

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 23rd MARCH 2026

Case No: 25/00017/FUL

Proposal: Installation of cooling pond with ancillary equipment, new bund and ground-mounted solar panels (Retrospective).

Location: The Old Hangar, Sibson Airfield, Sibson

Applicant: Mr M Richardson

Grid Ref: 509194 296396

Date of Registration: 06.01.2026

Parish: Sibson-cum-Stibbington

RECOMMENDATION - APPROVE

This application is referred to the Development Management Committee (DMC) as the officer's recommendation is contrary to that of the Parish Council.

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

- 1.1 The application site comprises data centre (DSM) located within The Old Hangar at Sibson Airfield, off Wansford Road (B671). The site is bounded to the north and east by the Peterborough Flying School, with open countryside to the south.
- 1.2 This application seeks approval for the installation of a cooling pond with ancillary equipment, bund and ground-mounted solar panels at The Old Hangar, Sibson Airfield, Sibson. This application is retrospective with works having been completed in August 2024.
- 1.3 There is a total of 350 anti-reflective panels covering an area of 1171.80m² with a total power of 175kWp in the northern section of the application site. The panels all face due south and each measure 1.1m in length and 45cm high. The cooling pond (30m by 15m with a 1.6m depth) is located west of The Old Hangar with four heat exchangers submerged in the pond and two pumps and associated control equipment located within the pump-house. A bund with tree planting has been constructed to the west of the cooling pond.
- 1.4 The Cooling pond operates by using various pipework which connects the submerged Heat Exchangers to the pumps and onwards to the computer racks within the data centre. Warm water

is pumped from the computer racks through the heat exchangers where the heat is dissipated in the pond. Cool water is then returned to the computer racks.

- 1.5 This application has been accompanied by a Planning Statement. Various additional information has also been submitted by the Applicant during the course of the application, including aerial photographs of the site and details of other solar farm adjacent to runways. These are referred to in more detail in the main body of the report.
- 1.6 The Planning Statement sets out the background for the application and states that the application site comprises of a data centre, which provides services such as cloud storage and website hosting. The host building houses numerous servers relating to this use, which require 24-hr monitoring and maintenance. The cooling pond and associated infrastructure were introduced to provide a cost-effective and environmentally friendly solution to the need for the constant cooling of the servers. The floor mounted solar panels, were also introduced to provide an alternative power-source for the data centre.
- 1.7 Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

2. NATIONAL GUIDANCE

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'
- 2.2 The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
 - delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
 - building a strong, competitive economy;
 - achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
 - conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment
- 2.3 Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website [National Guidance](#)

3. PLANNING POLICIES

3.1 Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)

- LP1: Amount of Development
- LP2: Strategy for Development
- LP3: Green Infrastructure
- LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
- LP5: Flood Risk
- LP10: The Countryside
- LP11: Design Context
- LP12: Design Implementation
- LP14: Amenity
- LP15: Surface Water
- LP16: Sustainable Travel
- LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
- LP19: Rural Economy
- LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
- LP35: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

For full details visit the government website [Local policies](#)

3.2 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:

- Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
- Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017)
- Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022)
- Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD (2017)

4. PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 0303128FUL – Change of use from warehousing to disaster data storage centre or warehousing – Approved
- 4.2 0301378FUL – Change of use from warehousing to disaster data storage centre – Approved
- 4.3 0300270CLED – Certificate of Lawful Development for retention of use of hangar for storage purposes – Consent

5. CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 Sibson-cum-Stibbington Parish Council – Objection.
“This Parish Council has a history of objecting to “Application in Retrospect” and this application is no different.

We absolutely object to this application and the fact the several Solar Panels have been erected within very close proximity to Sibson Airfield. We are currently objecting to the erection of a Solar “farm” at Haddon which is nearby. The erection of a large quantity of solar panels on this site, surely will offer the same “Glint

and Glare” effect as Haddon, and they are close to the Airfield than Haddon. The danger to aircraft could be fatal if allowed to remain.

We are also concerned as to what this site is being used for. There has been more than one building erected in the past years, and a cooling pond, all without permission.

We as a Parish Council find the “secrecy” of these planning irregularities questionable.”

- 5.2 Huntingdonshire District Council Environmental Health Officer – No objections to the proposal with regards to environmental health matters.

6. REPRESENTATIONS

- 6.1 Peterborough Flying School – No objection. “From our day-to-day flying activity, we’re not aware of any reported issues or disruption that have been linked to the small-scale solar panel installation in its current form and specific location. Obviously, this reflects operational experience to date only and isn’t a technical assessment or a general safety statement. However, I would add that given the location and small scale, it is of my opinion that the panels are unlikely to be of “danger” to aircraft.”
- 6.2 Owner of Sibson Airfield – No objection.
- 6.3 One letter of support was also received stating: “I wish to lodge my support of planning application 25/00017/FUL. As a pilot of some 30 years, I find the objection bought by the Parish Council regarding ‘glint and glare’ is completely unfounded. I have never had any such problems from solar panels as the angle of the panels will not affect a landing aircraft. Furthermore, there are solar panels all around and on airfield all over the country. Even commercial airports have solar panels.”
- 6.4 The applicant has also submitted representations in response to the objection received by the Parish Council. This states that the panels are anti-reflective and are not in the flight path/face away from the runway. It should also be noted that the adjacent car park at Sibson is larger in area than the solar installation and in summer months is full of vehicles which are likely to emit glint and glare in all directions. However, there is no known reported issue of glint and glare affecting or endangering aircraft.
- 6.5 The applicant notes that Birmingham International Airport has 12,000 panels pointing directly at the runway. Edinburgh Airport is similar with 15,000 panels. Little Staughton Airfield has thousands of panels all around its runway (that have been approved by HDC). Aerial photos of each of these sites has been provided by the Applicant.

- 6.6 The Applicant also goes on to state that there is no secrecy in relation to the site/business. The data centre consumes large amounts of power and generates significant amounts of heat. DSM is on target to become Net Zero compliant by end of 2026 and this is being achieved in part by the solar panels (which also supply back to the grid) and the use of the cooling pond to cool the computer servers with all water sourced from rain. Last year DSM were awarded the regional 'Business of the Year for Green Innovation'.

7. ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:

- The Principle of Development
- Design and Visual Amenity
- Residential Amenity
- Highway Safety
- Flood Risk and Surface Water
- Biodiversity
- Other matters – glint and glare

The Principle of Development

- 7.2 The application site is located outside of the built-up area of any settlement and is therefore classified as countryside land in accordance with the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. As such, Policy LP10 (The Countryside) is considered relevant in this instance.
- 7.3 Policy LP10 states that development in the countryside will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies of this plan.
- 7.4 This application seeks retrospective approval for the installation of a cooling pond with ancillary equipment, new bund and ground-mounted solar panels at The Old Hangar, Sibson Airfield, Sibson. Information received during the course of the application confirms that the wider site operates as a data centre with the solar panels erected to support the use of power and the cooling pond to reduce the heat generated. As such, Policy LP19 (Rural Economy) is considered to provide an opportunity for development.
- 7.5 Policy LP19 of the Local Plan states that a proposal for the expansion of an established business within its operational site will be supported. The proposal is considered to be within the operational site of the established business and therefore in accordance with Policy LP19 in this regard. Furthermore, paragraph 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework states

that decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas.

- 7.6 Given the nature of the proposed development, Policy LP35 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy) is also considered relevant and states that a proposal for a renewable or low carbon energy generating scheme will be supported where it is demonstrated that all potential adverse impacts including cumulative impacts are or can be made acceptable.
- 7.7 Policy LP10 goes on to state that all development in the countryside must
- (a) seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value;
 - (b) recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and
 - (c) not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.
- 7.8 The existing land that is the subject of this application is classified as Grade 3 (Good to Moderate) agricultural land. Some 98% of the district comprises land within Grades 1 to 3, with 15% being Grade 1 and an estimated 77% of land falling within the definition of best and most versatile land.
- 7.9 Given there is a limited supply of land of lower grades in the district and that a significant number of sites allocated for development in the District in the Local Plan to 2036 are on land that is the best and most versatile, it is considered that the proposed development does not represent an unacceptable loss of agricultural land and any harm that results is very limited.
- 7.10 As discussed in greater detail in following sections of this report, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that the proposed development would be acceptable in relation to criteria (b) and (c) of Policy LP10.
- 7.11 As such, the principle of development is considered to be acceptable in this instance with the proposal in accordance with Policies LP10, LP19 and LP35 of the adopted Local Plan to 2036, subject to all other planning matters being addressed.

Design and Visual Amenity

- 7.12 Policy LP11 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context. Policy LP12 states that new development will be expected to be well designed and that a proposal will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it contributes positively to the area's character and identity and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings and landscape. This is also reflected in Policy

LP10 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

- 7.13 This application seeks retrospective approval for the installation of a cooling pond with ancillary equipment, a new bund and ground-mounted solar panels at The Old Hangar, Sibson Airfield, Sibson.
- 7.14 The proposed solar array is considered to be small in scale and commensurate to the size of the application site. The 350 solar panels are ground-mounted (45cm in height) and are approximately 275m from the highway of Wansford Road. Screening is provided by the existing soft landscaping, which includes a hedge comprising of 40ft high conifers located to the south of the site. Furthermore, the proposed solar panels would be well-related to the main building. As such, the visual impact of the proposed solar panels on the streetscene of Wansford Road and the wider countryside is considered to be limited.
- 7.15 With regard to the proposed cooling pond, it is considered to be of an acceptable scale and location and is screened by a bund to the west, approximately 1.2m in height. The proposal includes tree planting atop the bund which is considered to be acceptable and a condition ensuring this planting is maintained will be imposed on any permission granted.
- 7.16 As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of its scale and design and would not result in visual harm to the application site, the streetscene or the wider countryside. The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policies LP10, LP11 and LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

Residential Amenity

- 7.17 Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.
- 7.18 Given the nature of the proposed development and proximity to the closest neighbouring residential properties (approximately 100m to High Leys Farm, Elton Road, Sibson), the proposal is not considered to result in any detrimental impacts on any neighbouring properties amenities. The apparatus used for the cooling system are housed internally and therefore any associated noise is limited. The proposal is also well screened by trees.
- 7.19 As such, the proposal is deemed to be in accordance with Policy LP14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, the

Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

Highway Safety

- 7.20 Policies LP16 and LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates access for emergency vehicles and service vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles.
- 7.21 The proposed development would be accessed via the existing vehicular access off Wansford Road with no alterations proposed. Given the nature of the proposed development and the fact that it is serving the existing building on site with ample parking and acceptable access arrangements, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that the proposal would not result in any highway safety concerns.
- 7.22 As such, the proposal is deemed to be in accordance with Policy LP17 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

Flood Risk

- 7.23 The application site lies within Flood Zone 1 in accordance with Environment Agency mapping and the Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024). The flood risk vulnerability of the proposed development is 'essential infrastructure' in accordance with the Planning Practice Guidance, which is compatible with land within Flood Zone 1.
- 7.24 Given the low flood risk and minor scale of development, Officers are satisfied that surface and foul water drainage can be secured as part of building regulations and other relevant legislative requirements in this instance.
- 7.25 As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on both flood risk and surface water and therefore accords with Policies LP5, LP6 and LP15 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

Biodiversity

- 7.26 Paragraph 187 of the NPPF (2024) states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible,

through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type, and location of development.

- 7.27 Whilst the proposals do not indicate any measures for biodiversity enhancement, the proposal incorporates a bund and tree planting and therefore the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that given the scale and nature of the proposal, it would ensure no biodiversity net loss. It is also worth noting that the land on which the works have taken place was previously an area of predominantly hardcore associated with the Old Hangar.
- 7.28 Overall, the proposal is broadly considered to be in accordance with Policy LP30 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

Other Matters

Aircraft safety – glint and glare

- 7.29 In terms of aviation activity, Sibson Aerodrome is the closest airfield to the proposal, and is located immediately east of the site. There are two runways, one running east/west (runway 24/06) and one running north/south (33/15). Sibson Airfield is classed as an unlicensed aerodrome (it has not applied for CAA approval for its use for fare paying passenger carrying).
- 7.30 Concerns were raised by the Parish Council during the course of the application over potential 'glint and glare' impacts from the proposed solar panels on air traffic safety given the proximity to Sibson Aerodrome (Peterborough Flying School).
- 7.31 Glint is defined as a momentary flash of light that may be produced as a direct reflection of the sun in the solar panel. Glare is a continuous source of excessive brightness experienced by a stationary observer located in the path of reflected sunlight from the face of the panel. The effect occurs when the solar panel is stationed between or at an angle of the sun and the receptor.
- 7.32 The application is retrospective with works having already been undertaken and the solar panels have therefore been operational for approximately two years. The Solar panels are anti-reflective, face away from the runways and are partially screened by planting/buildings. As part of this application, both Peterborough Flying School who operate from the airfield, and the owner of the Airfield, have confirmed they have no objections to the proposed development in terms of air safety. The panels are therefore not considered to be located / directed so as to interfere with a pilot's primary "field-of-view".

- 7.33 It is also noted that there is an existing solar farm at Little Staughton Airfield, with solar panels located either side of the runway. Likewise, several major civil airports in the UK now have solar capacity built or permitted within or adjacent to their perimeters. The Parish Council have made comparison to the Haddon Solar farm where the need for a glint and glare assessment was required. However that scheme was for a much larger scale development of around 40,000 panels, rather than 350 here, and over a much larger site area. This application is in retrospect and the panels have been on site for a number of years with no concerns from the adjacent flying club or airfield owner.
- 7.34 It is therefore considered that no evidence has been presented to the LPA during the course of this planning application to suggest that the proposal would result in any impairment to aircraft safety.
- 7.35 Accordingly, there is not considered to be any evidence that glint and glare from the solar panels will result in significant impairment to aircraft safety.

Conclusion

- 7.36 The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as it is:

- * Acceptable in principle
- * Has environmental benefits in terms of generation of energy
- * Would not be harmful to the character or appearance of the area;
- * Would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the amenity of neighbours;
- * Would not be detrimental to highway safety in the locality;
- * Is acceptable with regards to the impact on biodiversity;
- * There are no other material planning considerations which lead to the conclusion that the proposal is unacceptable.

- 7.37 Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

8. RECOMMENDATION - APPROVE, subject to the following conditions:

- Plans
- Landscaping

If you would like a translation of this document, a large text version or an audio version, please contact us on 01480 388388 and we will try to accommodate your needs

**CONTACT OFFICER: Amanda McSherry – Development
Management Team Leader (North)**

Enquiries – Amanda.mcsherry@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING APPICATION NO. 25/00017/FUL

SIBSON-CUM-STIBBINGTON PARISH COUNCIL WISH TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING OBJECTION TO THE ABOVE.

This Parish Council has a history of objecting to “Applications in Retrospect” and this application is no different.

We absolutely object to this application and the fact that several Solar Panels have been erected within very close proximity to Sibson Airfield. We are currently objecting to the erection of a Solar “farm” at Haddon which is nearby. The erection of a large quantity of solar panels on this site, surely will offer the same “Glint and Glare” effect as Haddon, and they are closer to the Airfield than Haddon. The danger to Aircraft could be fatal if allowed to remain.

We are also concerned as to what this site is being used for. There has been more than one building erected in the past years, and a cooling pond, all without permission.

We as a Parish Council find the “secrecy” of these planning irregularities questionable.



Chairman

Sibson-cum-Stibbington Parish Council.

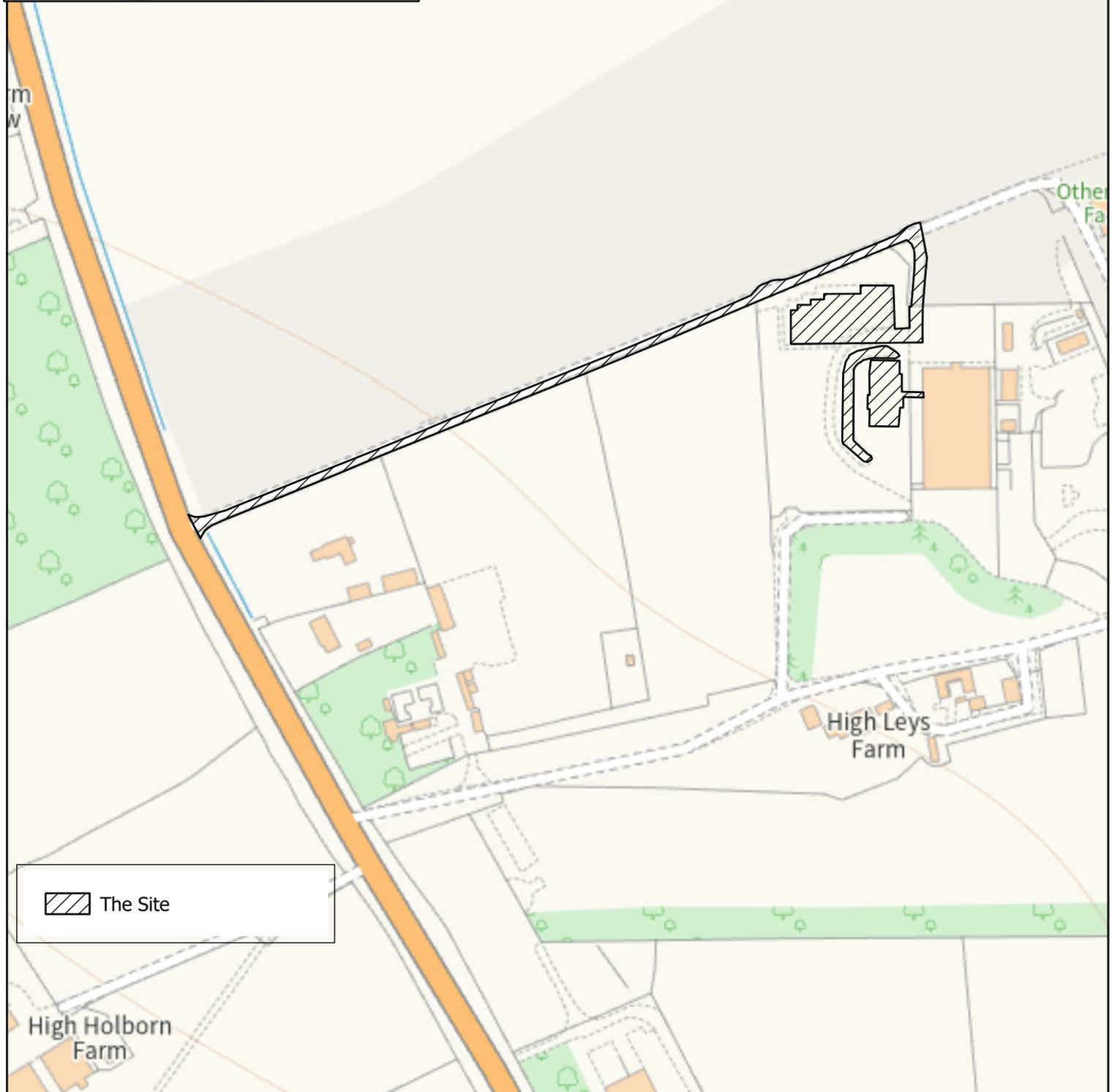
Development Management Committee

Application Ref: 25/00017/FUL



Scale = 1:2,500

Date Created: 11/03/2026





Item No - 1
 Name - E001 Location Plan
 Scale - 1 : 2500



NOTES:

The level of detail shown on this drawing is relative to the **PLANNING APPLICATION** only and this drawing should not be used for any other purpose without prior approval of the Architect and subsequent checking / development by others prior to construction.

Planning adherence - the Client / Contractor is to undertake the works in complete accordance with the LA approved planning drawings and is to take responsibility for the discharge of any associated planning conditions.

Building Control - the Client / Contractor must liaise directly with the chosen Building Control body to ensure the project is in complete accordance with the Building Regulations prior to construction.

Structure & Construction - these drawings have not been coordinated with a Structural Engineer nor an Energy Assessor and therefore show indicative construction build-ups only and are not to be used for construction purposes.

The future Contractor is responsible for visiting site and taking / checking all dimensions relative to setting out and construction.

All dimensions are in millimetres unless noted otherwise.

| SITE PLAN KEY | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| | SITE BOUNDARY | | |
| | ADDITIONAL LAND OWNED | | |
| | FENCE LINE | | |

| Date | No. | Description | Issued by |
|------------|-----|--|-----------|
| 27/11/2024 | A | CLIENT ISSUE | CL |
| 06/01/2025 | B | PLANNING ISSUE | AM |
| 02/06/2025 | C | Planning Issue - Red Line Boundaries updated | CL |

PLANNING ISSUE

Drawn by CL

Checked by MT



PLANNING | ARCHITECTURE | PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Grey House, 3 Broad Street, Stamford, PE9 1PG
 01780 239181
www.classq.co.uk

Project
DSM Building, Sibson

Drawing Title
E001

| Date | Revision | Scale @A3 |
|-----------|----------|--------------|
| Nov. 2024 | C | As indicated |

Copyright of this drawing is vested in Class Q Ltd (Reg. 11587961). This drawing may not be copied, reproduced or amended without written permission. No liability shall be accepted by Class Q Ltd for amendments made by others.

NOTES:
 The level of detail shown on this drawing is relative to the **PLANNING APPLICATION** only and this drawing should not be used for any other purpose without prior approval of the Architect and subsequent checking / development by others prior to construction.
 Planning adherence - the Client / Contractor is to undertake the works in complete accordance with the LA approved planning drawings and is to take responsibility for the discharge of any associated planning conditions.
 Building Control - the Client / Contractor must liaise directly with the chosen Building Control body to ensure the project is in complete accordance with the Building Regulations prior to construction.
 Structure & Construction - these drawings have not been coordinated with a Structural Engineer nor an Energy Assessor and therefore show indicative construction build-ups only and are not to be used for construction purposes.
 The future Contractor is responsible for visiting site and taking / checking all dimensions relative to setting out and construction.
 All dimensions are in millimetres unless noted otherwise.

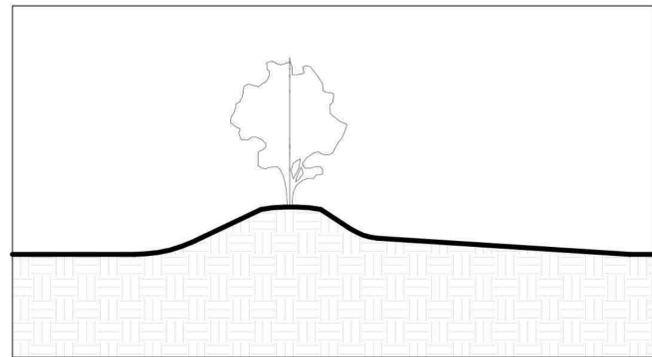
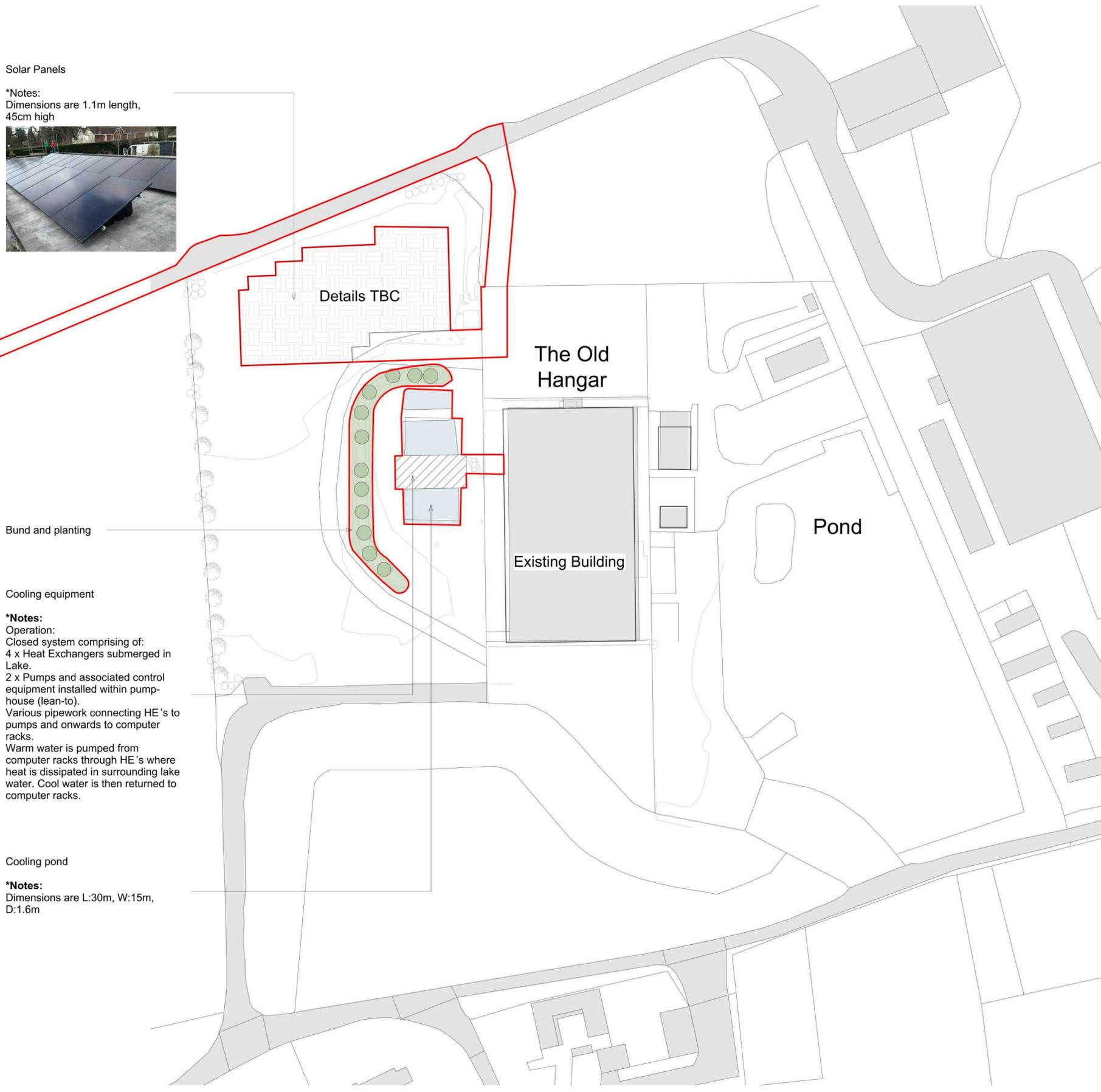
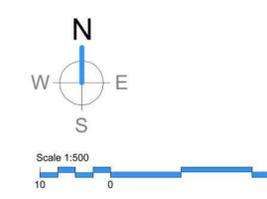
Solar Panels
 *Notes:
 Dimensions are 1.1m length, 45cm high



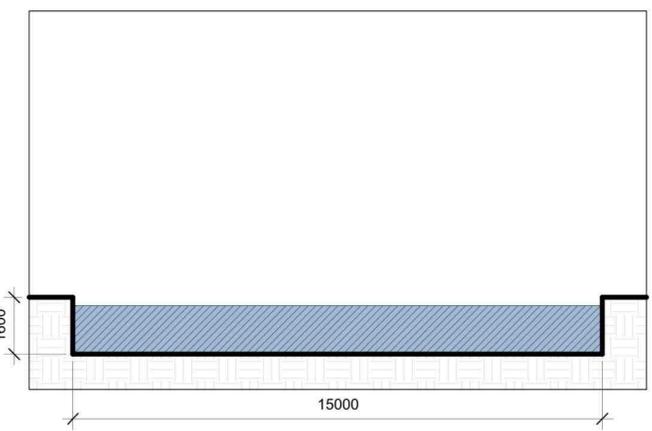
Bund and planting
Cooling equipment

*Notes:
 Operation:
 Closed system comprising of:
 4 x Heat Exchangers submerged in Lake.
 2 x Pumps and associated control equipment installed within pump-house (lean-to).
 Various pipework connecting HE 's to pumps and onwards to computer racks.
 Warm water is pumped from computer racks through HE 's where heat is dissipated in surrounding lake water. Cool water is then returned to computer racks.

Cooling pond
 *Notes:
 Dimensions are L:30m, W:15m, D:1.6m



Item No -
 Name - Bund profile
 Scale - 1 : 100



Item No -
 Name - Pond Cross Section
 Scale - 1 : 100

| SITE PLAN KEY | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| — | SITE BOUNDARY |

Areas
 Solar Panel Area: 1171.80 m²
 Total Red Line Boundary Area: 3936.78 m²

| Rev | Date | Description | Checker |
|-----|------------|--|---------|
| F | 02/06/2025 | Planning Issue - Red Line Boundaries updated | CL |
| E | 07/04/2025 | Planning Issue - Pond cross section added | CL |

PLANNING ISSUE

Drawn by **CL** Checked by **MT**



PLANNING | ARCHITECTURE | PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Grey House, 3 Broad Street, Stamford, PE9 1PG
 01780 239181
www.classq.co.uk

Project
 DSM Building, Sibson

Drawing Title
 P001
 Drawing Title
 Proposed Site Plan

Date
 Nov. 2024
 Revision
 F
 Scale @A1
 As indicated

Copyright of this drawing is vested in Class Q Ltd (Reg. 11587961). This drawing may not be copied, reproduced or amended without written permission. No liability shall be accepted by Class Q Ltd for amendments made by others.

NORTH

WEST

EAST

SOUTH

15

24

06

33

Flydays - Sibson Aerodrome

Runways

Solar Panels Facing South

Sibson Aerodrome

DSM Group

40ft Trees

Former RAF Sibson (Sibson I)

Elton Rd

Elton Rd

Wansford Rd

B671



An aerial photograph of a property. At the top left, a red arrow points to a line of trees. In the center, there is a pond with a wooden deck and a smaller adjacent pond. To the right, a large array of solar panels is installed on a gravel area. At the bottom, a large hangar building is visible. The entire property is enclosed by a fence.

40ft Trees

**350 Anti Reflective
Solar Panels - Facing
Due South (180 degrees)**

Hangar Building 30ft High

