

Officer Report on Planning Application: 11/04287/FUL

Proposal :	The installation of photo voltaic panels and solar hot water panel to south west roof slope (Retrospective). (GR 334967/110531)
Site Address:	The Barn Chaffcombe Gate Farm Chaffcombe
Parish:	Chaffcombe
WINDWHISTLE Ward (SSDC Member)	Mrs S Osborne (Cllr)
Recommending Case Officer:	Chloe Beviss Tel: (01935) 462321 Email: chloe.beviss@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	29th December 2011
Applicant :	Mr N Hill
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Mr Richard Long Hamdon Design Service Ltd Glebe House 54 St Michaels Gardens South Petherton TA13 5BD
Application Type :	Other Householder - not a Change of Use

REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The application is to be considered by Area West Committee at the request of the Area Chair. It is felt that the issues should be given further consideration by members, particularly in respect of the impact on the character of the building balanced against the support for climate mitigation measures.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL



This application is seeking retrospective planning permission for the installation of photovoltaic solar panels and a solar hot water panel to the roof of a dwellinghouse.

The application property is one of a complex of three good quality barn conversions known as Chaffcombe Gate Farm on the outskirts of Chaffcombe, which surround an inner courtyard. The barns are mainly of natural stone under clay tile and natural slate roofs.

The application building is known as 'The Barn' and is the far south-western most of the barns, situated gable end onto the adjacent highway and running parallel with the immediately adjoining right of way. The property comprises two buildings, the nearest to the road of natural stone outer elevations and a horizontal timber boarded inner elevation (facing courtyard) under a pitched slate roof with water tabling, the adjoining building has a lower pitched roof of clay tiles with natural stone elevations.

The microgeneration equipment the subject of this application is situated on the second building above the clay tiled roof on the outer elevation facing south west. The agent has confirmed that the solar hot water panel was installed in 2006 and the photovoltaic panels more recently in August 2011. The hot water panel is located almost centrally on the roofslope close to the ridge whilst the photovoltaic panels are arranged beneath it and to either side.

Retrospective planning permission is required as permitted development rights to carry out further external alterations were removed when the original conversion was granted consent, the development is therefore in breach of this condition. The barns are neither listed or within a conservation area.

HISTORY

00/00594/FUL: Alterations and conversion of barn into a dwelling. Conditionally approved 21.9.00

01/01439/FUL: Alterations and conversion of barn into a dwellinghouse (Amended plans to alteration the north elevation and insert rooflights) Conditionally approved 18.09.2001

03/01425/FUL: Erection of a wooden shed. Conditionally approved 11.7.03

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decisions must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of determining current applications the Local Planning Authority takes the view that the relevant development plan comprises the saved policies of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and the saved policies of the South Somerset Local Plan.

The policies of most relevance to the proposal are:

Saved policies of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (April 2000):

Policy STR1 - Sustainable Development
Policy STR6 Development outside towns, rural centres and villages
Policy 5 - Landscape Character

Saved policies of the South Somerset Local Plan (April 2006):

Policy EC3 - Landscape Character
Policy ST3 - Development Areas
Policy ST4 - Extensions and Alterations to Buildings in the Countryside
Policy ST5 - General Principles of Development
Policy ST6 - The Quality of Development

National Guidance:

Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy

Guidance also considered relevant:

English Heritage: Small scale solar electric (photovoltaics energy) and traditional buildings.

English Heritage: Small-scale solar thermal energy and traditional buildings

English Heritage: The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A Guide to Good Practice.

SSDC Design Guidance: The Conversion of Traditional Farm and Other Buildings.

CONSULTATIONS

Chaffcombe Parish Council: No objections.

Highways: No observations.

Area Engineer: No comment.

SSDC Conservation Manager: Agricultural buildings are converted on the basis that they are, to paraphrase implications of EH7, EC3, ST3, ST5, ST6 etc, an asset to the local distinctiveness of the area and their character is retained for the contribution it makes in the landscape. This implies that they express local vernacular characteristics (otherwise they would not contribute) and pv panels on the roof of such a building is necessarily out of character because they are not part of that vernacular character of natural local materials. On LBs principal elevations are a no-go area. That is basically saying it does adversely affect the character of a traditional building. Your case is not listed but still a traditional building and therefore will be affected adversely. But I also think it is a question about prominence. With your case it is a principal elevation but how prominent in wider and nearer context? I have no time to visit and wonder about appearance or visual profile - policy EC3 - when viewed across the fields adjacent. If high this is definitely a no. If discrete in the wider landscape then the local view onto it is what matters and it is - am I right? - quite prominent, on a principal elevation, visible if obliquely from a public place so is inappropriate.

SCC Landscape Architect: In most instances, pv installations on roofs do not bring about an adverse landscape impact. Where there may be issues are those instances

where Pvs are viewed as being a disruptive element on the 'roofscape' to thus impact on the character of the building. In this instance, whilst small scale and limited to the immediate locality, I believe there is an aggregated adverse impact - due to the conflicting tones of the roof materials/pv's; the uncomfortable proportions of the solar hot water panel in relation to the PV's; and the dominant area given over to these systems, which disrupts the simple composition of stone and tile. Consequently, there are grounds for a landscape refusal, policies ST6 and EC3.

REPRESENTATIONS

Two neighbours notified and site notice posted. Two letters of support from adjoining occupiers, however one stating they would not be happy for the panels to be re-sited on the garage roof which most of their windows face so would be visible by them.

Third letter of support from a resident of Chaffcombe stating the installation is in no way intrusive to anybody, does not affect the fabric of the building as it is removable and it is very attractively done, being symmetrical on the roof. The writer questions the need for planning permission in this case as he was advised a similar installation at his property did not require consent.

CONSIDERATIONS

The main considerations in this case relate to the impact on residential and visual amenity, the impact on the character and setting of the original building(s) and the distinctive character and quality of the local landscape.

Principle of Development

National policy is broadly supportive of applications for renewable energy sources, provided that the impact on the landscape character can be minimised.

Planning permission is required in this case due to the original conversion scheme containing a condition to restrict further external alterations to the buildings by reason of maintaining their character. It is normal for conversion schemes to be conditioned in such a way in order that a proposed development can be carefully considered through the submission of a planning application.

Residential Amenity

Given the siting and nature of the installations, it is not considered there will be any significant impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

Visual Amenity and Landscape Impact

As quoted in the South Somerset Local Plan, the District Council believes that new development should maintain or enhance the character and quality of the countryside.

The application and surrounding buildings are considered traditional and of local vernacular which are distinctive of and contribute to their rural setting. Whilst views of the site from a wider context are discrete due to the surrounding topography and hedgerows, it is the affect on the immediate locality which causes concern.

Small scale microgeneration installations are fast becoming a familiar feature within settlements as well as countryside locations due to national support and in most cases, no need for planning permission. It could be deemed that their appearance is

incongruous in all contexts however this is considered to be the case in respect of this application.

The roofscapes of these buildings are considered significant to their character and relationship with their countryside location. The visual dominance of the panels, their appearance in conflict with the traditional roofing material and their layout, pre-determined by the previous chronology of roof installations (the earlier solar water panel and roof vents), are considered to introduce a visual profile out of keeping with the surrounding environment which disrupts the otherwise simple roofscape of the south-western outer elevation thereby causing unacceptable harm to the distinctive character and quality of the local landscape particularly when viewed from the immediately adjacent public footpath.

It is noted that rooflights are present on the adjoining slate roof building, however these are relatively unobtrusive in relation to the roof and are set into the surface unlike the solar panels which are much larger in comparison and are proud of the roof surface.

Impact on Character of and Setting of Original Buildings

Policy ST4 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006) states:

"Once a building is converted to a new use, it is important that its external appearance and setting are maintained, in order to protect the amenity and character of the rural area."

Whilst neither listed or in a conservation area, the good quality set of traditional converted buildings are considered to hold significant group value and are an asset to the local distinctiveness of the area.

The relative weight is afforded to the fact that in many situations, even in conservation areas, these sorts of proposals do not require planning permission. However, permission is required in this case for the very reason that the character of the building should be maintained and planning policies including national guidance support this.

English Heritage guidance in respect of small scale solar energy installations on traditional buildings states:

"It is generally not considered sympathetic to a building's appearance to have a solar panel or other equipment fixed to any of its main elevations, i.e. the face or faces seen from the principal viewpoint, towards which it is mainly viewed. Thus buildings with main elevations aligned in the direction of optimal solar radiation may present special installation problems with regards to visual impact."

The siting of these installations does not immediately address the adjacent highway, however they are situated on an elevation which fronts the public right of way with which the barn conversion runs parallel. This south west facing roofslope is an external elevation, in that it does not face the internal courtyard of the small development, and as such can be considered one of the building's main elevations towards which it is mainly viewed. The proposal is therefore in conflict with English Heritage guidance.

Whilst the Local Planning Authority are keen to support schemes for the generation of sustainable energy, the key consideration in this case is the impact on the original building and its setting. It is considered that the panels are out of keeping as they are not part of the vernacular character of natural local materials and occupy an unduly prominent position, clearly visible from public vantage points, the layout and combined

effect of which unacceptably dominates one of the main elevations of this traditional building.

The Old Stables (adjoining barn) and Neighbour Comments

Whilst each case is considered on its own merits, it is relevant to note that planning permission has recently been granted and the installation completed for photovoltaic panels to the south west facing roof slope of the neighbouring property's garage. The proposal in this case was considered to acceptably balance the generation of sustainable energy against maintaining the character of the building as the panels are situated on a less prominent inner facing elevation and not a main outer elevation and as they are located on the garage building which is subservient to and detached from the main barn.

Support from neighbours and another interested party has been expressed and it is important that there is support for climate mitigation measures. In this regard the Local Planning Authority note that there may be the opportunity to re-site the panels on the host barn's garage/carport which sits in between the above mentioned garage and the third barn's garage/carport which all lie to the north east of the development. This would require an application for planning permission for the same reason as this proposal but, without prejudice, may receive a favourable recommendation given its similarities to the application at The Old Stables.

The occupiers of The Coach House have indicated their support to the present siting of the panels but have stated that they would not be happy for them to be re-sited onto the garage roof as most of their windows face this inner courtyard. This comment is not a matter for consideration through this application.

CONCLUSION

This retrospective application is recommended for refusal as it is considered to be contrary to the aims and objectives of Policies EC3, ST3, ST4, ST5 and ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006), Policies STR1, STR6 and 5 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (2000), the aims and objectives of PPS 7 and the advice and guidance contained within English Heritage documents in respect of microgeneration installations on traditional buildings where the proposal causes unacceptable harm to the distinctive character and quality of the immediate landscape and adversely affects the character of the building and its setting by reason of the prominent position of the panels on a main elevation, their layout, dominance and incongruous appearance against a backdrop of natural local materials on what is a significant roof slope of a traditional rural building.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse permission

FOR THE FOLLOWING REASON:

1. Whilst providing a sustainable form of energy, the solar panels, by virtue of their layout, positioning, dominance on a main elevation and conflicting appearance with the existing roof material, introduce a visual profile out of character with the local vernacular resulting in unacceptable harm to the distinctive character and quality of the local landscape and adversely affect the external appearance of this traditional rural building and value of the group of vernacular buildings, of which it is part and therefore their setting contrary to Policies EC3, ST3, ST4, and ST6 of the South

Somerset Local Plan (2006), Policies STR1, STR6 and 5 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review (2000) and the advice contained with English Heritage Guidance.

Informatives:

1. The Local Planning Authority will now consider the expediency of Enforcement Action.