

Title of Report:	Planning Committee Report – LA01/2023/0728/F
Committee Report Submitted To:	Planning Committee
Date of Meeting:	24 September 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee YES/NO	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them
Lead Officer	Development Management and Enforcement Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil
Included in Current Year Estimates	NO
Capital/Revenue	N/a
Code	N/a
Staffing Costs	N/a

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:

	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

App No: LA01/2023/0728/F **Ward:** Causeway and Coleraine

App Type: Full Planning

Address: Lands located southeast of the Ballycastle Roundabout on the eastern outskirts of Coleraine. At their northern point lands are located south of the existing cluster of dwellings and buildings located along Ballyrashane Road. Lands extend south and are bound by the Ring Road on their western boundary and New Mills Road on their south-western boundary. Lands extend west to 170m north of Tullans Country Holiday Park.

Proposal: Installation and operation of a 29.9 MW solar farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated infrastructure including photovoltaic panels, mounting frames, inverters transformers, substation, fencing, pole mounted security cameras and associated site access and landscaping.

Con Area: N/A **Valid Date:** 10.07.2023

Listed Building Grade: N/A **Target Date:** 05.02.2024

Agent: RPS, Elmwood House, 74 Boucher Road, Belfast, BT12 6RZ

Applicant: Dunluce Developments, 44 Lodge Road, Coleraine, BT52 1ND

Objections: 5 **Petitions of Objection:** 0

Support: 1 **Petitions of Support:** 0

Executive Summary

- The proposal is for the installation and operation of a 29.9mw solar farm and associated infrastructure including photovoltaic panels, mounting frames, inverters, transformers, substation, battery storage (BESS), fencing, pole mounted security cameras and associated site access.
- As a major application this proposal was subject to the Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) process and the public consultation laid out within that before the application was submitted.
- An EIA determination was carried out under Regulation 12 of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2017. It was not considered that the proposal would have any significant adverse environmental effects, therefore, an Environmental Statement was not required.
- 5 objections have been received regarding the proposed development. All concerns raised by the statutory consultees have been addressed and the required mitigation will be dealt with by the proposed conditions attached.
- 1 letter of support has been received regarding the proposed development.
- The proposal has been assessed against the relevant policy, mainly Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy, and has been found acceptable in terms of the principle of development, impact on the public, safety, human health, residential amenity, visual amenity, landscape character, biodiversity, nature conservation, and local natural resources.
- This proposal is considered acceptable at this location having regard to the Northern Area Plan 2016 and all other material considerations.
- Approval is recommended subject to the proposed conditions.

Drawings and additional information are available to view on the Planning Portal-

<https://planningregister.planningsystemni.gov.uk/simple-search>

1.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Committee has taken into consideration and agrees with the reasons for the recommendation set out in section 9 and the policies and guidance in sections 7 and 8 and resolves to **APPROVE** planning permission subject to the conditions set out in section 10.

2.0 SITE LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The application site is located on lands to the southeast of the Ballycastle Roundabout on the eastern outskirts of Coleraine; south of Ballyrashane Road; east of the Ring Road; and northeast of Newmills Road. The site benefits from main road connections to the wider Northwest, with the closest other settlement being Ballyrashane located c.2km to the northwest.
- 2.2 The subject site is located on a parcel of agricultural grassland measuring circa 52 ha. The site is relatively flat and is made up of 17 individual agricultural fields comprising mainly semi-improved neutral grassland with some areas of arable land. It is noted that these areas have since been subject to livestock grazing and are subsequently more representative of species poor semi-improved grasslands. Limited areas of the site, including a number of access lanes are comprised of areas of hardstanding / bare ground. There is a minor designated watercourse, the Lodge Burn, which flows along the eastern boundary of the site within bankside hedgerows for a portion of its length.
- 2.3 While the site is within the rural area, there are a number of dwellings and agricultural buildings surrounding the site, mainly located to the north along Ballyrashane Road and to the south located along the Newmills Road. Tullans Country Holiday Park is approx. 0.5km to the south of the site boundary.
- 2.4 Access to the solar farm is proposed from the Ballyrashane Road via an existing access lane.

- 2.5 The site is not located within the boundary of any statutory or non-statutory designated sites of international, national or local nature conservation importance. The site however, is hydrologically linked to Bann Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is a designated site of international importance and Bann Estuary Area of Special Scientific Interest, which is a designated site of national importance. There are a number of designated sites and features of Natural Heritage Importance surrounding the site.

3.0 RELEVANT HISTORY

- 3.1 LA01/2022/1562/PAN - Installation and operation of a 29.9 MW solar farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated infrastructure including photovoltaic panels, mounting frames, inverters transformers, substation, fencing, pole mounted security cameras and associated site access and landscaping
PAN Acceptable 19.12.2022

4.0 THE APPLICATION

- 4.1 The proposal is for the installation and operation of a 29.9mw solar farm and associated infrastructure including photovoltaic panels, mounting frames, inverters, transformers, substation, fencing, pole mounted security cameras and associated site access. The development will include:

The main components of the project comprise:

- Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Panels mounted in frame tables at an inclination of 25-30 degrees depending upon localised topography;
- A primary substation, comprising electrical infrastructure and associated buildings – including control building. These elements will be located within a compound typically measuring 0.3ha;
- 20 No. Inverter Substation Containers on concrete plinths, typically measuring circa. 7m x 2.5m;
- A number of strategically located CCTV security cameras (3m high);
- Perimeter post and wire “deer” fencing (c.2.45m high);
- Associated Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility;
- Access to the site via the existing field entrance off the Ballyrashane Road;
- Temporary construction compounds;
- Associated internal service tracks.

- 4.2 When operational the development will have a Maximum Export Capacity (MEC) of up to 29.9MW. The land will continue to be used for agriculture with sheep grazing taking place across the entire area. The proposed infrastructure will not impede the agricultural use.

Design & Access Statement

- 4.3 A Design & Access Statement is required under Article 6 of the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (NI) 2015 as the application is a major application. The application falls within the major category due to the 29.9MW generation capacity of the solar farm.
- 4.4 The Design and Access Statement provided is to provide details of the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development and how issues relating to access to the development have been dealt with.
- 4.5 The Design and Access Statement states how the site was selected and how the layout of the solar farm was considered giving regard to visual amenity, residential amenity, topography, existing vegetation and environmental/location constraints.
- 4.6 The statement demonstrates that the Applicant undertook significant consideration of siting of the development, such as avoiding areas of flood risk, setting the development back from roads and dwellings, reducing the number of panels and employing landscaping to provide screening. This involved detailed assessment of the site which identified a number of constraints and led to refinements to the layout to provide an acceptable scheme prior to submission of an application.
- 4.7 The development is not proposed to be open to access by the general public. For security and operational reasons, there will be no permitted access to persons other than for the purposes of maintenance or monitoring the facility.

5.0 PUBLICITY & CONSULTATIONS

External

- 5.1 Initial neighbour notification was carried out on 14 September 2023. The application was initially advertised on 2 August 2023 in the local papers.

- 5.2 There were 5 objections to this proposal and 1 letter of support. These are considered below.

Internal

- 5.3 See appendix 1 for details of consultations carried out and the responses provided. All consultees were content with the proposal subject to conditions.

Proposal of Application Notice

- 5.4 As this application is considered a major application it must comply with the Proposal of Application Notice and carry out community consultation at least 12 weeks prior to the submission of the application.
- 5.5 A Proposal of Application Notice was submitted on 19 December 2022 under LA01/2022/1562/PAN. The Applicant advised that they intended to undertake the following forms of consultation:
- Public event;
 - Project website;
 - Press notice of the public event and the website;
 - Letter drop to properties surrounding the development site and local elected members;
- 5.6 The PAN was considered to be acceptable as it met the requirements of Section 27 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Community Consultation Report

- 5.7 The community consultation report was submitted as part of the planning application, received on 4 July 2023 which is more than 12 weeks after the Proposal of Application Notice was received, as required by the legislation.
- 5.8 Copies of the following have been provided in the report:
- Screen shots taken from the project website;
 - Copy of the newspaper adverts;
 - Copy of the information leaflet which was posted out to properties surrounding the site and elected members;
 - Map of properties and list of elected members who were sent the leaflet;

- Copy of feedback form;
- Table showing responses to feedback;
- Photos taken at public event.

- 5.9 The report states that formal notices advertising the public event and the website were placed in the Coleraine Chronicle and the Coleraine Times on 9 February 2023 and 8 February 2023 respectively. An event leaflet was issued on 6 February 2023 to 148 local residents who are likely to have a view of the development. An email was issued to elected members on 7 February 2023 informing them of the event. The dedicated website went live on 13 February 2023 and provided information on the development, contact details and how to provide feedback. The website also provided a facility for online feedback. A public event was held on 16 February 2023 at the Lodge Hotel in Coleraine where information about the proposal was displayed and the development team were on hand to answer questions.
- 5.10 Overall, sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that appropriate consultation has been carried out to show compliance with section 27 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
- 5.11 Over 29 people attended the public event, 30 feedback forms were submitted and 1 email with comments was received. 57% of those that responded were supportive of the development whilst 43% were opposed or undecided.
- 5.12 Issues raised by respondents and visitors to the public event included the visual impact, noise, proximity to dwellings, cameras and lighting and community fund/cheaper electric. All comments raised have been considered and where necessary addressed in the final design proposals submitted as part of the proposal. An example of a design amendment was the removal of in excess of 6.75 acres of panels and the inclusion of substantial landscaping proposals to reduce the visual impact of the development on neighbouring properties.

6.0 MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Section 45(1) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires that all applications must have regard to the local plan, so far as material to the application, and all other material considerations. Section 6(4) states that in making any

determination where regard is to be had to the local development plan, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 6.2 The development plan is the Northern Area Plan 2016 (NAP). The site is within the countryside.
- 6.3 The site is within Coleraine Farmland Landscape Character Area (LCA 54).
- 6.4 The site is not within any European designations. However, it is hydrologically linked to the Bann Estuary SAC/ASSI.
- 6.5 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) is a material consideration.
- 6.6 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) is a material consideration. As set out in the SPPS, until such times as a new local plan strategy is adopted, councils will apply specified retained operational policies.
- 6.7 Due weight should be given to the relevant policies in the development plan.
- 6.8 All material considerations and any policy conflicts are identified in the “Considerations and Assessment” section of the report.

7.0 RELEVANT POLICIES & GUIDANCE

[The Northern Area Plan 2016](#)

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement \(SPPS\)](#)

[Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage](#)

[Planning Policy Statement 3: Access, Movement and Parking](#)

[Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and The Built Heritage](#)

[Planning Policy Statement 15: Planning and Flood Risk](#)

[Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy](#)

[Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy – Best Practice Guidance](#)

[PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside](#)

8.0 CONSIDERATIONS & ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The main considerations in the determination of this application relate to: the principle of development, impact on the public, safety, human health, residential amenity, visual amenity, landscape character, biodiversity, nature conservation, and local natural resources.

Principle of development

- 8.2 The SPPS advises that the Council should take account of the proposal's contribution to the wider environmental benefits along with consideration of impact on health, safety and amenity, visual impact, impact on biodiversity and habitat, and future decommissioning.
- 8.3 An assessment was carried out by Shared Environmental Services under Regulation 43 (1) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (NI) 1995 (as amended) as the site has potential hydrological links to the Bann Estuary SAC and ASSI, approx. 30km downstream. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in its role as the competent authority has adopted the HRA report, and conclusions therein. The test of likely significance concluded that the proposal would not have a significant effect on the integrity of any European site.
- 8.4 An Environmental Impact Assessment was carried as the proposed development falls within Schedule 2, Category 3(A) of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2017. The determination was negative and an Environmental Statement was not requested.
- 8.5 The type and quantities of chemicals used for the batteries do not fall within the Schedule listed within the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Regulations (NI) 2015 and therefore do not require Hazardous Substance Consent.
- 8.6 The Northern Area Plan 2016 is silent on the matter of solar farm development in this area.

SPPS Development in the Countryside and PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside

- 8.7 Planning Policy CTY 1 of PPS 21 allows for renewable energy projects in accordance with PPS 18 which is assessed below.
- 8.8 Policy CTY 13 of PPS 21 states that planning permission will be granted for a building in the countryside where it can be visually integrated into the surrounding landscape and it is of an appropriate design. Also, CTY 14 of PPS 21 states that a planning permission will be granted for a building in the countryside where it does not cause a detrimental change to, or further erode the rural character of an area.
- 8.9 The proposal includes 24 permanent buildings consisting of a primary substation, which will be located in a compound with 7 battery storage units and 7 battery inverter units, and 9 inverter substations located throughout the site. The compound will be bounded by a 2.4m high green fence.
- 8.10 The sub-station building will measure 12.19m by 2.44m and will be 2.89m high. It will be finished in green steel cladding. The battery storage units will measure 12.2 by 2.4m and will be 3.4m high. They will be finished in a light grey metal cladding. The battery inverter units will measure 6m by 2.5m and will be 3m high. They will also be finished in a light grey metal cladding. As stated above, these will be located within the compound. The compound will be located centrally within the site and is not in proximity to any dwellings.
- 8.11 The inverter stations will measure 7m by 2.5m and will be 3m high. They will be located throughout the site, not in proximity to any dwellings.
- 8.12 Woodland planting is proposed on the western site boundary directly adjacent to the substation compound and also along the western to south western site boundary which runs from the Ballycastle Road Roundabout, along the Ring Road and along the rear of the dwellings on Newmills Road.
- 8.13 Due to the proposed planting, existing field boundary vegetation, existing development and the topography of the landscape, views of the substation compound and buildings will be limited from the

public road network, with no significant visual impact. The inverter stations have also been sensitively located being placed next to existing field boundaries where the existing vegetation is to be retained. This will afford screening to the units reducing their visual impact. The design and materials are considered acceptable and the buildings will not be prominent features in the landscape and will not cause a detrimental change to the rural character of the area.

- 8.14 The SPPS also states that all development in the countryside must integrate into its setting, respect rural character, and be appropriately designed. Given the nature of a solar farm, it is difficult for it to integrate into the countryside. However, the proposal, including the solar panels and the associated infrastructure, has been sensitively designed so as to respect rural character as much as it can and is therefore acceptable.

SPPS Renewable Energy and PPS 18 Renewable Energy

- 8.15 Policy RE1 and paragraph 6.224 of the SPPS requires that all renewable energy development, associated buildings and infrastructure will not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on:

(a) public safety, human health, or residential amenity;

- 8.16 There are several residential properties and non-residential properties in proximity to the site boundary given its location adjacent to the SDL of Coleraine. These are located along the Newmills Road, Ring Road and Ballyrashane Road. The closest dwellings to the site boundary are no's 9 to 25 (odd numbers) Ballyrashane Road and no's 10 to 16 (even numbers) and no. 20 Newmills Road.
- 8.17 There is no evidence to demonstrate that solar farms have a negative impact on human health. Environmental Health was consulted on the proposal, as the competent authority on human health, and they have not raised any objections on these grounds.
- 8.18 There will be no on-site office or permanent staffing of the site and visits to the site for maintenance work will typically be less than 26 per year. The solar farm will be fenced which will restrict access to site personnel only. No hazardous substances will be stored on site. It is considered that the risk of accidents would be low and

any construction or maintenance activities on site will be covered by health and safety plans.

- 8.19 A Glint and Glare Assessment has been submitted with the proposal. The assessment indicates that solar reflections are geometrically possible towards 45 of the 55 assessed dwellings. Existing screening is predicted to significantly reduce the visibility of the reflective area for 29 out of the 45 dwellings receptors. Therefore, for these dwellings, no impact is predicted and no mitigation is required. Visibility of the reflective area is predicted for the remaining 16 dwellings under the baseline conditions. The developer has proposed mitigation in the form of vegetation along the proposed development boundary. This vegetation is predicted to reduce the visibility of the reflective area for all these dwellings. Therefore, once the proposed mitigation is in place, no impact is predicted and no further mitigation is required. It is considered that the impact of glint and glare on residential amenity is not significant. The planting will be controlled by condition in the event of an approval.
- 8.20 With regard to noise, Environmental Health (EHO) has assessed the proposal and have no objection to the predicted noise levels at any of the receptor locations. EHO are content with the proposal, subject to conditions being applied in the event of an approval.
- 8.21 With regard to the visual impact on residential properties, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was submitted as part of the application. This assessment was prepared and reviewed by chartered landscape architects at RPS. The assessment considered the impact of the proposed development on residential properties in proximity to the site. The assessment shows that properties to the north of the Newmills Road are predicted to experience localised moderate to major significant visual effects during the operational phase prior to the successful establishment of mitigation planting that is an integral part of the proposed development. With mitigation integrated, moderate and not significant effects are predicted during the operational phase for these properties. The remaining residential properties assessed along the Ballyrashane Road and residential areas along the eastern edge of Coleraine are not predicted to experience significant effects which will decrease further with planting in place. Planting will be conditioned in the event of an approval. The LVIA concludes that predicted visual effects associated with viewpoints

are considered to reduce to not significant effects following the successful establishment of planting.

- 8.22 No site lighting has been proposed, therefore, there will be no nuisance from lighting at night.
- 8.23 HSENI has been consulted as the statutory consultee for developments which involve major hazard installations regulated under the Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (COMAH) and for planning applications for Hazardous Substances Consent (HSC). HSENI advises that in terms of the applicability of HSC and COMAH, the Applicant must assess dangerous substances stored or produced during normal operation and from loss-of-control scenarios. A facility that does not come under COMAH for regular operations must still consider the loss of control scenarios. HSENI advise that the Applicant should provide an assessment of safety concerns regarding fire and explosions risks based on the specifics of the application. The Applicant has provided an Emergency Response Plan (ERP).
- 8.24 NIFRS has also been consulted, and they have provided standing advice and outlined measures relevant to the planning application in terms of fire safety, firefighting, protecting life and property in the event of fires, harm to the environment and other emergencies. These measures include the provision of means of escape; the provision of a free flowing exiting system; giving warning in the event of fire; reduction of the risk of fire; reduction of the risk of spread of fire; provision of the means of extinguishing fires; provision of the means of detecting fires; limiting damage to the environment and the provision of access routes and vehicle hardstanding areas for fire appliances etc. These measures have been included within the Emergency Response Plan (ERP).
- 8.25 The risk of fire is considered to be low and the batteries will continue to be maintained and inspected as per manufacturer's guidelines. The ERP adequately addresses all the measures required by HSENI and NIFRS. Neither consultee objects to the proposal.
- 8.26 Given the safety measures incorporated, the proposed technology of the batteries, fire protection measures and the distance to residential dwellings (approx. 320m to nearest residential property, 20 Newmills Road), there are no significant concerns regarding

health and safety. Nor are there likely to be any unacceptable impacts on residential receptors in terms of noise, odour or other nuisances.

(b) visual amenity and landscape character;

- 8.27 The site is not located within any sensitive landscapes. Causeway Coast AONB is located approx. 8.5km to the north of the site and Binevenagh AONB is located approx. 13km to the west of the site. The LVIA has established that due to intervening topographical changes, vegetation cover and built form between the AONBs and the proposed development site, the AONBs are not predicted to experience any significant effects as a consequence of the proposed development.
- 8.28 The site is located within Coleraine Farmland Landscape Character Area (LCA 54). The site is not located within an area described as having particular Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics and Values. At this location the landscape is already influenced by the built form of Coleraine as the site lies on the fringe of the development. Landscape features such as boundary hedgerows and trees will be retained as part of the development proposals, with effects being limited to a change in land use for those portions of the site being utilised for the proposed development. Indirect effects are predicted to occur within proximity to the site boundary, though the wider LCA will remain unaltered.
- 8.29 A total of 8 viewpoints have been assessed in the LVIA, for both construction and operational phases of the proposed development. Of these, two viewpoints have been assessed as experiencing localised significant visual effects during the operational phase prior to the establishment of planting. These viewpoints are located on the A29 (Ring Road) approaching the site from the south, and the Newmills Road/A29 Junction, also to the south of the site. Predicted visual effects associated with these viewpoints are considered to reduce to not significant following the successful establishment of planting. The remaining viewpoints are not predicted to experience any significant visual effects due to screening effects provided by topographical changes and intervening vegetation cover.

8.30 The Planning Department considers that critical viewpoints of the proposed development will also be from the Ballycastle Road Roundabout when traveling south towards the site along the Ring Road and from Ballyrashane Road when traveling west toward the site. The Applicant has provided an updated landscaping plan which proposes to retain and significantly bolster existing boundary vegetation to limit views into the site.

8.31 The Planning Department requested further amendments to the proposal, including further landscaping and the removal of panels from the north western section of the site to reduce the visual impact. The Applicant advised that the removal of further panels would make the project unviable in terms of cost. The Planning Department considers that the removal of these panels is a small change to the overall scheme. No economic assessment has been provided reasoning how the proposal becomes unviable on removal of these panels. The changes requested would have improved the scheme. However, on balance, as currently presented in the absence of these changes, the scheme is not so unacceptable to warrant refusal. Although there are concerns regarding the visual impact of the proposal, the impact is limited to short range views from roads alongside the site. The impact is not considered unacceptable when weighed up against the environmental benefits of the project. It is therefore considered that the proposed landscaping is acceptable, albeit marginally so and when established, will assist integration and reduce the visual impact of the development.

(c) biodiversity, nature conservation or built heritage interests;

8.32 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (PEA) and a Protected Species Report have assessed the impact of the development on designated sites, habitats and species through conducting extensive survey works and has provided mitigation measures to avoid significant adverse impacts.

8.33 The proposed development site does not lie within or close to any designated sites, but has a hydrological link to the River Bann via the small watercourse along the eastern boundary which discharges into the River Bann. It therefore is connected to Bann Estuary SAC and ASSI, which is designated for sand dune and saltmarsh habitats. The PEA states that the saltmarsh and sand

dune habitats of the Bann Estuary SAC/ASSI are only occasionally inundated by estuarine and marine waters and are therefore unlikely to be affected by any pollution or sediment released into the watercourse by the proposed development. Such inputs would be subject to significant dilution within the intervening waters, and it is anticipated that no likely significant effects would occur via this hydrological link. The PEA considers that the proposed development is not likely to have a significant adverse impact on any designated sites. NED has advised that it concurs with this assessment.

- 8.34 The vast majority of the site supports terrestrial habitats which are of low ecological value including species-poor improved grasslands, former arable land and hardstanding. Habitats of relatively greater value in the context of the site include hedgerows, treelines and watercourses. These features are representative of NI Priority habitats (NIPH): Hedgerows and Rivers respectively which have the potential to provide habitat for NI Priority Species and other protected species such as otter, birds, bats and badgers.
- 8.35 The proposed development will retain the vast majority of the NIPH hedgerows, although some small sections will be lost where access tracks will cut through field boundary. These minor losses will be compensated for by planting new hedge lines at a ratio of 3:1 for the length lost: wet woodland type planting will be created along most of the eastern boundary to separate the development from the watercourse, and woodland screen planting will be created along the western boundary, towards the middle-north of the site and in front of the substation/battery building.
- 8.36 The proposed development will retain the NIPH watercourse, which was recorded to support high levels of otter activity, an NI Priority Species. No natal holts or dens were recorded within the site and the adjacent searched areas. The watercourse will be fully retained within the proposal, and a 15-60m wide buffer will be established between the solar array and areas of the watercourse which have been assessed as being important for otter. In addition, the buffer will be planted with a wet woodland strip. NED has no concerns regarding significant adverse impacts to Rivers NIPH or NIPS otters, provided a condition is included in any planning approval requiring adoption of Drawing 03: Landscape

Mitigation Plan to ensure retention of the buffer zone between the watercourse and any construction works.

- 8.37 A bat roost assessment was carried out. The assessment shows that the grazed semi-improved grasslands and arable land are likely to be of relatively limited importance for foraging and commuting bats. The hedgerows within the site are likely to be important for foraging and commuting bat populations, and will be mostly retained. The site contains no buildings or structures, but supports 31 trees with the potential to support roosting bats. Only one of these trees will be removed, T28, a fallen oak with low Bat Roost Potential. The PEA recommends that this tree is removed carefully following visual inspection by an ecologist to establish the presence or absence of roosting bats. NED have no concerns regarding impacts to bats, provided a condition is included in any planning approval requiring surveys of Tree T28 and its removal by soft felling techniques.
- 8.38 A badger survey recorded one badger sett within the site. This sett had a single entrance and was assessed as an outlier sett. Mitigation to protect badgers is proposed during construction, including pre-construction surveys, establishing an Ecological Exclusion Zone (EEZ) around the badger sett, and either covering open excavations trenches at the end of each day or providing a means of escape. NED has no concerns regarding impacts to badgers, provided a condition is included in any planning approval requiring implementation of badger protection mitigation measures during construction works.
- 8.39 Breeding bird surveys of the site show the site to support a fairly limited range of common and widespread breeding bird species. These species were primarily recorded to utilise the hedgerows on site, with some use of the fields themselves by starling, woodpigeon, gulls and corvids. Given the limited range of bird species present, it is not considered that the site is of particular importance for breeding birds. Habitats within the site of relatively higher importance for nesting birds, including hedgerows and watercourse will be largely retained within the proposal. Any small-scale removal of hedgerow habitats required to facilitate access to the site will be undertaken outside of the nesting bird season to ensure that such works do not give rise to adverse impacts to nesting birds. NED has no concerns regarding significant adverse impacts to birds.

8.40 DAERA NED and Shared Environmental Services have considered the impacts of the proposal on the designated sites and other natural heritage interests and, on the basis of the information provided, has no concerns subject to conditions being imposed on any planning approval.

8.41 With regard to built heritage, an Archeological and Cultural Heritage Assessment has been submitted. Historic Environment Division has advised that it is content that the proposal satisfies PPS 6 policy requirements, subject to conditions. This is discussed in more detail below.

(d) local natural resources, such as air quality or water quality;

8.42 Solar energy is considered to be a clean and green energy. The proposal relates to photovoltaic panels which convert light directly into electrical energy. The proposal will not involve the use of any non-renewable resources during its operation and will not generate any waste or emissions.

8.43 NIEA Water Management Unit is content with the proposal provided it complies with Flood Risk Policy FLD 4, conditions and standing advice are adhered to and any relevant statutory permissions are obtained. With regard to FLD 4 which relates to the artificial modification of watercourses, DfI Rivers has advised that it is not relevant to the proposal.

8.44 NIEA Drink Water Inspectorate is content based on the distance of the proposed development to the nearest private water supply that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant impact on private water supplies.

(e) public access to the countryside.

8.45 The lands within the application site boundary are owned by a private landowner, and subsequently leased by the Applicant, and used primarily for agricultural use. There are no Rights of Way within the site therefore public access to the site upon the construction of the proposed development will be no different than before, that is, access to the land will depend on the landowner's consent. The proposed development will not have any significant adverse impact on access to the countryside.

Economic, Environmental and Social Consideration

- 8.46 The SPPS requires material consideration of social, economic and environmental benefits. In this case, the provision of a sustainable supply of energy from a renewable resource must be given significant weight due to the considerable environmental benefits that provision of energy in this way provides. This proposal also positively contributes to regional and national targets for provision of energy from renewable sources.
- 8.47 Paragraph 4.1 of policy RE1 of PPS18 states that “the Department would support renewable energy proposals unless they would have unacceptable adverse effects which are not outweighed by the local and wider environmental, economic and social benefits.” In this case the development is considered acceptable with no unacceptable adverse effects therefore there is no need to scrutinise the wider environmental, economic and social benefits.

SPPS Natural Heritage and PPS 2 Natural Heritage

- 8.48 The SPPS and policies NH1, NH2, NH3, NH4, NH5 and NH6 of PPS 2 require consideration of the impact of the proposal on European and National sites, protected species, sites of nature conservation importance, habitats, species or features of natural heritage importance and AONBs.
- 8.49 These issues have all been addressed under the consideration of the SPPS Renewable Energy and PPS 18 Renewable Energy above. The proposal satisfies all policy requirements of the SPPS Natural Heritage and PPS 2.

SPPS Transportation and PPS 3 Access, Movement and Parking

- 8.50 The proposed access to the solar farm is to be located on Ballyrashane Road, which is not a Protected Route, at the point of an existing agricultural access. A Transport Assessment was submitted with the application. The assessment shows that when operational, there will only be occasional visitors to the site. DfI Roads is content with the proposal.

SPPS Archaeology and Built Heritage and PPS 6 Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage

- 8.51 An Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Assessment was submitted with the proposal which assesses the impact of the proposal on archaeological and cultural heritage assets.
- 8.52 Historic Environment Division (HED) has reviewed the assessment and note that the application site is in proximity to a number of recorded archaeological sites and monuments. HED advises that as the site is 52ha hectares in size, it is unlikely that it would be archaeologically sterile. Also, given the known archaeology within the immediate area, there is the potential for previously unrecorded below-ground archaeological remains to be found during ground works for the proposal.
- 8.53 HED has advised that it is content that the proposal satisfies PPS 6 policy requirements, subject to conditions. HED require a programme of archaeological works, in the event of an approval, to identify and record any archaeological remains in advance of new construction, or to provide for their preservation in situ, as per Policy BH 4 of PPS 6.

SPPS Flood Risk and PPS 15 Planning and Flood Risk

- 8.54 The published flood maps show that the proposed site contains areas of river floodplain, surface water floodplain and reservoir inundation. There are also a number of watercourses within the site. Due to this and the size of the development, FLD 1, FLD 2, FLD 3 and FLD 5 of PPS15 apply.
- 8.55 A Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment (FRDA) has been submitted with the proposal. The FRDA demonstrates that the proposed layout of the development has taken into account the areas of predicted flooding. Therefore, the layout has been designed to avoid siting panels or any other infrastructure in the areas highlighted as floodplain of the Lodge Burn. While the proposal doesn't meet the exceptions test laid out in FLD 1, no development will take place in the floodplain therefore FLD 1 is satisfied.
- 8.56 DFI Rivers confirm that there are a number of undesignated watercourses within the application site as well as one designated watercourse, the Lodge Burn, which flows along the eastern site

boundary. The policy requires a 5m buffer around watercourses. The layout of the development is suitably distanced from the watercourses with the required maintenance strip in place. DfI Rivers is content that proposal complies with Policy FLD 2 of PPS15 and the SPPS.

8.57 DfI Rivers is content with the FRDA and the Planning Department considers the proposal to meet with Policy FLD 3 of PPS15.

8.58 DfI Rivers reservoir inundation maps indicate that this site is in a potential area of inundation emanating from Ballyversall Reservoir. DfI Rivers has carried out an assessment of flood risk to people (based on the Defra / Environment Agency's "Hazard to People Classification using Hazard Rating") for an uncontrolled release of water emanating from Ballyversall Reservoir. The overall hazard rating at this site is considered as low. Therefore, it is considered to be an acceptable combination of depth and velocity, for development that does not involve vulnerable groups. Given the nature of the development, it will not be occupied or accessed by the public, therefore it does not involve vulnerable people and the policy is satisfied.

Consideration of Objections

8.59 5 objections have been received. Note – issues raised by objectors are in italics and are followed by Council's response:

- *Development will devalue property* – While the factors that can bring about property devaluation are a material planning consideration, property devaluation in itself is not afforded significant weight. In terms of amenity and other relevant considerations, the proposal is acceptable.
- *Proposed development is too close to dwelling/ Impact on residential amenity in terms of privacy (CCTV)/lighting/visual/noise* – the impact on residential amenity is considered in the report and it is deemed that there will be no unacceptable impact. There is no lighting proposed as part of the application. CCTV cameras are for security purposes. These will be pole mounted to heights of c.3m, be directed along fence-lines and utilise infra-red technology. Cameras are designed to not move either intentionally or unintentionally due to adverse weather conditions or animal activity. The developer assures that adequate safeguards will be in place to ensure that privacy interests are not compromised and the

rights of individuals whose personal data may be recorded by the cameras are protected.

- *Radiation* – solar panels generate low levels of non-ionizing electromagnetic radiation. Non-ionizing EMFs are generally perceived as harmless to humans and effects from non-ionizing radiation are not common. In fact, people come in contact with non-ionizing EMFs through radio and TV waves, cell phones, and microwaves every day without negative health impact. People outside of the fenced perimeter of a solar facility are not exposed to a significant amount of EMFs. Therefore, communities around solar farms are not at risk for adverse health issues from EMFs.
- *Visual impact on landscape* – this has been considered in the report. It is considered that there will be no unacceptable impact.
- *Impact on biodiversity/birds/wildlife* – NIEA has assessed the proposal and are content that there will not be a significant impact on biodiversity/birds/wildlife. This is addressed in the report.
- *Lost potential of the land* – The land is currently mainly used for grazing and it is proposed that the land will still be used for grazing once the development is complete. The land is outside the settlement development limits of Coleraine and is not zoned for any use therefore it has no other immediate development potential.
- *Impact of drainage and knock on effect for residential dwellings* – Drainage and issues regarding flooding have been assessed by DfI Rivers and are discussed in the report. It is considered that there will be no unacceptable impact.
- *An Environmental Impact Assessment should be carried out by the Council* - The proposed development falls within Schedule 2, Category 3(A) of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2017, therefore, an Environmental Impact Assessment was carried out. The determination was negative and an Environmental Statement was not requested.

8.60 1 letter of support has been received. The following points were raised:

- Proposal helps Council meet its long term goal for Sustainable Energy – development of SOLAR PVC Farms to make the Borough one of the UK's most sustainable regions by 2035; ensuring that sustainability and the development of a vibrant and growing economy go together.
- Project will help NI meet climate change targets.
- Applicant has been diligent in addressing residents concerns whilst maintaining the viability of the project.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The proposal is considered acceptable in this location having regard to the Area Plan and other material considerations. The principle of development, impact on the public, safety, human health, residential amenity, visual amenity, landscape character, biodiversity, nature conservation, and local natural resources are considered acceptable. The Planning Department had expressed concern about the visual impact of the proposal from specific critical views and requested some small changes to resolve same. These changes have not been forthcoming with the Agent citing viability issues. On balance, as currently presented in the absence of these changes, the scheme is not so unacceptable to warrant refusal. Accordingly, approval is recommended.

10.0 PROPOSED CONDITIONS

1. The permission hereby granted shall be for a limited period of 35 years only and shall expire on INSERT DATE.

Reason: To enable The Council to consider the development in the light of circumstances then prevailing.

2. Within 12 months of the cessation of electricity generation from the approved photovoltaic panels, all structures shall be removed and the land restored in accordance with a scheme to be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Council.

Reason: To restore and maintain the landscape quality of the area.

3. The rating level of the noise emitting from the development measured in accordance with BS 4142:2014 "Methods of rating and assessing industrial and commercial sound", at the boundary of the nearest receptor shall not exceed the existing background noise level by more than 0dB.

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity.

4. Within 4 weeks of the Council being notified of a reasonable noise complaint, from the occupant of a dwelling which lawfully exists or has planning permission at the date of this consent, the permitted development operator shall at their expense employ a suitably

qualified and competent person to undertake a noise survey to order to:

- Assess the level of noise immissions from the permitted development.
- The duration of such monitoring shall be sufficient to provide comprehensive information on noise levels with the development operating at the maximum capacity.
- Details of the noise monitoring survey shall be submitted to the Council for written approval prior to any monitoring commencing.
- 2 weeks prior notification of the date of commencement of the survey shall be provided.

The noise survey information shall include detail of:

- Any noise limit/s breaches.
- Recommendation of acoustic mitigation required.
- Confirmation of implementation of mitigation measures and evidence of noise limit/s conformance.

The noise survey information shall be provided within 4 weeks (unless extended with the Council) further to a written request from the Council.

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity.

5. Noise and vibration due to site preparation works shall be controlled by adherence to Best Practicable Means, having regard to BS 5228:2009, Parts 1 and 2. The hours of working shall be restricted to 07.00 - 19.00 hours on Monday to Friday, 07.00 - 13.00 hours on Saturday with no such working on Sunday, unless otherwise agreed by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity.

6. No site works of any nature or development shall take place until a programme of archaeological work (POW) has been prepared by a qualified archaeologist, submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Council in consultation with Historic Environment Division, Department for Communities. The POW shall provide for:

- The identification and evaluation of archaeological remains within the site;
- Mitigation of the impacts of development through licensed excavation recording or by preservation of remains in-situ;
- Post-excavation analysis sufficient to prepare an archaeological report, to publication standard if necessary; and
- Preparation of the digital, documentary and material archive for deposition.

Reason: to ensure that archaeological remains within the application site are properly identified, and protected or appropriately recorded.

7. No site works of any nature or development shall take place other than in accordance with the programme of archaeological work approved under condition 6.

Reason: to ensure that archaeological remains within the application site are properly identified, and protected or appropriately recorded.

8. A programme of post-excavation analysis, preparation of an archaeological report, dissemination of results and preparation of the excavation archive shall be undertaken in accordance with the programme of archaeological work approved under condition 6. These measures shall be implemented and a final archaeological report shall be submitted to the Council within 12 months of the completion of archaeological site works, or as otherwise agreed in writing with the Council.

Reason: To ensure that the results of archaeological works are appropriately analysed and disseminated and the excavation archive is prepared to a suitable standard for deposition.

9. If during the development works, new contamination or risks are encountered which have not previously been identified, works should cease and the Council shall be notified immediately. This new contamination shall be fully investigated in accordance with the Land Contamination: Risk Management (LCRM) guidance. In the event of unacceptable risks being identified, a Remediation Strategy shall be agreed with the Council in writing, and subsequently implemented and verified to its satisfaction. This strategy should be completed by competent persons in

accordance with the Land Contamination: Risk Management (LCRM) guidance.

Reason: Protection of environmental receptors to ensure the site is suitable for use.

10. After completing the remediation works under condition 9 and prior to occupation of the development, a Verification Report needs to be submitted in writing and agreed with the Council. This report should be completed by competent persons in accordance with the Land Contamination: Risk Management (LCRM) guidance. The Verification Report should present all the remediation and monitoring works undertaken and demonstrate the effectiveness of the works in managing all the risks and achieving the remedial objectives.

Reason: Protection of environmental receptors to ensure the site is suitable for use.

11. The Landscape Mitigation Plan shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Council, including:

- a) The retention of mature trees and hedgerows on the site
- b) Planting schedule to include details of new planting with appropriate numbers of native species of trees/shrubs
- c) Details of the aftercare of all planting on the site.

Reason: To protect existing trees and minimise the impact of the proposal on the biodiversity of the site, including priority habitats and protected species.

12. The Construction Environmental Management Plan, dated March 2024, completed by RPS shall be implemented in full in accordance with the approved details and all works on site shall conform to the approved CEMP, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Council.

Reason: To minimise the impact of the proposal on the biodiversity of the site, including protected/priority species and habitats.

13. The BESS facility shall not become operational until the site drainage has been constructed in accordance with Section 2.7

(‘Fire Water Management’) of the Coleraine Solar Farm Sustainable Drainage Strategy Report by RPS, dated October 2024. The operational site drainage of the BESS site shall be constructed as described in Section 2.7 and must include: a suitable storage volume for containment of contaminated firewater, a lined sub-base that is effective in preventing contaminated water infiltrating into the ground, and a readily accessible emergency pollution control valve to prevent contaminated water from entering the watercourse, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Council.

Reason: To ensure the project will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.

14. Within 3 months of the facility ceasing to operate and prior to decommissioning works commencing, a final Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan (DEMP) must be submitted for agreement with the Council. The final DEMP must be site specific and include all necessary mitigation measures for the decommissioning phase of the development to avoid any pollutant egress to the adjacent surface water environment. The approved final DEMP shall be adhered to and implemented in full throughout decommissioning in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Council.

Reason: To ensure the project will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site.

15. The site boundary fence, as shown on drawing no. 03 C received on 17 July 2025 and 04 received on 4 July 2023, shall be erected prior to the installation of the photovoltaic panels on site.

Reason: In the interest of public safety.

16. Details of the CCTV cameras shall be submitted to the Council, to be agreed in writing, prior to the commencement of development.

Reason: In the interests of public amenity.

Informatives

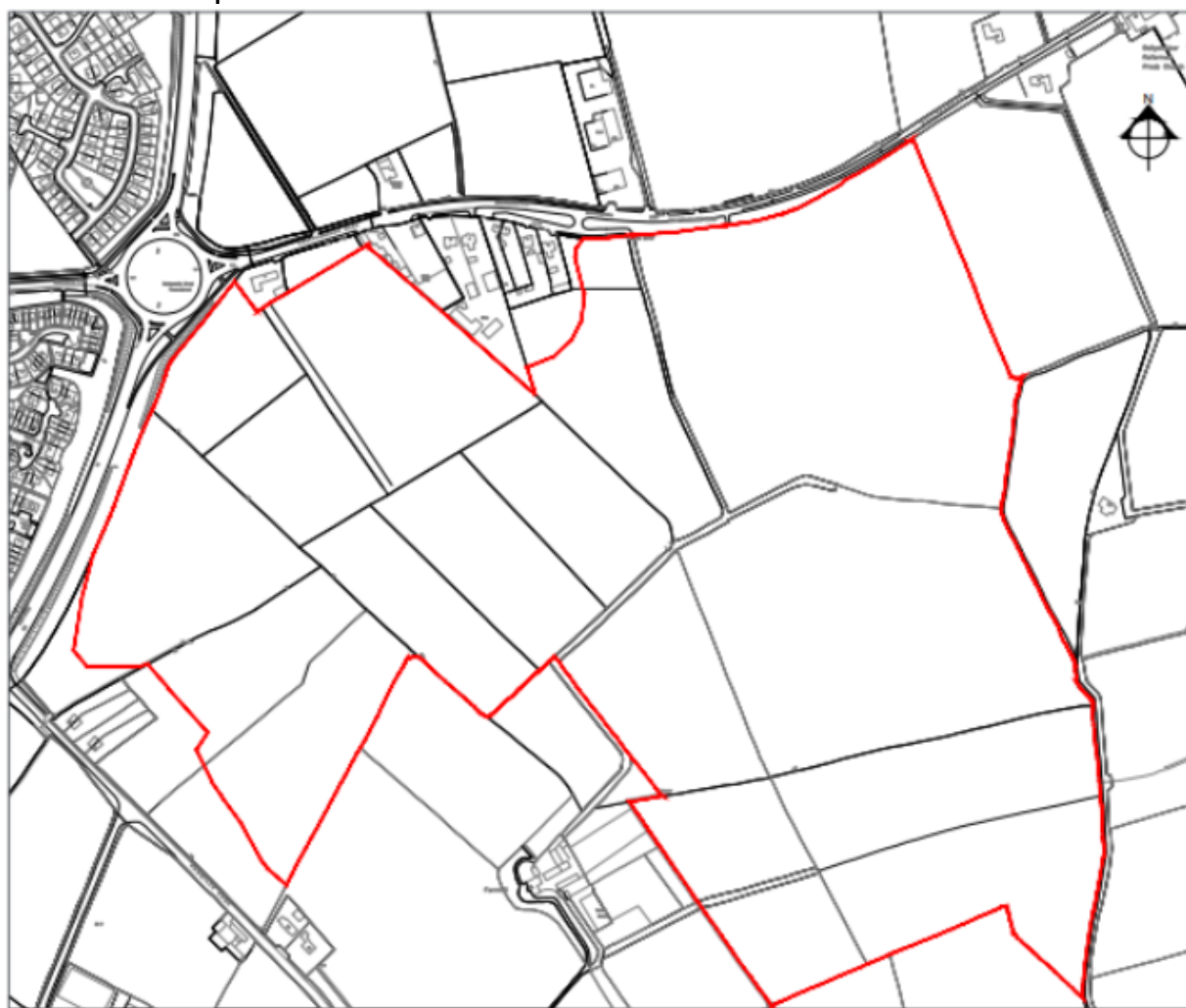
1. This approval does not dispense with the necessity of obtaining the permission of the owners of adjacent dwellings for the removal of or building on the party wall or boundary whether or not defined.

2. This permission does not alter or extinguish or otherwise affect any existing or valid right of way crossing, impinging or otherwise pertaining to these lands.
3. This permission does not confer title. It is the responsibility of the developer to ensure that he controls all the lands necessary to carry out the proposed development.
4. This determination relates to planning control only and does not cover any consent or approval which may be necessary to authorise the development under other prevailing legislation as may be administered by the Council or other statutory authority.
5. You should refer to any other general advice and guidance provided by consultees in the process of this planning application by reviewing all responses on the Planning Portal at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/finding-planning-application>

Appendix 1: Consultation Responses

Consultee	Date of response	Response
NI Water – Strategic	18/08/2023	No objection subject to conditions
City of Derry Airport	20/08/2023	No objection
SONI	24/08/2023	No objection
DfI Rivers	25/09/2023	No objection
NIE	27/03/2024	No objection
NIFRS	24/08/2024	No objection
NIHSE	06/06/2024	No objection
NIEA	05/06/2024	No objection subject to conditions
SES	21/05/2025	No objection subject to conditions
HED	20/02/2024	No objection subject to conditions
DfE Energy	03/10/2023	No objection
DfI Roads	24/08/2024	No objection
EHD	09/04/2024	No objection subject to conditions
Development Plan	12/08/2024	No objection

Site location plan



Site layout

