OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00683/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Retrospective application for the installation of 48 ground-mounted solar array

Location: Lower Park Farm Agden Green Stonely

Applicant: Mr Michael Lyons

Grid Ref: 511841 266071

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The dwelling is within the countryside to the south east of the settlement of Stonely, and east of Kimbolton.

The site lies within a rectangular shaped paddock located east of an existing barn, The wider site comprises a detached dwelling and associated garden, a barn, and paddock land. The wider site is enclosed by hedgerow and trees on all boundaries, with a gate providing access to the main house and the barn.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

The application is for the retrospective installation of 10 Kw solar panel array at the northern boundary of the property.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (12th December 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)
LP5: Flood Risk

LP10: The Countryside
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP31 Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows
LP35:Renewable and low carbon energy
Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING HISTORY

7901584FUL for ALTERATIONS AND EXTENSION
THE POPLARS AGDEN RISE STONELY,
GRANTED dated 30.10.1979

00/02089/FUL for Erection of building for garage/garden storage use,
GRANTED dated 23.01.2001

02/00239/FUL for Erection of conservatory,
GRANTED dated 27.02.2002

24/00616/FUL for New access to serve the existing residential property,
GRANTED dated 16.09.2024

25/00684/FUL for Conversion of existing barn to dwelling.,
PENDING

CONSULTATIONS
UK Power Network: Informative about overhead lines
Archaeology: No comments
Environmental Health: No objections
Highways: the site of the solar array is well shielded by a combination of the existing vegetation and the barn, so only glimpsed views of the solar array are available from the site entrance when travelling along Kimbolton Road. The site is not visible from Agden Green Road to the north due to a thick tree belt along the road frontage. Based on the information submitted, from the perspective of the Local Highway Authority the proposed development is acceptable
Tree officer: There should be no impact on the trees either now or in the future.

REPRESENTATIONS

No objections received at time of determination.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:
- Principle
- Design and Visual Amenity
- Residential amenity
- Flood risk.
- Highways
- Ecology

* Principle

The site lies in the open countryside. The Section 14 of the NPPF identifies that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

The retrospective application is for a solar array to provide an affordable renewable energy source for the applicant's home. The energy generated will provide general electricity usage associated with the house, with the intention of future proofing the residence and could enable vehicle charging units to be installed. The solar array has been designed to generate the daily energy requirement of the residential property on the most overcast day in the middle of winter.

Paragraph 168 states "When determining planning applications for renewable or 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 cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable".

Local Plan Policy LP10 states that development will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies in the plan. Such a specific opportunity includes those set out in Policy LP35 of the Local Plan to 2036.

Policy LP10 goes on to state that all development in the countryside must:
* seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of a higher agricultural value;
* recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and
* not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 specifically supports renewable and low carbon energy under policy LP35. This policy is intended to encourage appropriate schemes whilst ensuring that the risks of adverse impacts are properly addressed as assessed below.

The principle of the proposed development is therefore considered to be appropriate having regard to the policies above.

*Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Countryside - Design and Visual Amenity

Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 state that developments should respond positively to their context, draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings and contribute positively to the area's character and identity.

The application site lies within an area that is characterised by agricultural fields and sporadic agricultural buildings, well screened on a sloping landscape. The visibility of the panels from wider vantage points will be very limited given the low level height of the panels and the distance between the site and public vantage points. The visual impact of the PV's panels is minimal and considered to respond positively to its wider context.

Overall, the proposal is considered to respond positively to its context within the surrounding countryside and contributes positively to the areas character and identity. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with Policies LP11 and LP12 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and the NPPF (2019) in this regard.

*Residential Amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

The dwelling sits within a significant plot, with the solar panels located well within the site. The boundary of the nearest dwelling to the application site is over 40m from the solar panels and therefore there will be no impact on the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

The proposal, therefore, accords with LP14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (2019) in this regard.

*Flood Risk

National guidance and Policy LP5 of the Local Plan to 2036 seek to steer new developments to areas at lowest risk of flooding and advises this should be done through application of the Sequential Test, and if appropriate the Exceptions Test.

It is noted that site is flood zone 1. Therefore, due to the nature and location of the solar panels, it was not considered necessary to request a flood risk assessment in this instance. It is accepted that the development would not have an adverse impact on flood risk in the locality and is acceptable. As such, the development is considered compliant with LP5 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and the NPPF in this regard.

*Highways

Policy LP17 of the Local Plan seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates access for emergency vehicles and service vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles. Harm to highway safety should not arise from development.

The proposal is well screened from the highway and will not cause glare to traffic.

*Ecology

The NPPF (2024) states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type, and location of development.

Policy LP31 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that the potential for adverse impacts on trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows has been investigated and that a proposal will only be supported where it seeks to conserve and enhance any existing tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of value that would be affected by the proposed development.

The application is supported by a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment which concluded that a habitat uplift of 13.35% can be achieved through the retained modified grassland being sown with a seed mix and will pass Defra BNG condition criteria A, B, C and G, achieving a condition score of Moderate. Therefore, the proposal complies with LP 30.

No trees are harmed by the proposal.

*Conclusion
The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as it:

* Is of an appropriate scale and design;
* Would not have a harmful impact upon the countryside;
* Would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the amenity of neighbours;
* Would not adversely affect flood risk or highways in the locality.

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
Enquiries about this report to **Hannah Hodges**