

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Application No: 15/0802/PP

DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING SERVICES  
RECOMMENDATION ON PLANNING APPLICATION

Regd: 30/10/2015

**Applicant****Agent**Environmental Energy Investments  
(Scotland) Ltd  
The Signal Box  
5 Appin Lane  
Edinburgh  
EH14 1JLPeter Brett.  
2nd Floor  
160 West George Street  
Glasgow  
G2 2HG

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**Nature of proposals:**

Installation of 4.9 MW solar farm with associated infrastructure including access, erection of communication building, storage shed, substations, CCTV cameras and boundary fence

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**Site:**

West Mitchelton, Bridesmill Road, Lochwinnoch

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**Application for:**

Planning Permission-Full

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**Introduction**

This is a 'local' application in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 which the Head of Planning has sought to bring before the Board in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation Protocol. The reason for bringing the application before the Board is the significant scale, the representations and that these are the first applications of this type (along with application ref 15/0821/PP) to be considered within Renfrewshire. The applicant will be notified of the reasons for bringing the application to the Board for determination.

**Description**

Planning permission is sought for the installation of a 4.9 megawatt (MW) solar voltaic (PV) farm and associated infrastructure including site fencing and transformers / switch room on land at West Mitchelton Farm, Lochwinnoch. The proposal would comprise approximately 17,600 solar panels distributed in 35 horizontal arrays interspersed by access paths. The fixed solar panels will be mounted on metal frames and positioned with the bottom edge of the panels at least 800 mm above ground level to facilitate continued grazing.

Each individual panel will be non reflective and angled at approximately 30 degrees to the horizontal with a maximum overall height of between 1.7m and 2.4m (to top edge of panel). In addition to the PV panels, the development will also include site fencing in the form of a 1.9m high deer fence with wooden poles and wire mesh, a storage building extending to approx 7.5 square metres, a site transformer extending to approx 10 square metres, a communications building extending to approx. 10 square metres, a client side substation extending to approx. 15 square metres, a metered substation extending to approx. 12 square metres, 3 field transformers, 5 field inverters, access road and 15 CCTV posts of 2.4m in height.

The application site extends to approximately 8.92 hectares of grade 4.2 agricultural land, 2.5km to the north of Lochwinnoch. It is located to the east of B786, Lochwinnoch Road and which is accessed via the existing West Mitchelton Farm access track. The application site forms part of West Mitchelton Farm, is gently undulating and is used mainly for grazing. The site is bounded to the north by Gockstane Wood and to the south, east and west by

undulating agricultural land and field boundaries. There are a number of residential properties within proximity to the application site namely, East Mitchelton 0.4km to the east, the bungalow 0.4km to the south, Peockstone Cottages 0.7km to the south west and Sandiestone farm 0.2km to the north west.

### **History**

15/0708/EO - Screening opinion as to whether the proposed solar farm would require an Environmental Impact Assessment. EIA not required.

At this time, there are no other consented solar farms within 10km of this application site.

There is a concurrent proposal for a 4.9 MW solar farm approximately 0.4km to the west on agricultural land associated with but some distance from Weels Farm (15/0821/PP) which is also under consideration.

### **Policy & Material Considerations**

#### **Development Plan**

#### **Adopted Renfrewshire Local Plan**

Policy ENV1 - Greenbelt

Policy ENV2 - Natural Heritage

Policy I6 - Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments

Policy I5 - Flooding and Drainage

#### **New Development Supplementary Guidance**

Environment Development Criteria

Green Belt

Green Belt Development Criteria

Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies

Natural Heritage

Flooding and Drainage

#### **Material considerations**

Planning legislation requires that planning decisions are made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the proposal requires to be assessed in relation to the policies and guidance outlined above, the views of consultees, the issues raised through representations and the physical attributes of the site.

### **Publicity**

Neighbour notification was undertaken in line with the requirements of the relevant legislation. The proposals were also advertised in the Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette with a deadline for representations of 02/12/2015.

### **Objections/Representations**

There have been 7 objections submitted which can be summarised as follows.

1. The area is open countryside with green belt status and therefore should not be built upon.
2. This development would result in a substantial reduction in value of surrounding properties and other more appropriate sites could be used.
3. The choice of site would indicate that the applicant does not want to look over such a development from his own property.
4. The site is close to the boundary with Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park so there is an immediate visual impact upon those entering or leaving the park via public roads as well as those travelling along the B786.
5. Roads in the area are very narrow in places with soft verges utilised by heavy farm

vehicles. There has been a number of accidents on these roads and there is concern that problems will arise as a result of construction traffic associated with this development, including noise and disturbance.

6. Noise pollution from the initial construction period will cause distress to livestock, domestic animals and house dwellers and the development itself would overlook Kaim House.

7. The field on the left of the application site regularly floods with excess water washing onto the B768 causing dangerous driving conditions. This development could add to such problems.

8. Solar panels generate high levels of noise pollution.

9. Solar panels contain chemicals and as such could cause damage to the local environment and public health.

10. There will be reflection and glare from the panels and this would not only cause a hazard to road users but may affect livestock that roam in fields nearby.

11. The effects of the excavations to the existing drainage systems within these fields would lead to the field becoming waterlogged.

12. The proximity of panels to surrounding dwellings will impact on privacy.

13. The proposal is contrary to the terms of Policy I6 of the Renfrewshire Local Development Plan. In particular, the proposal would give rise to significant adverse effects on visual amenity and the amenity of existing uses and residents and cause harm to the Green Belt.

14. There are a number of residential properties and farmsteads within 1km of the site. however, the LVIA does not consider the impact on residential receptors and a full residential amenity survey has not been carried out.

### **Consultations**

**Scottish Natural Heritage** - No comments.

**Director of Community Resources (Environmental Services)** - No objection.

**Glasgow Airport Safeguarding** - No objection.

**West of Scotland Archaeology Service** - No objection, subject to a condition requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological works.

**Lochwinnoch Community Council** - Object to the proposal due to its scale and resultant visual and landscape impact when viewed alone and together with the neighbouring proposal for a solar farm at Weels Farm; there is concern that the proposal would severely restrict grazing; there would be an unacceptable impact on local infrastructure; the proposal is contrary to green belt policy.

**Head of Roads (Traffic)** - No comments.

**Head of Roads (Design Services)** - No objection.

### **Summary of Main Issues**

Environmental Statement - N/A

Appropriate Assessment - N/A

Design & Access Statement - The report states that the development will make a contribution to the achievement of Scottish Government policies in regard to renewable energy creation and carbon reductions. It is stated that as demonstrated through reports submitted as part of the application and through mitigation where considered necessary, no significant impacts are expected to arise from this development. It is concluded that there

are potential economic benefits during the construction phase of the development and that the land remains available for grazing post development.

### Other Assessments

**Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** - It is claimed that as a result of the topography and the presence of woodland copses, tree belts and hedgerows in the landscape, the site has limited visibility. The siting of the proposed development has had due regard to the effects on visual receptors. Primary mitigation, such as retaining and enhancing existing field boundaries will minimise the landscape and visual effects of the solar development. Secondary mitigation, such as enhancement of hedgerows and repair of stone walls, is also proposed. It is claimed therefore that there will be no landscape or visual effects of major or severe significance arising as a result of the proposed development. In relation to cumulative impact the report states that considering the proposed development in combination with Weels Farm (App Ref No: 15/0821/PP) and Barnaigh Farm (no application yet submitted), landscape and visual effects are limited due to the scale of the developments which are seen in a wider context. It is accepted that there are views where all three sites will be seen in combination, however, it is claimed that these will be only partial and glimpsed views due to intervening landform and vegetation.

**Ecological Appraisal** - An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey was undertaken within the site boundary in October 2015, and was supported by a desk study of the location of nearby sites designated for nature conservation, and pre-existing biological data records held by the Glasgow Museum Service. The appraisal found the site to be predominantly improved and semi-improved pasture, variously bordered by walls, fences, hedgerows and watercourses. Areas of greater botanical diversity were associated with the hedgerows and watercourses, and small patches of unimproved grassland in the east of the site. The site abuts a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) along its northern boundary. The appraisal concludes with measures that will protect the areas of greatest biodiversity interest, primarily through avoidance and stand off from the more botanically diverse habitats and the adjacent SINC.

**Archaeological Assessment** - It is stated that the site contains a number of field boundary walls of eighteenth or nineteenth century which may be affected by the development. The site also has some potential to contain prehistoric and/or medieval remains surviving as previously unknown buried features. It is concluded that further mitigation measures may be required in order to determine the likely presence of any archaeological artefacts and/or features, and to establish the nature and extent of any such features.

**Construction, Decommissioning and Traffic Management Statement** - It is stated that the proposed access to the site during both construction and decommissioning is the existing access via Bridesmill Road and for the limited access required when the site is operational. During the construction and decommissioning phases, traffic movement to and from the site will be minimised as much as possible and deliveries restricted to 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1pm Saturday. All delivery vehicles will be able to enter the site and unload within the compound area. On completion of the construction works, a post construction road survey will be undertaken and any remediation works required agreed. The same will apply to the decommissioning of the site.

**Flood Risk Assessment** - It is stated that the site is located in an area of low risk of flooding and the typical design of the solar panels is such that there will be a negligible increase of impermeable areas across the site. It is further stated that the FRA demonstrates that the scheme will not alter the existing greenfield runoff regime and therefore no formal surface water management measures are required for the development.

**Statement of Transport Matters** - It is stated that there will not be a significant impact on the surrounding road network due to the low level of movements and activities associated with

both the installation and operational phases. During the construction phase, there will be 5 HGV trips and 10 private vehicle trips to the site, on a daily basis, a total of 1,315 trips over a 3 month period. Decommissioning the site will result in a total of 6 HGV trips to the site per day over a 3 month period. It is considered that the local road network will be capable of dealing with the small increase in additional vehicles. It is considered that the cumulative traffic impact on the network from other known solar farm applications is minimal and can be managed through a Traffic Management Plan.

Planning Obligation Summary - N/A

Scottish Ministers Direction - N/A

### **Assessment**

The determining issues in relation to this application relate to landscape character, visual amenity, impact upon ecology, residential amenity and highway safety taking into account the provisions of the adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan and New Development Supplementary Guidance.

In relation to the principle of the development, National Guidance on Renewable Energy contained within Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)(2014)(sustainability),(A Low Carbon Place-Delivering Heat and Electricity) supports the full range of renewable technologies and the Scottish Government has set a target of achieving 100% of Scotland's electricity from renewable sources by 2020. The SPP advises that development plans are expected to set out the detailed criteria by which proposals for renewable energy technologies would be considered and to guide them to appropriate locations. The need to protect local residential amenity, designated areas, species, habitats and historic environments from inappropriate forms of development and to ensure that impacts on local communities, aviation interests and broadcasting installations are addressed is also recognised.

The Glasgow and Clyde Valley Strategic Development Plan 2012, whilst containing no specific policy on solar farms supports renewable energy and notes that there should be a shift from decarbonised centralised energy from the National Grid to decentralised energy generation based on alternative renewable sources.

The application site is covered by Policy ENV 1 of the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan (2014) which states that the green belt in Renfrewshire aims to identify appropriate locations to support planned growth, where required, as well as maintaining the identity of settlements, protecting and enhancing the landscape setting of an area and protecting and promoting access opportunities to open space. It states that appropriate development within the green belt will be considered acceptable where it can be demonstrated that it is compatible with the provisions of the New Development Supplementary Guidance (NDSG).

Policy I6 'Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development' states that renewable and low carbon energy developments will be supported in principle where they are appropriate in terms of the location, siting and design having regard to any individual or cumulative significant effects on: local environment, landscape character, built, natural or cultural heritage; amenity of existing or allocated uses; visual amenity; outdoor sport and recreation interest and the safe and efficient use of the airport. It states that any development will require to comply with these criteria as well as the details outlined in the NDSG.

Renfrewshire's NDSG sets out development types within the green belt which may be considered acceptable in principle which includes renewable energy developments. Developments which are considered to be acceptable in principle require to be assessed against the 'Green Belt Development Criteria.

With regard to the current application, the following conclusions can be made.

**Landscape Impact** - The SG green belt development criteria considers that the local landscape character should be maintained and enhanced, development layout, design and siting should respect and incorporate important landscape features and there should be no significant detrimental effect on identified nature conservation interests. The SG on renewable and low carbon technologies requires that significant visual intrusion within the landscape in terms of scale, location and design should be minimised.

In this regard, the impact of the development on the landscape has been considered in the Local Landscape Area context. While there are no such designated areas within or in close proximity to the application site, the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park is located approximately 650m to the south west. Therefore the proposal is not considered to have any visual impact on the landscape qualities of designated areas but could impact on the setting and approaches to the Regional Park.

The SNH Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Landscape Assessment 1998, identifies landscape character types for the Glasgow and Clyde Valley region. The application site falls within two broad landscape character areas, namely Broad Valley Lowland and Rugged Moorland Hills. It considers that within the Broad Valley Lowland Area, the aim should be to conserve and enhance the diversity of the landscape and in particular protect the transition between valley floor and surrounding hills. It considers that urban expansion onto valley slopes may result in elevated developments which do not fit comfortably in the landscape. Within the Rugged Moorland Hills Area, the aim should be to conserve the upland character and new developments which introduce modern elements or which would undermine the sense of 'wilderness' and remoteness should be resisted.

The applicants have submitted details of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which analyses the potential extent of the visual impact of the development proposed on the site and surrounding landscape. It considers that where there are views towards the site, it would be seen as a small part of a much wider view. The applicant claims that the layout of the solar arrays has been designed to fit within and retain existing landscape features.

In this regard, whilst the impact of the proposal on the wider landscape may be moderate, there is concern that its impact on its immediate environment has the potential to be significant to such a degree that it cannot be considered to be in compliance with the requirements of the policies and guidance in relation to landscape impact.

**Visual Impact** - The SG on Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies requires that significant visual intrusion within the landscape in terms of scale, location and design, has been minimised and site selection justified. In this regard the visual effects of the proposal have been assessed through the applicants Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as generally being of moderate significance. It is stated that site selection has been dictated by a number of factors including infrastructure constraints, proximity to substation, sufficiency of solar irradiation and south facing slope, distance from designated sites and topography.

Notwithstanding this, it is considered that due to the location of the development in an elevated position in open countryside, the scale and nature of the proposal and its proximity to surrounding residential properties and transport corridors, especially the B 786, it cannot be concluded that significant visual intrusion will not occur. The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to the requirements of the SG in relation to visual impact. The LVIA refers to the presence of woodland copses, tree belts and hedgerows in the landscape as having the potential to influence visual impact although it remains unclear as to whether these would remain to provide the asserted mitigation.

**Residential Amenity** - Third party concerns have been raised regarding the potential of the

proposal to have an overbearing and dominant impact on neighbouring residential properties. In this regard, the closest residential properties are located approx. 0.2km to 0.4km to the north east and west. Whilst it is acknowledged that the panels may be visible from neighbouring surrounding properties, it is not certain that this visibility would result in a significant loss of amenity. The Director of Community Resources was consulted on the proposal but has raised no issues with regard to noise impact or glare.

**Ecology and Impact on Heritage Sites** - The application site is not located within any site designated through the Local Development Plan for its importance for nature conservation (SINC's) although there is a scheduled monument, Knockmade Homestead, located approx. 0.7km to the north west. Although there are a number of (SINC's) in close proximity to the site including Gockstane Wood and Mire, it is not considered that there will be an adverse impact, due to the nature of the proposal. This is confirmed though the Habitat Survey submitted in support of the application. With regard to Knockmade Homestead it is considered that the application site is at a sufficient distance, that any impact will not be significant.

**Cumulative Impact** - The SG on Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies considers that the individual or cumulative impact of the proposed development along with any other existing and approved similar development will not lead to an unacceptable impact on the environment, amenity, community or recreational interest. In this regard there is a concurrent application under consideration (App Ref no: 15/0821/PP) located approximately 0.4km to the west of the application site. That application seeks planning permission for the installation of a 4.9 MW solar farm. It is considered that the nature and scale of these developments in such close proximity could lead to a significant cumulative impact. Notwithstanding the intervening topography and vegetation, there will be views where both of these sites will be seen together and it is considered that their impact on landscape character and visual amenity both on a localised scale and from greater distances could be significant. Therefore in relation to the requirements of the SG in this respect it is concluded that the proposal would have an unacceptable cumulative impact.

With regard to traffic safety issues it is not envisaged that there will be a significant impact on the surrounding road network due to the low level of movements and activities associated with both the installation and operational phases of development.

With regard to flooding and drainage, the site is located in an area of low risk of flooding and the typical design of the solar panels is such that there will be a negligible increase of impermeable areas across the site.

Glasgow Airport were consulted on the application and have offered no objection.

The issues raised through letters of representation have been considered above.

In summary, the assessment balances the presumption of protecting and enhancing the greenbelt and promoting access opportunities to open space as set out in Policy ENV 1 against the principle of supporting renewable and low carbon technologies as set out in Policy I 6. Neither policy anticipated all types of emerging renewable technologies or is sufficiently sensitive to the particular characteristics of solar farms. In the circumstances and on the basis of the information currently available I prefer to give more weight to Policy ENV 1 and the protection of the greenbelt and on this basis recommend that the application should be refused.

### **Recommendation and reasons for decision**

Given the above assessment it is concluded that the proposed development is contrary to Policies ENV 1 and I6 and new Development SG due to their impact on the landscape and visual amenity and character of the green belt and there are no other material considerations which would outweigh this. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be

refused.

**Index of Photographs**

Photograph's of the site have been indexed.

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**RECOMMENDATION**

Refuse

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**Other Action**

**Conditions and Reasons**

- 1 That due to its location and scale, the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would be harmful to its openness and character and conflict with its aims and purposes. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy ENV 1 and the New Development Supplementary Guidance.
- 2 The proposal would result in negative landscape and visual impacts from public roads and vantage points in the area, contrary to policy I6 and the New Development Supplementary Guidance.

Fraser Carlin  
Head of Planning and Housing

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Background Papers  
For further information or to inspect any letters of objection and other background papers, please contact David Bryce on extension 7892.





Renfrewshire  
Council

15/0802/PP

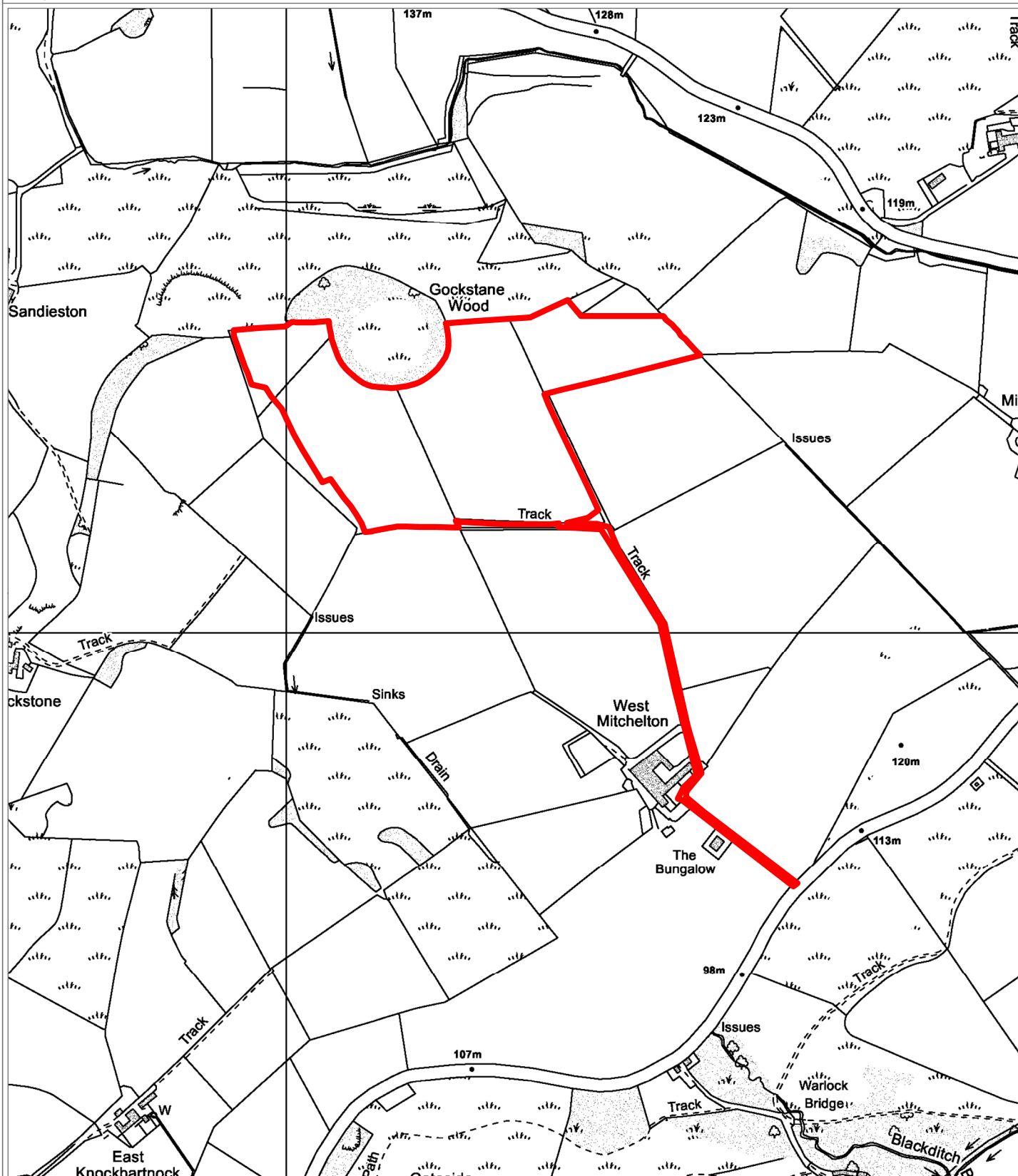
West Mitchelton, Bridesmill Road, Lochwinnoch



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User: ptcameronr1

Date: 21/01/2016



Notes:

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RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Application No: 15/0821/PP

DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING SERVICES  
RECOMMENDATION ON PLANNING APPLICATION

Regd: 30/10/2015

**Applicant****Agent**Environmental Energy Investments  
(Scotland) Ltd  
The Signal Box  
5 Appin Lane  
Edinburgh  
EH14 1JLPeter Brett  
2nd Floor  
160 West George Street  
Glasgow  
G2 2HG

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**Nature of proposals:**

Installation of 4.9 MW solar farm with associated infrastructure including access, erection of communications building, storage shed, substations, CCTV cameras, and boundary fence.

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**Site:**

Weels Farm, Kaim Road, Lochwinnoch

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**Application for:**

Planning Permission-Full

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**Introduction**

This is a 'local' application in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 which the Head of Planning has sought to bring before the Board in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation Protocol. The reason for bringing the application before the Board is the significant scale, the representations and that these are the first applications of this type (along with application ref 15/0802/PP) to be considered within Renfrewshire. The applicant will be notified of the reasons for bringing the application to the Board for determination.

**Description**

Planning permission is sought for the installation of a 4.9 megawatt (MW) solar farm and associated infrastructure including site fencing and transformers / switch room on land at Weels Farm, Lochwinnoch. The proposal would comprise approximately 17,820 solar panels distributed across two separate fields in horizontal arrays interspersed by access paths. The fixed solar panels will be mounted on metal frames and positioned with the bottom edge of the panels at least 800 mm above ground level to facilitate continued grazing.

Each individual panel will be non reflective and angled at approximately 25 degrees to the horizontal with a maximum overall height of between 1.7m and 2.2m (to top edge of panel). In addition to the PV panels, the development will also include site fencing in the form of a 1.9m high deer fence with wooden poles and wire mesh, a storage building, a site transformer, a communications building, a client side substation, a metered substation, field transformers, field inverters, access road and CCTV posts of 2.4m in height.

The application site extends to approximately 11.9 hectares of grade 4.2 agricultural land, approximately 2.5 km to the north of Lochwinnoch. It is located to the west of B786, Lochwinnoch Road and will be accessed via existing country roads. The application site forms part of Weels Farm, is gently sloping from south east to north west and is used mainly for grazing. The southern section of the site is bounded to the north by West Kaim Farm and a residential dwelling known as The Kaim, to the south by agricultural land and a dwelling known as 'Langcroft', to the east by a country road and to the west by open

agricultural land. The northern section of the site is bounded to the north by Knockmade Hill, a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), to the south by a country road and agricultural land, to the east by the B 786 and to the west by agricultural land.

### **History**

15/0707/EO - Screening opinion as to whether the proposed solar farm would require an Environmental Impact Assessment. EIA not required.

At this time, there are no other consented solar farms within 10km of this application site.

There is a concurrent proposal for a 4.9MW solar farm approximately 0.4km to the west on agricultural land associated with West Mitchelton Farm (15/0802/PP) which is also under consideration.

### **Policy & Material Considerations**

#### **Development Plan**

#### **Adopted Renfrewshire Local Plan**

Policy ENV1 - Greenbelt

Policy ENV 2 - Natural Heritage

Policy ENV 3 - Built Heritage

Policy I6 - Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments

Policy I5 - Flooding and Drainage

#### **New Development Supplementary Guidance**

Environment Development Criteria

Green Belt

Green Belt Development Criteria

Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies

Natural Heritage

Scheduled Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Sites

Flooding and Drainage

#### **Material considerations** - SPP

Planning legislation requires that planning decisions are made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the proposal requires to be assessed in relation to the policies and guidance outlined above, the views of consultees, the issues raised through representations and the physical attributes of the site.

### **Publicity**

Neighbour notification was undertaken in line with the requirements of the legislation. The proposals were also advertised in the Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette with a deadline for representations of 02/12/2015.

### **Objections/Representations**

There have been 13 objections submitted which can be summarised as follows.

1. The area is open countryside with green belt status and therefore should not be built upon.
2. This development would result in a substantial reduction in value of surrounding properties and other more appropriate sites could be used.
3. The choice of site would indicate that the applicant does not want to look over such a development from his own property.
4. The site is close to the boundary with Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park so there is an immediate visual impact upon those entering or leaving the park via public roads as well as

those travelling along the B786.

5. Roads in the area are very narrow in places with soft verges utilised by heavy farm vehicles. There has been a number of accidents on these roads and there is concern that problems will arise as a result of construction traffic associated with this development, including noise and disturbance.

6. Noise pollution from the initial construction period will cause distress to livestock, domestic animals and house dwellers and the development itself would overlook Kaim House.

7. The field on the left of the application site regularly floods with excess water washing onto the B768 causing dangerous driving conditions. This development could add to such problems.

8. Solar panels generate high levels of noise pollution.

9. Solar panels contain chemicals and as such could cause damage to the local environment and public health.

10. There will be reflection and glare from the panels and this would not only cause a hazard to road users but may affect livestock that roam in fields nearby.

11. The effects of the excavations to the existing drainage systems within these fields would lead to the field becoming waterlogged.

12. The proximity of panels to surrounding dwellings will impact on privacy.

13. The proposal is contrary to the terms of Policy I6 of the Renfrewshire Local Development Plan. In particular, the proposal would give rise to significant adverse effects on visual amenity and the amenity of existing uses and residents and cause harm to the Green Belt.

14. There are a number of residential properties and farmsteads within 1km of the site.

However, the LVIA does not consider the impact on residential receptors and a full residential amenity survey has not been carried out.

### **Consultations**

**Scottish Natural Heritage** - No comments to make as proposal does not meet their criteria for consultation.

**Director of Community Resources (Environmental Services)** - No objection.

**Glasgow Airport Safeguarding** - No objection.

**West of Scotland Archaeology Service** - Express concern that the proposal would impact significantly on the setting of the scheduled ancient monument located 100m to the north of the site, and have recommended that a condition be attached to the grant of any planning permission requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological works.

**The Coal Authority** - No objection.

**Lochwinnoch Community Council** - Object to the proposal due to its scale and resultant visual and landscape impact when viewed alone and together with the neighbouring proposal for a solar farm at West Mitchelton Farm; there is concern that the proposal would severely restrict grazing; there would be an unacceptable impact on local infrastructure; the proposal is contrary to green belt policy.

**The Head of Roads (Traffic)** - No objection subject to condition.

**The Head of Roads (Design Services)** - No objection.

### **Summary of Main Issues**

Environmental Statement - N/A

Appropriate Assessment - N/A

Design & Access Statement - The report states that the development will make a contribution to the achievement of Scottish Government policies in regard to renewable energy creation and carbon reductions. It is stated that as demonstrated through reports submitted as part of the application and through mitigation where considered necessary, no significant impacts are expected to arise from this development. It is concluded that there are potential economic benefits during the construction phase of the development and that the land remains available for grazing post development.

#### Other Assessments

**Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** - It is stated that at National level, the site lies within Character Area 63: Clyde Muirshiel where key characteristics are high coastal moorland contrasting with the surrounding farmland, loch and wetland areas on lower ground, feeling remote despite being surrounded by settlements. It is considered that the area may also share characteristics with the Character Area 69; Renfrewshire Hills and Clydesdale where characteristics include upland farmland and unimproved grassland dotted with mature shelterbelts and hedges. Much of these areas have open aspects and are relatively accessible. In terms of Local Landscape Character it is stated that the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Landscape Character Assessment characterises the area encompassing the site as Broad Valley Lowland and Rugged Moorland Hills (Character Area's 10 & 20), the key characteristics of which, amongst others are, wide flat bottomed valley, presence of wetlands and rivers, transition from arable to rough grazing from valley floor to high valley sides, distinctive upland character, rugged landform, moorland vegetation and the predominant lack of modern development. It is stated that these areas share a sense of apparent naturalness and remoteness which contrasts with the farmed and developed lowland areas. These assessments consider that the landscape is most sensitive to the development of tall structures on hilltops and along the crest and scarps, and that landform enclosures may be capable of reducing visual impacts.

It is concluded that the site as existing has limited visibility as a result of topography, woodland copses and tree belts within the landscape and layers of field boundary vegetation with mature trees. It is claimed that there are few open, close range views and medium and long distance views are predominantly filtered or glimpsed. It concludes that there will be impact of major significance on Knockmade Hill Scheduled Ancient Monument where the surrounding landscape context of the Monument will change. The rating of the significance reflects the high sensitivity of the monument and its proximity to the application site.

In relation to visual effects, it is stated that no visual effects of severe significance were identified during or after construction, other than at Knockmade Hill Scheduled Ancient Monument. Moderate visual effects are noted at various locations including from the B786 looking north west, and from Knockmade Hill looking south.

In relation to cumulative impact the report states that considering the proposed development in combination with West Mitchelton Farm (App Ref No: 15/0802/PP) and Barnaigh Farm (No application yet submitted), landscape and visual effects are limited due to the scale of the developments which are seen in a wider context. It is accepted that there are views where all these sites will be seen in combination, however, it is claimed that these will be only partial and glimpsed views due to intervening landform and vegetation.

**Ecological Appraisal** - An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey was undertaken within the site boundary in October 2015, and was supported by a desk study of the location of nearby sites designated for nature conservation, and pre-existing biological data records held by the Glasgow Museum Service. The appraisal found the site to be predominantly improved pasture bordered by walls, fences, hedgerows and watercourses. Areas of greater botanical diversity were associated with the hedgerows and watercourses, and small areas of marshy grassland and scrub. A Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) was noted approx. 50 m north of the site. The potential of the site to support protected species was

considered to be limited although opportunities for roosting and foraging/commuting bats were noted. There was some considered to be potential for boundary feature habitats to be used by nesting birds. The report recommended a stand off from the more ecological important boundaries and measures to enhance biodiversity.

Archaeological Assessment - It is stated that the site contains a number of field boundary walls of eighteenth or nineteenth century which may be affected by the development. The site also has some potential to contain prehistoric and/or medieval remains surviving as previously unknown buried features. There is also potential for an operational impact upon certain views from and of the Scheduled Monument on Knockmade Hill. It is stated that the impact on archaeological features is unlikely to be significant. It is concluded that there will be no significant impacts from the proposed development upon the setting of any cultural heritage assets in the surrounding area.

Construction, Decommissioning and Traffic Management Statement - It is stated that the proposed access to the site during both construction and decommissioning is the existing access via Lochwinnoch Road and for the limited access required when the site is operational. During the construction and decommissioning phases, traffic movement to and from the site will be minimised and deliveries restricted to 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1pm Saturday. All delivery vehicles will be able to enter the site and unload within the compound area. On completion of the construction works, a post construction road survey will be undertaken and any remediation works required agreed. The same will apply to the decommissioning of the site.

Flood Risk Assessment - It is stated that the site is located in an area of low risk of flooding and the design of the solar panels is such that there will be a negligible increase of impermeable areas across the site. It is further stated that the FRA demonstrates that the scheme will not alter the existing greenfield runoff regime and therefore no formal surface water management measures are required for the development.

Statement of Transport Matters - It is stated that it is not envisaged that there will be a significant impact on the surrounding road network due to the low level of movements and activities associated with both the installation and operational phases. During the construction phase, there will be 5 HGV trips and 10 private vehicle trips to the site, on a daily basis, a total of 1,315 trips over a 3 month period. Decommissioning the site will result in a total of 6 HGV trips to the site per day over a 3 month period. It is considered that the local road network will be capable of dealing with the small increase in additional vehicles however it may be prudent to provide some local widening on the section of the Kaim Road between the B786 and Kaim Burn to allow HGV vehicles to pass each other. Additionally where Kaim Road meets Kaim Burn the road alignment is confined by a small bridge and tight corner. It is stated that the pinch point should be subject of a swept path analysis to confirm its suitability. It is considered that the cumulative traffic impact on the network from other known solar farm applications is minimal and can be managed through a Traffic Management Plan.

Coal Mining Risk Assessment - It is stated that no coal mining has taken place in the vicinity of the site. Shallow copper mining has taken place, with underground workings recorded terminating to the west of the northern site and to the north of the southern site. Given the relatively light weight structures proposed, it is considered unlikely that any historic mine workings present a significant risk.

Planning Obligation Summary - N/A

Scottish Ministers Direction - N/A

## **Assessment**

The determining issues in relation to this application are considered to relate to landscape character and visual amenity, impact upon ecology and heritage assets, residential amenity or nearby residential properties and highway safety.

In relation to the principle of the development, National Guidance on Renewable Energy contained within Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)(2014)(sustainability),(A Low Carbon Place-Delivering Heat and Electricity) supports the full range of renewable technologies and the Scottish Government has set a target of achieving 100% of Scotland's electricity from renewable sources by 2020. The SPP advises that Development Plans are expected to set out the detailed criteria by which proposals for renewable energy technologies would be considered and to guide them to appropriate locations. The need to protect local residential amenity, designated areas, species, habitats and historic environments from inappropriate forms of development and to ensure that impacts on local communities, aviation interests and broadcasting installations are addressed is also recognised.

The Glasgow and Clyde Valley Strategic Development Plan 2012, whilst containing no specific policy on solar farms supports renewable energy and notes that there should be a shift from decarbonised centralised energy from the National Grid to decentralised energy generation based on alternative renewable sources.

The application site is covered by Policy ENV 1 of the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan (2014) which states that the green belt in Renfrewshire aims to identify appropriate locations to support planned growth, where required, as well as maintaining the identity of settlements, protecting and enhancing the landscape setting of an area and protecting and promoting access opportunities to open space. It states that appropriate development within the green belt will be considered acceptable where it can be demonstrated that it is compatible with the provisions of the New Development Supplementary Guidance (NDSG).

Policy I6 'Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development' states that renewable and low carbon energy developments will be supported in principle where they are appropriate in terms of the location, siting and design having regard to any individual or cumulative significant effects on: local environment, landscape character, built, natural or cultural heritage; amenity of existing or allocated uses; visual amenity; outdoor sport and recreation interest and the safe and efficient use of the airport. It states that any development will require to comply with these criteria as well as the details outlined in the NDSG.

Renfrewshire's NDSG sets out development types within the green belt which is considered to be acceptable in principle which includes renewable energy developments. Developments which are considered to be acceptable in principle require to be assessed against the 'Green Belt Development Criteria.

With regard to the current application, the following conclusions can be made.

**Landscape Impact -** The SG green belt development criteria considers that local landscape character should be maintained and enhanced, development layout, design and siting should respect and incorporate important landscape features and there should be no significant detrimental effect on identified nature conservation interests. The SG on renewable and low carbon technologies requires that significant visual intrusion within the landscape in terms of scale, location and design should be minimised.

In this regard, the impact of the development on the landscape has firstly been considered in the Local landscape Area context. While there are no such designated areas within or in close proximity to the application site, the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park is located approximately 650m to the south west. Therefore the proposal is not considered to have any visual impact on the landscape qualities of designated areas but could impact on the setting and approaches to the Regional Park.



Guidance on Landscape Character Impacts is provided by the SNH Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Landscape Assessment 1998, which identifies landscape character types for the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Region and considers that where appropriate sites selected should be capable of absorbing proposed development to ensure that it fits into the landscape. The application site falls within two broad landscape character areas, namely Broad Valley Lowland and Rugged Moorland Hills. It considers that within the Broad Valley Lowland Area, the aim should be to conserve and enhance the diversity of the landscape and in particular protect the transition between valley floor and surrounding hills. It considers that urban expansion onto valley slopes may result in elevated developments which do not fit comfortably in the landscape. Within the Rugged Moorland Hills Area, the aim should be to conserve the upland character and new developments which introduce modern elements or which would undermine the sense of 'wilderness' and remoteness should be resisted.

The applicants have submitted details of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which analyses the potential extent of the visual impact of the development on the site and surrounding landscape. It considers that the northern section of the character area has visibility to the site and where there are views towards the site, it would be seen as a small part of a much wider view. The applicant claims that the layout of the solar arrays has been designed to fit within and retain existing landscape features.

In this regard, whilst the impact of the proposal on the wider landscape may be moderate, there is concern that its impact on its immediate environment has the potential to be significant to such a degree that it cannot be considered to be in compliance with the requirements of the policies and guidance in relation to landscape impact.

Visual Impact - The SG on Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies requires that significant visual intrusion within the landscape in terms of scale, location and design, has been minimised and site selection justified. In this regard the visual effects of the proposal have been assessed through the applicants Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as generally being of moderate significance. It is stated that site selection has been dictated by a number of factors including infrastructure constraints, proximity to a substation, sufficiency of solar irradiation and south facing slope, distance from designated sites and topography.

Notwithstanding this, it is considered that due to the location of the development in an elevated position in open countryside, the scale and nature of the proposal and its proximity to surrounding residential properties and transport corridors, especially the B 786, it cannot be concluded that significant visual intrusion will not occur. The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to the requirements of the SG in relation to visual impact. The LVIA refers to the presence of woodland copses, tree belts and hedgerows in the landscape as having the potential to influence visual impact although it remains unclear as to whether these would remain to provide the asserted mitigation.

Residential Amenity - Third party concerns have been raised regarding the potential of the proposal to have an overbearing and dominant impact on neighbouring residential properties. In this regard, the closest residential properties are located approx. 94 m to 0.4km to the north, south, east and west. Whilst it is acknowledged that the panels may be visible from neighbouring surrounding properties, it is not clear that this visibility would result in a significant loss of amenity. The Director of Community Resources was consulted on the proposal but has raised no issues with regard to noise impact or glare.

Ecology and Impact on Heritage Sites - The application site is not located within any site designated through the Local Development Plan for its importance for nature conservation (SINC's) but is in close proximity to Knockmade Hill Scheduled Ancient Monument. Due to the proximity and scale of the proposal it is considered that there could be an unacceptable

impact on views from and to Knockmade Hill. Although there are a number of (SINC's) in close proximity to the site including Knockmade Hill and Mire located immediately to the north and Barr Minnan 0.4km to the north west, it is not considered that there will be a adverse impact, due to the nature of the proposal. This is confirmed though the Habitat Survey submitted in support of the application. In this regard the proposal is considered to be contrary to the terms of Policy ENV 3 and the New Development SG on Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Archaeological sites which seeks to safeguard Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings.

**Cumulative Impact** - The SG on Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies requires that the individual or cumulative impact of the proposed development along with any other existing and approved similar development will not lead to an unacceptable impact on the environment, amenity, community or recreational interest. In this regard there is a concurrent application under consideration (App Ref no: 15/0802/PP) located approximately 0.4km to the west of the application site. That application seeks planning permission for the installation of a 4.9 MW solar farm with a similar number of solar arrays. It is considered that the nature and scale of these developments in such close proximity could lead to a significant cumulative impact. Notwithstanding the intervening topography and vegetation, there will be views where both of these sites will be seen together and it is considered that their impact on landscape character and visual amenity both on a localised scale and from greater distances could be significant. Therefore in relation to the requirements of the SG in this respect it is concluded that the proposal would have an unacceptable cumulative impact.

With regard to traffic safety issues it is not envisaged that there will be a significant impact on the surrounding road network due to the low level of movements and activities associated with both the installation and operational phases of development. The Head of Roads has offered no objection to the proposal subject to conditions.

With regard to flooding and drainage, the site is located in an area of low risk of flooding and the typical design of the solar panels is such that there will be a negligible increase of impermeable areas across the site. The Head of Roads has no objection to the proposal. The Head of Roads has no objection to the proposal.

Glasgow Airport were consulted on the application and have offered no objection.

The issues raised through letters of representation have been considered above.

In summary, the assessment balances the presumption of protecting and enhancing the greenbelt and promoting access opportunities to open space as set out in Policy ENV 1 against the principle of supporting renewable and low carbon technologies as set out in Policy I 6. Neither policy anticipated all types of emerging renewable technologies or is sufficiently sensitive to the particular characteristics of solar farms. In the circumstances and on the basis of the information currently available I prefer to give more weight to Policy ENV 1 and the protection of the greenbelt and on this basis recommend that the application should be refused.

### **Recommendation and reasons for decision**

Given the above assessment it is concluded that the proposed development is contrary to Policies ENV 1, ENV 3 and I6 and New Development SG. The proposal is contrary to policy ENV 1 and I 6 and associated SG due to its impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the green belt and to Policy ENV 3 and associated SG due to its impact on the setting of a Scheduled Ancient Monument and there are no other material considerations which would outweigh this. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be refused.

### **Index of Photographs**

Photograph's of the site have been indexed.

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RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

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Other Action

Conditions and Reasons

- 1 That due to its location and scale, the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would be harmful to its openness and character and as such conflict with its aims and purposes. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy ENV 1 and the New Development Supplementary Guidance Greenbelt Development Criteria.
- 2 The proposal would result in negative landscape and visual impacts from public roads and vantage points in the area, contrary to policy I6 and the New Development Supplementary Guidance Renewable and Low Carbon Technologies.
- 3 That due to its impact on the setting of Knockmade Hill Scheduled Ancient monument, the proposal is contrary to policy ENV 3 and the New development Supplementary guidance which seek to safeguard Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings.

Fraser Carlin  
Head of Planning and Housing

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Background Papers

For further information or to inspect any letters of objection and other background papers, please contact David Bryce on extension 7892.





Renfrewshire  
Council

15/0821/PP

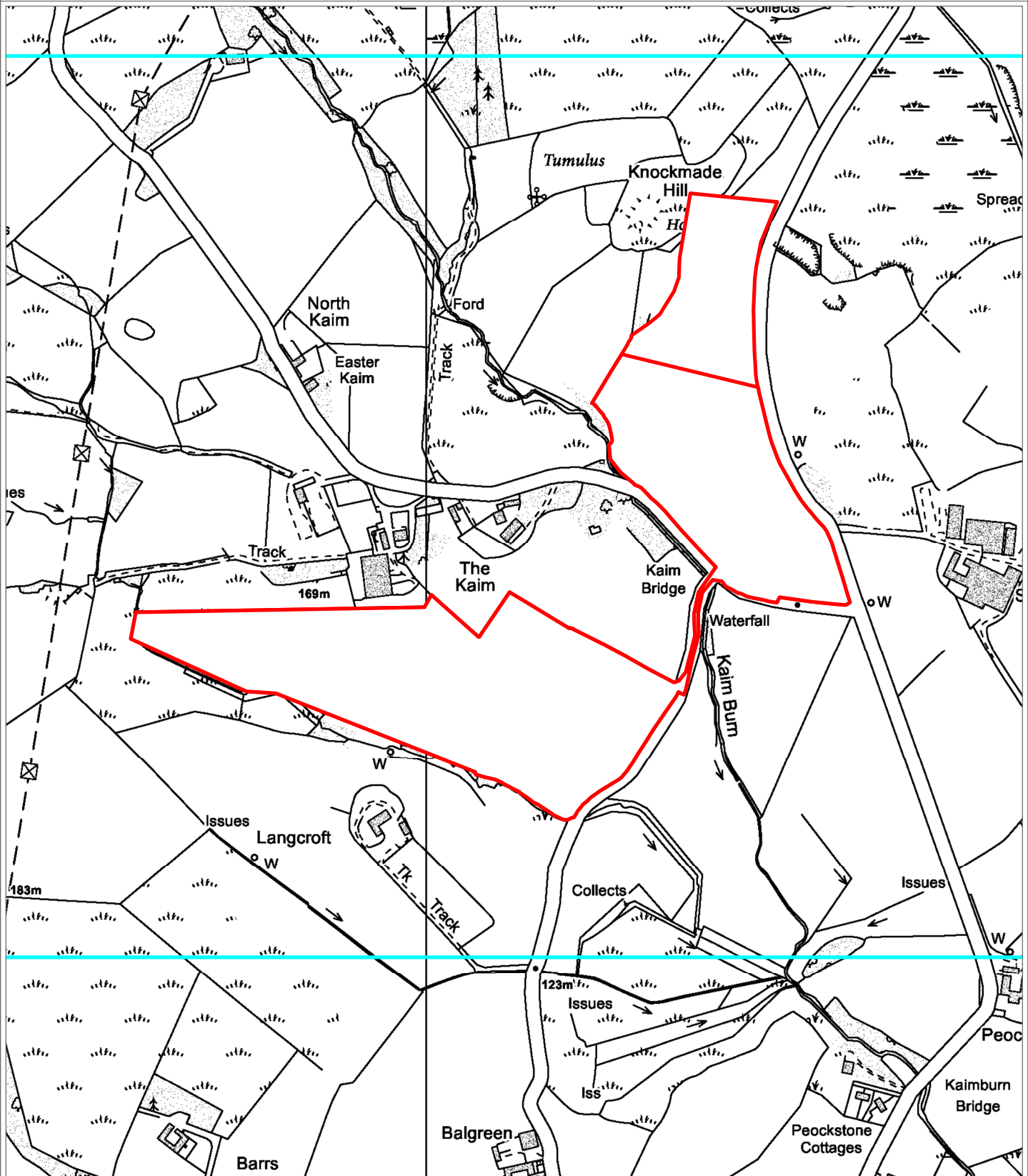
Weels Farm, Kaim Road, Lochwinnoch



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User: ptcameronr1

Date: 21/01/2016



Notes:

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