SPORTS COMPLEX SOLAR PANEL SYSTEM – ADDITIONAL CAPITAL BUDGET REQUEST FOR DRAINAGE REPAIRS AND ELECTRICAL WORKS TO THE SPORTS COMPLEX PLANT ROOM

AGENDA ITEM No. 12

MEETING: **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

DATE: **2ND DECEMBER 2026**

REPORT BY: **TOWN CLERK**

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update to Members in relation to the Oak Leaf Sports Complex solar panels project and specifically to highlight two significant issues which have been raised during the survey phase of the project, relating to drainage repairs and electrical upgrade works to the sports complex plant room, that require consideration and action before the project can proceed.

1.2 The report requests consideration of the two issues, and, if it is agreed to go ahead with the recommended works, requests that an additional capital budget approval is agreed to fund these unbudgeted requirements.

2.0 Background to the Report - Solar Panel System Feasibility Study

2.1 Members will recall that the Council has undertaken a feasibility study regarding the installation of a solar panel system to feed the Oak Leaf Sports Complex

2.2 It was agreed at the January 2026 Policy and Resources Committee Meeting that:-

i) The information provided in the Phase 1 Feasibility Study Report and the recommendations made, as well as the additional budget implications highlighted are noted.
ii) Officers proceed with the Sports Complex Solar Panel System Project based on the smaller ground mounted system within the depot yard.
iii) An additional Capital Budget of £63,300 be approved.
iv) Officers are authorised to proceed with the project, including the organisation of the various surveys and permissions, the engagement of the consultants to undertake RIBA Phases 2 to 6 contract management process, the engagement of Durham County Council Procurement to undertake the tender process, and the reprofiling of the depot yard, subject to progress updates being reported back to the Council as required.

2.3 Since then officers have been working closely with the building surveyor consultants to progress the organisation of the various surveys and permissions.

2.4 To date, the following progress has been made:

- Pre-Planning Application Enquiry made to Durham County Council
- Asbestos Refurbishment and Demolition (R&D) Survey completed
- Topographical Survey completed
- Utilities Survey and Searches completed
- CCTV Drainage Survey completed

2.5 As previously reported, the pre-planning advice has now been received from Durham County Council, and it has been confirmed that the proposal will require full planning permission in its current form. This is because the scheme exceeds the permitted development threshold of 200 cubic metres. Encouragingly, no objections in principle have been raised, with Environmental Health and Highways both confirming they have no issues with the proposal. Planning officers have indicated they would support progressing to a full application based on what has been submitted so far.

2.6 All surveys are now complete as it has been advised that the following surveys are not required for the reasons given:

Geo-Environmental / Geo-Technical Survey
We've reviewed this with our structural team, and at this stage it's not considered necessary. The PV system will be supported on relatively shallow foundations, and as we're not designing a building, the associated ground risk is significantly lower. We would only revisit this if anything unexpected arises during later design stages.

Arboriculture Survey
This is not currently required. It would only become necessary if, following input from the PV specialist, there is a recommendation to remove or significantly prune trees to reduce overshadowing of the panels.

3.0 Current Situation

3.1 Further discussions have taken place with the surveyors overseeing the project on behalf of the Council, regarding the final design, size and location of the solar panel system within the depot yard and how this will be connected up to the sports complex electricity supply via underground cabling between the depot and the sports complex plant room.

3.2 The focus of these discussions has been on maximising the space within the depot yard whilst ensuring that sufficient accessible space is retained for storage and tipping, as well as minimising disruption to facilities during the civil works and installation e.g. ensuring that works operations are not impacted, that access is maintained for sports and golf complex customers, and that deliveries can still be made to the rear of the sports complex.

3.3 These discussions have been positive, and a final layout and cabling arrangements are close to being agreed.

3.4 However, there are two significant issues which have been identified by the surveyors which they have recommended need to be addressed ahead of the solar panel system being installed. These relate to drainage repairs and electrical upgrade works to the sports complex. The following section of the report provides further details on these two key issues.

Drainage Survey / Remedial Works

3.5 The CCTV Drainage Survey has identified that significant repairs are needed to the stretch of drainage pipework line running from the depot to the sports complex, a total length of nearly 77 metres.

3.6 A summary of the drainage report, the advice given and an indicative plan is attached at Appendix 1A. The quote for the work from the survey company is attached at Appendix 1B, while a second quote from the Council's regular drainage supplier is attached at Appendix 1C.

3.7 The required works cover a 'no dig' remediation to the drainage line from Manhole 1 to Manhole 9 on the attached drawing, and include:

- *Removal of tree root ingress via a robotic cutter*
- *Fully cleanse the line by Jet-Vac*
- *Install 6 x 150mm diameter x 1000mm length RSR to specifically strengthen severely damaged sections*
- *Install 150mm diameter x (approx.) x 76.51m length ultra violet light cured in place pipe (CIPP) liner (Brandenburger BB2.5 liner, which has the best specific properties for this project)*
- *Trim outlets in manholes and seal annulus (where liner meets chamber)*
- *Complete the final cleanse of line*
- *Complete post-installation CCTV Survey*

3.8 It has been advised that no dig 'sleeving', which can be undertaken from manhole to manhole, is more cost-effective than excavating and replacing the full drain run.

3.9 The cost of completing these remedial works is not insignificant, and an additional quote has therefore been sought from a local drainage company, who have undertaken repairs on behalf of the Council previously. Further details on these quotes and the estimated cost of the works are set out in the Financial Implications Section.

Electrical Works

3.10 A review of the sports complex plant room set-up and how the cabling might be best brought into the room has been undertaken by the surveyors overseeing the project.

3.11 It is apparent that most of the electrical boxes in the plant room are still in use and take up most of the space on the wall, restricting the space for the additional cabling from the solar panel system.

3.12 Ultimately, officers will be guided by the surveyors as to what the options are for bringing the cable into the plant room and connecting it up to the sports complex electricity supply.

3.13 However a further concern has been raised in relation to the age of the electrical infrastructure within the sports complex plant room. It has been advised that this system is approaching the end of its estimated useful life and it may be more cost efficient in the long term to upgrade the electrical system now.

3.14 Advice has therefore been sought as to whether it may be an opportune time to upgrade the electrical infrastructure, including the distribution board and electrical switch systems, in the sports complex plant room, ahead of the solar panel project. The initial advice received is attached at Appendix 2.

3.15 Please note that the electrical infrastructure in the sports complex is regularly tested and all safety recommendations in the inspections have been actioned. These inspections have not to date, made any specific recommendations to replace the equipment.

3.16 The surveyors have advised that the benefits of undertaking the electrical upgrade works would be:

- Removes life expiring equipment
- Resolves the PV connectivity issue
- Removes the risk that adding the solar panel system to the current electrical system would not conform to current regulations
- Provides future proofed electrical equipment with spare capacity to expand / add new PV arrays and EV charging and creates capacity and space within the plant room.
- Provides an opportunity to remove asbestos containing materials from within the plant room and a heater (heating the adjacent changing room) from the plant room, the latter being a possible fire risk in its current location.
- Combining this work with the PV contract may also offer better value for money, rather than two separate contracts.

3.17 The surveyor has highlighted the following risks if the electrical upgrade works are not undertaken:

- The current equipment is life expiring.
- The existing system may not energise correctly due to its age, leaving issues to resolve and we may be faced with retrospective upgrade works just to complete the PV installation.
- The cable route into the plant room and locating the new PV equipment on the already congested wall, will still need to be resolved, which there is not currently an identified solution for.
- No futureproofing of the electrical infrastructure for future PV or EV systems to be added.

3.18 The surveyors have recommended that it would make sense to undertake this work as part of the pre-enabling works for the solar panel installation.

3.19 To undertake a detailed review of the plant room, its equipment and what can be rationalised, the surveyors would need to carry out a full survey of the equipment to understand how it is currently operating, to then develop a strategy to upgrade, replace, remove etc, also bearing in mind business continuity implications for the day to operation of the sports complex.

3.20 However, the surveyors have pulled together some indicative high-level ‘ballpark’ estimates for design fees and the upgrade works, with a view to giving the Town Council an indication of budget requirements should it wish to proceed with upgrading the electrical infrastructure within the sports complex plant room. This is attached summarised below:

Work Item	**Estimate £**
Full Replacement of Electrical Infrastructure and Switchgear	£50,000
Temporary Electricity Supply via Generator	£10,000
Contractor Preliminaries, Overheads and Profit (20%)	£12,000
Design Fees	£3,500
Asbestos Removal	£4,000
Total Estimated Cost	**£79,500**

3.21 These costs are based on industry pricing guides and should not be wholly relied upon for budgeting purposes but represent a rough estimate of costs for discussion. It has been assumed that there will be no wish to shut the sports complex down for the duration of the works (1 to 2 weeks) and the above estimates therefore allow for a temporary supply (diesel generator). At this early stage it has been advised that these are best case figures, and actual tendered costs could be in the region of +/- 20%.

4.0 Matters for Consideration

4.1 Members are asked to consider undertaking the recommended drainage repairs and the upgrade of the sports complex electricity infrastructure, bearing in mind the significant unbudgeted costs involved, and if agreed, to approve an additional capital budget approval to meet the cost of the required works.

4.2 If the solar panels project is to progress, it is recommended that these works are completed as soon as practicable. Please note however, that the identified works would eventually be required to be undertaken regardless.

4.3 The final layout of the PV solar array at the depot site and cabling arrangements will be agreed between the surveyors and officers which will then allow a planning application will be submitted once the scheme has been finalised.

4.4 Once the drainage repairs and electrical works have been completed and planning permission is secured, the consultants will prepare a tender specification for the recommended system and the associated civils and groundworks, which will then allow the sports complex solar panel capital project to proceed to tender and installation, hopefully early in the new year.

5.0 Policy Implications

5.1 This report complies with the following Councils Strategic Aims: -

Aim No. 2. - To manage the Council's finances and assets in a responsible manner

Aim No. 5. – To contribute to the environmental improvement of Great Aycliffe by managing and developing parks, play areas and green spaces.

6.0 Staffing Implications

6.1 The Town Clerk is leading on the Sports Complex Solar Panels project with support from the Works and Environment Manager and Sports Complex Manager.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 There is a total budget provision of £188,450 set aside in the 2026/27 Capital Programme Budget for the Sports Complex Solar Panel project.

7.2 A breakdown of this budget and spending to date is attached at Appendix 2.

7.3 Whilst this budget does include contingency provision of nearly £16,000 and the cost of the surveys is likely to be around £10,000 less than expected, freeing up a possible saving on the solar panels project budget, it is considered that the cost of the drainage repairs and electrical improvements should be dealt with as a separate issue and that an additional capital budget approval should be agreed for these works.

7.4 This will allow for the contingency budget and survey savings to be retained within the solar panels capital budget, and available to offset any unforeseen costs relating to the installation of the system. If there is a saving on the project budget, this would be returned to capital reserves following the completion of the project.

7.5 The cost of the drainage repairs was quoted at £19,638 by the drainage survey company, but a separate quote has been sought from the Council's regular drainage repair contractor at a cost of £14,647. It is recommended that the work is undertaken by this company. The quote for the work from the survey company is attached at Appendix 1B, while the quote from the Council's regular drainage contractor is attached at Appendix 1C.

7.6 An indicative quote for an electrical survey, design fees and upgrade works for the electrical system in the sports complex plant room has been provided by the surveyors, as summarised in paragraph 3.20 and attached at Appendix 2, and is estimated at £79,500, subject to variation in the region of plus or minus 20%.

7.7 If both the drainage works and electrical improvements are undertaken, a total additional capital budget approval of £94,150 would need to be approved.

8.0 Crime and Disorder Implications

8.1 None.

9.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

9.1 None.

10.0 Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change Implications

10.1 The Council has previously declared a Climate Emergency and agreed to work towards making this Council carbon neutral by 2030 and carbon zero by 2050.

10.2 The installation of a solar panel system at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex will deliver a significant reduction in the Council's carbon footprint and is a key target within the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan.

11.0 Risk Assessment

11.1 It is not considered that the matters contained in this report poses a risk to health and safety of staff or to the financial or public standing of the Council to a degree that a risk assessment should be appended to this report.

12.0 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

12.1 Is any personal or sensitive data required for this proposal which may have any implications for GDPR? **NO**

13.0 Recommendations

13.1 It is recommended that Members:-

i) Receive the report.
ii) Consider the essential drainage repair works and electrical improvement works to the sports complex plant room as identified and recommended by the surveyors.
iii) Consider whether these remedial works should go ahead.
iv) If so, agree an additional capital budget approval of £94,150 to meet the cost of these works.

Town Clerk