

4. Relevant Planning History

E/2012/0329/LBC – Retention of 18 photovoltaic panels installed on roof of historic rear wing. REFUSED.

5. The Proposal

To retain 15 photovoltaic panels on the rear wing south elevation.



6. Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework outlines Government policy, including its policy on the historic environment.

The PPS5 Practice Guide is still extant, providing guidance on making changes to Heritage Assets.

The Aldbourne Conservation Area Statement provides supplementary planning guidance.

7. Consultations

Aldbourne Parish Council – OBJECTION – Our comments on the previous application (E/2012/0329/LBC) were made on the basis that the solar panels would not be visible from any other property. This is clearly not the case and they are considered obtrusive to neighbouring properties and incompatible with a listed building.

8. Publicity

The application has been advertised with a press and site notice. One representation of objection has been received from the neighbours at 5 The Green. These neighbours raises strong concerns over the potential for a precedent to be set on listed buildings throughout Wiltshire; the solar panels are entirely inappropriate for a listed building; they have a damaging effect on the conservation area; the listed building is not just a frontispiece for The Green; reducing the number of panels by three will not reduce their visual impact.

9. Planning Considerations

Background

Site - No.7 The Green is a grade II listed building that dates from the late 18th century/early 19th century. An historic, long, rear wing is also built of stone with brick surrounds to openings. No.7 occupies a prominent location on The Green within the Aldbourne Conservation Area and forms part of an important group of listed buildings surrounding The Green. However, whilst primarily listed for its contribution to this group, the building's significance is not confined to its front. To the rear of the street, the scale, proportions and vernacular / materials detailing of No.7 and neighbouring properties, contribute significantly to the special interest of the individual buildings and area.

The 18 photovoltaic panels were fitted to the rear roof slope in early 2012, without the benefit of listed building consent. The previous application, E/2012/0329/LBC, to retain all 18 panels, was refused and to date has not been appealed. The current application is a resubmission, albeit with a slightly amended scheme, removing 3 panels from the roof. The panels appear to have been fitted as per the information provided within the application.

Assessment

The NPPF introduces a presumption in favour of sustainable development, with the need to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment seen as an essential element alongside economic and social concerns. As well as the general policies being relevant, the specific policies for conserving and enhancing the historic environment, as set out in section 12, also need to be considered. The need to balance competing needs against each other is identified and Paragraph 98 advises that local planning authorities should, when determining planning applications [for renewable energy developments], "approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable...." **"unless material considerations indicate otherwise"**. The impact on the listed building, its fabric and setting are identified as material considerations in section 12.

The photovoltaic array has been fitted directly onto a plain clay tiled roof, which can clearly be seen within the application site and from neighbouring properties. The visual contrast between the two materials, i.e. natural orange clay tiles and the shiny black panels, is significant. The hard lines and stark, engineered, appearance of the panels is wholly out of character with the mellow appearance of the existing natural materials and it is considered that the panels create an alien and obtrusive feature which has a negative impact on the building and its surroundings, which include other listed buildings.

The site location is within the Aldbourne Conservation Area. It is recognised that the site is relatively discreet and not highly visible from publicly accessible views but significant public views are not needed in order for there to be intrinsic harm caused to the individual heritage asset itself, to the setting of neighbouring assets and to the character or appearance of the area.

It is noted that the agent, in the supporting information, has gone through the various 'tests' suggested by English Heritage in their document *Microgeneration in the Historic Environment* (2008). However the conclusion reached, that the panels have only a minor impact is challenged. The "minor visual impact" considered to be acceptable in English Heritage Guidance is such as might occur in the case of panels which are substantially hidden from view, within roof valleys or behind parapets (evidenced by the examples provided). The obtrusive impact of a fully visible array of panels is quite different and it is considered that the installation results in an unacceptable loss of special interest of the listed building.

There are strong concerns that if the application is approved, a precedent would be set to allow similar arrays of photovoltaic panels on other listed buildings throughout Wiltshire.

The primary justification lies in the enhanced sustainability of renewable energy likely to be provided by the installation. This would produce both private and public benefits but the latter would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm to the special interest of the listed building. The NPPF reinforces the requirement to seek all other options for improving energy before more damaging solutions are proposed, i.e. a more efficient boiler, ground/air source heat pumps, secondary glazing, under floor and loft insulation etc. In this case, there appear to be other, additional, less visually damaging options open to the applicants that have not been explored. However, the intrinsic importance of the designated heritage asset may mean that some inefficiency in energy use for the main listed house might be inevitable.

The position set out above is supported in recent appeal history and examples of decision notices relating to similar proposals which have been dismissed are appended.

It is also considered important to note that upon viewing the panels, the Parish Council has changed its opinion of the scheme from 'acceptable with concerns over a precedent being set' to an 'objection [as the panels] are considered obtrusive to neighbouring properties and incompatible with a listed building'.

10. Conclusion

It is considered that the retention of 15 photovoltaic panels will have a significant visual impact which will diminish the special interest of the listed building, including its character and setting. The energy saving benefits that may be derived from the panels are not considered to outweigh the harm that would be caused to the listed building. In addition, the precedent set by the approval of the application could have far-reaching consequences for Wiltshire's historic environment.

RECOMMENDATION

That listed building consent be REFUSED for the following reason:

- 1 The retention of 15 photovoltaic panels on the roof of the rear wing of the primary listed building, by virtue of their design and appearance, would introduce incongruous features to the building's roof. As a result, the proposal would have a harmful impact on the significance of the designated heritage asset and its setting. No evidence has been provided to illustrate other less intrusive options that should have been considered or to indicate that the alterations are necessary to achieve a public benefit which would offset the harm caused. The proposal therefore conflicts with policies contained in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Appendices:

Appendices A & B – Appeal Decisions

Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:

None