

14. FULL APPLICATION – INSTALLATION OF SOLAR ARRAY, PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY, ALDERN HOUSE, BASLOW ROAD, BAKEWELL (NP/DDD/1015/0932, P.2760, 421961 / 369440, 30/10/2015/CF)

APPLICANT: PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Site and Surroundings

Aldern House is a Grade II listed building dating from c.1820, which was originally designed and occupied as a house and is now in a mixed use of commercial and local authority offices. The offices lie on northern edge of Bakewell, within Bakewell's development boundary but outside of the designated Bakewell Conservation Area.

Proposal

The application seeks planning permission for the installation of a solar array across the flat roof above Aldern House. Four panels would be installed in one row on the eastern end of the flat roof and a further eleven panels would be installed in two rows on the part of the flat roof above the reception area to Aldern House. The panels would be black with dark frames and each panel would measure 1640 x 992 x 35mm. Once installed, the solar array would result in a reduction in carbon emissions attributable to Aldern House of approximately 2 tonnes per annum.

The application has been revised because the panels proposed in the original application are no longer available. However, the alternative panels that are now going to be installed, if permission is granted, have a lower wattage and therefore to get the expected output an additional panel has been added to the scheme. Therefore, the proposed array would now include 15 panels rather than 14 as originally anticipated. A parallel application for listed building consent has also been submitted and revised by the applicant.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be APPROVED subject to the following conditions or modifications.

- 1. Statutory three year time limit.**
- 2. The solar array shall be installed in complete accordance with the amended plans and specifications.**
- 3 The solar array shall be removed as soon as reasonably practicable when no longer needed.**

Key Issues

- The impact of the proposals on the significance of a Grade II listed building.

Relevant Planning History

There is a significant amount of planning history held on file for Aldern House, mostly for alterations and extensions to the building but there is nothing on file that is directly relevant to the current application.

Consultations

Highway Authority – No objections.

District Council – No response to date.

Town Council – Recommend approval on design grounds. The Town Council also commented that the proposal is to be applauded and encouraged and it is hoped others will follow this example on suitable buildings elsewhere in Bakewell.

Representations

No further representations have been received to date.

Main Policies

Policies in the Development Plan and emerging Development Plan Document support the provision of renewable energy developments where they would not harm the valued characteristics of the National Park (Policy CC2 of the Core Strategy and Saved Local Plan policy LU4) The Authority's Supplementary Planning Document on Climate Change provides further specific advice on solar arrays. The Authority's adopted policies and guidance on renewable energy is otherwise consistent with the approach taken in Paragraph 98 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework'), which says when determining planning applications for renewable energy development, local planning authorities should approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

However, the Authority also has a statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the Grade II listed Aldern House and its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The Authority must also pay due regard to the conservation purpose of its statutory designation. These statutory provisions are reflected in national planning policies including Paragraph 115 of the Framework, which says that great weight should be given to conserving landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage in National Parks, and paragraph 132, which says that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage assets (such as a listed building) affected by development proposals.

Similarly, Core Strategy policy L3 and saved Local Plan policy LC6 say that all development must conserve and enhance the significance of the listed building and other than in exceptional circumstances, development which would have a harmful impact on the significance of a designated heritage asset will not be permitted. Policies GSP1, GSP2 and GSP3 of the Core Strategy and saved Local Plan policy LC4 otherwise promote development that would be sensitive to the valued characteristics of the National Park and reflect and respect the purposes of its statutory designation.

Therefore, when determining the current application, it can be accepted that the solar array is acceptable in principle but the impact of the proposed development on the listed building and its setting is also a particularly important consideration alongside other planning considerations. Policies in the emerging Development Plan Document carry this approach forward promoting a positive and proactive approach towards renewable energy developments that are sensitive to the valued characteristics of the National Park.

Assessment

The submitted application is supported by a Design and Access statement and heritage impact assessment which illustrate that the solar array would not have any significant impact on any special architectural or historic interest associated with Aldern House. Primarily, this is because the array would not be seen in the context of the historic part of the building partly as they would be set back from the edge of the flat roof and partly because they would be screened by a parapet wall at the front of the building or other parts of the building that rise up from the flat roof. However, the array would be seen from various vantage points within the car park to the west of the building, which is at a higher level than the ground floor of Aldern House. Nonetheless, the

array would be seen in the context of the more recent additions to Aldern House and would not be especially conspicuous.

In these respects, to further reduce the visual impact of the solar panels, the applicant is proposing dark panels and low supports also in a dark recessive colour. In addition, positioning the solar panels in rows will unify the appearance of the array and the Authority's Conservation Officer agrees that the siting, layout and design will mitigate the visual impact of the solar array. Furthermore, the proposed installation will not physically affect any historic fabric. Consequently, it is considered that the proposed development would not harm the significance of the designated heritage asset (i.e. Aldern House) or the significance of its setting especially when taking into account the relatively modest scale of the array and the appropriateness of its design, siting and layout.

In terms of other relevant planning considerations, the panels would not be unneighbourly as they do not face any nearby residential property, the array would clearly not have any impact on parking provision or affect access provision, and there is no evidence to suggest the installation of the array would have any impact on a protected species or its habitat. It is therefore concluded that not only is the installation of the solar array acceptable in principle, but also that the proposed development would not have any adverse impacts on any recognised conservation interest or have anything but a positive impact on the use of Aldern House by the Authority, its tenants and visiting members of the public.

Conclusion

Accordingly, the current application is recommended for conditional approval because the proposed development fully complies with the Authority's adopted planning policies and guidance and accords with national planning policies in the Framework. In this case, conditions imposing the statutory time limit for commencement and compliance with the amended plans are necessary in the interests of the proper planning of the local area. A condition requiring the array to be removed when no longer required would be consistent with the identical condition attached to permitted development rights for solar arrays by the Government.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil