

## Planning Statement

Land at White Horse Road  
Vigo  
Kent  
DA13 0UF



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## **1. Site location and appraisal**

- 1.1 The site is located less than a mile to the east of the village of Vigo on the north side of White Horse Road.
- 1.2 Set immediately adjacent to the north side of White Horse Road, the land forms a deep verge area between the carriageway and the open field to the north with thick and high mature hedging between the grass verge and field beyond.
- 1.3 Unrestricted access to the site is currently via the road and verge.
- 1.4 The rural area is a protected landscape as it forms part of the Kent Down Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as well as being part of the Greenbelt. It is punctuated by small woodlands and isolated dwellings and farmsteads. No public footpaths/ rights of way immediately pass the site, although path NS238 is set some 70m to the east on the south side the road.

## **2 Planning History**

- 2.1 Searches of the local authority website has revealed no relevant planning history for this site.

## **3 Proposed Development**

- 3.1 The erection of a green plastic-coated Securifor 358 type wire weld mesh security fencing 3m high with an access gate.
- 3.2 Alterations to the current infrastructure includes the reduction in height of the 6m high pole supporting the photovoltaic panels, removal of the photovoltaic panels and the supporting framework, the introduction of a small wind turbine to generate electricity (replacing the need for the panels) and finally the repositioning of a vehicle crash barrier.

## **4 Planning Policies**

- 4.1 Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy, 2014, Policies CS02 Scale and Distribution of Development, CS12 Green Infrastructure, T1 Impact of Development on the Highway Network relate to this submission.
- 4.2 Kent Down AONB Management Plan 2021 – 2026.
- 4.3 National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Paras 147, 150, 176 & 177
- 4.4 Policy expansion:

- 4.4.1 The site sits within a protected landscape where the aims and spirit of Core Strategy policy, NPPF and the AONB Management Plan all aim to protect the character, openness and setting of the wider landscape.
- 4.4.2 There are exceptions for certain categories of development, but public utility infrastructure is not specified; probably because it is so specialised. However, the reality of the situation is that the infrastructure needs to be protected from thieves and vandals who have attacked the site.
- 4.4.3 Aside from the visual impact of damage, it presents a risk to life on the basis the infrastructure is a partially 'above ground' gas facility. For this reason, it is considered while the respected case officers will have to consider the visual changes against provisions of local policies and national guidance documents, there is an overriding consideration of public safety. Therefore Health & Safety Executive requirements are also a material consideration.

## **5 Development Appraisal**

- 5.1 The key issues relating to the application are:
  - 5.1.1 Impact upon visual amenity
  - 5.1.2 Need for the fencing.
  - 5.1.3 Impact upon the wider area due to the loss of the facility resulting from criminal damage.
- 5.2 Impact upon visual amenity:
  - 5.2.1 It can be seen from Plate 1 (overleaf) the site is read in context with the dark hedging on both sides of the road which delineates the public realm and the fields/ property boundaries.
  - 5.2.2 Some 70m to the east of the site are residential properties and associated outbuildings which form part of the streetscene.

Plate 1: Site surroundings:



- 5.2.3 The wider area is relatively open, though punctuated by small areas of woodland. The proposed green powder coated metal fencing will have a neutral visual impact on the setting due to its dark colour and will be read against the green kiosks and hedging. Moreover, the current installation forms part of the local character and has done for some time now and by removing the solar panels, lowering the height of the pole and adding a small turbine and fencing, the site is still clearly a utility facility which are not uncommon in the rural areas. The fencing proposed is widely used across many settings, both urban and rural including in protected landscapes.
- 5.2.4 By installing a small turbine in place of the solar panels and reducing the height of the supporting pole, the mass, bulk and scale of the infrastructure at that higher level will reduce. This is an inherent gain for the visual amenity of the locality.
- 5.2.5 For reasons of completeness, a close boarded fence has not been suggested due to its solid nature set close to the road. It was considered this would form an incongruous feature in the locality which would be harmful to the visual amenity of the wider setting. Similarly, standard metal palisade fencing was discounted due to the stark visual intrusion imposed whether green or not.

- 5.2.6 Additionally, it would form a solid barrier on the verge and dangerously impair visibility at the field entrance. It appears to be an historic access point, though how old has not been determined. That said, we are dealing with the present and while there is an identified need to secure the infrastructure, the safety of the users of the highway and entrance point has been considered and the use of open wire weld mesh fencing is an effective compromise. It is possible to see through it and in low light/ darkness, lights will clearly shine through it.
- 5.2.7 The galvanised metal crash barriers are to remain, although one is to be repositioned to accommodate the new fencing.
- 5.2.8 Based on the above considerations, it is considered the scheme does not conflict with the provisions of the Policies CS02, CS12 and T1 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy, 2014.
- 5.3 Need for the fencing.
- 5.3.1 It can be seen from Plate 1 that the important facility is in an isolated location. A site visit will show that the facility has been attacked (actually several times) resulting in the solar panels being stolen and the kiosks broken into and monitoring equipment both damaged and stolen. For reasons of both security of SGN Plc infrastructure and public safety due to the presence of the gas mains, a security fence is urgently required.
- 5.3.2 As a result of an apparent demand for solar panels due to their cost the isolated site is regrettably a tempting target. In light of this, the site security and operation has been reviewed and the solar panels are to be permanently removed and replaced with a small wind turbine to charge the monitoring equipment in the kiosk. The turbine is akin to a unit often used in domestic applications so is small in scale. A full enclosure is required to help secure the kiosks.
- 5.3.3 As the utility company has a duty to protect and secure their assets for reasons of security and public safety, this site is no exception and hence the need for the fencing.
- 5.4 Impact upon the wider area due to the loss of the facility resulting from criminal damage.
- 5.4.1 Should the site be damaged and the gas infrastructure be damaged to a point where a leak occurs, then clearly an immediate risk to life exists. However, should the monitoring equipment fail due to damaged infrastructure, then the gas flow would need to be restricted or stopped resulting in disruption to those consumers across the wider area.

5.4.2 While SGN would seek to repair the infrastructure as soon as possible, the inherent disruption to both domestic and commercial users could be considerable. Therefore, securing the site is important despite the sensitive landscape setting in which it sits.

## 5.5 Other matters:

5.5.1 The fencing has been positioned in order to afford sufficient circulation/working space around the kiosks for SGN personnel to carry out any necessary works. While SGN infrastructure occupies the majority of the verge area in this location, it was considered preferable to install fencing only where strictly necessary in order to minimise cost, visual intrusion and visibility, hence the scheme presented.

5.5.2 To aid the reader on the specific type of fencing proposed and indeed used widely by the gas utility, Plate 2 below shows an example of green plastic-coated Securifor 358 type wire weld mesh security fencing.

Plate 2: Typical wire weld mesh fencing.



## 6 Conclusion

6.1 It can be seen from the above statement that the erection of the proposed green plastic coated 3m high wire weld mesh fencing as used in so many public sector sites such as schools, hospitals, local authority playing fields etc... will not adversely affect the visual amenity of the locality. The reason

it is so popular across the country is that it is more difficult to climb than other fencing systems such as Palisade and timber panelling/ close board.

- 6.2 The scheme is considered to have a neutral visual impact and further enhanced by the removal of the solar panels and the advantage of removing the potential for the kiosks to be vandalised or at least having unsightly and anti-social graffiti as is so often the case. Therefore, it is considered the scheme does not conflict with the provisions of the documents stated at Section 4 above.

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