

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND REGENERATION

CONSIDERATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR GROUND MOUNTED SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SCHEMES.

REASON FOR REPORT:

To consider whether Planning Committee wish to continue to determine all solar photovoltaic (PV) panel schemes that are ground mounted and recommended for approval, irrespective of the scale of the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION:

That with the exception of domestic scale proposals, applications for ground mounted solar PV arrays recommended by Officers for approval be brought before the Committee for determination.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION:

The current arrangements for the determination of such applications and that the scale of proposals and hence impact may vary widely.

RELATIONSHIP TO CORPORATE PLAN:

Well Managed Council

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: Planning performance has the potential for significant financial implications in the event that applications are not determined within 26 weeks or an extension of time negotiated. In that instance the planning fee is returned.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS: The Government monitors planning performance in terms of speed and quality of decision making.

RISK ASSESSMENT: Financial risk as a result of fee return and the designation of planning authorities in special measures for underperformance is referred to above. These aspects are actively monitored, to allow priorities to be adjusted as required to reduce the risk.

1.0 BACKGROUND.

1.1 At the meeting of Planning Committee on 20th February 2013 it was debated whether all future planning applications for photovoltaic (PV) panels that are ground mounted be determined by Planning Committee, rather than being considered by officers under delegated powers given to the Head of Planning and Regeneration. It was resolved as follows:

***RESOLVED** that only applications for ground mounted solar PV arrays that were recommended by Officers for approval be brought before the Committee for determination. If Officers were minded to refuse ground mounted solar PV array applications then the specific Ward Member be informed of the proposed reasons for refusal before the decision is issued.*

1.2 This resolution has to date not been reviewed in light of the consideration of such applications over the intervening period.

2.0 APPLICATION CONSIDERATION BY PLANNING COMMITTEE.

- 2.1 At present all ground mounted solar PV planning applications are determined by Planning Committee if recommended for approval. This is irrespective of the scale of the application. Accordingly domestic, small-scale solar PV schemes are considered by Committee if they are ground mounted rather than being located on buildings. This can result in a delay in the determination of such applications due to the need to schedule it for a meeting of the Committee and additional work for officers in writing a Committee report. Additionally there is currently inconsistency in that a building-mounted solar PV scheme of the same scale is not automatically considered by Planning Committee if recommended for approval.
- 2.2 Planning applications for solar PV panels may vary widely in scale and accordingly impact. This is reflected in the range of applications submitted since February 2013. All are currently dealt with the same in that if recommended for approval they are determined by Planning Committee. Members are requested to relook at the resolution to respect of such applications and to consider whether it should continue to apply to all scales of proposal if recommended for approval, or if domestic scale (small-scale) proposals could be excluded and hence determined under delegated powers. The normal opportunity for Ward Members to call a planning application into Planning Committee for a decision, having given planning reasons for doing so, would still apply.

Contact for Information: Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning and Regeneration
01884 234346

List of Background Papers: Planning Committee 20th February 2013

Circulation of the Report: Cllr Richard Chesterton
Members of Planning Committee