Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan: Energy and Biodiversity Site Submission

Issues and Options (Regulation 18) Consultation and Call for Sites

Representations on Behalf of Tarmac Trading Limited

August 2025

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Appendices

1 Introduction

1.1.1 This site submission promotes the availability of Tarmac's Poolfields land interest (hereafter referred to as the Site) for development. The Site is located west of Whitegate Lane, to the southwest of Northwich town. Given the nature and location of the Site, it is considered that an energy generation and/or energy storage land use is the most appropriate.

1.1.2 There also exists the potential to deliver biodiversity net gains on the 18.8 hectare Site as well as energy generation/storage.

1.1.3 This submission is in response to the new site suggestions consultation closing on 29th August 2025. This consultation coincides with a Local Plan Issues and Options (Reg 18) consultation.

1.1.4 The Site is owned by Tarmac and it is available for development within the first 5 years of the new Local Plan period.

1.1.5 The Site location and its boundary are shown in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 respectively.

1.1.6 This representation document advocates for the allocation of Tarmac's Poolfields land interest for an energy generation and/or storage site. This will make an important contribution to meeting Cheshire's renewable energy generation and storage needs. The Site could also become a biodiversity hub and connect significantly enhance the immediate ecological network.

2 Site Context

2.1 Site Location and Description

2.1.1 The Site is located 1.4km south of Hartford village, 4.2km southwest of Northwich, and 3.2km north of Winsford. The Site measures approximately 18.8 hectares and consists of mostly arable and pasture farmland spread across five separate fields.

2.1.2 The Site is bounded by Whitegate Lane to the east, from where an existing agricultural gate provides access to the Site. The Site is enclosed on other boundaries by woodland which visually isolates the Site from the wider landscape.

2.1.3 The Site is situated between two ponds (Petty Pool and New Pool), woodland, and two golf courses. Biodiversity enhancement on the Site would connect these ecological networks and form a large biodiversity hub.

2.1.4 The closest residential property is the property Poolfields Farm accessed from Whitegate Lane, which is located between the Site and Whitegate Lane.

Figure 1. Site location and context. *Google Maps, 2025*

2.1.5 The individual fields are separated by mature boundary trees and hedgerow which provides additional screening. Furthermore, a number of individual trees are located within these fields.

2.1.6 Agricultural land classification data indicates that the Site is Grade 3 'Good to Moderate' and Grade 4 'Poor' quality agricultural land.

2.1.7 An above ground electrical powerline runs across the Site in the southeast-northeast direction.

2.1.8 In terms of topography, the Site rises and falls from west to east, varying from 37mAOD – 57mAOD. The highest area is in the centre of the Site with land levels falling away to the east and west.

2.1.9 The Site is located 1.6km away from Hartford National Grid Substation to the northeast (2.6km by road).

2.1.10 The Site is not located within the Greater Manchester Green Belt.

2.1.11 The Site is located in a rural area however there are numerous activities nearby including Sandiway Golf Club, Petty Pool fishery, Vale Royal Abbey and Golf Club, Whitegate village, and a caravan park to the west. Nevertheless, the Site benefits from a high degree of visual separation from surrounding landuses owing to the immediate woodland and topography.

2.1.12 The Site is located entirely within Flood Zone 1 and has a very low risk of fluvial flooding. The Site is also identified as having a very low risk of surface water flooding.

2.1.13 No Public Rights of Way traverse the site. The nearest path is Whitegate and Marton FP3 which runs near the southern boundary of the Site through woodland.

2.1.14 A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Pettypool Brook Valley SSSI, bounds the site to the northwest and southwest.

2.1.15 The nearest Listed Buildings are located on Whitegate Lane near to the northeast and southeast, the Grade II Listed Monkey Lodge and The Vicarage.

2.2 Planning Policy Context

2.2.1 The current adopted development plan consists of the Strategic Policies document (adopted January 2015), the Land Allocations and Detailed Policies document (adopted July 2019), and the Whitegate and Marton Neighbourhood Plan (made March 2017). The new Local Plan will replace both of these documents.

2.2.2 The adopted Policies Map indicates that the Site is in proximity to a number of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and the Pettypool Brook Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

2.2.3 The stretch of woodland in the east of the Site is part of an LWS. The Site is therefore closely related to these ecological networks. Policy ENV 4 of the Strategic Policies document states that development should not result in any net loss of natural assets and should seek to provide net gains.

2.2.4 The Site is located in a mineral safeguarding area for sand and gravel. However, the proposed uses are temporary in nature and would therefore not sterilise any potential mineral resource.

2.3 Summary

2.3.1 The Site is located in a rural area but it is also in proximity of a number of large urban areas and transport infrastructure. The Site is not washed over by any ecological or Green Belt designation, but it is situated in between a number of Local Wildlife Sites and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Site itself however is used for food production and there is an important opportunity for onsite biodiversity gains and habitat creation which would also benefit the surrounding ecological network.

3 Poolfields Energy and Biodiversity Site

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This section describes the site submission and the proposed development.

3.2 Energy Site

3.2.1 Appendix 2 shows the Site at a smaller scale and the field boundaries, isolated trees, and power line crossing the site can all be seen. The site measures c. 18.8 hectares in total. When taking standoffs from trees, site and field boundaries, and the power line as well as considering a potential perimeter road, it is estimated there remains c. 12 hectares for energy development.

3.2.2 A site of this size could result in up to 5MW of solar energy deployment, enough to power up to 1,500 homes. This would meet the energy demand of the villages and businesses in the vicinity, including Whitegate, Foxwist Green, and the Sandiway and Vale Royal Abbey golf clubs, helping significantly to decarbonise their operations.

3.2.3 Solar rollout could be combined with a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), connecting to the nearby Hartford Substation, providing additional strategic capacity for the grid. If BESS is delivered on just 1 hectare of the site, this would deliver approximately 60MW of electricity storage.

3.2.4 The balance of solar deployment to BESS can be considered further through consultation with the National Grid, as well as more detailed investigation on the potential of the site. If the National Grid requires additional storage in this area, Tarmac is happy to agree to a more suitable balance in any development plan allocation.

3.2.5 It has been highlighted previously that the Site is located just 1.6km from Hartford Substation. Initial research indicates that at present, this substation is operating at maximum capacity. Tarmac's Poolfields site therefore provides Cheshire West and Chester Council and the National Grid a good opportunity to provide additional electricity storage in this area and support the role of the grid, particularly as the UK move towards a renewable energy future which will require a significant national drive to increase battery storage.

3.2.6 In assessing the Site for solar suitability, the Site does undulate however this is most pronounced in the east of the Site. A large area in the centre and north of the Site gently slopes and is clearly suitable for solar deployment. The landform and landscape features (trees, woodland, hedgerow) enclose the Site from the

surrounding landscape, limiting intervisibility between the Site and the wider landscape.

3.2.7 In assessing the Site for BESS suitability, the Site has good accessibility for construction and maintenance including access from the A556 just 2km to the north. The Site has a very low risk of flooding, and it is located near to power lines and Hartford Substation. These factors meet the basic requirements of a potential BESS site.

3.3 Biodiversity

3.3.1 In addition to energy development, it is envisaged that the Site could also become a biodiversity hub and connect the surrounding ecological networks. The Site is located in proximity of a number of Local Wildlife Sites, including one which runs onto the Site, as well as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. A number of waterbodies are also located nearby. Given the Site measures 18.8ha, and there is approximately 12ha of good land for energy purposes, there is plentiful space to incorporate significant ecological enhancements into an energy development. The entire Site would at least be improved from agricultural land to some form of improved grassland which itself is a significant enhancement.

3.3.2 The draft local plan seeks to deliver high quality, interconnected and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure. The Site is strategically placed to interconnect the surrounding ecological networks and deliver a much larger and more integrated ecosystem in this area.

3.3.3 At the Site boundaries and areas not best suited to energy development (due to topography, layout etc), biodiversity enhancements could be incorporated into any energy allocation. This could involve woodland creation to partially extend the surrounding woodland, and enhance hedgerows which can act as ecological corridors.

3.4 Agricultural Land

3.4.1 Domestic food production is vital for the UK's food security and this must be considered. The Site is currently used for agricultural arable farmland (although Google images indicate there may be pasture use at times as well), with Grades likely to be 3 'Good to Moderate' and Grade 4 'Poor'.

3.4.2 An energy development would therefore not impact any Grade 2 or 1 farmland. Furthermore, food production could be maintained in the form of pasture grazing around and under the solar panels, with the fields rented to a sheep farmer for

example. Grazing and solar energy production can happen together in the same fields, continuing food production albeit in a different way. The Site could also accommodate beehives.

3.4.3 Moreover, the energy site would only be temporary, as solar farms and BESS sites generally are. It is envisaged that the Site would be removed from arable farmland for approximately 30-40 years which will allow it to naturally regenerate. The energy infrastructure can be constructed so as not to cause any serious damage to the soils.

3.5 Availability

3.5.1 Tarmac confirms that the Site is available for an energy development immediately and it is envisaged this would be developed within the first 5 years of adoption of the new local plan.

3.6 Summary

3.6.1 Overall, the Site has a high potential for a proposed energy generation and storage site. The Site has good access to the A556 for construction and maintenance vehicles, and benefits from co-location with Hartford Substation and other nearby power infrastructure.

3.6.2 The Site also has good potential for significant ecological enhancements and interconnecting the surrounding Local Wildlife Sites.

3.6.3 A level of food production could be maintained for the duration of the development. However, the development is ultimately only temporary and would not permanently sterilise any agricultural land.

4 Local Plan Consultation and Call for Sites

4.1 Draft Local Plan

4.1.1 The Issues and Options consultation publicises a draft plan for comment. The draft plan outline 4 overarching principles including 'tackling climate change – adapting to and mitigating against the effects of climate change and achieving a net increase in biodiversity'.

4.1.2 This principle is reflected immediately in draft Policy SD 1 'Sustainable Development' which, among other things, seeks to maximise opportunities to generate energy from renewable sources and to re-balance the grid through energy storage, and also to deliver high quality, interconnected and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure.

4.1.3 Section 28 of the draft plan relates to energy. Draft policies for solar energy, wind and other energy related developments are included and draft criteria are provided for considering applications. It is stated that proposals should take account of the Landscape Sensitivity Study and Guidance on Wind and Solar Photovoltaic Developments (2016) and be directed to the least sensitive locations.

4.1.4 It is clear that the emerging local plan will have a focus on delivering renewable energy infrastructure and enhancing biodiversity in Cheshire West and Chester. Tarmac's Poolfields site could make an important contribution to both of those objectives.

4.2 Call for Sites

4.2.1 The Call for Sites consultation is open concurrently with the Issues and Options consultation. The Council is requesting sites for a wide range of developments including 'Energy (generation/storage)'. The consultation also requests details regarding the availability of the site, ownership, and likely delivery timeframes.

4.3 Landscape Sensitivity Study

4.3.1 The Landscape Sensitivity Study and Guidance on Wind and Solar Photovoltaic Developments (2016) is a Council published document. Whilst the document was published in 2016, it helps to guide wind and solar development proposals in the borough to those landscapes which are least sensitive. Based on the site size and potential space for solar development, the Site would likely comprise a 'medium solar farm' of 6ha-15ha. For medium solar farms, the Site is identified as having 'high' landscape sensitivity. However, the Site is not located in the Green Belt, a National

Landscape or in a key settlement gap. It has also been mentioned previously that the Site itself benefits from strong enclosure from surrounding woodland, and onsite hedgerow and individual trees, all of which would be retained and enhanced.

4.4 Summary

4.4.1 Overall, the emerging plan places a strong emphasis on the need to mitigate climate change, which is one of four draft key principles running through the entire document. It is very supportive of renewable energy development and biodiversity enhancement. The proposed Poolfields Energy and Biodiversity site therefore responds positively to the emerging plan and its objectives.

5 National Policy

5.1 National Planning Policy Framework

5.1.1 In terms of examining local plans, the NPPF confirms that emerging local plans can only be found 'sound' if they are:

a) **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;

b) **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;

c) **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and

d) **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

5.1.2 Section 14 of the NPPF relates to 'Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change'. Paragraph 161 states that the planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and should help shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

5.1.3 Paragraph 165 states that to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat plans should consider identifying areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development.

5.1.4 Paragraph 168 confirms that local planning authorities should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and give significant weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the proposal's contribution to a net zero future.

5.2 Summary

5.2.1 The NPPF emphasises the importance of renewable energy development and places strong weight in favour of it. Local planning authorities are encouraged to identify areas for renewable energy development where this would secure the development. Given that the Poolfields site is located in the countryside, an allocation would be required to establish the principle of development and give the confidence needed for potential investors.

6 Conclusion

6.1.1 Tarmac's Poolfields site is hereby submitted for a proposed Energy and Biodiversity Site. The boundaries of the Site are shown in Appendix 1 and 2.

6.1.2 The Site is well suited to solar generation, energy storage, and ecological enhancements (a biodiversity 'hub'). The Site is located 1.6km from Hartford National Grid Substation. In terms of biodiversity, the Site could interconnect a number of wildlife sites in the area to create a significantly enhanced and integrated wildlife network in the area.

6.1.3 The Site measures 18.8ha in total, providing ample space for a development as described. Tarmac is happy to consider the balance between energy generation and storage, and ecological enhancements further, subject to consultation with relevant stakeholders and the needs of the grid.

6.1.4 Tarmac also confirms that the Site is available for development immediately.

6.1.5 The energy development would not sterilise any agricultural land as it would be temporary (c. 30-40 years). Food production could also continue on the site in the form of grassland grazing.

6.1.6 Given the site is located in the countryside location, it is important that an allocation is placed on the site to establish the principle of development. This would immediately make the site highly attractive for any investor. An energy and biodiversity development is unlikely to materialise without clear policy support in the form of an allocation.

6.1.7 Tarmac thanks the Council for the opportunity to comment on the pre-submission consultation document. If the Council requires any additional information then please do not hesitate to contact us.

Appendix 1: Site Location Plan (1:50,000)

Appendix 2: Site Boundary on Aerial (1:2,500)