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SOLAR PV INSTALLATION AT THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE, MILL STREET, HOUGHTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT 26.492.01 - 499 B - OCTOBER 2026



Fig.1: View of The Old School House from the garden of the property, showing the two upper and lower south facing roof planes toward the right where the solar PV panels are intended to sit.

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INTRODUCTION

This Design & Access Statement supports the Listed Building Consent Application to install Solar Photovoltaic panels on two of the south facing roof slopes of The Old School House, PE28 2AZ, along with the placement of necessary infrastructure, including battery storage and electrical connections.

1.1 SUPPORTING MATERIAL

This Design and Access Statement is to be read in conjunction with the existing survey drawings and the drawings of the proposed works, along with the Heritage Statement (26.492.01 498) which provides historical context. Also submitted are the Solar proposal document from South East Solar and Electrical Ltd. dated Mar 27/07/26 which provides details on solar panel placement and products, and the solar panel information sheet details the specification information and fixing methods of the proposed PV panels.



Fig.2 Satellite view of the Old School House Site with the boundary highlighted in red. Showing proximity of the site with the Grade II listed Houghton Mill and its weir at the bottom (www.google.com).*

ASSESSMENT

2.1 USE OF BUILDING

The Old School House is a detached domestic Grade II listed property, used as a single residence within a spacious garden.

2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Please see Heritage Statement (26.492.01 498 rev. A) for Historical Context.

2.3 PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The Old School House is a property which sits at the end of Mill Street on the southern edge of Houghton village adjacent to Houghton Mill which is a Garden II* listed National Trust owned property. The site is triangular with one edge alongside Mill Street and the other alongside the driveway to the Houghton Mill car park. The site is bounded by a tall timber fence and thick hedges and some small trees. The house sits

at the far end (north) of the property from the boundary adjacent to the Houghton Mill property and faces Mill Street down which both are accessed and which has other domestic properties of mostly a historic nature. The upper part of the Old School House is partly visible from the property of Houghton Mill.

2.4 MATERIALS & CHARACTER



Fig.3: View of the Old School House from the end of Mill Street. The proposals do not noticeably affect the fabric visible from the road.

The house has a gault brick wall finish with slate roofs including more modern extensions. The windows and bargeboards facing Mill Street have a more detailed level of finish, but the details are modernised and plainer when facing the garden.

2.5 CONDITION

The Old School House is a Victorian construction with 21st Century extensions and alterations of which both are generally in very good condition and is fully inhabited.

2.6 PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework August 2026

The proposals should consider in particular, chapters:

5. Mitigation of Climate Change

20. Conserving and enhancing the Historic Environment.

See Heritage Statement (26.492.01- 498 A) for list of proposed alterations to the Historic fabric with justifications setting any harm against the benefits.

Climate Crisis

Huntingdonshire District Council recognised the climate crisis and Ecological Emergency in Huntingdonshire in their full council meeting on Wednesday 22nd February 2023 and produced the Climate Strategy which sets out a target of achieving net zero carbon by 2040 at the latest. This document notes the priority action to *"Support the sharing of guidance and advice to residents ... on measures they can take to .... install renewables."*

See Evaluation section below for details on how the proposal seek to respond to each relevant policy from the NPPF.

The submitted information on the proposals has been supplied by South-East Solar and Electrical Ltd. who are part of the Switch Together Scheme of which Cambridgeshire County Council area is associated.

INVOLVEMENT

3.1 PLANNING HISTORY & CONTEXT

Planning and listed Building consent ref: 0801894FUL/ 0801936LBC. A Planning and listed building consent application for Replacement of existing conservatory with sunroom, erection of garage/barn and provision of new access and entrance gates was approved on 08/09/2008 but these works do not seem to have been carried out.

Planning and listed Building consent ref: 1000815FUL/1000816LBC. A Planning and listed building consent application for Erection of rear extension and alterations to dwelling was refused consent on 29/07/2010 despite recommendation for approval from the Houghton and Wyton Parish Council.

Planning and listed Building consent ref: 1001928FUL/. A Planning and listed building consent application for Erection of rear extension and alterations to dwelling was approved on 14/01/2011.

3.2 PLANNING CONTEXT

The connection to the grid should be considered as providing a public benefit and weight should be given to what is section W3 of the National Planning Policy Framework, without excessive demands for evidence of the requirement for such an installation:

W3: Renewable and low carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure

1. In considering proposals for renewable and low-carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure, substantial weight should be given to:

   c) The contribution that small-scale and community-led renewable and low carbon energy projects can make to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, along with their associated economic and social benefits.

2. *Applicants should not be required to demonstrate the need for renewable or low carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure. Where proposals for this form of development come forward outside areas which have been identified as suitable for them in the development plan, their acceptability should be assessed against the national*

decision-making policies in this Framework, taken as a whole.

Any basis on which the solar panel array was consented referring to these reasonings for The Old School House in Houghton and the public benefit from the low carbon electricity added to the grid would outweigh the reversible addition of the solar panels from modern roof slopes which sit a reasonable distance way from the listed mill building which they face and facing away from the body of the conservation area so has minimal detriment to the context of either of these assets. Therefore, it can be argued the proposal is in accordance with NPPF as the public benefit of low carbon energy creation on site outweighs the limited harm the proposal has on the adjacent heritage assets.

The recognition by communities that there is a climate emergency and that radical measures need to be taken to achieve net zero by 2050 is nationwide, though is 10 years faster in Huntingdonshire District. Taking account of this, for example in 2023 Permission was also granted for photovoltaic panels to be fitted on the roof of Grade I listed York Minster, on a roof partly visible in famous views such as from the city walls and Clifford's tower. However despite being visible, in this context the panels are recessive and don't overly distract from the view and the significance of the visible assets in a way that exceeds the public benefit from the low carbon energy creation.

3.3 SOLAR SYSTEM INFORMATION

See the submitted Solar PV System information (provided by South-East Electrical & Renewables Ltd. who have designed the proposal for the overall system), for technical details regarding the proposed Panel product and fixing and 'on-roof' installation system to be used, which enables the array to be reversible, with minimal physical affect to the modern slate roof covering being obscured.



Fig.4: View from the Old School House garden toward Houghton Mill.

EVALUATION

4.1 RESPONSE TO RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

NPPF Chapter 5 Policy CC2 - Mitigation of Climate Change .2: '*Substantial weight should be given to the benefits of improving the energy efficiency of existing buildings and/or drawing energy from …. renewable and low carbon sources (including through the installation of … solar panels where these do not already benefit from permitted development rights) …'*

By utilising the south facing roof of the house to install solar panels to use a renewable resource to create electricity, the potential of the site is used to achieve reduction in energy use. The roofs are not visible from the Mill Street direction and the public area of the Conservation area so do not adversely affect the character of the immediate context.

NPPF Chapter 20 Policy HE6 - Proposals affecting designated heritage assets .4: '*Where a development proposal would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset the effect on the asset and its significance should be weighed against any public benefits resulting from the proposal. Important public benefits can include … enabling energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures to be employed'*

The installation proposals have taken into account the high significance and character of the Grade II listed Old School House itself and the setting of the Grade II* listed Houghton Mill and by seeking to minimally affect only less significant fabric and all necessary installations have been balanced with the requirement to utilise the resources available on site to help mitigate the climate crisis, and looking to maintain the original qualities of the building's features where it is important to do so, to avoid harming the qualities of the conservation area and setting of adjacent listed buildings.

The '*much photographed and painted view across the mill pond to Houghton Mill set against a backdrop of hedgerows, trees and meadows'* as described in the Huntingdonshire District Council Houghton & Wyton Conservation Area Appraisal in their Key views and vistas section on page 25, does not encompass the direction towards the Old School House and so the significance of the historic asset and its context won't be significantly affected.

DESIGN

5.1 SOLAR SYSTEM PROPOSAL

Solar Photovoltaic panel arrays

The two arrays of solar panels are proposed to be installed on the two south facing slope to the rear of the house out of view from Mill Street. They are to be installed over the existing slate roof coverings to retain the slates and be as reversible as much as possible. They will both sit on modern roofs covering modern extensions so will not physically any historic fabric and ill have minimal visual effect on the more architectural character of the original front of the house facing Mill Street. The proposals have been reduced to the minimal extent feasible as the roof visible from the Street was not thought to be an appropriate location for panels given the sensitive street context. The Upper roof will house 2 panels and the single storey roof will house 3 panels meaning a total of 5 panels are proposed on the overall house. Though the upper roof panels and part of the lower roof panels will be visible from next to the Mill, there is sufficient distance between the points that the panels will not be adversely affect the visual amenity of the mill and foreground objects such as the Mill house, the signpost and fences, trees and hedges at the

boundary with the Old School House will catch the eye more, whilst the panels will not stand out significantly over the grey slate roof they will sit on.



Fig.5: View from the rear of the Old School House at first floor showing the garden and the heavily vegetated boundary which obscures much sightline from the property of Houghton Mill which is far right. Trees and the National Trust café obscure any view from toward the river.

Solar system cables and Battery system

The electrical cable from the PV panel arrays will follow a discrete route down the side of the property making use of the house's shifts in wall plane to find the most discrete corner to run and tucked against the underside of the substantial eaves, as indicatively shown on the submitted drawings. Due to the constricted nature of the loft spaces this route was thought the most appropriate and will involve minimal visual impact to the property.

A Battery storage system along with the invertor will be place under an existing climbing plant on the side elevation and a fence will obscure the sight of this from the road making this the most inconspicuous spot.

The Solar bidirectional meter that is associated with the system will be installed in the Cloakroom cupboard which is a Utilitarian space where the existing electricity meter is and will not damage any internal features or character.

Electric vehicle charger
To make best use of the electricity made at source, an electric vehicle charger is proposed at the front of tr house, adjacent to the driveway, which though at the front is low down amongst vegetation and shielded from view by hedges and round the corner from the architecturally significant porch and entrance.

See Heritage Statement ref 26.492.01 498 A for list of works affecting the Historic fabric.
Alternative Locations
The only other viable southern facing roofs of the property are those facing Mill Street and due to the proximity and visibility of this to other heritage assets and publicly accessible within the Conservation area it was thought these were not appropriate locations for a solar panel array. Though the garden is comparatively large it is a fully used and carefully managed garden with a focus on a wildlife friendly planting and any ground based panels would affect the contribution the garden has to the biodiversity of the area as well as being close enough to the Listed Old School House so as to adversely affect the setting of the heritage asset, therefore.

Improving the overall energy efficiency of the property

As part of previous alterations to the house, most of the windows in the house are double glazed thereby improving the energy efficiency of the property.
As part of the Solar installation, an EV charger is proposed to utilise the energy created on site to enable powering of electric vehicles.

6.1 ACCESS

Vehicular and pedestrian access to the site or Barn will be unaffected by the proposed works and there will be no change to the area of parking. Bin and bike storage will also be unaffected.

7.1 CONCLUSION

The introduction of renewable source of power on site will help the property contribute to the reduction of energy consumption from non-renewable resources, using the existing roofs best placed to provide the most effective location to maximise electricity production. The panels are to be located on the roofs facing the garden away from the public areas of the conservation area or more architecturally significant elevations of the Old School House listed building, or at a distance away from the nearby National Trust property so as to have reduced visual impact on the setting the that listed building. The panels will only be visible from outside the conservation area in an area dominated by modern agricultural structures and so will not adversely affect the significance of the conservation area or Grade II listed farmhouse setting. The roof of the house extensions where the panels will be sighted are modern and associated infrastructure with the Solar panels will be placed in the most discrete manner and place possible so there will be negligible direct disruption to any significant historic fabric physically or visually. The significance of the heritage assets of The Old School House and nearby listed buildings and surrounding Conservation area will be maintained with minimal compromise helping address the climate change crisis but the installation will nevertheless be reversible. Therefore, it can be concluded that any negligible minimal harm the proposal has on the adjacent heritage assets will be outweighed by the public benefit of low energy creation in the most efficient way the site has to offer. Therefore, to consent to these proposals will be fully in accordance with the priority actions of the Huntingdonshire District Council's Climate Strategy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Other Considerations

Biodiversity

Due to the nature of the proposals a biodiversity survey and report is not thought to be warranted. The garden of the house has wildlife features such as a small pond, insect hotels and swathes of grass left to grow long with unmown grasses with pollinator friendly planting in places and the Solar PV installation will not adversely affect this situation but through creation of energy on site by means other than fossil fuels will enhance the overall contribution the site makes to two of the targets of shifting to renewables and increasing biodiversity set out in the Huntingdonshire District Council's Climate Strategy.

Heritage statement

The historic context of the property and the effects of the proposals on the historic fabric are referred to in the Heritage Statement (260.492.01- 498 A**).**

Photographs

Relevant photographs have been included within the Design and Access Statement and the Heritage Statement.