

Conservation Team Advice

Date: 16th December 2025
Application Ref: SMD/2025/0388
Site Address: New Buildings Farm, Sandon Road, Sharpley Heath
Proposal: Solar farm with ancillary infrastructure, security fence, access, landscaping and designed to allow continued agriculture.

Heritage assets affected:		
Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☐	
Non-Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☒	• Moated Site, Draycott in the Moors (HER ref: MST6540) – Non-Designated Heritage Asset • New Buildings Farm – potential Non-Designated Heritage Asset • Blakelow Farm – potential Non-Designated Heritage Asset

Conservation Advice

Summary of Significance

The proposal would be situated north of Sharpley Heath village and has the potential to affect the setting and significance of potential Non-Designated Heritage Assets including a Moated Site, New Buildings Farm and Blakelow Farm.

The Moated Site is included on the Historic Environment Record (HER ref: MST6540) and recorded as a well-defined earthwork with below ground works, possibly of medieval origins. Moated sites were prominent in the medieval period and consisted of residences surrounded by a moat, often acting as a physical symbol of status of the landowner or designed for practical reasons for drainage, fishponds or barriers to livestock. The significance of the site derives from its above-ground works which are a physical and tangible link to the past, but also have potential evidential value of any below-ground works which would better inform our understanding of the past. With reference to the Council's 'Local Heritage Register' selection criteria, this would meet the criteria as it is a site with visible surviving features and locally uncommon type of monument.

Immediately adjacent to the development site boundary are New Buildings Farm and Blakelow. Both of these farmsteads are visible on c.1901 OS map (Fig.1), however their

layout has been greatly altered and would have lost their historic integrity. Therefore, these would unlikely meet the criteria for selection to include on the Council's Local Heritage Register.



Fig.1 c.1901 OS map [online] (National Library of Scotland)

Assessment and Impact

The proposal would involve the development of a solar farm on open agricultural fields north of Bromley Wood.

The preliminary layout plan (dwg no. 1115 02) illustrates that the proposed panels would not be located over the earthworks recorded on the HER. As noted in the Cultural Heritage Baseline and Impact Assessment document, it is recommended that no groundworks should take place in this parcel of land to preserve the earthworks and potential archaeological remains. From a conservation perspective, we are supportive of this approach as it would remove any direct impacts to the NDHA.

The proposal would, however, still have a negative impact on the immediate setting of the NDHA as the proposed solar panels would have an overtly engineered appearance. Their installation would contrast with and diminish the rural character of the landscape adjacent to the moated site. Given the scale of development and proximity, this would result in a moderate-high level of impact to the NDHA's setting. Nevertheless, the proposal would not result in the loss of historic fabric or integrity of the asset and, on balance, the majority of its significance would be conserved (par.216 of NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework).

Legislation and Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

In determining applications, local authorities should take account of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (par.210).

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining applications and a balanced judgement will be required in regard to the scale of harm or loss of significance of the non-designated heritage asset (par.216).

Local Development Framework

Consideration should also be given to the following documents and local development framework policies:

- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020) – DC2 The Historic Environment

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the proposal would result in a moderate degree of harm to the setting of the Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA). The proposal would not have any direct impact to the heritage asset and would not result in the loss of historic fabric or evidential value. The impact on the setting has the potential to be reversible should the panels be removed in future. On balance, the proposal would not result in the total loss of significance of the NDHA (par.216 of the NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework). In addition, it is recognised that there would likely be public benefits in terms of climate change which may balance or outweigh the heritage harm arising from the proposed development. Therefore, there are no objections to the proposal from a conservation perspective.

For any consent granted, we would suggest that a programme of protecting the area of the moated site in the construction phase is agreed to ensure that construction of the proposed development does not affect or impact the earthworks (HER ref: MST6540).

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