REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND REGENERATION

15/01034/MFUL - ERECTION OF A 500KW ANAEROBIC DIGESTER AND ASSOCIATED WORKS WITH 2 SILAGE CLAMPS. REVISED SCHEME TO INCLUDE THE CHANGE OF ORIENTATION OF THE LAYOUT AND INSTALLATION OF 2 DRIERS - LAND AT NGR 299621 112764 (RED LINHAY) CROWN HILL HALBERTON

Section 1: Consideration of planning application 15/01034/FULL.

Description of Development:

The proposed development is for a revised scheme for the installation of an anaerobic digester (AD) to generate 500kW of electricity converted from biogas via a combined heat and power unit (CHP). Some of the power will be used to run the site with the remainder exported to the National Grid. The site was a pasture field which formed part of the Hartnoll Farm agricultural holding accessed via the existing access on Crown Hill and is adjacent to existing agricultural buildings associated with Hartnoll Farm. Works have already commenced on site and this application is to regularise those works. It follows a previous planning permission for an AD plant in this location under application 13/01605/MFUL.

The proposed site covers an area of 1.23 Hectares including a bund and planting area of 0.3 hectares. It is some 0.32ha larger that the approved scheme 13/01605/MFUL with most of the additional site area being taken up with the additional planting and bund to the site, which will assist with screening and protection of the nearby Grand Western Canal. The report on the application considered at Planning Committee on 13th January 2016 set out a schedule of both the components of the approved scheme and that of the current application together with a summary of the changes. The extent of changes between the approved scheme and that currently under consideration are:

- 1. The site has increased in size from 0.91 hectares to 1.23 hectares the majority of the area is the increase to the length of the silage units and a larger bunded area. The site now extends further to the South/South-east by 36 metres to the internal base of the bund and 46 metres to the outside edge of the bund and is therefore closer to the Grand Western Canal.
- 2. The main AD structures have re-aligned to a north south axis from an east west axis.
- 3. The silage clamps have reduced in number from 4 to 2 but have reduced in size and capacity from 7844 cubic metres to 7200 cubic metres a reduction of 644 cubic metres.

- 4. Re-location of the digester tank to the site directly to the south of the AD unit which is located in approximately the same point as the previous approval 13/01605/FULL.
- 5. The digester tank is slightly larger an increase from 3409 cubic metres to 3927 cubic metres an increase of 518 cubic metres.
- 6. Buffer tank is 1m higher than the approved size.
- 7. CHP unit is 1.5m longer and 0.4m wider, but of the same height.
- 8. Additional structures are Control Building, Gas compressor building, Transformer HV and LV, Office Building, 2 x Dryers.
- 9. Additional Information Submitted Historic Environment site assessment, Landscape response (East Devon), Ground water Vulnerability Plan, additional Noise Assessment Document.

This application seeks to make internal layout changes of the site to part facilitate the movement of vehicles and to be able to incorporate the earth bund, an element which the Environment Agency look to see included.

The site comprises of part of a field located adjacent to Crown Hill a County Highway and at its closest point, the site is approximately 20m to the west of the Grand Western Canal. The land is gently sloping, broadly down from north to south. The field is enclosed by hedgerows to the north, east and west of the site with sporadic trees. The closest residential property to the site is at 'Crown Hill Timber' which is 33m away to the north of the entrance to the site. Other properties within close proximity are Lisieux, Badgers Holt (65 and 80m respectively from the closest edge of the site [tree planting area]). Other properties Beech Cottage, Osterley and Green Gates are screened by the first two properties but are all between 100 and 125m from the nearest point of the site (the planting area around the Bund).

Part of the land is currently still in agriculture with the main core subject to development of the AD Plant.

The site is proposed to be laid out in accordance with the plans submitted under this application.

Existing boundary hedgerows and trees are proposed for retention with new native trees proposed to be planted in the area to the east and south east of the site closest to the Grand Western Canal and a new native hedgerow planted to the north western boundary of the site. It is considered that the inclusion of tree planting to the south west is not required due to the topography of the land.

The area of ground proposed to be covered by the AD Plant and associated infrastructure totals approximately 0.93 hectares of the site area with the remainder of the site being the bund and planting scheme.

REASON FOR REPORT:

At the meeting on 13th January 2016, Members resolved as follows:

RESOLVED that Members were minded to refuse the application and therefore wished to defer the decision to allow for a report to be received setting out:

a) the implications of the proposed reasons for refusal based on concerns regarding landscape and visual impact, the impact on the character and appearance on the Grand Western Canal conservation area, the impact on residential amenity and whether the transport plan was up to date, accurate and could be relied upon.

b) Potential enforcement action.

This report seeks to review potential reasons for refusal as indicated.

Relationship to Corporate Plan:

The emerging corporate Plan sets out four priorities including the economy, community and the environment, upon which this application has a bearing.

Financial Implications:

The applicant may make an application for costs against the Council at appeal. Such costs claims are made by demonstrating that there has been unreasonable behaviour that has led to unnecessary expense. The Council must be in a position to defend and substantiate each of its reason for refusal.

Legal Implications:

Planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The starting point for decision making is therefore the policies within the development plan.

Risk Assessment:

If Committee decide to refuse the application for reasons that cannot be sustained at appeal there is a risk of a successful appeal costs claim against the Council for reasons of unreasonable behaviour.

REASONS FOR REFUSAL AND IMPLICATIONS:

During the meeting, Members indicated that they were minded to refuse the application for the following proposed reasons:

- 1. Landscape and visual impact.
- 2. Impact upon the character and appearance on the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area.
- 3. Impact upon residential amenity
- 4. Whether the transport plan was up to date, accurate and could be relied upon.

Suggested wording for reasons for refusal

Your officers suggest the following wording for the reasons for refusal:

1. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, due to the scale and siting of the proposed Anaerobic Digester installation, the development is considered to have a harmful effect on the rural landscape character and visual amenities of the area including when viewed from public vantage points on local roads,

public footpaths including the Grand Western Canal and it has not been demonstrated that this harm could be satisfactorily mitigated. The application is considered to be contrary to policies COR2 and COR5 of the Mid Devon Core Strategy 2007 (Local Plan Part 1), DM2, DM5 and DM22 of the Local Plan 3 Development Management Policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 2. The proposed development is located in close proximity to the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area. It is the opinion of the Local Planning Authority that if granted it would unacceptably detract from significance of the Conservation Area (a designated heritage asset) in terms of its character and appearance. Accordingly it is considered contrary to policies COR2 and COR5 of the Mid Devon Core Strategy 2007 (Local Plan Part 1), DM2, DM5, DM22 and DM27 of the Local Plan 3 Development Management Policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 3. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, due to the proximity of neighbouring dwellings it is considered that the proposed development will have an unacceptably negative impact on the amenity of the occupiers of these neighbouring properties due to odours and noise associated with the development and running of the plant. The application is considered to be contrary to policies COR2 and COR5 of the Mid Devon Core Strategy 2007 (Local Plan Part 1), DM2, DM5, DM7 and DM22 of the Local Plan 3 Development Management Policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 4a. The submitted transport statement is not considered sufficiently up to date and does not address traffic generation associated with the newly erected livestock building on the farm holding. It is the view of the Local Planning Authority that this will impact on the ability of the Anaerobic Digester installation to be able to adequately function without additional and unacceptable traffic generation to the detriment of local amenities and character, contrary to policies COR2 and COR5 of the Mid Devon Core Strategy 2007 (Local Plan Part 1), policies DM2, DM5 and DM22 of the Local Plan Part 3 Development Management Policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.

OR

4b. It is the view of the Local Planning Authority that it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that the proposed Anaerobic Digester when considered in conjunction with other approved development for livestock buildings, will not result in additional and unacceptable traffic generation to the detriment of local amenities and character, contrary to policies COR2 and COR5 of the Mid Devon Core Strategy 2007 (Local Plan Part 1), policies DM2, DM5 and DM22 of the Local Plan Part 3 Development Management Policies and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Implications: reason for refusal 1.

Your officers identified in their report to Planning Committee on 13th January 2016 that the proposed development would cause some harm to the rural landscape character of the area when viewed from public vantage points such as local roads and public footpaths, and The Grand Western Canal, but that this harm would be limited due to the nature of the topography which provides a degree of containment in short distance views and "loses" views of the development in panoramic longer distance views.

Your officers identified a greater degree of harm to the visual amenities of private residential properties, stated in the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to have between minor and moderate adverse effects on residents, reducing over time as views of the development become filtered by mitigation planting.

Your officers weighed this harm to the rural landscape character and visual amenities of the area against the benefits of the scheme and concluded that the balance weighed in favour of the development. In addition an AD plant has already been granted consent on the same site with substantially lower amounts of screening compared with that proposed in this application. Members are advised to consider the effects on landscape character and visual amenities for themselves and consider whether the additional mitigation measures by way of earth bunding and planting are sufficient to mitigate the landscape and visual harm. Furthermore, Members will need to be sure that harm to landscape and visual impact arising from this development will be materially greater than that associated with the approved scheme, to the extent that refusal is warranted in this case, whilst planning permission was granted for the earlier scheme.

Implications: reason for refusal 2.

Your officers identified in their report to Planning Committee on 13th January 2016 that the proposed development could cause some harm to the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area but that this harm would be limited due to the nature of the topography and natural screening which provides a degree of containment in short distance views and views from some more distant points from the Canal.

The Canal by its nature is set down in the landscape with only glimpses of the proposed from various points along the tow path. More prominent views are available on the bridge crossing the canal at Badgers Holt, but this is limited to this part of the canal, and would be only visible when crossing the bridge.

Your Conservation Officer has assessed the impact the proposal will have on the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area. Whilst the complex is quite visible from the conservation area, it is found that it is not more harmful to its setting than that previously given consent. With planting it will create 'less than substantial harm'.

Since the previous planning approval for the AD plant the farmer has been granted planning consent for two agricultural buildings which in themselves provide substantial screening from certain parts of the Grand Western Canal.

Your officers weighed this possible harm to the Grand Western Canal against the benefits of the scheme and concluded that the balance weighed in favour of the development. In addition an AD plant has already been granted consent on the same site with substantially lower amounts of screening compared with that proposed in this application. Members are advised to consider the effects on the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area for themselves and consider whether the additional mitigation measures by way of earth bunding and planting are sufficient to alleviate the negligible visual harm. Furthermore, Members will need to be sure that harm to the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area arising from this development will be materially greater than that associated with the approved scheme, to the extent that refusal is warranted in this case, whilst planning permission was granted for the earlier scheme.

Implications: reason for refusal 3.

Your officers identified in their report to Planning Committee on 13th January 2016 that the proposed development would cause some harm to local residents with regard to noise and odour. Likely sources of noise were identified as related traffic movements from construction and operational phases, the unloading of materials on site, the running of the combined heat and power unit, the running of the driers and the pumping of digestate to land.

Your officers weighed this harm against the information provided with regard to:

- a) Noise levels associated with the development of the scheme and the subsequent servicing of the proposed AD plant has been scrutinised by the Environmental Health Officer who is, following the additional noise information submitted, content that noise levels at nearby receptors can be maintained at a level of 22dB (LA90 15min).
- b) Odour associated with the development have been considered by your officers and it is considered that as the system is a closed system and the only storage within the silage clamps will be crops and dry digestate from the on-site activity, there will be no increase in odours over and above what would normally be associated with farming activities. It is therefore considered that all aspects of the AD process and management of the operation adequately address concerns relating to odour raised by respondents. In the appeal APP/T4210/A14/2224754 (AD Plant) odour control forms part of the Environment Agency's regulatory responsibility.

Your officers (including advice from Environmental Health) concluded in their report that the majority of the noise would be temporary and infrequent and much of its source is from common agricultural practice, it is not considered to be likely to cause a statutory nuisance or impact upon the amenities of the occupiers of nearby dwellings such as to warrant a reason for refusal.

Odour associated with the AD plant will be dealt with under the control measures via the Environment Agency permitting regime. The appeal Inspector for the Edgeworthy AD plant proposal considered such control measures were adequate to protect against unacceptable odour emission associated with the development and therefore to meet policy requirements within DM7 and DM22 of the Local Plan Part 3. The Fletcher Bank called in appeal on an AD plant also gives guidance on the approach to odour: whilst considered by the Inspector, he too concluded that the appropriate control was through the Environment Agency's consenting regime and that it was therefore not a material planning consideration unless residual odour would be unacceptable in planning terms.

In this instance Environmental Health's advice is that adequate control measures are in place to address odour. Members are advised that given the separate requirements under the Environmental Health consenting regime, in order for a refusal on odour grounds to hold up, the Local Planning Authority will need to be in a position to clearly demonstrate that the development will lead to unacceptable residual odour having taken into account all the proposed mitigation measures. Furthermore the Council would need to clearly demonstrate in terms of both noise and odour why the current proposal is unacceptable when the earlier scheme under application 13/01605/MFUL was acceptable.

Your officers conclude that whilst the site may have changed in its orientation along with the inclusion of additional buildings associated with the site and off the site, they do not consider these changes to be so harmful and or have a detrimental impact on the noise and odour management associated with this application as to form a reason for refusal. Members are advised to consider the degree of impact likely to be experienced, and weigh this against the benefits of the scheme.

Implications: reason for refusal 4.

The present Transport Statement associated with this application was first undertaken in October 2013 for the initial application 13/01605/MFUL. This application was subsequently approved by the Planning Committee.

The same Transport statement was utilised for this application. It is apparent the same details have been used and plans within the document are clearly associated with the previous application. The plans do not change the detail of the movements associated with the new proposal.

The Transport Statement submitted with the application did not make any reference to the new livestock building which was granted consent under 15/00382/Full. The building had only recently been granted consent at the time of the submission. Although the building takes away a small area of land (889sqm), it is considered that this is not such a material amount of land as to impact on the transport movements of the AD plant. Members were concerned that the livestock buildings had not been taken into account in traffic generation figures and indicated that they were minded to refuse on this basis. Draft reason for refusal 4a addresses these concerns.

However, since Planning Committee's consideration of the application at the meeting of 13th January 2016, the applicant has submitted an addendum to the transport statement within which the effect of the two livestock buildings at Red Linhay is assessed. The addendum report sets out that of the 71 cattle to be kept within the two livestock buildings at Red Linhay, only 31 will require grazing of the adjacent

land. The rest are intensive beef cattle which are housed in the buildings and not grazed at any time of the year. Winter feed and all year feed is imported in from other parts of the farm (historically already happening).

The report sets out that 20 acres of land will be needed for grazing of these 31 cattle over the year, but that this 20 acres can be mitigated against by including a further 26 acres of land at Hartnoll Farm within the area proposed to be cropped as AD feedstock. The 26 acres is located to the west of Manley Lane and to the north of the Grand Western Canal. The 31.1 tractor/trailer loads from this 26ha area of crops can be delivered to the AD site via a farm track instead of using public roads. The report concludes that there will be no impact upon the submitted number of road movements generated to the AD Plant as a result of the introduction of the agricultural livestock buildings.

This 26 acres of land straddles the former railway line. The part to the north lies within an area allocated for development within the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension, although shown in the adopted masterplan as landscape/green infrastructure. The part of the land to the south of the former railway land is identified in policy as forming part of the green infrastructure area associated with the urban extension. A further masterplanning exercise for this part of the urban extension site (known as Area B) has yet to be completed. Whilst none of the 26 acres is therefore currently identified for development within the adopted masterplan, this has yet to be finally established via a further masterplanning exercise. Therefore in the longer term, the continued availability of this land to crop for the AD plant has not been finally established.

In the event Members feel there is sufficient uncertainty about the future availability of this land parcel at Manley Lane, they will need to then consider if an additional 31.1 tractor and trailer loads bringing feedstock to the AD plant on the roads (from an alternative site) is significant, will cause unacceptable impacts and is defendable as a reason for refusal.

Your officers concluded in their report that there would be no material change to the transport movements associated with this application and that of the previously approved application for the same sized AD Plant. Your officers concluded that whilst the site may have changed in its orientation along with the inclusion of additional buildings associated with the site and off site, they do not consider these changes to be so harmful and or to have such a detrimental impact on the highway network over and above the stated traffic movements for the approved AD plant, such as to justify refusal.

Members are advised to consider the degree of impact likely to be experienced, and weigh this against the benefits of the scheme as for reason for refusal 1. To make a case for refusal on this basis Members will also need to demonstrate the difference in traffic generation and impact between the previously approved scheme and that now being considered. A case would need to be made that any difference was significant and would lead to unacceptable impact. In the event that Members wish to refuse on this basis, draft reason 4b has been prepared.

Conclusions

The proposed re-orientation of the AD Plant and associated buildings will provide the Authority, public and immediate area with a scheme which delivers greater controls through the implementation of more stringent planning conditions, increased planted screening, along with the provision of an earth bund between the site and the Grand Western Canal, to that of the existing approved AD Plant under 13/01605/MFUL which was found acceptable. Members will need to weigh any additional impacts associated with the current application compared with that granted and balance them against the greater controls and mitigation referred to above.

In order to refuse planning permission Members will need to clearly demonstrate, with evidence, that:

- 1. there are additional impacts resulting from the current scheme over and above that approved;
- 2. that they are significant and would be unacceptable; and
- 3. that they outweigh the additional controls and mitigation measures proposed within the current scheme and within draft conditions.

This would need to be demonstrated for each reason for refusal. Expert evidence would be required to substantiate such a position. At this time, preliminary expert views are not available.

Should Members still be minded to refuse the application contrary to officer recommendation, Members may wish to concentrate upon reason 1. Members should consider very carefully refusing the application for the further reasons as set out in draft reasons 2, 3 and 4.

Section 2: Consideration of options for enforcement action.

Members are asked to note that this section of the report is only relevant if planning permission for application 15/01034/MFUL is refused.

It should be noted that the assessment of enforcement options as set out in this report has been informed by Counsel's opinion. Counsel was asked to clarify whether the applicant has a fall-back position in terms of whether they are able to implement the original planning permission for the AD plant on the site and if enforcement action is proposed, the scope of that action available.

Alleged Breach:

Without an appropriate planning permission, an unauthorised development has been undertaken at Red Linhay namely the construction of a 500kW anaerobic digester and associated works with 4 silage clamps.

Recommendation:

That the Legal Services Manager be authorised to take any appropriate legal action including the service of a notice or notices, seeking the removal of the structures from the land and the reinstatement of the land back to its former use as agricultural land together with the issue of a stop notice to prohibit construction works. In the

event of any failure to comply with the notices served the additional authority to prosecute, take direct action and/or seek a court injunction.

Reasons/Material Considerations:

A planning application was submitted in 2013 ref 13/01605/MFUL for the provision of a 500kW anaerobic digester and associated works with 4 silage clamps.

The attention of officers was drawn to this site in April 2015 when precommencement conditions had not been discharged fully. Following correspondence, planning application 15/01034/MFUL was submitted. The Planning Officer made his site visit on the 23rd July 2015 where upon it was found that the applicant had already commenced the construction of the site in accordance with the newly submitted application rather than the 2013 approval. At the time of the site visit the officer informed the site manager that the works were unauthorised and that no further works should take place until such time as any approval or not is given. This was followed up with an e-mail to the applicant and agents. Works have therefore taken place contrary to officer advice and at the applicant's risk.

It was made clear to the owner that Planning Permission would be required for the works undertaken to date, and that formal enforcement action would be placed on hold until such time as the planning application 15/01034/MFUL was determined.

Further communication has taken place with the owner and agent concerning amendments to the proposed scheme and the provision of further planting etc. In the event that the current planning application is refused formal enforcement action must be considered. This part of the report sets out options for such action.

Human Rights and Equality Issues:

The taking of any enforcement action could be said to affect the land/property owner/occupiers human rights under the provision of Article 8 and Article 1 of the First protocol to the Human Rights Act 1998.

In this case, the owner has made a free choice to construct the anaerobic digester and ancillary structures firstly not in accordance with the 2013 approval 13/01605/MFUL and prior to the decision on application 15/01034/MFUL. The Local Planning Authority believes it is pursuing a legitimate aim in seeking compliance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended so as to prevent demonstrable harm to the interests of acknowledged importance and to protect the environment.

Options for action or remedy:

The list of options available is as follows:

Take no action – This would not be appropriate as it could lead to the setting of a precedent allowing the construction of structures without planning consent. To do nothing in the event that the revised scheme is found to be unacceptable would also act to undermine the planning system.

Invite a further application to grant consent to regularise the Development – If application 15/01034/MFUL is refused, it would be inappropriate to invite a further planning application for the retention of the 500kW anaerobic digester and associated works with 4 silage clamps.

Issue Enforcement Notice - This is the recommended course of action in the event of a refusal of application 15/01034/MFUL.

The works required within such a notice are informed by legal advice over the status of the original planning permission on the site and whether it is still capable of being implemented. Assessment of the case and as informed by legal advice has led to the conclusion that as the earlier permission cannot still be implemented, and there is not a fall-back position available to the applicant.

As it is the view of the Local Planning authority that the earlier planning permission cannot be implemented, an enforcement notice is able to seek removal of the structures from the land – This is the recommended course of action.

Reasons for decision:

The unauthorised development has been undertaken within the last four years. The development is contrary to policies COR2 COR5 and COR18 of the Mid Devon Core Strategy (Local Plan Part1), policies DM1, DM2, DM3, DM4, DM5, DM6, DM7, DM22, and DM27of the Mid Devon Local Plan Part 3 (Development Management Policies) and the taking of such action would be in line with policy DM31 of the same document.

Steps required:

- 1. Remove the unauthorised structures from the land as listed below in points a) to p):
 - a) Digester Tank 8m Height diameter 25m and dome of height 5.5m with an overall height from excavated site 13.5m
 - b) Buffer tank height 4m and diameter 9m
 - c) Control cabin 12mx 3m x 2m high
 - d) CHP unit building 13.5m x 3m, including any chimney max height 7m
 - e) Control Building 14m x 7m x 3m
 - f) Gas compressor building 8m x 3.5m x 3m
 - g) Transformer HV Switch 2.5m x 2.5m 2.4m high (If installed)
 - h) LV Panel structure 12m x 2.5m x 2.5m high
 - i) Office 13.5m x 2.5m x 2.5m high
 - i) Solids feeder 9m x 4m x4m high
 - k) 2 x dryers 43m x 6m 3.5m high
 - I) A separator frame and clamp 9m x 7m 5.5m high
 - m) Feedstock clamps 2 bays 60m x 15m x 4m partially completed
 - n) Hardcore and concrete yard used for the anaerobic digester plant
 - o) Bund
 - p) Any other item not listed above which has been installed associated with the anaerobic digester plant.

- 2. Reinstate land back to its former use as agricultural land.
- 3. During the course of reinstatement there is to be an archaeological watching brief [details of which to be added to the notice prior to issue following advice from DCC archaeology department].

Period for compliance:

Six months from the date the notice comes into effect.

Issue a stop notice to prohibit construction works.

A stop notice may only be issued together with an enforcement notice. It prohibits the continuation of the specified activity and is used where the effects of the unauthorised activity (in this case the construction works) are seriously detrimental to the amenities of the area or adjoining occupiers. It does not immediately come into effect.

Compensation is payable if the enforcement notice is quashed (other than by the grant of planning permission), where it is varied or withdrawn or the stop notice is withdrawn.

If an enforcement notice is to be issued and construction works are continuing, the issue of a stop notice is a recommended course of action to control those works and safeguard local amenities.

Issue a temporary stop notice to prohibit construction works.

A temporary stop notice is valid for 28 days only and requires the breach to immediately cease. It does not require that an enforcement notice be served with it. It is intended to allow the Local Planning Authority time to consider whether to serve an enforcement notice.

Compensation may be payable if the activity has planning permission, is permitted development, if it is subsequently found to be lawful or in some circumstances if the temporary stop notice is withdrawn. It is not considered that any of these apply.

It is not recommended in this instance as this report considers enforcement options available if planning permission is refused.

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Background Papers Planning Committee 13th January 2016

File Reference 15/01034/MFUL

Circulation of the Report Cllrs Richard Chesterton

Members of the Planning Committee