

8. FULL APPLICATION – INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS, WITH 4 NO. 44 PANEL ARRAYS ON LAND BEHIND TAGG LANE GRANGE, TAGG LANE, MONYASH. (NP/DDD/0122/0035, SC)

APPLICANT: MR BOAM

Summary

1. The application seeks planning permission to erect two rows of ground mounted solar panels within a parcel of land to the south east of the main farm buildings at Tagg Lane Grange.
2. In this case, it is considered by virtue of the location, size and appearance of the solar array, this would have an adverse visual impact on the valued landscape character of the area. As a result, the application is recommended for refusal.

Site and Surroundings

3. Tagg Lane Grange is located on the south side of Tagg Lane close to the cluster of agricultural buildings located on the junction between Tagg Lane and the A515. The farm complex comprises of the main farmhouse, a number of large modern agricultural buildings, which are sited towards the rear of the dwelling and used for general purpose storage and cattle housing.
4. The applicant runs a dairy business, with part of an existing agricultural barn converted to camping facilities and additional café/shop and seating area associated and connected with the existing farm enterprise.
5. Sited to the east of the main farm and within the adjoining field, is a touring caravan site (also in the applicant's ownership) entered directly off Tagg Lane (B5055) and through a separate gated access from the main farm.

Proposal

6. Permission is being sought to erect two rows of ground mounted solar panels, each row containing 88 panels (176 in total).

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reasons:

7. **The development, by virtue of the location, size and appearance would result in significant adverse visual impact on landscape character and the wider scenic beauty of the National Park. The proposal is therefore contrary to the landscape conservation objectives set out in the NPPF and the Authority's Local Plan policies GSP1, GSP3, CC2, DMC1 & DMC3.**

Key Issues

8. The principle of the development.
9. The landscape impact of the development.

Relevant history

10. 2020 - (NP/DDD/0520/0390) - Solar PV array made up of 220 panels: 1 row of 2 mounting tables (37m x 4.12m) and 1 row of 3 mounting tables (56m x 4.12m), each table holds 44 panels: formation being 11 wide, 4 high - Withdrawn.

11. 2020 - (NP/DDD/1120/1130) - Increase in permitted caravan pitches from 12 to 16 including landscaping details for hard standing areas and access road. Refused on landscape grounds.
12. 2020 – (NP/GDO/0420/0381) - GDO Notification - Portal framed building - extension to dairy facilities - Prior Approval not Required.
13. 2019 – (NP/DDD/1118/1057) - Change of use of part of existing agricultural barn into camping facilities and additional café/shop seating area. Works include new openings in the north facing elevation. Extension of existing ice cream production facility of 12 x 4.6m.- Granted.
14. 2018 – (NP/GDO/1118/1109) - GDO Notification - Agricultural building - portal frame with fibre cement cladding - Prior Approval not Required.
15. 2017 – (NP/DDD/0117/0044) - Toilet for shop staff – Granted.
16. 2016- (NP/DDD/0116/0009) - Erection of Ice Cream Production Unit and conversion of redundant grain store to Farm Shop. Granted.
17. 2016 – (NP/DDD/1215/1207) - Change of use from agricultural to touring caravan site – Granted.
18. 2014 – (NP/DDD/0614/0679) - Erection of Cattle Shed and Whole Crop Store. Granted.
19. 2013 - (NP/DDD/0313/02132013) - Feed storage silo – Granted.
20. 2012 – (NP/DDD/0812/0850) - Construction of agricultural building and concrete slurry store – Granted.
21. 2010 – (NP/DDD/1210/1229) - Erection of feed storage area. Granted.
22. 2010 - (NP/DDD/0210/0109) - Extension to general purpose building. Granted.
23. 2010 - (NP/DDD/0210/0110) - Livestock building – Granted.

Consultations

24. Highway Authority – No response at the time of writing the report.
25. Parish Council – Support.
26. PDNPA Landscape – No objections, subject to landscaping details.

Representations

27. None.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

28. The Government’s intention is that the document should be considered as a material consideration and carry particular weight where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date.

29. In particular Para: 176 states, that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
30. In the National Park, the development plan comprises the Authority's Core Strategy and the new Development Management Policies (DMP). These Development Plan Policies provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park's statutory purposes for the determination of this application.
31. In this case, it is considered there are no significant conflicts between prevailing policies in the Development Plan and government guidance in the NPPF.

Main Development Plan Policies

Core Strategy

32. GSP1, GSP2 - *Securing National Park Purposes and sustainable development & Enhancing the National Park*. These policies jointly seek to secure national park legal purposes and duties through the conversion and enhancement of the National Park's landscape and its natural and heritage assets.
33. GSP3 - *Development Management Principles*. Requires that particular attention is paid to the impact on the character and setting of buildings and that the design is in accord with the Authority's Design Guide and development is appropriate to the character and appearance of the National Park.
34. DS1 – *Development Strategy* - supports the development of renewable energy infrastructure in principle.
35. L1 - *Landscape character and valued characteristics*. Seeks to ensure that all development conserves and enhances valued landscape character and sites, features and species of biodiversity importance.
36. CC1 - *Climate change mitigation and adaption*. Sets out that development must make the most efficient and sustainable use of land, buildings and natural resources. Development must also achieve the highest possible standards of carbon reductions.
37. CC2 *Low carbon and renewable energy development*. Sets out that proposals for low carbon and renewable energy development will be encouraged provided they can be accommodated without adversely affecting landscape character or the special qualities of the National Park.

Development Management Policies

38. DMC1 - *Conservation and enhancement of nationally significant landscapes*. In countryside beyond the edge of settlements listed in Core Strategy policy DS1, any development proposal with a wide scale landscape impact should provide a landscape assessment with reference to the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan, proportionate to the proposed development. And the effect of the proposal on the landscape and, if necessary, the scope to modify it to ensure a positive contribution to landscape character.
39. DMC3 - *Siting, Design, layout and landscaping*. Reiterates, that where developments are acceptable in principle, policy requires that design is to high standards and where possible enhances the natural beauty, quality and visual amenity of the landscape. The siting, mass, scale, height, design, building materials should all be appropriate to the context. Accessibility of the development should also be a key consideration.

40. DMT3 - *Access and design criteria*. States amongst other things, that a safe access should be provided in a way that does not detract from the character and appearance of the locality and where possible enhances it.

Supplementary Planning Document

41. Climate Change and Sustainable Buildings.

Relevant guidance

42. The Authority's Landscape Strategy offers relevant guidance on the application of landscape conservation policies in the Development Plan. In this case, the site is within the Limestone Plateau Pastures landscape character area.

Assessment

Principle of the development

43. Policy DS1 supports the development of renewable energy infrastructure in principle.
44. Although the site is located fairly close to the farm complex, it nevertheless has a clear separation and is viewed within a wider open landscape setting, exposed to public view from both Tagg Lane and at distance from the A515.
45. Consequently, there are concerns over the development and its potential conflict with the principles of the Development Plan regarding landscape impact, which is further discussed in the following report.

Siting, Design and materials

46. The solar array would be sited in a parcel of land to the south east of the main farm buildings and to the south of an existing touring caravan site.
47. The full array would be made up of 176 panels, comprising 2 rows of 2 mounting tables, each table measuring approximately 39m in length x 4m wide x 3.2m in height from ground level. Each table would hold 44 panels, the formation being 11 panels wide and 4 high.
48. According to the submitted details, the PV modules would be Canadian Solar 300w panels or similar. These modules having an anti-reflective coating to ensure that there are no undesirable side effects related to light reflecting glare.

Landscape and visual impact

49. Policy L1 seeks to ensure that all development conserves and enhances valued landscape character and sites.
50. The adopted supplementary planning document '*Climate Change and Sustainable Buildings*' is a material consideration. This states at paragraph 9.2.9, that large scale ground mounted solar arrays are not appropriate. It also says, that to meet National Park policies, ground mounted solar arrays outside the curtilage of a building should be avoided.
51. The landscape character type for the area is defined as Limestone Plateau Pastures within the White Peak. Described as an upland pastoral landscape with a regular pattern of straight roads and small to medium sized rectangular fields bounded by limestone walls.

52. Tree cover is mostly limited to occasional tree groups, or small shelter belts, allowing wide views to the surrounding higher ground. The landscape surrounding the application site is generally considered a peaceful rural setting, reflecting these characteristics.
53. The solar array would be sited in a relatively flat area of land to the south east of the main farm buildings and to the south of an existing touring caravan site. This area of field is located around 80m from the main road (Tagg Lane), however, is clearly visible when approaching the farm from the west and also at distance from the main A515 road, in particular when approaching from the south.
54. Whilst less dominant from distance, they would appear solid in these views, therefore would look at odds with the typically open landscape character of the locality.
55. From these aspects, but particularly from Tagg Lane, the introduction of two rows of ground mounted panels and their supporting structures at a height of 3.2m and almost 40m in length would appear prominent and unduly intrusive, having a harmful visual impact on the character, appearance and setting of the surrounding landscape, particularly given that the only boundary to the edge of the field when looking from Tagg lane is post and wire fencing, which provides no effective screening of the site.
56. The plans show the removal of two trees from the field, with the intention of planting another six on the boundary between the caravan and development sites. Whilst this may give some cover (When viewed from Tagg Lane) in the longer term, it would take a number of years before these trees would mature enough to have any significant impact on the screening of the site.
57. The Authority's Landscape Architect had offered some proposed mitigation measures regarding landscaping for this particular scheme, should it go ahead. This included maintaining a dry stone boundary wall to the south of the proposed panels, where this would act as the permanent extent of development on site. In addition, the opportunity to plant a mixture of small and medium sized trees to the west of the existing campsite, to help reinforce a separation with the farm's activities from the open fields beyond.
58. However, again, planting would inevitably take a number of years to mature to afford any meaningful screening of the development site. Therefore, it is challenging to reflect how best to mitigate the landscape harm this development would cause, other than looking at alternative siting of the panels. One such location could be on the roof slopes of the existing buildings, which had previously been discussed with the applicant (See section on 'Other Matters' below).
59. In this case, it is also material that the incremental development of this site and the neighbouring site over recent years (as detailed in the history section of this report). It is therefore important that the array is not considered in isolation, but is looked at in the context of impacts arising from the expansion of the site as a whole, and that would be furthered by the erection of the array.
60. In support of such an approach, policy DMC1 states that any development proposal with a wide scale landscape impact should provide a landscape assessment with reference to the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan to address the effect of the proposal on the landscape and, if necessary, the scope to modify it to ensure a positive contribution to landscape character.
61. The submitted details do not include an appraisal these matters, but it clear that the increasing sprawl of the site beyond it's current boundaries and in to prominent open fields would compromise the valued rural characteristics of the wider area. It would be an incongruous feature that also serves to draw further attention to the existing grouped development in the landscape.

62. Whilst the Authority supports in principle the introduction of renewables, the development plan supports a ‘landscape first’ approach that accords with the National Parks statutory purposes, and the management and protection of the landscape must therefore take precedent.
63. Consequently, due to a combination of the open aspect of the site, the scale and appearance of the array, and the cumulative impacts arising from this further addition to the large area of development in this countryside location, Officers have concluded that the development would have a harmful effect on the landscape and scenic beauty of the National Park and would conflict with policies GSP1, GSP3, L1, and CC2 of the Core Strategy and policies DMC1 & DMC3 of the Development Management policies document, where priority is given to the conservation and enhancement of the National Park and valued landscape character. It would also conflict with paragraph 176 of the NPPF.
64. Furthermore, there would be conflict with the National Park’s Climate Change and Sustainable Building Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), where it seeks to avoid ground mounted solar arrays outside of the curtilage of buildings.
65. Overall, whilst the development would reduce reliance on non-renewable energy sources is a material consideration, the benefit of this is significantly outweighed by the adverse landscape impacts that would arise from the development, as detailed above.

Other Matters

66. A site visit by Officers met with the applicant after the previous scheme (NP/DDD/0520/0390) was withdrawn, to discuss any alternative options available. The advice was that if possible, the panels should preferably be located on the south facing roof slopes of the applicants existing agricultural buildings and that a ground mounted array would unlikely be supported on landscape impact grounds.
67. The applicant had declared, that the roofs of the buildings were not structurally sound enough to support the panels and would indeed block out natural light from the integral rooflights, requiring artificial lighting to the internal space, which in turn would negate any environmental benefit.
68. However, no evidence has been provided (in the form of a structural survey for example), to say that the structural integrity of the buildings could or could not support an array of solar panels on the roofs of the agricultural buildings.
69. It is acknowledged, that the current application has reduced the scale of the development from the previously withdrawn scheme from 220 to 176 panels. Nevertheless, it is still considered the siting and scale would be unacceptable in landscape terms.

Potential amenity issues

70. With respect to the amenity of neighbouring dwellings. Given the distance of separation from the nearest residential properties, the proposal would have no adverse impact or significantly harm any residential amenity in the locality, therefore accords with policies GSP3 & DMC3 in these respects.

Local Highway matters.

71. The local Highway Authority have not responded. However, the development would have no impact on the access or highway than already exists. Regarding this, the proposal would be acceptable in highway terms, according with policies DMT3 in these respects.

Environmental Management and sustainability

72. The submitted planning statement indicates, that ‘... *this solar PV array would allow the business to cut its CO2 production by 30 tonnes a year. One of the core principle planning policies of the NPPF is a move towards a low carbon economy and the Framework is clear in its support of renewable energy projects. The generation of electricity at the site is a positive factor in favour of the proposal and it would make a valuable contribution in the context of wider environmental benefits.*
73. Whilst this is acknowledged, the benefit of this is not outweighed by the landscape harm of the scheme on the locality and the valued characteristics of the National Park landscape more widely. Consequently, the scheme is contrary to policies DMC3 & CC2 in these respects.

Conclusion

74. It is concluded that on balance, the location, size, and appearance of the development would result in significant harm to the landscape character of the area. The benefit that would arise in terms of reduced reliance on non-renewable energy would not outweigh the impact the panels would have on landscape character.

There are no other planning policy or other materials considerations that indicate that planning permission should be approved. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

Human Rights

75. Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.
76. List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil

Report Author: Steve Coombes, South Area Planning Team.