

Planning Statement

Old Inn House, Redhill, Sandon, Buntingford, SG9 0TH

September 2024

Contents

1.0 Introduction..... 2

2.0 The Site and Surrounding Area..... 3

3.0 The Proposals..... 5

4.0 Planning Policy..... 6

5.0 Planning Assessment..... 8

6.0 Conclusion 11

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This planning statement has been prepared by G2 on behalf of Mr Jules Davidoff to support a full planning application for installation of 30 ground mounted solar panels at Old Inn House, Redhill, Sandon, Buntingford, SG9 0TH.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Planning Statement is to explain the planning proposals, along with the supporting statements and their findings to assist officers, members of the public and other stakeholders in the determination of the planning application having regard to adopted national and local planning policy.
- 1.3 This Planning Statement has been prepared in conjunction with a number of supporting plans that accompany and inform the planning application. These documents ensure that the application accords with national and local validation requirements,.
- 1.4 The application is accompanied by the following documents:
 - 1512_G2_P001 - Site Location Plan
 - 1512_G2_P002 - Proposed Solar Layout Plan
 - 1512_G2_P003 - Proposed Solar Panel Elevations
 - Solar Panel Quote
 - Biodiversity Gain Information prepared by Logika Group

2.0 The Site and Surrounding Area

- 2.1 The site is located within Buntingford and the administrative boundary of North Hertfordshire District Council, who are the relevant Local Planning Authority (LPA).
- 2.2 Old Inn House is located in Redhill, Sandon, Buntingford, SG9 0TH and sits within the rural village of Sandon. The site comprises a rectangular piece of disused amenity green space, associated with the property at Old Inn House. The site formerly comprised agricultural land and has a downwards sloping topography to the north-west of the site.
- 2.3 The site has a dense border of vegetation on the western and northern perimeter. Immediately to the north of the site, beyond the vegetation, is a barn and stables associated with the subject dwelling and adjacent menage. Old Inn House is approximately 100m from the site off Cat Ditch Road and the site serves as ancillary living space to the rear of the dwelling. Immediately to the east of the site is a menage, also owned by the applicant. To the south of the site is more disused amenity green space.
- 2.4 The surrounding area is characterised by its rural setting, featuring a mix of traditional cottages and modern houses amidst agricultural fields and woodlands. The site is accessible via local roads connecting to the A507, facilitating access to nearby towns such as Buntingford and Baldock.
- 2.5 There is Grade II listed building (Bridge House) located approximately 120m to the north of the site.
- 2.6 The application site is situated within the Rural Area as per the adopted Local Plan Proposals Maps.

Planning History

- 2.7 Immediately to the east of the site, planning permission was granted on 12th November 2009 for a 'change of use of paddock to menage, involving the construction of all-weather riding arena with associated fencing. Replacement stable block and storage barn' (Reference: 09/01560/1).

Pre-Application Feedback

- 2.8 Pre-Application feedback was obtained from North Herts District Council on 29th July 2024 (Reference: 24/01436/PRE). A summary of the pre-application feedback obtained is detailed below:
 - The proposed development is acceptable in principle. The scheme is a form of renewable energy development that is wholly supported within the NPPF and Policy NE12 of the Local Plan. It is acknowledged that the proposal does not conform with any of the criteria set out in Policy CGB1 of the Local Plan; however, in my view the considered compliance with National policy and the sustainable nature of development outweigh this conflict, as long as the impacts of the proposal are, or can be made, acceptable.

- It is considered that the layout of the panels as submitted would appear acceptable in design terms.
- It may be appropriate to incorporate additional landscaping on the southern and eastern boundaries to help mitigate this potential impact, which could also go some way to providing the required BNG.
- This proposal is unlikely to result in any impact to this designated heritage asset.
- It is very unlikely that the proposal will result in any material harm to the reasonable living conditions and amenities of neighbouring dwellings, given the isolated nature of the site.
- Consideration of the sites wider perception and possible glare should be included into any submission.
- Details of battery storage should be provided with any submission.
- A 10% Biodiversity Net Gain should be included with any submission.

3.0 The Proposals

- 3.1 The proposals comprise the installation of 30 ground mounted solar panels, forming 5 rows of 6, within the applicant's amenity space to improve the energy efficiency of their home.
- 3.2 The panels are proposed south facing to maximise the solar gain. Each solar panel will be 1134 x 1762mm in scale. The total area for the solar panels will be 102m². The solar panels are black in colour.
- 3.3 A wooden fence is proposed around the perimeter of the area of solar panels to ensure they are separated from the adjacent menage.
- 3.4 The applicant has contacted a number of solar panel providers, who have provided site specific analysis regarding the performance of solar development at the site and due to the confirmed financial and sustainability benefits, the applicant wishes to implement 30 ground mounted solar panels. A quote provided by Ryan Theed accompanies this application and details the benefits of implementing the solar panels. This is also the quote the applicant wishes to pursue.
- 3.5 The proposed solar panel system by Ryan Theed comprises 30 Trina Vertex S 415W All Black Mono solar panels to collect sunlight and turn it into DC electricity. The panels will be connected to a 1 FOX ESS Hybrid Inverter (10.5) inverter, which converts the DC electricity into mains (AC) electricity. A Mira HV25 battery storage system will also be installed in the barn to the north of the site to store excess energy from sunny days, so that the applicant can use generated electricity at night too. Battery storage systems increase the proportion of electricity generated by a solar PV array that is consumed in the property rather than exported to the grid. This leads to financial savings and sustainability benefits, as it replaces expensive imported electricity (at 30p per kWh) with free electricity generated by the solar panels. The new PV system will supply the property with clean, green electricity and in sunny periods some will also be exported back to the grid.
- 3.6 It is anticipated that the installation of the solar panels will provide 9,588 kWh per year, which will predominantly be used to power the subject dwelling.

4.0 Planning Policy

- 4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that all applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2 This section sets out the development plan policies that are most relevant to the consideration of this planning application identifies any other relevant material considerations. The local and national planning policies are considered in greater detail in Section 5 – Planning Assessment to provide an analysis of the policies in relation to the proposed scheme.

The Adopted Local Plan

- 4.3 The Local Plan for NHDC comprises the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 and associated Proposals Maps. This was adopted on 8th November 2022. The site lies within the rural area within the plan.
- 4.4 The policies which are considered relevant to the proposals are as follows:
- D1 – Sustainable Design
 - D3 – Protecting Living Conditions
 - SP5 – Countryside and Green Belt
 - CGB1 – Rural areas beyond the Green Belt
 - NE12 – Renewable and low carbon energy development

Material Considerations

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.5 National planning policy and guidance from the Government is provided by the NPPF, most recently amended in 2023, and is a material consideration for decision-making. The emphasis is upon ensuring that sustainable development is brought forward and delivered. Section Two of the NPPF confirms that to achieve sustainable development, the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These objectives (economic, social and environmental) should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of Plans and the application of the policies in the Framework to decision making.
- 4.6 The following paragraphs of the NPPF are also considered to be of relevance:
- 4.7 Paragraph 163 of the NPPF states:
- "When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:*

- a) *not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to significant cutting greenhouse gas emissions;*
- b) *approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas; and*
- c) *in the case of applications for the repowering and life-extension of existing renewable sites, give significant weight to the benefits of utilising an established site, and approve the proposal if its impacts are or can be made acceptable."*

4.8 Paragraph 164 of the NPPF states:

"In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic (including through installation of heat pumps and solar panels where these do not already benefit from permitted development rights). Where the proposals would affect conservation areas, listed buildings or other relevant designated heritage assets, local planning authorities should also apply the policies set out in chapter 16 of this Framework".

4.9 Paragraph 180 of the NPPF states:

"Planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;"*

5.0 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

- 5.1 The proposal for a renewable energy project, such as solar development, is strongly supported by Paragraph 163 and 164 of the NPPF, which aligns with the Government's commitment to a low-carbon future. This includes recognising that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to significantly cutting greenhouse gas emissions and giving 'significant weight' to the installation of solar panels, where permitted development rights do not exist. As the proposals comprise ground mounted solar panels there are no permitted development rights and thus planning permission is required. Significant weight should therefore be attributed towards the proposals which should be recognised for the importance it will have in providing sustainable energy to the associated dwelling and grid.
- 5.2 Policy NE12 of the adopted Local Plan states that proposals for solar farms on the best and most versatile agricultural land will be assessed in line with national policy. Proposals for other renewable and low carbon energy development which would contribute towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions will be permitted subject to an assessment of the impacts upon:
- i. Landscape quality, landscape character and visual amenity, including consideration of cumulative impacts of development;*
 - ii. Environmental assets;*
 - iii. The historic environment, including the impact on the setting of historic assets;*
 - iv. The transport network;*
 - v. Air quality;*
 - vi. Aviation interests; and*
 - vii. The amenity of residents. In assessing renewable and low carbon energy proposals against the above criteria the Council will give significant weight to their local and wider benefits, particularly the potential to reduce greenhouse gas and other harmful emissions, and the social benefits of community owned schemes where this is relevant.*
- 5.3 An assessment of this criteria is detailed in the sections below.
- 5.4 The application site is located in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt. According to Policy CGB1 of the Local Plan, development in these areas is permitted only if it meets specific criteria outlined in the policy. In this case, the proposal does not meet any of those criteria, making it contrary to this policy.
- 5.5 Despite the proposal's non-compliance with Policy CGB1, it is considered that the development is acceptable in principle. The scheme is a renewable energy development strongly supported by both the NPPF and Policy NE12 of the Local Plan. It is considered that the alignment with national policy and the significant weight attributed to this, plus the sustainable nature of the project, outweighs the policy conflict. This view was also supported by officer through the pre-application enquiry undertaken.

Design

- 5.6 In accordance with Policy D1, the proposed solar panels are of a design which is necessary for their purpose and as a result there is limited flexibility in their appearance. The proposed panels are black, moderate in scale and ground mounted. They will be formed in 5 rows of 6 and accommodate a small area, which will be fenced off for security purposes and to ensure separation with the adjacent ménage. Overall, the design of the proposals has been carefully considered to ensure limited harm is generated to the character of the area, countryside and any nearby residents.

Impact on the landscape and countryside

- 5.7 Paragraph 180 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should recognise the intrinsic value and beauty of the countryside.
- 5.8 The proposals comprise the installation of 30 ground mounted solar panels totalling a development area of 102m². The area of land where these panels are proposed has been identified by the applicant and provider as appropriate for this type of development and has been carefully sited to minimise any views from nearby dwellings, listed buildings and public viewpoints. The site is well screened by dense hedgerow to the west and north of the site blocking any views of the proposed development off Cat Ditch Road, which is the nearest road comprising public viewpoints and houses. The site is isolated and there are no public areas where the site can be viewed. As a result, the site provides no contribution to the value and beauty of the countryside and therefore a solar development in this location would generate no harm to it.
- 5.9 It is considered that this area of land is suitable for this type of development, as it should not result in any significant harm to the character and appearance of the countryside or landscape and therefore the proposals are compliant with Paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

Environmental Impacts

- 5.10 The site is not within a designated environmental area and the proposal does not harm any trees or hedgerow. The application site comprises former agricultural land which currently serves as disused amenity green space to Old Inn House but is separated from the main curtilage. The site is of low biodiversity value.
- 5.11 Due the sites characteristics and the small scale of the proposals, they would not impact drainage or biodiversity on the site. Additionally, the proposal would be a temporary structure (albeit with a long lifespan) to ensure minimal environmental impact and to allow for easy decommissioning if no longer needed.
- 5.12 A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment accompanies this planning application, which shows that a 13.83% gain is achievable through re-seeding the paddock and planting two native trees either on the site or in adjacent fields/field boundaries.

Impact on nearby heritage assets

- 5.13 Although there is a Grade II listed building situated to the north of the site, it is considered that there is sufficient distance and interference for the proposals to have no impact on this heritage asset. The listed building is 130m from the site and there is a several buildings, trees, hedgerows and fencing, which separate them.

Air quality impacts

- 5.14 The proposals would not affect air quality.

Aviation impacts

- 5.15 The proposals would not affect aviation interests.

Impact on the amenity of residents

- 5.16 The proposal would offer benefits to the residents of Old Inn House while ensuring it does not adversely affect nearby residents in terms of noise, pollution, overshadowing, loss of privacy, or visual appeal. The site is separated from any nearby residents, beyond the rear garden areas of properties off Cat Ditch Road, which are the nearest residential properties. The proposals will not be viewable from any residential properties besides the applicants. Therefore, the amenity of neighbouring occupiers would not be adversely impacted by this proposed development.
- 5.17 The proposals will not initiate any glare which would impact any nearby residents due to the containment of the site by vegetation and the distance to any nearby dwellings. In accordance with Policy D3 the proposals would protect living conditions of any nearby residents.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The statement supports a full planning application for the installation of 30 ground mounted solar panels at Old Inn House, Redhill, Sandon, Buntingford, SG9 0TH.
- 6.2 The NPPF and Policy NE12 of the adopted Local Plan emphasise the importance of recognising the significant contribution even small-scale renewable and low carbon projects make to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, national policy states that significant weight should be attributed towards domestic solar developments and approval should be granted if the impacts are acceptable or can be appropriately mitigated. Therefore, as highlighted within this letter, the proposed development will have no impacts on the countryside, environment, heritage assets, air quality, aviation and neighbouring residents. The scheme is also of an appropriate design relative to its use.
- 6.3 Although the proposal does not entirely comply with Policy CGB1 of the Local Plan, given the sites designation as Rural Area, its contribution to local emissions reduction and its minimal impact on any key considerations, the proposals are considered to outweigh any conflict with this policy. Overall, the proposed development is considered acceptable and complies with the NPPF, as well as Policy NE12 the adopted Local Plan.