

30th November 2021

Dear Sir / Madam,

21-17: Free-standing PV Panels on associated land of Wood Farm, Red Road, Alton

1.0 Description of the Proposals & Analysis

- 1.1 The proposals are associated with the property Wood Farm, accessed via Red Road in Alton. Wood Farm is a detached three storey house (excluding basements) with an integrated Garage block with 2-bedroom Flat above. Wood Farm was rebuilt in 2010 on the site of a former farmhouse, using Hollington stone and a clay tile roof. The building has an overall floor area of circa 600m², making it a large dwelling. As a result, using a sustainable energy source is necessary ethically, practically, and financially. The site is 'Rural' outside any established settlement boundaries in an area of 'Open Countryside' (not greenbelt). The property does not benefit from mains Gas and as result the heating methods available are via electricity or oil.
- 1.2 The proposals look to provide Free-standing Photo Voltaic / Solar Panels (PV) outside of the immediate garden curtilage. This will be in two rows of Panels 20x2m, at 1.4m Height from ground level. The purpose of these PV's will be to provide power to the existing Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP), which are the most sustainable heating method, for the main dwelling.
- 1.3 The existing ASHP require a 9KW Input, the proposed PV's will provide this. They will also be linked to a battery storage system, which will store any excess energy created, to export back to the grid at a rate of 4 pence per KW. The purpose of the proposals is to provide Wood Farm a sustainable energy source and reduce dependence on the existing 50KW Oil Heating system, used when the ASHP's cannot perform efficiently. The purpose is not for profit, and the feed-back tariff is quite irrelevant to the applicant.
- 1.4 The characteristics of this part of Staffordshire is highly rural. Dwellings are infrequent, set within spacious plots with open space surrounding. Buildings are typically medium to large residential properties of eclectic styles. The nearest neighbour is 'Smeltingmill' 142m North, this is a dwelling by the 'Mill Pond' at Dimmingsdale. 'The Ramblers Retreat' Cafe is around 195m to the East. To the South there is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): 'Dimmings Dale & The Ranger'.
- 1.5 The property is in the 'open countryside', surrounded by 'Ancient Woodland' to three sides, with agricultural land to the West (also owned by the applicant). Access to the site comes via an undulating single car access, paved in MOT Type 1. This is circa 1/2 mile in length from Red Road to the application site and this also serves another property. The site has a tall drystone wall to the south and east boundaries, it is elevated high above the neighbouring properties, but the dense woodland boundaries mean it cannot be seen from any long view other than from the West. This is highly beneficial as it provides excellent screening for the proposals. The proposals will sit on the site below the adjacent wall height (5m away). This prevents any impact on the 'Open Countryside'.

- 1.6 Other options for the position of the PV's have been considered, for instance roof mounted PV's could be installed to the roof of the house or the flat; this could be done without the need for planning permission. However, because of the height of the adjacent trees to the south, PV's mounted to the roof of the flat would not yield as great a return. The main house roof also faces east-west, this is not as efficient as a south facing array. Additionally, an area of agricultural land to the West was considered for ground mounted PV's, this was further from the house and too close to the southerly trees, as result this was discounted.
- 1.7 PV's in the proposed location are able to face squarely South, ground mounted frames will be auger driven in situ to ensure minimal disruption to the below ground environment, the overall height of the proposals at 1.4m height, is easily shielded by existing boundary treatments and the proposals are behind the principal elevation, circa 30m to the North.
- 1.8 Pre-application advice established that the siting of the PV's was not within domestic curtilage, a letter by Ms Hannah Hollins of SMDC stated the site was a *"remote far corner of the land which does not have intimacy or enclosure with the dwelling"*.
- 1.9 Paragraphs 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7 demonstrate that the proposals are in the best possible location for freestanding PV's. As this is a "remote corner" using PV's with a 1.4m overall height, with views shielded to at least two sides by dense trees will ensure the "openness of the countryside" is not affected.

2.0 Planning Policy Background & Discussion

- 2.0.1 Section 38(6) of The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material circumstances indicate otherwise.
- 2.0.2 In Staffordshire Moorlands, 'The Local Plan' was adopted on 9th September 2020 and sets out the council's vision and strategy for the district until 2033.
- 2.0.3 National guidance in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) underpin the general strategy for development with which all development plans must be in broad conformity.
- 2.0.4 The following policies are relevant to the proposals, and these will be appraised in the following section of this report:

2.1 Local Plan

2.1.1 The Local Plan sets out how SMDC would like to see the district develop by 2033. Section 5 sets out Spatial Aims and Spatial Objectives.

- Spatial Aim SA1 has the aspiration to create *"distinctive, sustainable, self-supporting settlements"*.
- Spatial Aim SA2 outlines policy should meet *"the needs of our communities."*
- Spatial Objective SO8 looks to *"To promote local distinctiveness by means of good design and the conservation, protection and enhancement of historic, environmental and cultural assets throughout the district."*
- Spatial Objective SO9 looks to *"To conserve and improve the character and distinctiveness of the countryside and its landscape, heritage, biodiversity and geological resources."*

2.1.2 Policy SD1 relates to 'Sustainable Use of Resources'. Policy states the council will support *"development that is located and designed to minimise energy needs and to take advantage of maximised orientation (subject to design and landscape policies) to achieve energy savings in line with Policy SD 3."* Paragraph 7.12 goes on to elaborate on this saying: *"the siting and design of all stand-alone renewables installations requires careful consideration, to protect the natural and built environment, and other amenities, without precluding the supply of any type of renewable energy"*. In essence this policy states that efforts to generate renewable energy should be supported so long as the effect of the proposals does not have wider negative effects.

2.1.3 Policy SD2 relates to 'Renewable/Low-Carbon Energy'. Policy states the council will *"support small- and large-scale standalone renewable or low-carbon energy schemes subject to the following considerations: in the case of solar energy proposals that are not affixed to buildings or structures, applicants will be expected to demonstrate that they have examined whether previously developed land is available before greenfield land. Where agricultural land is proposed, poorer quality land should be utilised before higher quality agricultural land."*

2.1.4 Policy SD3 relates to 'Sustainability Measures in Development'. Policy states *"The Council will support measures designed to improve the sustainability of existing buildings (such as improved thermal insulation, water conservation, or the installation of micro-renewables)."*

2.1.5 Policy DC3 relates to 'Landscape and Settlement Setting' policy states the council will resist proposals which have a *"prominent intrusion into the countryside"*.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF)

2.2.1 Chapter 14 of the NPPF relates to 'Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change':

2.2.2 Paragraph 152 expects local authorities to *"support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure"*.

2.2.3 Paragraph 158 states local authorities should *"recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions"*.

3.1 Conclusion

- 3.2 The proposals will reduce Wood Farm's dependence on non-renewable energy sources; this will make the site more self-sufficient. This accords with Local Plan Spatial Aims SA1 and SA2. By improving the existing building efficiency, Policy SD3 is also met. Although the proposals are only small in scale, they will still have a worthwhile impact by making a large building quite sustainable. This should be supported by SMDC as Paragraph 14 of the NPPF states.
- 3.3 The applicant has carefully considered their options on the site, as is expected by Policy SD2. The proposed location for a small amount of ground mounted Solar Panels is in an inobtrusive area, only 30m north of the dwelling, views are shielded by walls and trees. The alternative options on the building, close to the tall trees to the south of the site were not possible. Options in the agricultural land to the West would not be preferable over the proposal location either. The siting of a small number of PV's, low to the ground, with screening to three sides accords with Policies SD1, SD2 and DC3.
- 3.4 The proposals do not directly or indirectly damage existing ancient woodland. They also have no effect on the nearby SSSI. The proposals will have a minor improvement on air quality locally, this is positive in a sensitive site location.
- 3.5 Going forwards an increase in the cost of Natural Gas will result in more dwellings turning to ASHP powered by electric. The Government is in fact offering Grant Funding for ASHP installations. These units use large amounts of electricity; therefore, methods of sustainable electricity generation will become increasingly popular in Staffordshire, across the UK and worldwide. These measures meet the aims of Chapter 14 of the NPPF.
- 3.6 For the reasons rehearsed above it is respectfully suggested that the application should be recommended for **approval**.

Yours Faithfully,

Bruce Johnson

on behalf of applicant: Mr M Halsey