

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

Application Reference Number	19NP0105
Description / Site Address	Installation of 60 no. ground mounted photovoltaic solar panels at Whitefield Hall, Hepple, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 7LN
Expiry date of publicity / consultations	4 December 2019
Last date for decision	6 January 2020

Details of Proposal

The proposal relates to the provision of photovoltaic panels to provide domestic energy for Whitefield Hall. The application site is located in an agricultural field to the west of Whitefield Hall and to the south of the 'C' road which runs west between Bickerton Cottages and the junction with the B6341 to Hepple.

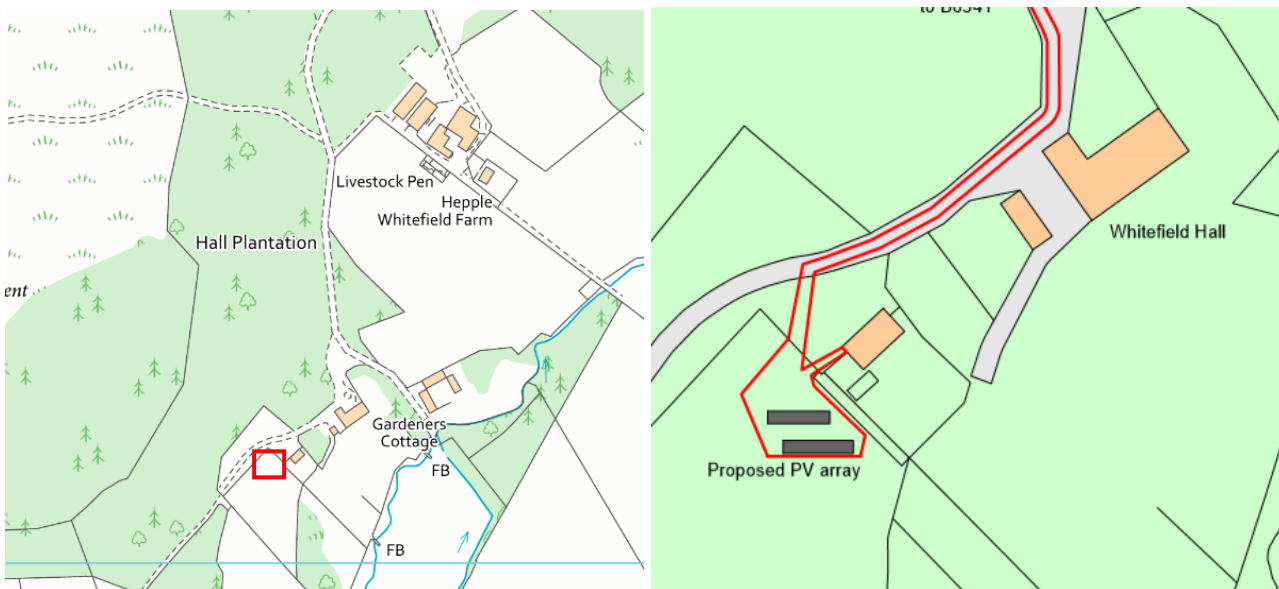


Figure 1: Site Location

The proposal is for the erection of two double banks of 15 panel photovoltaic cells (total 60 cells). Each bank would have a total width of approximately 15m (1m per photovoltaic cell) and a maximum height of 2.5m above ground level. The panels would be orientated to face south and would be angled at 30 degrees. The two panels would be within close proximity, but slightly offset, from each other. The information provided indicates that the panels are required to provide domestic energy to Whitefield Hall and that it is anticipated that the solar array will produce 15,000kw annually, representing a saving of 8.17 tonnes of carbon annually.



Planning Policy & Guidance

National Policies

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Local Policies

Northumberland National Park Authority Core Strategy and Development Policies Document (Core Strategy) (2009)

Policy 1	<i>Delivering Sustainable Development</i>
Policy 2	<i>Climate Change</i>
Policy 3	<i>General Development Principles</i>
Policy 5	<i>General Location of New Development</i>
Policy 17	<i>Biodiversity and Geodiversity</i>
Policy 19	<i>Tranquillity</i>
Policy 20	<i>Landscape Quality and Character</i>
Policy 21	<i>Farming</i>
Policy 25	<i>Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency</i>

Northumberland National Park Local Plan 2017-2037 Publication Draft Plan

Policy ST1	<i>Sustainable Development</i>
Policy ST2	<i>General Development Principles</i>
Policy ST4	<i>Spatial Strategy</i>
Policy DM10	<i>Habitats, Biodiversity and Geodiversity</i>
Policy DM11	<i>Landscape, Tranquillity and Dark Night Skies</i>
Policy DM13	<i>Renewable Energy</i>

The NNPLP has been submitted to the Secretary of State for examination. As the policies within the NNPLP are currently untested, it is considered they can currently be afforded little weight. Paragraph 213 of the NPPF advises that weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to the degree of consistency with the NPPF i.e. the closer a policy in a local plan accords with the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given to them. The adopted development plan is the Northumberland National Park Core Strategy (2009) and the policies within the Core Strategy are considered to be in accordance with the NPPF and can therefore be given due weight.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

NNPA Building Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (Design Guide SPD)

NNPA Landscape Supplementary Planning Document (Landscape SPD)



Relevant Planning History

13NP0042 Lawful Development Certificate for proposed development in respect of works to reinstate and improve existing spring water supply to dwelling house *Approved 19th August 2013*

Consultation/Representations

Hepple Parish Council: No objection

NNPA Ecologist: No objection: subject to the working methodology relating to badgers and other wildlife being made a condition.

NNPA Access & Recreation Officer: No objection: however care should be taken to not obstruct access to the adjacent right of way.

The application has been advertised by means of a site notice displayed on the 13th November 2019 and letters sent to four neighbouring properties. No representations have been received in response.

Assessment

The main issues to be taken into consideration in the assessment of this application are:

- The principle of the development;
- Design, visual amenity and local landscape character;
- Residential amenity;
- Impact upon National Park special qualities;

Principle of the Development

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places emphasis on a presumption in favour of sustainable development to guide decision making. In relation to climate change, Paragraph 148 states that the planning system should support '*renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure*'. Policy 1 of the NNPA Core Strategy Local Development Framework (Core Strategy) seeks to ensure that development '*Reduces the causes and impacts of climate change, particularly by maximising renewable energy generation.*' while ensuring that proposals will conserve or enhance the special qualities of the National Park. The effects of the proposed scheme on these qualities are discussed in more detail later in this report.

Policy 2 (e) states the National Park will support proposals which increase small scale renewable energy regeneration with Policy 25 (c) requiring new development to realise the potential for generation of on-site renewable energy. As the proposal is for small scale renewable energy generation to serve an existing property, it is considered to accord with the relevant requirements of the above policies and the NPPF.



Policies ST1 and DM13 of the emerging Northumberland National Park Local Plan (NNPLP) generally echo CS policy 1 in supporting renewable energy development which does not negatively impact the special qualities of the National Park. However, little weight can be afforded to policies within the NNPLP at this time as they have not been tested through examination.

Core Strategy Policy 5 states that new development in the open countryside will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the development cannot take place in an identified Local Centre, Smaller Village, or through the reuse of an existing building. A similar approach to the location of new development is taken by policy ST4 of the emerging NNPLP although little weight can be given to this policy at the current time.

As the application is for the installation of photovoltaic panels to provide domestic electricity for the applicant's home, it is considered acceptable for the PV panels to be located within the open countryside due to the need to be close to the property which they are intended to serve. The principle of development is therefore considered acceptable subject to consideration of impacts on the special qualities of the National Park which are discussed below.

Design, visual amenity and local landscape character

Core Strategy Policy 3 requires new development to be of a *'high quality design and construction'* which includes ensuring that *'materials are appropriate to the site and its setting'*. Policy ST2 of the emerging NNPLP places a similar emphasis on high quality design although little weight can be afforded to this policy at the current time. The PV panels are typical of stand-alone PV panels, being designed for functional rather than aesthetic purposes. The proposed design is therefore considered to be appropriate given the intended use.

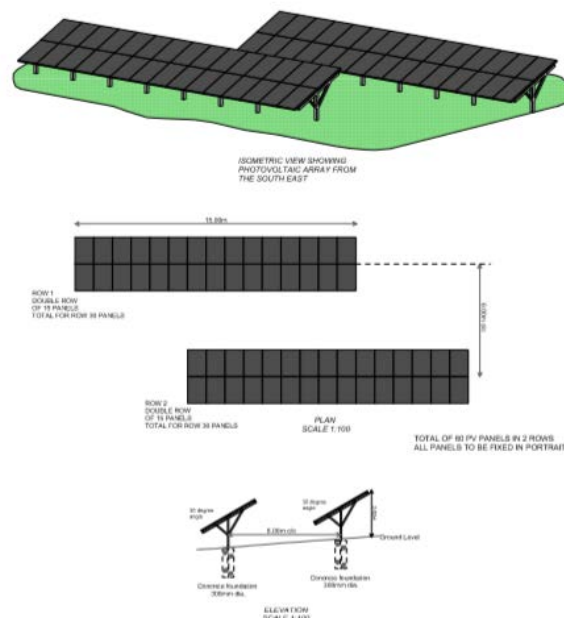


Figure 2: PV Panels: Isometric, Plan and Elevations



The field in which the panels are to be located slightly rises from bridleway 120/013 (which runs in a north-easterly direction along the site boundary) before dropping away to the trees to the south and east. The most northerly of the panels would sit just below, and beyond, the brow of this small incline and in close proximity (3m) to the adjacent hedge. In this location the PV panels (particularly the panel to the north) would be clearly visible when viewed from the adjacent bridleway, which, based on discussions with the NNPA Access and Recreation Officer, is well used, particularly by cyclists.



Figure 3: View towards proposed locations from in the field (left) and from bridleway (right)

However, by locating the panels in close proximity to the hedge and associated development with the most northerly being just below the small ridge, it is considered that potential impacts on local landscape character are reduced while ensuring that the primary purpose of the panels is not unduly compromised by being too far down the slope. This is in the context where users of the bridleway would view the panels against the backdrop of a combination of existing development, woodland and the rising ground to the south rather than against the skyline, again reducing their visual impact. The location slightly down slope would also be useful in breaking and softening the form of the panels when viewed from the bridleway. On this basis, it is considered that any impact on local landscape character or visual amenity would not be sufficiently harmful to warrant refusal of the application and the proposals are therefore considered to accord with the requirements of Core Strategy policy 3 in this respect.

Residential Amenity

Amongst others, Core Strategy policy 3 notes that new development will be permitted when '*amenity is not adversely affected in terms of visual impact, pollution, noise and waste*'. Although it can currently be afforded little weight, Policy ST2 of the emerging NNPLP advises that, again amongst others, that development will be permitted where it will not have '*an unacceptable adverse impact upon the amenities of adjoining occupiers*'.

While there is a garage / workshop approximately 10m to the north-east of the proposed PV Panels, the nearest residential property is at a distance in excess of 70m to the north-east. Given the



relatively small scale of the development with the panels having a maximum height of approximately 2.5m it is not considered that they would have any impact on this property, or any others, through unacceptable loss of daylight or sunlight. Similarly, following installation it is not considered that the proposals would generate any additional noise or other unneighbourly impacts. The proposals are therefore considered to accord with the requirement of Core Strategy policy 3 in this regard.

Impact upon National Park Special Qualities

Landscape

Core Strategy Policy 20 states that 'The natural beauty and heritage of the National Park will be conserved and enhanced whilst being responsive to landscape change'. Policy DM11 of the emerging NNPLP places a similar emphasis on the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and heritage of the National Park although this can currently be afforded little weight.

Impacts in relation to local landscape character have been considered under 'Design, Visual amenity and local landscape character' (above). In relation to wider landscape impacts, it is acknowledged that the proposals would introduce new non-agricultural development in to an agricultural field, something which would generally be resisted by the LPA due to the potential adverse impact on landscape character. However, as noted above, the proposed panels would be well related to existing development on the wider site. The nearest public visual receptors other than the adjacent bridleway would be public rights of way to the south of the site in the Simonside Hills. These rights of way are however at a distance in excess of 1km from the application site and when viewed from here, the panels would be viewed in the context of the existing development on site and against the backdrop of the woodland to the north. On this basis it is considered that any impact on landscape character would be minimal and insufficient to warrant refusal of the application. The proposals are therefore considered to accord with the requirements of Core Strategy policy 20.

Biodiversity

The proposed panels would be located within an existing agricultural field. Core Strategy policy 17 states that the National Park will '*protect, enhance, and restore biodiversity and geological conservation interests across the National Park*'. Policy DM10 of the emerging NNPLP offers similar support to proposals which maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the National Park although little weight can be given to this policy at the current time.

The NNPA Ecologist has been consulted on the proposals and raised no objection subject to the working methodology relating to badgers and other wildlife being made a condition of any approval which may be issued. The Ecologist has noted there is little risk to biodiversity if these working methods are carried out. The Ecologist has also confirmed that given the nature, scale and location of the proposals, a bespoke ecological survey is not required in support of the application.



In light of the above and subject to an appropriate condition ensuring that works are undertaken in accordance with the working methodology for wildlife, the proposals are considered to accord with the requirements of Core Strategy policy 17.

Tranquility

Given the nature of the proposals it is not anticipated that any external lighting would be required and no detail has been provided as part of the application to suggest external lighting will be installed. However, as the scheme is located within the International Dark Sky Park, it is considered prudent to attach a condition requiring any lighting which may be required in association with the scheme to be first approved in writing by the LPA. Subject to the imposition of a suitably worded condition, it is considered that the proposals would accord with the requirements of Core Strategy policy 19. Although it can currently be afforded little weight, it is also considered that the proposals are in accord with emerging policy DM11.

Given the nature, scale and location of the proposals, it is not considered that there would be any impact on the cultural heritage of the National Park.

Recommendation & Conditions

Grant conditional permission subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To ensure that the development is commenced within a reasonable period of time from the date of this permission, as required by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

- Application form, received 11th November 2019;
- Proposed ground mounted solar array, Proposed Details, Dwg No 1a, October 2019, received 14th November 2019;
- Proposed installation of 15kwp (60 No. Panels) Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Panels, Planning Statement, 10 November 2019, received 11th November 2019;
- Product Specification Corbin Solar System H, received 11th November 2019;
- Product Specification REC N-Peak Black Series, received 11th November 2019;

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt, to enable the local planning authority to adequately manage the development and to ensure the proposal accords with policies 1, 2, 3, 5, 17, 19, 20, 21 and 25 of the Northumberland National Park Authority Core Strategy & Development Policies Document (Core Strategy) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).



3. Prior to the fixing of any external lighting associated with the development, details of the external lighting shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. Details should include:

- The specific location of all external lighting units;
- Design of all lighting units;
- Details of beam orientation and lux levels; and
- Any proposed measures such as motion sensors and timers that will be used on lighting units.

The approved lighting scheme shall be installed in accordance with the approved details and shall be maintained as such during the operation of the development, unless removed.

Reason: In order to ensure that there is no harmful impact upon the tranquility and intrinsically dark character of Northumberland National Park and the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park through excessive light pollution, in accordance with Policies 1 and 19 of the Core Strategy and paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

4. The development hereby approved should be carried out in strict accordance with the 'Management of Ecological Resources' section of the 'Proposed installation of 15kwp (60 No. Panels) Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Panels, Planning Statement, 10 November 2019' Report. In particular, attention is drawn to the need to undertake the development in accordance with the requirements in respect of:

- Protection of hedges and trees;
- Working methods;
- Timing of works;

Reason: To ensure the development poses no risk of unacceptable harm to protected species and to ensure the development is in accordance with Core Strategy Policy 17, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended).

Informative Notes

1. This planning permission is granted in strict accordance with the approved plans. It should be noted however that:
 - (a) Any variation from the approved plans following commencement of the development, irrespective of the degree of variation, may constitute unauthorised development and may be liable to enforcement action.
 - (b) You, your agent, or any other person responsible for implementing this permission should inform the Local Planning Authority immediately of any proposed variation from the approved plans and ask to be advised as to the best method to resolve the matter. Most



proposals for variation to the approved plans will require the submission of a new application.

2. This consent is granted subject to conditions and it is the owner and the person responsible for the implementation of the development who will be fully responsible for their compliance throughout the development and beyond. Some conditions may require work to be carried out, or details to be approved prior to the commencement of the development.

Where pre-commencement conditions are not complied with, the whole of the development could be unauthorised, and you may be liable to enforcement action. In some circumstances, the only way to rectify the situation may be through the submission of a new application. If any other type of condition is breached then you may be liable to a breach of condition notice.

3. The proposed development lies within a coal mining area which may contain unrecorded coal mining related hazards. If any coal mining feature is encountered during development, this should be reported immediately to the Coal Authority on 0345 762 6848.

Further information is also available on the Coal Authority website at:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/the-coal-authority

Background Papers

Application File 19NP0105

EIA Screening Opinion

	Signature	Date
Planning Officer	<u>C Godfrey</u>	<u>17/12/2019</u>
Head of Development Management	<u>S Buylla</u>	<u>17/12/2019</u>