

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Planning Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 3 December 2024 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Atkinson, A Bell (Vice-Chair), M Currah, J Elmer, J Higgins, P Jopling, C Martin, A Savory, K Shaw, A Simpson, G Smith, S Zair and D Sutton-Lloyd (substitute for G Richardson)

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Richardson.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor Sutton-Lloyd was present as substitute for Councillor Richardson.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5a DM/24/00903/WAS - Proposed anaerobic digestion plant - Sprucely Farm, Sedgfield, Stockton On Tees, TS21 2BD (Bishop Middleham)

The Committee considered a report of the Senior Planning Officer for the installation of a proposed anaerobic digestion plant at Sprucely Farm, Sedgfield, Stockton On Tees (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Planning Officer gave a detailed presentation which included a site location plan, site photographs, a site layout plan and a summary of the report.

Mr Hepplewhite addressed the Committee and confirmed that the Applicant had worked proactively to address all issues raised throughout the planning process. The proposal would have no visual impact, no odour or traffic issues and there would be a significant biodiversity net gain. The application represented sustainable development and whilst local residents and the town council were entitled to their opinion, the issues which had been raised did not warrant refusal.

In response to a question from Councillor Jopling, Mr Hepplewhite confirmed that there had been concerns with regard to potential odour and noise, however the type of technology proposed used anaerobic digestion which was enclosed in sealed tanks.

Councillor Elmer queried the impact of nitrates produced by the plant being sprayed back on to the surrounding fields and Mr Hepplewhite confirmed that any liquid or solid digestate put back onto the fields would substitute the existing use of fertiliser and with less nitrification, it was better for the land. In response to a subsequent question from Councillor Elmer, Mr Hepplewhite confirmed that nitrate levels would be reduced as a consequence of the development.

The Senior Planning Officer reiterated that the material would be spread over the fields that it came from. The Applicant also hoped to create a product which met Environment Agency Standards. He reminded the Committee that the deployment of the digester was not a planning matter and that the Applicant had the right to spread this material in any event.

Councillor Atkinson referred to the work Officers had put into compiling the reports and lack of attendance from objectors. He also noted that there was no Local Member in attendance and despite requesting the application be determined by the Committee, Sedgefield Town Council were not in attendance. He deemed the application to be acceptable and moved the recommendation for approval.

Councillor Martin confirmed that whilst there would undoubtedly be some odour from anaerobic digestion plant, however this was a pig farm and the location of the plant was as far away as it could be from any other development. He had considered concerns raised, however he could see no reason why the proposal could not be supported. He seconded the motion to approve the application.

Councillor Elmer advised that this was an important strategic decision as the Council would be collecting food waste and should be able to use local services. He referred to the rare occasions that applications received concerns from Public Rights of Way Officers and asked what was in place to mitigate the impact of HGV movements.

The Senior Planning Officer confirmed that Officers had requested the proposed landscaping scheme and it was accepted that this would mitigate the impact on the footpaths. He added that the impact was primarily due to the enjoyment of the route than of vehicular movements as these would be limited to 38 per day.

Resolved

That application be APPROVED subject to the completion of an agreement under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act to secure fees for biodiversity monitoring for a 30 year period and the conditions outlined in the report.