

2026/0360

Harmony HS (JV) Ltd

Site Address: Land off Tofts Lane, Snowden Hill, Barnsley S36 8YR

Introduction: This is a variation of condition application to vary condition 2 of application 2023/0322 (Energy storage facility) to allow for changes to the site layout, groundworks and landscaping

Relevant Site Characteristics

The site adjoins the existing electricity substation located adjacent to Tofts Lane and Mucky Lane on Snowden Hill in Hunshelf Parish.

The site is an open grassed area located within the boundaries of the existing sub-station. Ground levels rise as the land moves southwards away from Tofts Lane which runs east west along the northern boundary of the site.

The existing substation is located to the east of the site with access roughly in the middle and the proposed site located to the west. The site is contained within a low dry stone wall and there is high safety fencing around the substation itself. A number of high voltage lines converge at the site. The wider area is rural Green Belt, largely used for pasture.

The nearest residential dwelling is Carr Head Farm located over 400m to the southwest of the site. The site lies within Flood Zone 1 whereby the risks of both tidal and fluvial flooding are at their lowest and is not in or within proximity to any heritage assets. There are no ecological or landscape designations associated with the site.

Planning History

B/97/1540/PR - Erection of 32m high radio mast. Refused planning permission 15th April 1998 as it was considered that insufficient very special circumstances existed to allow the development which would have harmed the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt by virtue of its size.

2010/0586 - Erection of an embedded Short-Term Operating Reserve (STOR) power plant fuelled on diesel and comprising of 2 no. buildings, bunded area, delivery and parking area and formation of a new access. Decision: Withdrawn by the applicant.

2011/1454 - Installation of an embedded STOR power plant fuelled on gas or diesel and comprising of 52 containerised engines, ancillary equipment, bunded and fenced area, delivery and parking area and formation of a new access. (Resubmission of 2010/0586). Decision: Refused planning permission 29th August 2012 as it was considered that the benefits of the scheme were insufficient to clearly outweigh the harm that would have occurred to the visual amenities and openness of the Green Belt.

2017/0624 - Formation of a battery storage facility with associated transformer cabling security and CCTV Poles – Approved with conditions – Development not commenced within 3 years and permission has expired

2023/0322 - Energy storage facility – Approved with conditions

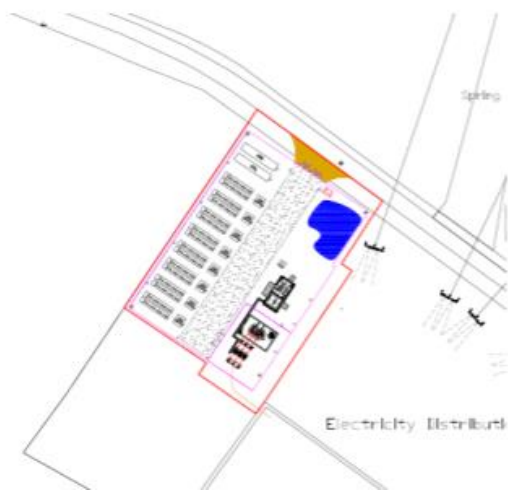
Proposed Development

This is a variation of condition application to vary condition 2 of application 2023/0322 (Energy storage facility) to allow for changes to the site layout, groundworks and landscaping.

The applicant has provided amended plans for a reduced scheme and has provided the following information in order to justify the amendments proposed:-

'Following commencement of the procurement process and engagement with a reputable battery supplier, a number of refinements to the approved scheme are proposed. These changes result in a materially reduced visual and spatial impact when compared to the consented layout. The amendments are summarised below:

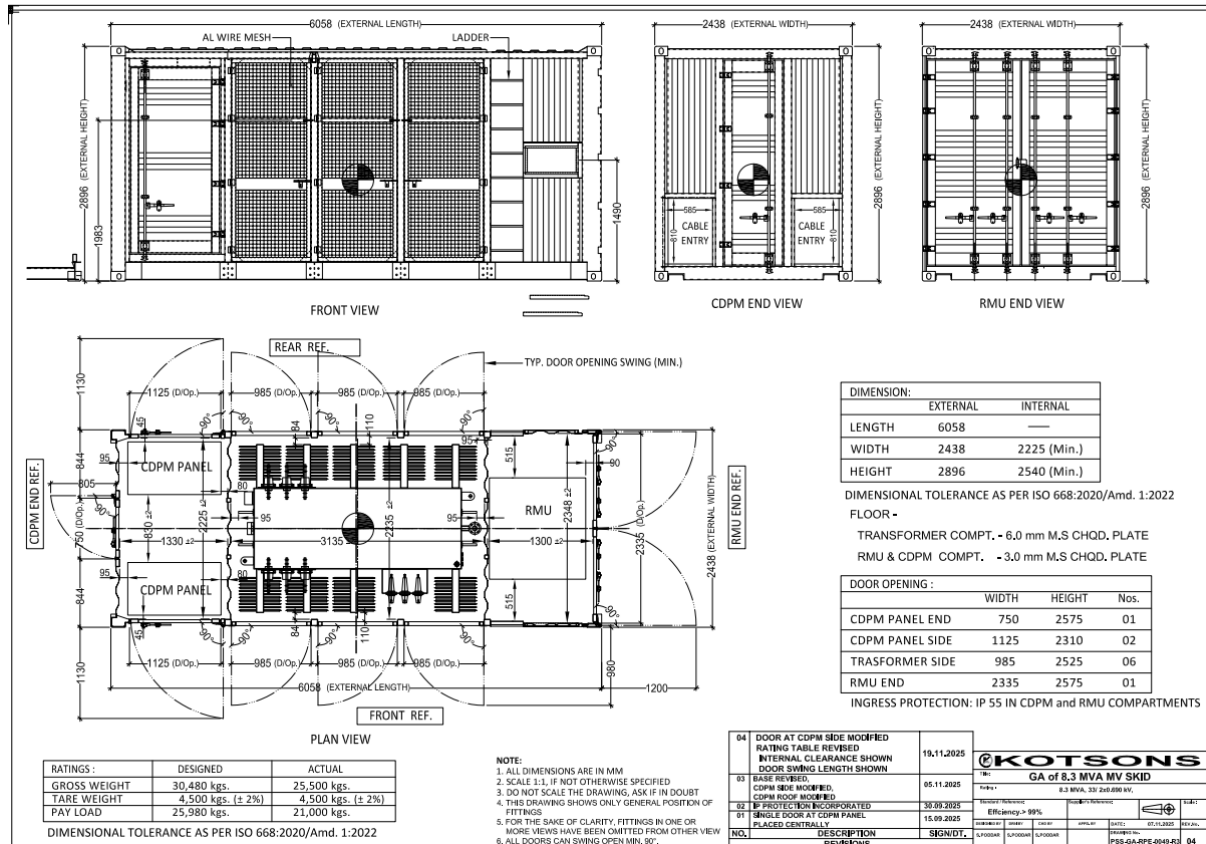
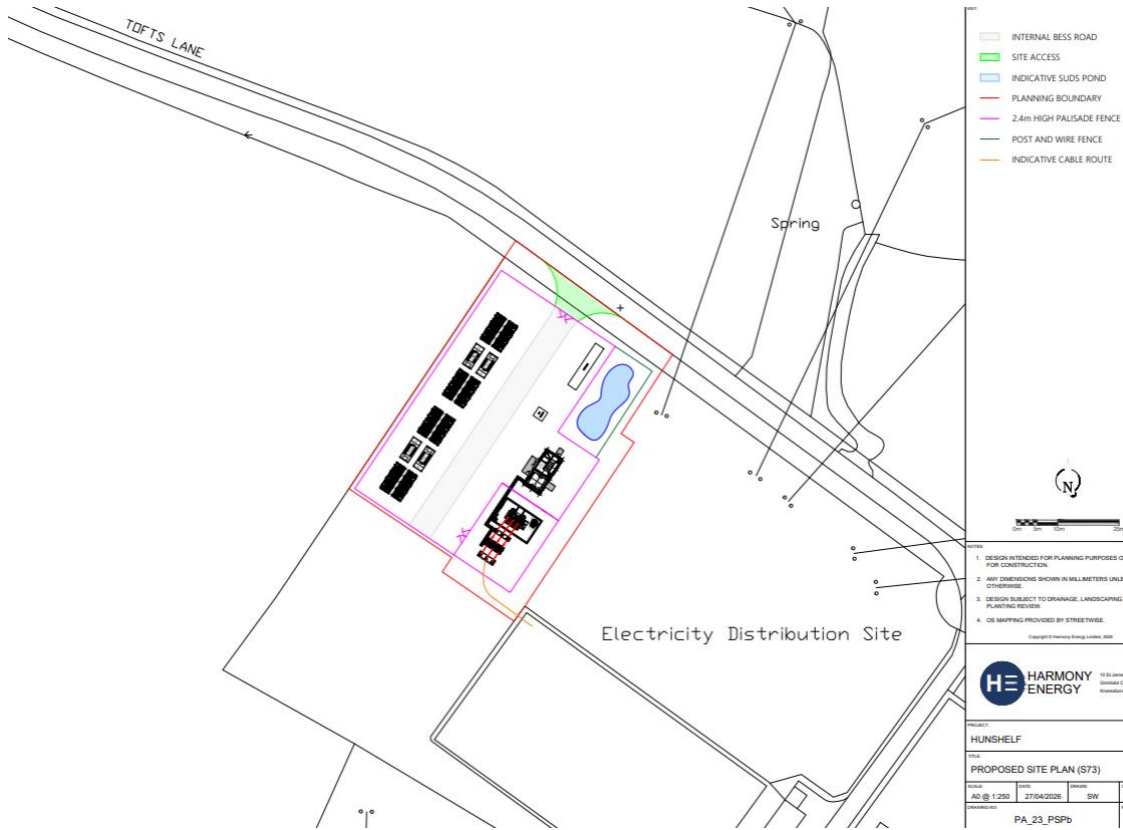
- A reduction in the built form at the site.
- Reduction of number of containers from 18 to 8 pairs
- Provision of green-finished battery units in place of white.
- Battery units with a maximum height of 4.3m including the concrete plinth (4.1m excluding plinth) – Previous units were proposed to a maximum of 3m

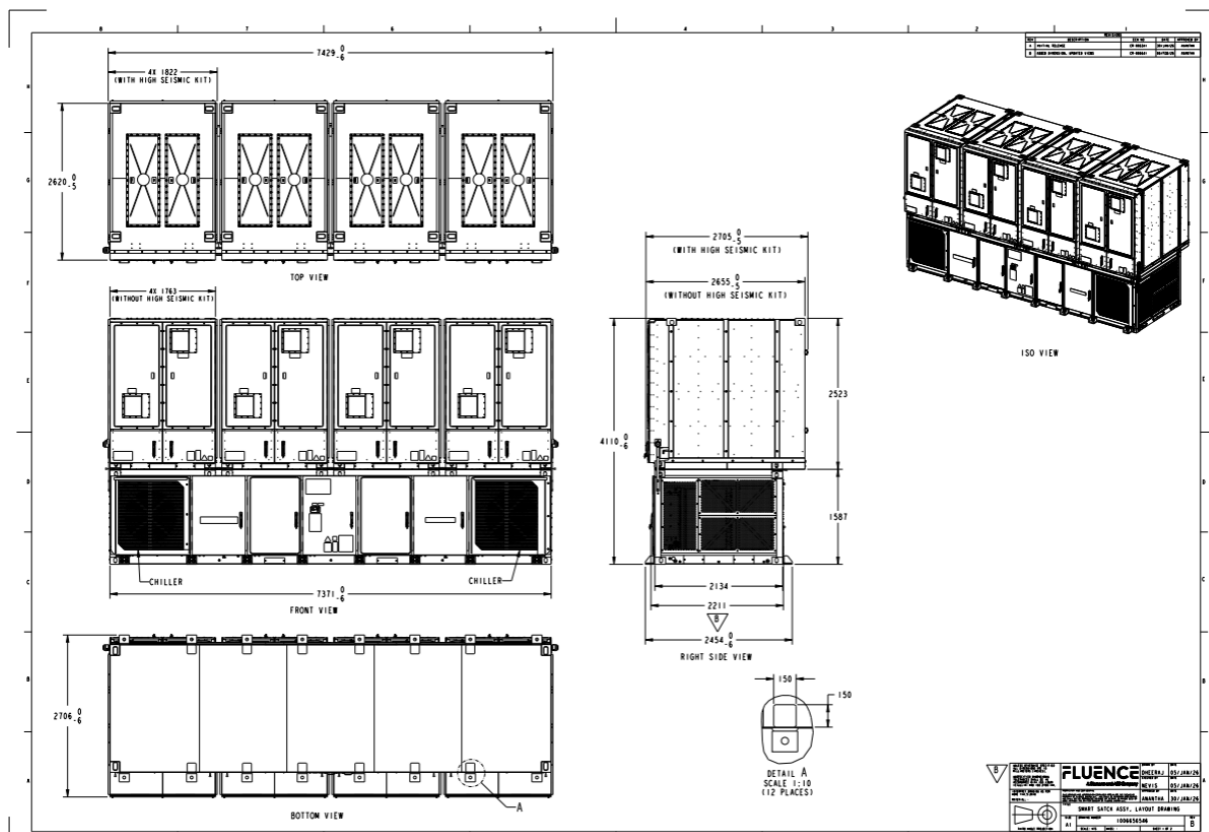


Approved Layout Plan



Proposed Revised Site Layout





Policy Context

The Development Plan

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan for Barnsley consists of the Barnsley Local Plan (adopted January 2019).

The Local Plan review was approved at the full Council meeting held 24th November 2022. The review determined that the Local Plan remains fit for purpose and is adequately delivering its objectives. This means, no updates to the Local Plan, in whole or in part, are to be carried out ahead of a further review. The next review is due to take place in 2027, or earlier, if circumstances require it.

The site is located within the Green Belt as shown on the Local Plan Proposals Map, therefore policy GB1, Protection of the Green Belt applies, protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development in accordance with National Planning Policy.

In addition the following policies apply:

Policy SD1, Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development;

GD1, General Development;

T4, New Development and Highway Improvement

D1, Design

BI01, Biodiversity and Geodiversity

LC1, Landscaper Character

CC1, Climate change and Sustainable Construction

CC3, Flood Risk

RE1, Low Carbon and Renewable Energy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance

In December 2024, The Government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") which is the most recent revision of the original Framework, published first in 2012 and updated a number of times, providing the overarching planning framework for England. It sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied. The NPPF must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in planning decisions. This revised document has replaced the earlier planning policy statements, planning policy guidance and various policy letters and circulars, which are now cancelled.

Central to the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development which is at the heart of the framework (paragraph 10) and plans and decisions should apply this presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11). The NPPF confirms that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental; each of these aspects are mutually dependent.

In respect of this application, relevant policies include:

- Section 2 - Achieving sustainable development
- Section 4 - Decision making
- Section 6 - Building a strong, competitive economy
- Section 9 – Promoting Sustainable Transport
- Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places
- Section 13 – Protecting Green Belt Land
- Section 14 - Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Para 142 - The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Para 143 - Green Belt serves five purposes: a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Para 153 - When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness⁵⁵. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Para – 154 Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the following exceptions applies:

a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and

burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;

e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and

f) development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

h) Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are: i. mineral extraction; ii. engineering operations; iii. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location; iv. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and vi. development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Para 160. When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

Para 158 - When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:

a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions;

b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas, and

c) in the case of applications for the repowering and life-extension of existing renewable sites, give significant weight to the benefits of utilising an established site, and approve the proposal if its impacts are or can be made acceptable

Para - 168 When determining planning applications for all forms of renewable and low carbon energy developments and their associated infrastructure, local planning authorities should: a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy

generation and the proposal's contribution to a net zero future; b) recognise that small-scale and community-led projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; c) in the case of applications for the repowering and life-extension of existing renewable sites, give significant weight to the benefits of utilising an established site.

The National Design Guidance (2019) is a material consideration and sets out ten characteristics of well-designed places based on planning policy expectations. A written ministerial statement states that local planning authorities should take it into account when taking decisions.

Supplementary Planning Documents

- Parking
- Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Trees and Hedgerows

Consultations

Hunshelf Parish Council - There are no observations from the Council but they have asked me to make you aware that they will be writing to the company to seek ways in which they can contribute to the community.

Highways DC – No objections

Ecology – No objections

Drainage – No objections

Pollution Control – No comments received

Representations

The application was publicised by way of a site notice. No comments have been received.

Assessment

Planning Assessment

The main issues for consideration are as follows:

- The principle of the development and the impact on the character and visual amenity of the area
- The impact on the highway network and highways standards
- The impact on the ecology of the site
- The impact on Amenity
- The impact on Fire Safety
- Other issues

For the purposes of considering the balance in this application the following planning weight is referred to in this report using the following scale:

- Substantial
- Significant

- Moderate
- Limited
- Little or no

The principle of the development and the impact on the character and visual amenity of the area

The proposal is inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Green Belt policy states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances, however the principle of the development has been established by the original planning approval 2023/0322, which is still extant and can therefore be implemented, and the applicant has now provided amended plans for a reduced scheme at the site.

As with the previous planning approval, the harm to the Green Belt, from the proposed development, is caused by the visual impact of the battery storage units and associated infrastructure on the landscape and from the increased highway movements associated with the proposed. The NPPF defines the essential characteristic of the green belt as “their openness and their permanence”. The proposal will have a harmful impact on this characteristic. The harm to the green belt is in part mitigated by the location of the proposed development, within the confines of the existing substation, which is an existing urban structure with clearly defined boundaries. The topography is such that the site is not highly visible over medium to long distance views, as demonstrated in the landscape and visual analysis accompanying the previous application. The site is highly visible in the immediate vicinity as viewed from Tofts Lane, Mucky Lane and the Public Rights of Way to the north and North West, all of which offer opportunities for outdoor recreation. Nevertheless the proposed battery storage, within the context of the existing substation, represents an intensification of the existing urban form rather than a standalone feature. In this respect the harm to the Green Belt is reduced.

The impact is further lessened by the reduction of the scheme which includes, reduction of number of containers from 18 to 8 pairs, provision of green-finished battery units in place of white. The battery units would have a maximum height of 4.3m including the concrete plinth (4.1m excluding plinth). Whilst the previous units were proposed to have a maximum height of 3m, this is outweighed by a reduction in overall development on site. The units would also be partially screened by the planting of screening which will soften the appearance as well as providing some benefits to biodiversity through the enhancement of habitat.

The case for very special circumstances is still as follows, the batteries are required to provide storage of electricity, increasing the flexibility of the Grid to respond to fluctuations in energy demand. This increased flexibility is required to support the Government’s target of reducing carbon emissions which will be achieved through the decommissioning of carbon intensive plants and delivery of low carbon generation i.e. wind and solar; low carbon generation being inherently inflexible in relation to when they generate electricity.

Whilst the proposed is not for energy generation, it is accepted that it will support these aspirations through storing energy for release when it is needed, providing increased flexibility to the network and supporting the transition to low carbon and renewable energy. Having established that there is a clear benefit to the proposed and that this can be considered to form part of the very special circumstances. The proposal site is also sited adjacent to an existing electricity substation, having sufficient space for the

proposed and the technical capacity is therefore considered a suitable site for the battery storage proposed.

It is therefore accepted that, weighing all the above in the balance, there are very special circumstances for the proposed development which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt in accordance with the NPPF and policy GB1 of the Local Plan. In addition the impact of the amended proposal upon the visual amenity and openness of the Green Belt is considered to be moderate.

The impact on the highway network and highways standards

Highway Officers have assessed the amended application and raised no objections. The changes to the layout would not have any significant impact on highway safety or the number of vehicle movements associated with the use. Once the construction work is complete, there will be very few highway implications with traffic generation being between approximately 10 and 20 vehicle trips per annum. These would be to support site operations and general maintenance activities at the facility.

A scheme for an energy storage facility on this site had already received approval in the previous application, and Highways have requested that the conditions from the 2023 application is added to the decision notice. The impact upon Highway Safety is considered to be moderate.

The impact on the ecology of the site

The proposed development would be located on an area of unused grass land adjacent to the existing electricity substation and additional planting is proposed in the form of a wildflower meadow and screening planting to the north eastern corner of the site.

The original application made in 2023 was supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) setting out results of a survey carried out in June 2022. Although the survey data is now 4 years old, updated surveys are not considered necessary. Aerial photographs of the site dated March 2026 show the habitat to still comprise improved pasture grassland and it is therefore considered disproportionate to request an updated PEA.

A Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Scheme was conditioned with the original planning permission and submitted as part of a Discharge of Condition application (ref: 2025/0515). This document sets out planting of the proposed SUDS basin and enhancement of an area of grassland in close proximity to the east of the site. The amended layout still shows the SUDS basin to the north-east corner of the development site and planting as indicated within the Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Scheme should still be implemented along with enhancement of the grassland habitat to the east.

The Ecology Officer has been consulted and is satisfied with the findings and recommendations made within the report and a condition is recommended to secure a Biodiversity Mitigation and Enhancement Scheme is submitted and agreed, prior to the commencement of the development. The proposal is therefore acceptable when measured against policy BIO1 of the Local Plan. The impact upon Ecology is considered to be moderate.

The impact on Amenity

The nearest residential dwelling is Carr Head Farm located over 400m to the southwest of the site, therefore a noise report has been submitted in support of the application. The

Pollution Control Officer considered the noise report submitted with the previous application and had no objections to the scheme.

The Pollution Control Officer has not commented on the amended scheme and as this is a reduced scheme there should be no significant impacts in terms of amenity. Subject to a condition regarding construction hours, there is no objection to the scheme in terms of residential amenity in accordance with Local Plan Policy POLL1. The impact upon amenity is considered to be limited.

Conclusion

The proposal has already been approved by the original planning application and this variation of condition application proposed a reduced scheme, with slightly taller battery units. These changes are not considered to be detrimental to visual amenity or to the openness of the Green Belt.

It is considered that the benefits of the development in the form of its contribution towards the security and supply of electricity would amount to very special circumstances that would be sufficient to clearly outweigh the limited harm to the openness and purposes of including land in the Green Belt that would occur in this case in accordance with the NPPF and policy GB1 of the Local Plan.

Recommendation

Grant planning permission subject to conditions

It has not been necessary to make contact with the applicant to request amendments to the proposal during the consideration of the application, as it was deemed acceptable.

Due regard has been given to Article 8 and Protocol 1 of Article 1 of the European Convention for Human Rights Act 1998 when considering objections, the determination of the application and the resulting recommendation. it is considered that the recommendation will not interfere with the applicant's and/or any objector's right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.