CASE OFFICER'S REPORT

Application Number: PL/2023/06758

Address: ASH HILL COTTAGE, ASH HILL COMMON, SHERFIELD ENGLISH, ROMSEY, SO51 6FU

Proposal: The installation of 24 ground solar panels within the grounds (field) of the property

Date of Inspection:
N/A
Consultation Expiry:
07/09/23
Press Advert: N/A

POLICIES
National Planning Policy Framework and the NPPG

National Planning Policy Framework
Section 2 Achieving Sustainable Development Section 12
Achieving Well Designed Places
Section 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Wiltshire Core Strategy
Core Policy 1 Settlement Strategy Core Policy 2
Delivery Strategy
Core Policy 42 Standalone Renewable Energy Installations Core Policy
50 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
Core Policy 51 Landscape
Core Policy 57 Ensuring high quality design and place shaping CP58
Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment
Core Policy 61 Transport and development

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Section 72

REPRESENTATIONS :

Whiteparish Parish Council – No comment.

Ecology – No objection, subject to conditions

Third Party Comments **–** None received.

Assessment

- Principle of development including design and scale;
- Impacts on the character of the area including amenity and the wider landscape;
- Impact upon the setting of Nearby Heritage Assets
- Ecological Impact;
- Impact on neighbouring amenity
- Highways Safety

Scale, design and impact on the character and appearance of the area and impact upon nearby Heritage Assets

The site comprises of a parcel of land associated with Ash Hill Cottage, with is a detached residential property set within a substantial sized plot. The application seeks approval to install

24 ground mounted solar array panels for the domestic use by Ash Hill Cottage.

Core Policy CP42 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) states:

Proposals for standalone renewable energy schemes will be supported subject to satisfactory resolution of all site specific constraints. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate how impacts on the following factors have been satisfactorily assessed, including any cumulative effects, and taken into account:

i. The landscape, particularly in and around AONBs
ii. The Western Wiltshire Green Belt
iii. The New Forest National Park
iv. Biodiversity
v. The historic environment including the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and its setting
vi. Use of the local transport network
vii. Residential amenity including noise, odour, visual amenity and safety and;
viii. Best and most versatile agricultural land

Applicants will not be required to justify the overall need for renewable energy development either in a national or local context.

Core Policy 57 of the WCS requires there to be a high standard of design is required in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complimentary to the locality.

The panels would be positioned low level within the existing field to the East of the main dwellinghouse and the scale and design are not considered to be excessive to provide sufficient power to the main house. Such sustainable energy is sought after and is deemed a positive addition, subject to the wider landscape impact.

Core Policy 57 requires that development should ensure the impact on the amenities of existing occupants is acceptable, and ensuring that appropriate levels of amenity are achievable within the development itself, and the NPPF (paragraph 130f) states that planning decisions should ‘create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.’

Core Policy 51 of the WCS states that development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures.

It is noted that a public footpath (WHIT28) runs along the south boundary of the site, however, it is considered that with low level panels and the fact that the footpath tapers off at an angle away from the

boundary of the site any views would be minimal.

In terms of the impact upon the wider landscape the panels would be seen in the context of the existing built form of the main dwellinghouse and due to the low-level nature of the panels the impact upon the surrounding landscape would be in the opinion of the case officer, relatively minor with the solar array not overly visible in the landscape.

Furthermore, it is noted that the neighbouring property to the South East, known as Ash Hill House is Grade II listed. This property is well stepped back from the application site and due to the nature of the proposal it is not considered to result in any additions which would be overbearing upon the Heritage Asset or its setting and the intervisibility would be minimal.

Therefore, the overall scale of the proposal are considered to be acceptable and would not result in any negative visual impact upon the wider landscape character or pose any harm to the setting of a nearby Heritage Asset, which would warrant a refusal. Therefore, the proposals are considered to comply with Core Policies 51, 57 & 58.

Impact upon Residential Amenities

Policy CP57 also states:

vii. Having regard to the compatibility of adjoining buildings and uses, the impact on the amenities of existing occupants, and ensuring that appropriate levels of amenity are achievable within the development itself, including the consideration of privacy, overshadowing; vibration; and pollution (such as light intrusion, noise, smoke, fumes, effluent, waste or litter)

Due to the location of the of the solar arrays in relation to neighbouring properties and its low-level nature the proposal does not raise any concerns in regard to impact upon any residential amenities.

Therefore, the proposal is considered to comply with Core Policy 57 in preserving residential amenities of any neighbouring properties.

Ecology

WCS policy CP50 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) and the NPPF requires the Local Planning Authority to ensure protection of important habitats and species in relation to development and seeks enhancement for the benefit of biodiversity through the planning system.

The Councils Ecologist provided the following comments:

Wiltshire Council considers land under solar arrays to be recorded as ‘modified grassland’ of low distinctiveness due to potential issues with changes/environmental conditions/shading and management. This is in line with advice Wiltshire Council has received from Natural England. We recognise that it may be possible to create habitat of greater biodiversity value beneath panels, however as this is still a relatively young industry supporting evidence is not yet

There is no anticipated significant net loss in biodiversity since the size of the array is relatively small and ecology report confirms the grassland to be impacted already has low
The submission of the ecology report to this planning application is welcome. The report confirms the grassland area to be impacted by the proposed works is of low distinctiveness and no evidence of protected species or habitat likely to support them were recorded in the vicinity of the proposed array. The siting and design of the panels above ground and away from the grassland of higher species diversity and a suitable distance from the hedgerow is a great example of design to avoid/minimise ecological impacts and is supported.
Since this is a householder development of a relatively small scale, the requirements detailed in Wiltshire Council’s Solar Farm PV advice note (SolarPVFarmEcologyAdviceNoteJuly2021.pdf (wiltshire.gov.uk) is considered to be too onerous for this application.

No objection, subject to conditions.

Highways

The Councils Highways Officer provided the following comments:

I am satisfied that the vehicle movements and size of vehicles associated with the delivery of materials for the solar array will not have a significant detrimental impact on highway safety.

Conclusion:

On balance, the proposal is considered to be acceptable and would not result in any adverse harm upon the overall character and appearance of the area or pose any detrimental effects upon any residential amenities. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with the NPPF, Core Policy 42, 50, 51, 57, 58, 61 & Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Section 72.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve, subject to conditions.