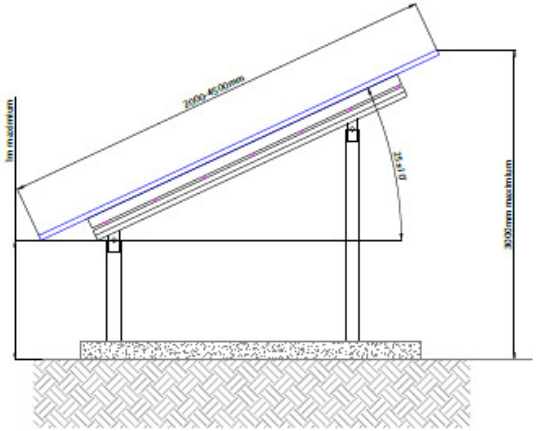
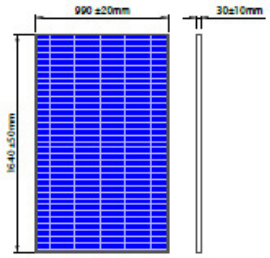


SIDE VIEW OF PV PANEL
CONCRETE SLEEPER INSTALLATION



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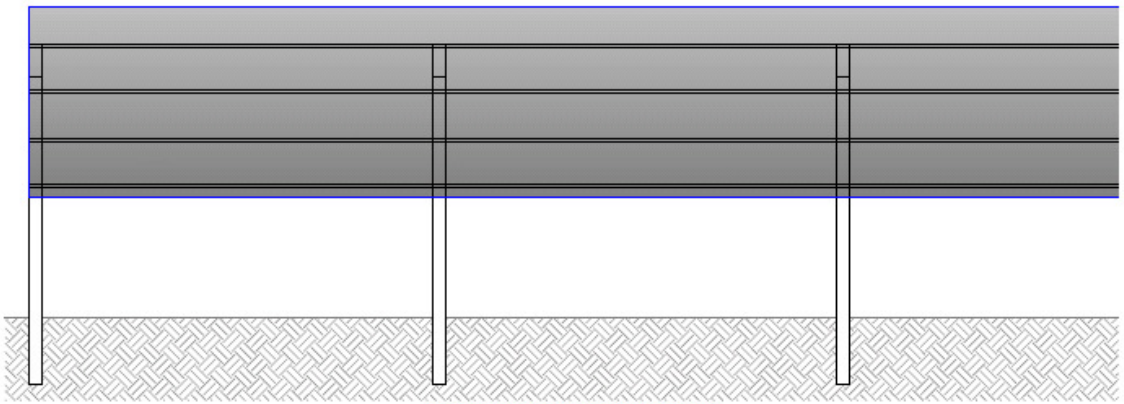

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