

**Subject:** Cumnor PC – VWHDC meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March to ask residents' questions about Cumnor Hill and Farmoor solar power station proposals

**VWHDC Attendees:** Paula Fox, Development Manager; Stuart Walker, Major Applications Team Leader; Sally Appleyard, Senior Planning Officer Major Applications.

**Cumnor PC attendees:** Dom Balchin, Tom Christophers, Chris Westcott and Clerk.

## Background

- 25<sup>th</sup> February – [Council requested a meeting with VWHDC](#) as 'Council and residents have unanswered questions'
- 3<sup>rd</sup> March [VWHDC replied to Council](#) declined to meet 'due to other work commitments'
- 8<sup>th</sup> March [Council repeated its request to meet](#) including Council's proposed list of requirements for any planning application
- 10<sup>th</sup> March 17:08 Stuart Walker replies to Council repeating 3<sup>rd</sup> March response declining to meet
- 10<sup>th</sup> March 18:28 Adrian Duffield replies to Council offering to meet and asking for Council's questions before the meeting
- 15<sup>th</sup> March Council sends questions to VWHDC ([see end of this note for full text of questions and information supplied](#))

## 16<sup>th</sup> March 11:30 Council – VWHDC Teams meeting (30')

### Intro

- Cumnor PC thanked VWHDC for the opportunity to put questions on behalf of our residents
- VWHDC said they recognised 'there's considerable expertise in the Parish in a number of areas' and 'very much want to work with you'. For any planning application 'VWHDC in house experts' would 'give it due regard it deserves' 'bolstered by outside opinion always helpful'
- The applicants 'may seek pre application advice from us'. (Subsequently confirmed in follow up question from Cumnor PC that VWHDC 'have preapplication enquiries for both sites' in the Parish)

Q1 How will you assess the extent and validity of any data and analysis submitted and what independent checks will you make yourselves?

- VWHDC is waiting for planning application to be submitted.
- More information would be available from the pre-application stage which would be shared once a planning application was submitted.
- Standard consultation process would be followed ie LVIA, habitats, survey
- VWHDC specialists would be invited to comment e.g., ecologist.
- Difficult to know whether any submitted application will be of sufficient quality at this stage
- If 3<sup>rd</sup> parties raise more detailed matters 'we will be double checking with our experts'
- Documents submitted by applicant (e.g. visual appraisal) need to meet prescribed methodology.
- VWHDC would consult Natural England if site is within 'buffers' of SSSI

Q2 How will you assess the viability of these proposals, as we understand you are required to do?

- Good for VWHDC to be aware of concerns but planning process doesn't allow us to give that any weight but 'doesn't mean we are not completely blind to it' This information may be questioned in other ways. But the Parish Council can raise this when responding to an application.
- Viability sits outside the planning process unless the applicant can't make their plans policy compliant (e.g., in the case of housing developments providing 35% affordable housing).
- 'All Souls ultimate intentions are not a planning consideration'
- Regarding the proposed grid connection to Osney for both sites 'we would expect an indication of the routes to be supporting the application so we can assess that' and 'we will test whether the prospect of that connection is reasonably deliverable.'
- Connection to the grid can be questioned by VWHDC consulting with utility companies. There may be no capacity, but if the developer pays towards upgrading the substation this would mean that utilities would not object.

Q3 How will you assess amenity impacts? In particular, how will you build on already 'peer reviewed' evidence such as that in Council's Neighbourhood Plan and the Oxford Preservation Trust/Historic England 'Oxford viewcones study'?

- Landscape Architect will assess amenity impacts using a site visit to assess if she thinks this is required.
- Best level of protection is by having a made Cumnor Parish Neighbourhood Plan, Oxford viewcones study, Green Belt designation. and VWHDC Local Plan - 'good we have those extra layers' for example 'absolutely respecting the viewpoints as well'
- 'It places Cumnor in the best position it can' 'It is green belt of course which is a really important designation'
- 'We absolutely recognise this will need very careful consideration'
- Planning Committee members would make site visits.
- Impact of CCTV on the public using footpaths would not be considered (as in the public realm).
- Impact of CCTV on resident's private amenity space if resident objects and CCTV is 'materially intrusive' would be considered i.e., removed or repositioned.

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**From:** clerk

**Sent:** 15 March 2022 09:18

**To:** 'Walker, Stuart' <[stuart.walker@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:stuart.walker@southandvale.gov.uk)>; Fox, Paula

<[Paula.Fox@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:Paula.Fox@southandvale.gov.uk)>; Appleyard, Sally <[sally.appleyard@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:sally.appleyard@southandvale.gov.uk)>

**Subject:** RE: Request for a meeting to discuss next steps for solar power station proposals in Cumnor

Dear Stuart,

Perfect Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March at 11.30am works.

Ahead of the meeting, and picking up on Adrian Duffield's suggestion in his 10<sup>th</sup> March email, here are three questions that our discussions with Cumnor residents show are high on our community's list of concerns, which Council shares.

- 1) Thanks for confirming that the list we supplied in Council's 8<sup>th</sup> March email (and cc'd again below) of issues to be considered in any planning application are all 'routine material considerations', but residents remain sceptical that any applicant will fully and honestly submit independent data and analysis to you as LPA across all these areas when you ask them to do so.

**So, how will you assess the extent and validity of any data and analysis submitted, and what independent checks will you make yourselves?**

For example, residents have noted that the EIA opinion for P21/V3288/SCR only describes the need for a landscape and visual appraisal rather than the more complete assessment (LVIA); the applicant wants to limit the radius to 3km (and in documents shared with adjacent landowners has further restricted this to 2km) and we believe has already conducted their own Agriculture Land Classification survey, which media reports indicate inevitably conclude that the land is of lower quality than that recorded by DEFRA.

As one local Cumnor archaeological expert asked 'will Solar 2 really undertake an on the ground archaeological and cultural appraisal?' given the Roman Road under the site.

- 2) As Adrian Duffield's reply to Layla Moran MP (7<sup>th</sup> March) helpfully confirms that 'connections to the National Grid network will be assessed at the planning application stage' and that the applicants for both the Cumnor Hill and Farmoor sites have confirmed to Council that they will connect to the grid in Osney (4+km by road from both sites and so at a cost in excess of £1m each we believe) **how will you assess the viability of these proposals, as we understand you are required to do?**

Council asks this about for both sites in the Parish as:

The Farmoor EIA submission mapped an area considerably larger than that to be occupied by the PV panels etc, giving rise to residents' concerns about the subsequent installation of industrial scale batteries (which, as Matt Hancock MP described in last week's HoC debate on solar farms, have given rise to numerous fires) housed in 40' shipping containers.

The Cumnor Hill site would have a much lower electricity output and so income than most current sites in England. Here residents believe, and have reasons to do so, that this application is a 'stalking horse' for the landowner, All Souls College.

There's a widespread view that having gained planning permission for a solar power station, using as grounds for building on Green Belt the Vale's own defined 'climate emergency', the applicant (who has [0 employees](#), debts of £177k and no track record that Council can find of ever having built a solar power station) will sell on the permission to a developer/investor who will then declare the site 'non-viable' and together with the landowner will seek to change the use from an 'industrial installation for the production of electricity' to housing, or cover it in industrial scale batteries.

- 3) Noting that Solar 2 Ltd were [refused planning permission](#) by Angus Council for a similar high profile, elevated, highly visible site enjoyed by many, with an extensive network of PROW "as the proposal would result in significant and adverse impacts on the amenity of the area", **how will you assess amenity impacts? In particular, how will you build on already 'peer**

**reviewed’ evidence such as that in Council’s made [Neighbourhood Plan](#) and the Oxford Preservation Trust/Historic England [‘Oxford viewcones study’](#)?**

Residents have asked this as, in their Angus planning submission, Solar 2 – trading in this case as [Berryhill Solar Farm](#), made the same claims as in [Cumnor and N. Hinksey](#): that the site’s 2m high security fencing, CCTV cameras, buildings and solar panels would be shielded by ‘3m hedging’. They similarly offered to consider beehives, wildflowers and grazing sheep.

Finally, as you appreciate, the pandemic has focused attention on the importance of health and wellbeing, both physical and mental.

Residents are frankly disbelieving that covering open fields in 3.5m high steel structures and buildings, and surrounding the whole area in 2m high fencing topped by CCTV, will do anything but significantly adversely impact the amenity value of both sites in the Parish, no matter how much hedging is planted. They have similar views (in some cases building on their professional expertise) on the significant adverse impacts on habitats and biodiversity too.

Best wishes

Tina

Clerk to Cumnor Parish Council

Council’s proposed list of requirements for any planning application are:

1. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (an LVIA - rather than a landscape and visual appraisal as recommended by the Landscape Officer) to extend well beyond the 3km limit proposed by the developer as the site is visible more than 20km away (see Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan and Oxford Viewcones study).
2. On site Archaeological and Cultural appraisal + Historic Environment. (Given the existence of a Roman road on the SE quadrant of the site and recovered artefacts from the site)
3. Locational justification for proposed development.
4. Impact on amenity including residential and recreational. Impacts on privacy due to extensive CCTV presence adjacent to properties and PROW
5. Flood risk assessment
6. Transport and Access Study given there is no road access to the site.
7. Ecological surveys including disturbance, displacement, habitat loss and/or fragmentation and/or opportunities for habitat improvement.
8. Agricultural Land Classification survey (independently conducted and not one commissioned by the developer)
9. Impact on infrastructure both on and beyond the site – including into neighbouring Council areas given the developer’s stated agreement with SSE to connect the site via underground high voltage cables to Oxford’s Bulk Supply Point in Osney.
10. Glint, glare and aviation impacts (the site is on the flightpath for the RAF etc. landing at Brize Norton)
11. Noise assessment (see your determination of P22/V0144/SCR for confirmation of noise generation)
12. Cumulative impacts
13. Site decommissioning and restoration
14. Other material considerations including relevant local and national guidance on Solar PV development