

17 April 2018



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Dear Sir/Madam

Millbrook Power Project (EN010068) Forest of Marston Vale - Reference MILL-OP010

Please find below the Forest of Marston Vale Trust's comments regarding the above planning application.

Background and policy context

The Forest of Marston Vale Trust is the charity leading on the delivery of the environmentally led regeneration of the Marston Vale by creating the Forest of Marston Vale. The Forest is one of 12 nationally designated Community Forests, with a Government set target to increase woodland cover to 30% by 2031. As one of England's Community Forests, the vision to create the Forest of Marston Vale benefits from both Government and national policy support. The National Planning Policy Framework states that:

"Community Forests offer valuable opportunities for improving the environment around towns, by upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife. An approved Community Forest Plan may be material consideration in preparing development plans and deciding planning applications." (NPPF, para 92)

The delivery of the Forest is supported by Policy CS16 (Landscape and Woodlands) and Policy CS17 (Green Infrastructure) of the Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy 2009, which states that the Council will:

"Continue to support the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale recognising the need to regenerate the environmentally damaged landscape through woodland creation to achieve the target of 30% woodland cover in the Forest area by 2030" (CS16)

"Seek a net gain in green infrastructure through the protection and enhancement of assets and provision of new greenspaces as set out in the strategic, Mid Bedfordshire and Parish Green Infrastructure Plans."

Our future is growing...

Marston Vale Services t/a The Forest Centre Ltd. (Registered in England No. 3538255) Registered office : Forest Centre, Station Road, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire, MK43 0PR on behalf of the Forest of Marston Vale Trust (Registered Charity No. 1069229).



Take forward priority areas for the provision of new green infrastructure in the Forest of Marston Vale (including Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway), the Ivel Valley, the Greensand Ridge, the Flit Valley and the Chilterns).

Require new developments to contribute towards the delivery of new green infrastructure and the management of a linked network of new and enhanced open spaces and corridors.” (CS17)

Development sites should contribute towards the achievement of the 30% woodland cover by maximising woodland or tree cover (with a 30% woodland cover target) across the development site. The trees and woodland should ideally be located within the public realm.

As an independent charity established to spearhead the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust works to implement the politically and publicly endorsed Forest Plan. The Forest Plan provides the strategic framework and long term vision for creating the Forest, setting out a range of aims, objectives and broad principles to be implemented. The Forest Plan states that:

“Land use decisions will clearly be important for the future of the Forest and such decisions will be taken by the planning authorities, in the context of the planning framework set out in the statutory development plans. No proposals in the Forest Plan can override the policies contained in these statutory plans. However, the Forest Plan should be:

- *A material consideration used to inform the preparation of statutory development plans;*
- *A material consideration in determining planning applications for development within the Forest boundary; . . .”*

And further states that:

“The Forest Team will seek to secure meaningful on and off-site landscape gains from development schemes in the Community Forest. These should be appropriate to the scale and location of the development. This will be done by establishing good working relationships with planning officers and, where appropriate, developers and ensuring that Community Forest aims and objectives are fully understood.”

The Forest Plan also clearly notes that:

“Development pressures will continue to cause controversy and impact upon communities within the Vale. An aim of the Forest Team will be to encourage landowners, developers and planning authorities to deliver Community Forest objectives and incorporate the principles of sustainability when considering further development.”

In accordance with these statements in the Forest Plan, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust has a long-standing policy regarding development within the Forest area:

“While the Trust will support development that directly meets the objectives of the Forest, the Trust is neutral on individual planning applications that do not directly conflict with the aims of the Forest of Marston Vale. Where development is planned the Trust will work with developers and planners to secure a contribution to the Forest that is consistent with the Forest Plan and with the impact of the proposed development on the Vale”.

(Policy on development - adopted 8th September 2005)

It is in the context of the above policies and guidance that the following specific comments are made on behalf of the Trust regarding the proposed Millbrook Power scheme.

Specific comments

The proposed development site is located within the Forest of Marston Vale and therefore required to comply with the aforementioned Central Bedfordshire Council planning policy regarding the 30% woodland cover target.

The Forest of Marston Vale Trust's consistent approach to development within the Forest area is based on the fundamental issue of land availability for tree planting, applying a simple arithmetic approach to achieving the target of 30% woodland cover by 2031. To achieve this, given that trees can only be planted on 77% of the Marston Vale (the remaining 23% is already built on or is open water), each developer has historically been expected to deliver its pro rata share based on 39% of the gross development area being planted as woodland, or an area equivalent to 39% of the gross development site being planted elsewhere in the Marston Vale. Considerable precedent has been established using this approach over the last 15 years, although the integration of woodland and tree planting within developments has not been achieved due to off-site contributions being preferred by developers.

Delivering 39% of woodland or canopy cover could be achieved by any, or a combination of the options below:

1. Plant a single area of new woodland of the required size;
2. Plant several areas of new woodland totalling the required size;
3. Integrate extensive individual and group tree planting into the development, over and above normal landscaping requirements and sufficient to ultimately yield >30% canopy cover utilising:
 - a) street trees
 - b) substantial tree planting to public realm/open space, including creation of woodland belts and trees within landscaping schemes
 - c) planting of new hedgerows with hedgerow trees
 - d) creation of woodlands as part of sustainable drainage (e.g. wet woodlands)
 - e) creation of community orchards

The Examining Authority's Written Questions and Request for Information document, issued on the 20 March 2018, noted the design of the proposed development was not satisfying the required Forest contribution and tree coverage as outlined above. Questions were also raised regarding planting already proposed for the restoration of Rookery Pit and the Covanta scheme, being used as part of Millbrook Power's contribution to the Forest or landscape mitigation.

Subsequently a meeting was held between The Forest of Marston Vale Trust and the applicant's agent on the 4 April 2018, to discuss the application and how the scheme would contribute to the delivery of the Forest of Marston Vale. The agent stated the applicant fully supports the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale and will contribute towards the 39% woodland creation target, through a mixture of planting new trees within the application site and making a financial contribution for further woodland planting within the Forest Area. The agent was unable to confirm exactly what area of tree planting could be achieved within the application site, as the final development footprint for the project was still to be finalised. The remaining area of woodland that cannot be planted within the site will be

provided for via a financial contribution based on the Trust's established and longstanding 'woodland creation model' which has informed developer contributions for many years.

The agent also confirmed that any existing or proposed tree planting associated with third party contributions towards Forest Plan objectives or landscape mitigations will not be used as part of the 39% Forest Contribution for the Millbrook Power scheme. The Millbrook Power Ltd development must clearly provide its own contribution. Any boundary planting within the Millennium Country Park, required to help screen the proposed development from those visiting and enjoying the Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park will also be delivered by the applicant and will be additional to their Forest creation contribution.

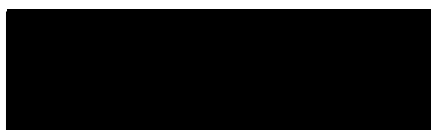
Based on the above details provided by the applicant's agent, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust is satisfied that the Millbrook Power application can meet the 39% woodland creation requirement by planting new trees/woodland on site and/or making a financial contribution to the Trust to plant sufficient woodland off-site. To be deemed acceptable the Trust, and in policy terms, any such contribution would need to demonstrate that it satisfied the following key points:

- i. That the 39% contribution is based on the gross development area (i.e. the "red line"), so as to be consistent with the approach taken with other development within the Forest area over the last 10-15 years; and
- ii. That any financial contribution made in lieu of on-site planting be based on a spend period of 25 years so as to accord with the accepted establishment period for new woodland upon which the 'woodland creation model' is based.

The Trust welcomes this recent positive dialogue with the Millbrook Power Ltd project team, and believes that, subject to further detailed discussions, an acceptable position can be reached to ensure that the proposed development is policy compliant through contributing appropriately to the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale.

Should you or the applicant require any further information regarding the above then please contact me to discuss this matter further.

Yours faithfully,



Darren Woodward
Forest Development Officer

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Encl. Millbrook Power Ltd – woodland creation model