

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2026/0256
Valid 28/05/2026

PLUM TREE COTTAGE
FOXT ROAD
FOXT

INSTALLATION OF SOLAR
PANELS

(FULL - HOUSEHOLDER)

MAIN ISSUES

- Heritage / Design
- Highway Safety

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site consists of a stone bungalow and its curtilage, and was approved under SMD/2016/0729. The site is located on open, countryside land within the Foxt Conservation Area. The neighbouring dwelling at the Malthouse, Foxt Road is located to the South-West of the site. The Fox and Goose public house is located to the North-East of the site. The Foxt Road highway runs adjacent to the Eastern curtilage boundary.

PROPOSAL

The proposed development comprises of the installation of solar panels on the front, East facing roof plane and rear West facing roof plane of the dwelling. The solar PV array would consist of 11 solar panels to be installed on the front elevation of the roof slope, and a further 7 panels to the rear roof elevation. To ensure the installation integrates with the building's aesthetic, high-specification, all-black (monocrystalline) solar panels are proposed. These panels feature black frames and backing sheets.

Notably, the proposed scheme is a revised version of the initially proposed scheme. The revised plans were submitted due to concern raised by the Council's Conservation Officer in relation to the impact of the solar panels on the conservation area.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
SS9 Smaller Villages Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC2 The Historic Environment

T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework

Sections:

- 3 - Decision-making policies
- 5 - Meeting the challenge of climate change
- 14 - Achieving well-designed places
- 15 - Promoting sustainable transport
- 20 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD

Part 5 – Alterations, Extensions and Conversions

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/1981/0089 – Site for three dwellings. Refused.
SMD/1981/0557 – Site for residential development. Refused.
SMD/1985/0645 – Use of building previously approved as holiday flat (SM1303, 22.05.84) for general residential purposes with formation of vehicular access. Refused.
SMD/2016/0729 – Erection of a 3 bedroom bungalow and new vehicular access. Approved.
SMD/2020/0256 – Proposed change of use from agricultural to garden use. Approved.
SMD/2024/0507 - Description of air source heat pump. Approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 17/07/2026
Neighbour consultation period ends: 16/07/2026
Press Advert: 01/07/2026

Public Comments

No public comments have been received.

Town / Parish Comments

The following comments have been received from Ipstones Parish Council:

*Ipstones Parish Council considered the above application at the latest meeting. Following a full discussion Ipstones Parish Council decided to support approval of the application.
Would you please note this decision for your records.*

Conservation Officer

First Comments:

Summary of Significance

Foxt Conservation Area (CA) encompasses the hamlet southeast of Ipstones, which has ancient origins. The boundary encompasses a sporadic and informal arrangement of farmsteads, retention of 17th and 18th century buildings, field enclosures and drystone walls, traditional and vernacular construction of buildings, use of local stone and brick in building's construction, rural context and verdant and wooded character. Plum Tree Cottage is a modern bungalow approved in 2016 set slightly below the road level.

Assessment and Impact

The application seeks to install solar panels to the east (front) elevation of Plum Tree Cottage. The plans show 18 solar panels to be installed, however, the heritage statement references the installation of only 14 solar panels. Clarity should be provided over the accurate number of solar panels to be installed.

The plans shows an irregular installation of solar panels showing a complete upper row with the second row of panels split into two irregular sections. This creates an awkward visual form. Historic England guidance for solar panels in the historic environment requires panels to be installed in a neat and orderly pattern in order to reduce visual impact:

"Exceptions may include buildings whose significance may be less sensitive to the installation of such panels (for example, certain industrial buildings). Steps should be taken to reduce the visual impact of panels in these locations as far as is possible. For example, using black frames, avoiding silvered or reflective panels and avoiding irregular or stepped panel layouts"

The proposed panels would be improved by following this guidance, either by relocating the proposed panels to a less visually intrusive elevation, or by forming a more regular and neat layout of panels.

The solar panel details provided do not specify the appearance of the proposed panels. However, if the case officer is minded to approve a condition should be included to require that panels are black framed in line with Historic England guidance above to reduce their visual impact.

Other matters

Solar plans are present at both The Malthouse Foxt Rd (in the CA), and Stonewalls Foxt Rd (adjacent to the CA). Neither of these existing installations appear to benefit from planning consent.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the proposed solar panels are set in an irregular stepped plan form which creates a cluttered appearance. It is recommended that an improved regular layout of panels is requested in order to reduce the visual impact, alternatively the panels could be relocated to a less prominent roof slope. If the case officer is minded to approve the application an appropriately worded condition should be attached to require panels to have black frames to reduce visual impact.

Final Comments:

Assessment and Impact

Amended plans have been received which show 11 solar panels to be installed on the front elevation of the roof slope, and a further 7 panels to the rear roof elevation. Those to be installed on the front elevation are shown to be in a neat straight line. These alterations have reduced the harm previously identified. However, a degree of harm remains due to the engineered appearance of the solar panels. Policy HE6 (4) of the NPPF states that public benefits such as enabling energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures may be considered public benefits. On this basis, should officers be minded to approve the application the following condition is recommended.

- The proposed solar PV panels hereby permitted shall comprise black panels with black aluminium frames only.

Reason:- To ensure that the external appearance of the development is appropriate to its surroundings and the Conservation Area in accordance with Policy DC 2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 and policies HE5 and HE6 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2026).

Legislation and Policy

Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 72(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that with respect to any buildings or land in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of that area.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2026

HE5: Assessing effects on heritage assets

1. Development proposals affecting heritage assets should be accompanied by an assessment of the significance of the assets affected (including any contribution made by their setting) and of the potential effect of the proposal on their significance. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is necessary to understand the potential effect of the proposal on their significance. The relevant historic environment record should be referred to in making this assessment, and appropriate expertise employed where necessary.

2. Assessments of the potential effects of development proposals on the significance of heritage assets (including through effects on their setting) should identify whether

proposals would be likely to:

- a. Have a positive effect, which is where the significance of a heritage asset would be enhanced, or better revealed; or
- b. Have no effect on the significance of a heritage asset; or
- c. Result in harm to the significance of a heritage asset, either from work affecting the asset itself or from development within its setting. The degree of harm should be identified: substantial harm would occur where the development proposal would seriously affect a key element of the asset's significance; or
- d. Cause the total loss of the significance of a heritage asset.

HE6: Proposals affecting designated heritage assets

1. When considering the potential effect of a development proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset, substantial weight should be given to the asset's

conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be).

This is irrespective of whether any potential effect amounts to a positive effect, harm, substantial harm, or total loss of its significance.

3. Any harm to a designated heritage asset will be a matter of considerable importance and weight, which should be dealt with in accordance with paragraphs 4 to 6 of this policy.

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 securing the long-term reuse of a vacant or underused listed building, and enabling energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures to be employed.

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
- Foxt Conservation Area Appraisal (2018)

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Application is for solar panels.

Solar panels will be roof mounted, dark coloured on a dark coloured roof. They will not affect access, parking or trip generation.

This proposal is highly unlikely to have an effect on the highway.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

In accordance with Policies SS1 and SS2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan the Council expects all new development to make a positive contribution towards the sustainability of communities and to protect and where possible enhance the environment. The site is located within the Smaller Village of Foxt, and therefore falls under Policy SS9. Policy SS9 allows only for appropriate development and seeks to ensure that new development reflects and enhances each village's special character and heritage by protecting and enhancing the setting and historic character of the village, including heritage assets.

The application site is located in the Open Countryside whereby Policy SS10 of the Local Plan (2020) is applicable. Policy SS10 states that these rural areas will provide only for development that has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside.

Part (3) of policy SS10 seeks to protect the quality and character of the area and requires all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.

Accordingly the general principle is considered acceptable subject to considerations of heritage / design and highway safety.

Heritage / Design

Policy DC2 states that the Council will safeguard and where possible, enhance the historic environment by resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the special character and historic heritage of the District's towns and villages and those interests of acknowledged importance; promoting development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area; and preventing the loss of buildings and features which make a positive contribution to the character or heritage of an area through appropriate reuse and sensitive development.

Policy DC1 seeks to ensure that all development is well designed and of a high quality, contributing to local distinctiveness and harmonising with sense of place.

Policy HE6 paragraph 1 of the NPPF (2026) states that when considering the potential effect of a development proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset, substantial weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential effect amounts to a positive effect, harm, substantial harm, or total loss of its significance.

Policy HE6 paragraph 4 of the NPPF (2026) states that 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 securing the long-term reuse of a vacant or underused listed building, and enabling energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures to be employed.

Policy HE5 paragraph 1 of the NPPF states that development proposals affecting heritage assets should be accompanied by an assessment of the significance of the assets affected (including any contribution made by their setting) and of the potential effect of the proposal on their significance. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is necessary to understand the potential effect of the proposal on their significance. The relevant historic environment record should be referred to in making this assessment, and appropriate expertise employed where necessary.

Historic England guidance for solar panels in the historic environment requires panels to be installed in a neat and orderly pattern in order to reduce visual impact:

"Exceptions may include buildings whose significance may be less sensitive to the installation of such panels (for example, certain industrial buildings). Steps should be taken to reduce the visual impact of panels in these locations as far as is possible. For example, using black frames, avoiding silvered or reflective panels and avoiding irregular or stepped panel layouts".

Notably, none of the adjacent buildings are listed. The site comprises a relatively new dwelling which is designed to sit sensitively in the conservation area. This being said, the roof tiles on the dwelling are not typical of what would be seen as a best fit for the character of a conservation area. The traditional vernacular in conservation areas would usually consist of buildings with roof tiles made from slate or a natural material, whereas the dwelling has been constructed from a more modern concrete roof tile. Thus, the addition of solar panels to the front facing roof plane would not have such a significant impact on the character of the conservation area as it would on a more traditional dwelling with slate or natural roof tiles.

The Council's Conservation Officer has commented on the application, stating that solar panels have a typically engineered appearance which starkly contrasts with the traditional palette of materials that characterise the Conservation Area. Whilst it is acknowledged that the building is of no historic or architectural value, the panels would be quite prominent on the front elevation of the building and may visually detract from the surrounding traditional built heritage. This harm would be very minor and, on balance, would likely be outweighed by the public benefits of energy efficiency and increase in renewable energy. Renewable energy systems comprise a significant public benefit, as they aid in addressing climate change and reducing CO₂ emissions, putting less demand on the national system and improving environmental credentials.

The plans initially showed an irregular installation of solar panels showing a complete upper row with the second row of panels split into two irregular sections, which created an awkward visual form. However, the solar panels were deliberately designed in this layout, so as to be sensitively arranged in relation to the existing roof vents. The applicant has stated that there are two vents for the house ventilation system in the middle of the roof, which make it impossible to present one block of panels. Regardless, the applicants were asked if a solution could be reached to neaten the appearance of the solar panels and resultingly reduce the impact of the solar panels on the conservation area.

Revised plans were submitted to the Council, showing 11 solar panels to be installed on the front elevation of the roof slope, and a further 7 panels to the rear roof elevation. Whilst the Council's Conservation Officer believes that there would still be a degree of harm due to the engineered appearance of the solar panels, the neater appearance of the solar panels and relocation of some on the rear roof plane would reduce the harm previously identified. Notably, the Conservation Officer has requested that any approval of the proposed development be subject to the condition that the proposed solar PV panels shall comprise black panels with black aluminium frames only.

Furthermore, there is a precedent in the area for solar panels, as can be seen on the neighbouring dwelling at The Malthouse, Foxt Road. A small array of solar panels can be seen on the roof plane located hard up to the boundary with the public highway, as can be seen in the photograph below:



Figure 1: Solar Panels at The Malthouse, Foxt Road.

Based on the fact that solar panels are already clearly present in visible locations amongst the immediate street scene, the Council cannot justify a refusal of the application in this instance.

Nevertheless, the Council's Conservation Officer still recommends that the solar panels are black framed (rather than silver framed) and that any battery storage is sited discreetly to the rear or side elevations so as to minimise the visual prominence further. Notably, the Heritage Statement submitted by the applicant specifies that high-specification, all-black (monocrystalline) solar panels are proposed, to ensure the installation integrates with the building's aesthetic. These panels feature black frames and backing sheets, which blend effectively with the dark grey concrete roof

tiles. Standard silver-framed or blue-tinted panels have been rejected to uphold the area's visual distinctiveness.

In summary, the proposal would result in very minor degree of harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. There is clear and convincing justification for this level of harm and the proposal would deliver public benefits which would outweigh this very minor degree of harm. There are no objections to the proposal from a conservation perspective and the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in this instance.

Highway Safety

Chapter 15 of the NPPF contains the relevant national planning policies relating to highway safety impacts. NPPF Policy TR6 states that development proposals should be refused if they would have a severe adverse impact on the transport network, or an unacceptable impact on highway safety. Policy T1 seeks to provide safe and sustainable access and ensure that development does not lead to an increase in on street parking.

Staffordshire County Council Highways department have stated that the proposal is highly unlikely to have an effect on the highway. The proposed solar panels would be roof mounted, dark coloured and on a dark coloured roof, thus they would not affect access, parking or trip generation.

Thus, the proposed development would have no impact on highway safety, in accordance with Policy T1.

The development does not give rise to any residential amenity concerns.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

In consideration of all of the above, the application is recommended for approval. Due to the application having no adverse effect upon neighbour or street scene amenity and no overall impact on the highway, it is deemed acceptable under planning policy. Although the proposal would cause a degree of harm to the conservation area, due to the engineered appearance of the solar panels, the public benefits of enabling energy efficient heating are considered to be public benefits which outweigh any harm. Therefore, the proposed development is recommended for approval, subject to compliance with all conditions.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE

Case Officer: Hannah Varley

Recommendation Date: 24/08/2026

X *J. Colley*

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council