



# **PLANNING SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

**Beba Energy and Mike Fairey of Maurice Crouch Growers Ltd**

**Proposed 115.6 kWp ground mounted solar panels  
extension to existing array**

**at Willow Farm, Wisbech Road, March, PE15 0HP**

Brown & Co  
6 Market Place  
Brigg  
North Lincolnshire  
DN20 8HA

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Prepared by: CG

Checked by: LP

For and on behalf of Brown & Co.

Brown & Co is a leading provider of agency, professional and consultancy services across the whole range of rural, commercial, residential, and agricultural markets.

Date: December 2020

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Brown & Co to support a full planning application submitted on behalf of Beba Energy and Mike Fairey of Maurice Crouch Growers Ltd for the installation of 115.6 kWp ground mounted solar panels extensions to existing array at Willow Farm, Wisbech Road, March, PE15 OHP.
- 1.2 The purpose of this statement is to set out the background to the applicant's proposals and the key planning issues raised by them. The statement is structured as shown below:
- **Section 1:** introduction;
  - **Section 2:** describes the physical characteristics of the site and its surroundings;
  - **Section 3:** outlines the proposed development;
  - **Section 4:** site history;
  - **Section 5:** summarises the relevant national and local planning policy context;
  - **Section 6:** provides a planning assessment of the key considerations raised by the proposal; and
  - **Section 7:** sets out in brief our overall conclusions on the proposal.
- 1.3 This statement should be read in conjunction with the following application documents submitted as part of the outline application:
- Planning application forms;
  - Site Location Plan (red line plan);
  - Block Plan;
  - PV layout/trench location plan;
  - Side elevations;
  - Detailed PV layout;
  - Front and rear elevations; and
  - Cable and trench cross section.

## 2. SITE & SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The proposed development site comprises of a small area of land in the centre of an agricultural unit. The proposed development is for an extension to the existing solar array.
- 2.2 The surrounding area comprises of agricultural land and buildings. There is a railway line to the south west of the application site and the village of Manea lies approx. 1.6 miles west.

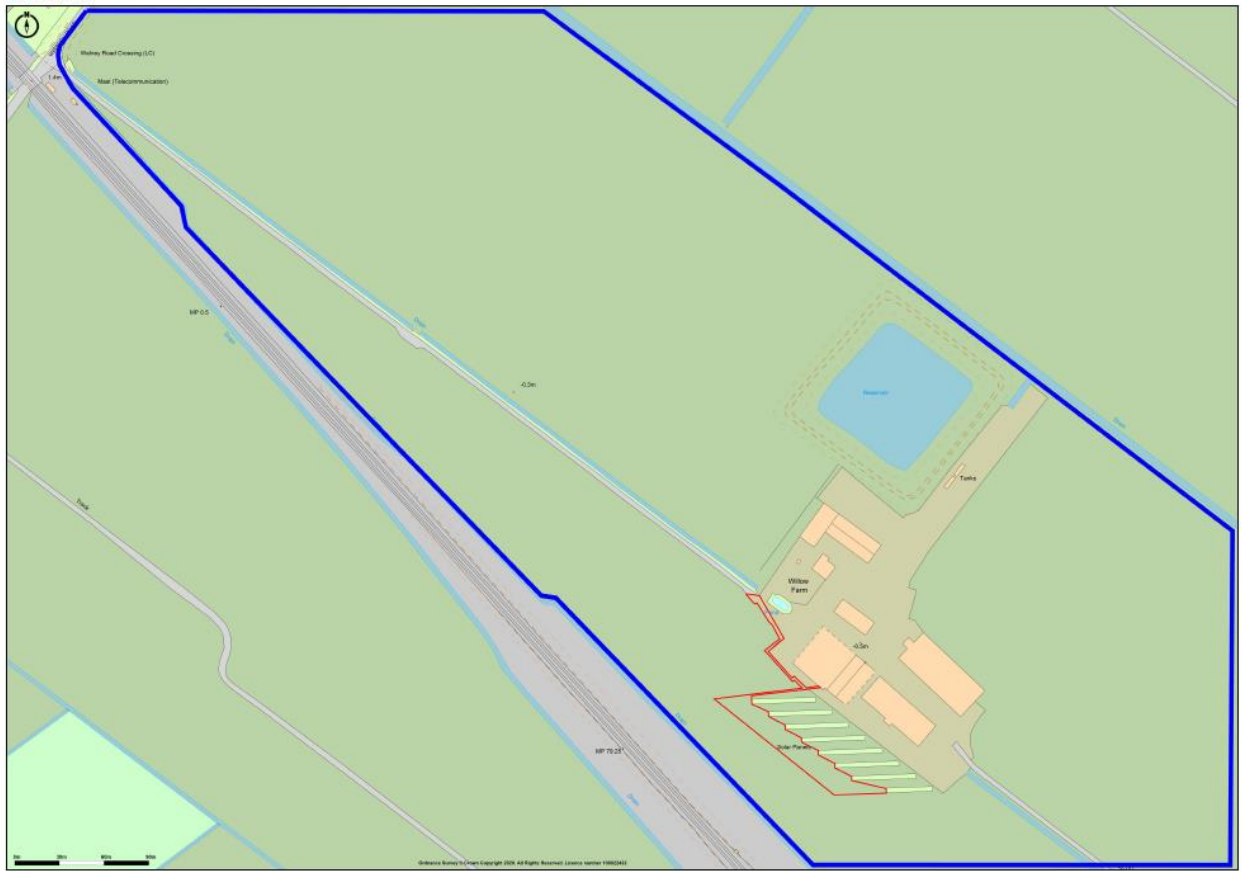


Figure 1: site location plan (not to scale)

### 3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The applicants are proposing to install a 115.6 kWp ground mounted solar PV array to provide renewable energy. The array will be an extension to the existing solar array. It will consist of 340 no. individual modules over a double mounted solar array, consisting of eight rows of free-standing panels, each measuring approx. 20.3m by 3.7m, with the first-row panel measuring 30.44m x 3.9m. The panels will be angled at 23 degrees, facing south with the maximum height 2.21m above ground level. The rows will be 5.4m apart. The panels will be constructed via the existing access into the site and a cable route trench will run from the panels to the existing agricultural building.
- 3.2 The proposed development will be used to produce renewable energy by converting solar radiation to electrical energy which will be used mainly on site to provide electrical power to the agricultural unit. There may be times when the power will be

supplied to the Grid.

## 4. SITE HISTORY

- 4.1 The application site is part of a large farm site. Planning permission was granted on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2011 with Fenland District Council for the erection of stand alone solar photovoltaic panels (planning reference: F/YR11/0711/F).
- 4.2 Other planning history for the wider site is shown below:

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### Planning Applications (6)

- [Erection of a steel frame store](#)  
Ref. No: F/91/1007/O | Status: 19
- [Erection of a storage building](#)  
Ref. No: F/92/0171/F | Status: 19
- [Erection of an agricultural workshop/ implement store](#)  
Ref. No: F/95/0916/AG1 | Status: 34
- [Erection of side extensions to existing agricultural building](#)  
Ref. No: F/YR05/0835/F | Status: Granted
- [Screening Opinion: Erection of 1 Wind Turbine](#)  
Ref. No: F/YR10/0426/SCOP | Status: Further Information Required
- [Erection of stand alone solar photovoltaic panels](#)  
Ref. No: F/YR11/0711/F | Status: Granted

## 5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 5.1 Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan is, therefore, the starting point for the assessment of all planning proposals. Development plan policies of particular relevance to this application are summarised below.
- 5.2 The Government's planning policies, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), are also a significant material consideration in deciding planning applications. National planning policies of particular relevance to this application are summarised below.

### Development Plan Policies –

- 5.3 Policy LP14 – Responding to Climate Change and Managing the Risk of Flooding in Fenland of the Fenland Council Local Plan applies.

Policy LP14 states that renewable energy proposals will be supported and considered in the context of sustainable development and climate change. Proposals for renewable energy will be assessed taking into account the following factors:

- Surrounding landscape;
- Noise Impact;

- Residential and visual amenity;
- Highway safety;
- Aircraft movement; and
- High quality agricultural land.

## National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.4 The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies and how these are expected to be applied and advises that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Three objectives of sustainable development are identified: economic, social and environmental.
- 5.5 Economic considerations include ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth. Social considerations include supporting healthy communities by creating high quality environments with accessible local services. Environmental considerations include protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environments.
- 5.6 At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking, the presumption in favour means approving developments that accord with the development plan without delay, and where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
- the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
  - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.
- 5.7 The NPPF establishes a series of core planning principles which include that planning should proactively drive and support sustainable development to deliver new homes, business units, infrastructure and thriving local places. To this end, every effort should be made to identify and meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area and to respond positively to wider opportunities for growth.
- 5.8 Other core principles of particular note in relation to the development proposed include: Section 2 of the current NPPF which sets out the purpose of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainability is summarised as ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

The NPPF outlines the three mutually supportive objectives of sustainability as being economic, social and environmental, and emphasises that the presumption in favour of sustainable development lies at the heart of the Framework.

- 5.9 Section 148 states that the planning system should ‘support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate’.
- 5.10 Chapter 14 addresses the need of the planning system to support the transition to a low carbon future and supporting renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.’ Within chapter 14, Section 152 states that local planning authorities should support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy, including developments outside areas identified in local plans or other strategic policies that are being taken forward through neighbourhood planning.
- 5.11 Section 153 also states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should expect new development to: a) comply with any development plan policies on local requirements for decentralised energy supply unless it can be demonstrated by the applicant, having regard to the type of development involved and its design, that this is not feasible or viable; and b) take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption. Additionally, section 154 states that when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should 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.

### National Planning Practice Guidance

- 5.12 The Government’s Planning Practice Guidance provides a web-based resource of national planning guidance covering a wide range of topics. Of particular relevance to this application is the guidance set in the sections of the NPPG relating to Active solar technology, (photovoltaic and solar water heating) on or related to a particular building is often permitted development (which does not require a planning application) provided the installation is not of an unusual design, or does not involve a listed building, and is not in a designated area. Where a planning application is required, factors to bear in mind include:
- the importance of siting systems in situations where they can collect the most energy from the sun;
  - need for sufficient area of solar modules to produce the required energy output from the system;
  - the effect on a protected area such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or other designated areas; and
  - the colour and appearance of the modules, particularly if not a standard design.

## 6. ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The proposed application is for an extension to an existing solar array at Willow Farm. Solar panels will convert solar radiation into electrical energy which will help

to power the commercial agricultural unit and significantly reduce CO2 emissions. Any excess energy which may be produced by the installation will be exported to the national grid for off-site network use.

- 6.2 The proposed installation will have the following benefits:
- Reduce the operational cost of the agricultural unit for the applicant by generating electricity on site from a renewable source;
  - Will protect the applicant from future energy price increases;
  - Will reduce the applicants; the local community's and the nation's reliance on electricity produced from fossil fuels, aiding the economy and benefiting the environment; and
  - There will be a significant CO2 reduction per annum for the 25 year life span of the panels.

#### Flood Risk

- 6.3 The proposed development site is located in Flood Zone 3 as shown on the flood map for planning produced by the Environment Agency however it does benefit from flood defences. A flood risk assessment has been completed as part of the application.

#### Biodiversity

- 6.4 The proposed development site comprises of existing farmland, close to agricultural buildings and a railway line. The proposed development site does not show any signs of ecological sensitivity and due to the minimally invasive construction and non-permanence of the structures, it is not considered that the proposal would have any adverse impact on biodiversity.

#### Decommissioning

- 6.5 The life span of the proposed solar installation will have an expected operational lifespan of 25 years. If required by the Local Planning Authority, a standard condition can be attached to any planning approval, which requires decommissioning to be considered and a scheme of works to be submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

#### Policy Compliance

- 6.6 It is considered that the low-carbon proposal is an environmentally and economically sustainable proposal. Given its relatively small scale, location within a partially developed site and neutral visual impact on its location, it can be described as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and would make a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.
- 6.7 The proposed array has been sited to maximise collected energy from the sun. The proposed panels are an extension to the existing array and when viewed from a distance will blend in with the existing development, not having any further impact on the surrounding landscape than what is currently experienced. The panels have



a non-reflective coating and dull metal framework, which will not be incongruous within this setting.

- 6.8 This application fits well with the Core Strategy and the NPPF. As the application is for a relatively small installation to provide an additional solar supply to an existing business, rather than a large commercial solar farm, and will be relatively well screened, it is not considered that the proposal would have any adverse visual impact on the landscape, impact on ecology or any heritage assets.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This document has sought to provide a detailed explanation of the proposed development project whilst addressing the relevant guidance, issues arising and policy surrounding the development.
- 7.2 The main purpose for the development is to provide energy to the agricultural buildings and to reduce reliance on the national energy supply. Any excess energy will be exported to the national grid distribution network for use off-site.
- 7.3 National and local plan policy offers clear support to renewable energy production proposals, including small scale schemes to power existing business developments such as the proposal within this application. This application is considered as sustainable development, meeting the NPPFs main aim of therefore being a presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 7.4 As a result of this development there will be no impacts on ecology, local amenity, heritage or permanent loss of agricultural land, which adheres to local and national planning policy.