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## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT

PROPOSED SOLAR FARM ON LAND OFF GREEN LANE, MARCHINGTON,  
EAST STAFFORDSHIRE

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## Executive Summary

This Community Consultation Report (CCR) accompanies the planning application for detailed planning permission for a solar farm of up to 5.77 MWp and associated development (the Proposals) on land off Green Lane, Marchington, East Staffordshire (the Site).

TGC undertook a detailed programme of community consultation to inform interested parties about the Proposals and to gain an insight into local issues. The purpose of this CCR is to provide details of this programme and more importantly set out how the findings have been incorporated into the Proposals.

The community consultation began with TGC sending information to Marchington Parish Council (PC), Staffordshire County Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council and the local MP regarding the proposal to hold a consultation event at Marchington Village Hall.

Invitation letters were also sent to 695 households, as well as 11 local businesses, these businesses were also sent posters advertising the event, and asked if they could display them in public areas. An advert was placed in the Uttoxeter Advertiser on 13 May 2015.

A consultation event was held in Marchington Village Hall on Thursday 28 May 2015 from 3pm to 7pm, attended by approximately 35 people with a number of supporters of the scheme.

Issues raised and discussed included:

- Local support for the development of renewable energy generating developments;
- Landscape and visual impacts; and
- The appropriateness of the site in planning and locational terms.

These were taken into consideration and:

- Screening would be incorporated around the Site's boundary;
- A Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal has been prepared and accompanies the application; and
- Traffic management has been considered in detail at this stage and would be secured via condition through the use of a detailed Traffic Management Plan.

Overall, TGC consider that the community consultation programme has been successful, based on the feedback received, as it has enabled TGC to gain an insight into local issues and concerns relating to the Proposals. These have been reflected in the Proposals as detailed above, and as such the programme is considered to have added value to the design process and ensured that the Proposals reflect these local issues.

## 1.0 Introduction

This CCR accompanies the planning application for a 5.77 MWp solar farm and associated development (the Proposals) on land off Green Lane, Marchington, East Staffordshire (the Site), as illustrated on the Site Location Plan which accompanies the application. This CCR provides detailed explanation of the consultation process that has been undertaken in order to inform the Proposals.

The Proposals are being proposed by TGC Renewables (TGC) who in turn have prepared and submitted the planning application for which this CCR has been prepared. The project team has extensive experience in the development, construction and operation of solar PV farms throughout England.

In advance of submitting the planning application TGC sought to inform and engage with interested parties of the evolving design process at an early stage. TGC organised a community consultation programme to inform the community of the Proposals and to gain an insight into local issues to guide the planning and design processes.

The community consultation event provided local people with an opportunity to learn more about the Proposals, raise issues and discuss these with members of the TGC project team. Illustrative presentations were used to set out information on the Proposals and the background to PV development.

This report is submitted as part of the planning applications to illustrate TGC's commitment and efforts to involve the local community in the Proposals, in line with the Solar Trade Association's (STA) 10 Commitments, as well as best planning practice. The CCR highlights the response of the participants, draws together the key messages and issues raised during the course of the consultation, and summarises what has been done to address these in terms of the Proposals for which planning permission is now sought.

## 2.0 Approach to Consultation

The effective management of stakeholder expectations and of the consultation process is of prime importance to the successful progression and delivery of all development proposals.

As such, TGC is committed to a comprehensive strategy of community engagement. The views of local communities are valued, alongside local opinions, aspirations, expectations and requirements, all of which help to shape development proposals. As a result, a wide range of consultation activity has been undertaken prior to this submission. This has included engaging with the local community and key consultees, consulting on proposals, providing explanations of initial plans and listening to local views.

It is widely recognised that the proposal of renewable energy developments often raise interests and concerns within local communities. TGC understands this and subsequently their approach to development endeavours to ensure positive, long term effects on the local communities and environment.

During the community consultation process, TGC has aimed to engage, consult, listen and provide opportunities for community involvement. By providing more than just information on the Proposals and engaging with the local community, more informed and valuable feedback has been gained throughout the process. This approach is taken by TGC with a view to acting as a responsible developer and gaining a planning permission which both meets our needs and avoids significant detrimental impacts on the host community.

The main objectives of this programme of consultation has been to:

- Encourage as wide a cross section of people as possible, who live locally, to have a say in the development of the Proposals;
- Ensure that local people have access to accurate and factual information on all aspects of the Proposals which may be of particular interest or concern to them;
- Provide the local community with the opportunity to shape the Proposals as they progress, ensuring that the outcomes of community engagement have been reflected in the Proposals as far as is possible;
- Ensure people have access to information detailing why the Site was identified as suitable for a solar PV farm;
- Enable TGC to gauge public opinion regarding the Proposals;
- Engage with key consultees to make them aware of the Proposals and allow them to provide feedback that can be incorporated into the design iteration process, if necessary; and
- Enable TGC to gauge the level of investment interest within the local community.

Furthermore, in preparing for the community consultation exercise and to deliver it in the most effective manner, TGC sought to:

- Provide an open and welcoming forum for local people to air their views on the Proposals;
- Explain and discuss any issues and concerns raised;
- Encourage discussion and provide everyone with an opportunity to participate; and
- Accurately record the feedback of the participants of the event.

In order to meet these objectives, TGC has:

- Held a public exhibition at Marchington Village Hall on Thursday 28 May 2015 for which adverts were published in the Uttoxeter Advertiser on the 23 May 2015, public notices were displayed in local businesses and individual invitations were sent out to several interested parties including local residents.

Examples of some of the materials utilised during the community consultation process are contained within the appendices accompanying this CCR. Due to the fact that they contain personal information, the completed feedback forms and sign-in sheets from the exhibitions are not included for public viewing. However, this information has been analysed and the results are summarised within this report.

## **3.0 Methodology – Public Consultation Event**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section of the CCR sets out factual details of the community consultation event held by TGC. The feedback, findings and issues discussed are analysed in Section 4 below. Details of how these findings have influenced the Proposals are also set out in Section 4.

Effective consultation should recognise that individuals will have different interests and concerns which they will want to explore and that all attendees should have the opportunity to express their views. This open approach to consultation was reflected in a flexible agenda at the consultation event, where attendees were able to discuss the details of TGC's proposal and the UK Government's aspirations for renewable energy projects.

Attendees were able to discuss the detail behind the reasons for site selection, design principles and potential visual impact of the Proposals, along with the benefits of the Proposals. The event was designed to be open and informative rather than a rigid presentation and it is considered that this format worked well.

### **3.2 Consultation Event – Marchington Village Hall**

A public exhibition was held for the Proposals on Thursday 28 May 2015 with approximately 35 people attending throughout the course of the event. The aim of this exhibition was to allow members of the public to discuss the Proposals, continue the process of engaging with local people and provide information and guidance on both the project itself and how individuals and groups could comment on the Proposals and get involved in the process. Additionally, in order for TGC to gauge the level of local resident/community interest in investment in the Proposals, 'Investment Expression of Interest' forms were made available for all attendees. This form allows local community members to express their interest in investment by providing their contact details. Consequently, TGC actively encourage local/community ownership in line with Commitment 8 of the STA's 10 Commitments.

The public exhibition provided an additional opportunity for engagement with local people and businesses, allowing them to express their particular interest or concern regarding the Proposals. The exhibition offered local residents and other interested parties the opportunity to view the design and layout of the Proposals, ask questions and offer comment.

The public exhibition was held once the design for the Proposals had progressed to a more advanced stage. The aim of the exhibition was to build upon the consultation carried out, by providing further and more detailed information on the Proposals and to provide an update to attendees. Full details of the entire project process were available for attendees. Full details of the entire project process were available for attendees. Details of the Proposals were displayed for public viewing and comment at the exhibitions.

The public exhibition was held from 3pm to 7pm with members of the project team (Roy Amner – TGC Development Director) present in order that specific questions could be answered as required.

#### **Publicity**

TGC publicised the event widely to actively inform both the general public and relevant interest groups. The aim of this publicity was to encourage as many people as possible to attend. The methods used are set out below.

Prior to this event, several advertisements were published inviting people to attend the exhibition for further information and discussion. The advertisement of the public exhibition comprised:

- A notice displayed in the Uttoxeter Advertiser on the 13 May 2015 (Refer to Appendix B);
- Invites sent to 695 households in the area (Refer to Appendix C);

- Invites to 11 local businesses with a request for them to display posters advertising the event (Refer to Appendix D); and
- Invitation letters sent to local district and county councils, councillors and the local MP (Refer to Appendix A).

## The Event

Presentation boards detailing the Proposals were on display as people entered the event. This gave participants the opportunity to view the illustrative boards and have informal discussions with TGC staff and with one another regarding any concerns held in respect of the Proposals. It is worth noting that a number of members of the local community are supportive of renewables in particular solar and the need to tackle climate change.

Comment sheets were made available at the exhibition and attendees were encouraged to complete and return these in order to provide feedback to the project team. Throughout the event, relevant issues were discussed, and TGC contact details were provided to ensure members of the community could get in touch at any stage if necessary.

During the consultation event attendees were consulted on three separate sites within the Marchington area, including the Proposals. The Proposals were unanimously selected as the most appropriate and favourable option by local residents.

The main issues discussed and noted from this stage of the community consultation process were, with key comments noted as appropriate:

- Support for renewable energy and solar farms, to tackle climate change;
- Support for the Site's location;
- "To safeguard the footpath. To not impact on the aspect from the village over the Dove Valley";
- "No problems";
- "Only concern is the disruption to any existing footpaths";
- "Good full information – thank you. Keen to maintain footpath – please! Anything that you can do to support wildlife as part of the scheme (e.g. wildflowers) would be much appreciated";
- "Have no objection";
- "Good information. No issues for us if footpath retained";
- "Positive use of Grade 3 land to provide green energy. We are strong supporters of renewables. Keen to see natural grazing whenever possible. Would be good to see and pay back into the community e.g. school, village hall, community electric, transport etc. Seems to be little visual intrusion and connection to grid underground via existing power lines";
- "In agreement with the scheme";
- "Happy with the scheme";
- "I agree with the site";
- "No problem as sufficiently out of the way – sightwise and with regards to footpaths";

- “I do not support the Proposals. We have already played our part in supporting the development on Moisty Lane. If everyone conceded to a single development in their area all our energy requirements would be met. The very thing that makes Marchington special is going to be potentially ruined by other people who just seek to gain personal wealth. Try proposing elsewhere!”;
- “I strongly oppose the development of the solar farm within the Marchington area. This is a beautiful village and as a frequent walker down Green Lane I cannot believe you can even consider destroying the green fields that surround this lane. I have lived in this village for over 15 years and not only myself but my relatives and children adore walking in this area. The creation of the solar farm will be visually appalling and I cannot express my opposition to this proposal vehemently enough”;
- “If planning is given this could be possible, but do not really like the idea!”.
- “At least there it would be out of sight and won’t be ruining our beautiful countryside/village”;
- “Plans to build the farm on the turkey farm land will not affect villagers detrimentally. Traffic down green lane would not be appropriate as the state of this is very poor already”;
- “Green Lane is used as a social amenity by villagers”;
- “No strong objection to solar panels behind prison or turkey sheds”;
- “No problems”;
- “Screen along side of turkey house”.

It is worth noting that two local residents expressed an interest in investing in the Proposals by completing the ‘Investment Expression of Interest’ forms made available during the public exhibition event. TGC will endeavour to facilitate this investment in the Proposals by local residents.

## 4.0 Conclusions and Implementation of Findings

TGC is committed to a comprehensive strategy of community engagement and as such, consider that the process undertaken has added value to the development of the Proposals.

There is support for the Proposals with a number of respondents from the public exhibitions supporting the idea of the Proposals. In addition, a good level of support was expressed for solar energy development in general, with local people recognising that England must develop renewable energy in order to secure future energy requirements.

The community consultation process has not identified any new significant issues which have not already been identified and assessed in the application, largely due to the process of technical and environmental assessment undertaken. However, views expressed have been taken into account as necessary throughout the design iteration process, and TGC remains confident that any identified issues have been resolved through minor changes to the Site layout and design as it has evolved.

Although the community consultation process alone has not resulted in significant changes to the design and development process, the findings of the process have influenced, and will continue to guide the Proposals, and the relationship TGC has with the local community.



A list of the main material considerations identified during the consultation programme is set out below:

- Support for the Proposals and recognition of the contribution of the Proposals to generating renewable energy;
- Support of the Site location;
- Concerns about the potential impact on the Public Rights of Way in the area; and
- Concerns over the site access.

With the above in mind, TGC note the following aspects of the Proposals, some of which have been based on the feedback of the consultation programme:

- Screening would be incorporated around the Site, as shown on the Site Designs, to prevent and/or reduce as best possible any visual impacts;
- A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared and accompanies the application to assess any potential visual impacts to the wider area; and
- A Provisional Traffic Management Plan has been prepared and accompanies the application. Further to concerns expressed by local residents regarding the utilisation of Green Lane for construction traffic, TGC has investigated accessing the Site from the south, passing HM Dovegate and the poultry farm. This route is detailed within the PTMP and subject to negotiations would be the preferred route utilised. Further detail can be secured through the use of a condition requiring the contractor to finalise details in due course.

TGC would also draw attention to the Planning, Design and Access Statement (P,DAS) which accompanies the application. This sets out information relating to many of the issues raised in the community consultation programme, such as the need for renewable energy projects to tackle climate change and the findings of the specialist reports which accompany the application. Full details of the proposed community benefits are also set out in the P,DAS, and can be summarised as £500 to £1,000 per MW installed on the Site for ten years (irrespective of whether or not the Proposals are supported by the PC).

Overall, TGC believes that a robust and inclusive community consultation process has been undertaken, providing valuable key insights into local concerns. This has informed the Site design process and helped the project team tailor the Proposals to address, not only technical constraints to development, but also the aspirations and needs of the local community. This will ensure that they benefit from the Proposals, maximising positive effects.