Horsham District Council

DELEGATED APPLICATIONS - ASSESSMENT SHEET

APPLICATION NO./ADDRESS:
DC/24/1566
Needs Farmhouse, Steyning Road, Partridge Green, West Sussex, RH13 8ED

DESCRIPTION:
Installation of a 22.95kW solar system, comprising 54 ground mounted PhotoVoltaic Panels (in 3 rows), 2 batteries and an inverter.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:
There is an extensive planning history for Needs Farmhouse, none of which are directly relevant to this current application.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE
The application site is located on the western side of Steyning Road. The parcel of land is situated to the south east of Need's Farm House, a Grade II Listed Building and south west of the Listed War Memorial. The site forms part of an open agricultural field which is screened by hedgerows along the eastern and northern boundaries. The application site is situated in the rural countryside, however the site does not fall within a Conservation Area.

DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLICATION
The proposal seeks planning permission for the installation of a 22.95kW solar system, comprising 54 ground mounted PhotoVoltaic Panels (in 3 rows), 2 batteries and an inverter.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES
The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Horsham District Planning Framework (2015):
Policy 31 - Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
Policy 32 - Strategic Policy: The Quality of New Development
Policy 33 - Development Principles
Policy 34 - Cultural and Heritage Assets
Policy 36 - Strategic Policy: Appropriate Energy Use

West Grinstead Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2019 -2031
Policy 1 – Local Gap

Horsham District Local Plan (2023-40) (Regulation 19):
Strategic Policy 7: Appropriate Energy Use
Strategic Policy 9: Water Neutrality
Strategic Policy 17: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
Strategic Policy 19: Development Quality
Strategic Policy 20: Development Principles
Policy 21: Heritage Assets and Managing Change within the Historic Environment

REPRESENTATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS RESPONSES
Where consultation responses have been summarised, it should be noted that Officers have had consideration of the full comments received, which are available to view on the public file at www.horsham.gov.uk

Consultations:
HDC Conservation: *Objection*

Newt Officer: It is considered that the proposed development would present a low risk to great crested newts and/or their habitats. However, as the development is within the red Impact Risk Zone, as modelled by district licence mapping, recommend an informative.

Representations:
There were no responses received from neighbour consultation.

Parish Comments:
Object, for the following reasons: -

- This is development in the countryside
- Harm to the setting of a listed building as it is too close
- Significant harm to the setting of WGPC War Memorial
- Damage to the landscape due to size.

Member Comments:
None received

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY:
The application has been considered having regard to Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Human Rights Act 1998, which sets out a person's rights to the peaceful enjoyment of property and Article 8 of the same Act, which sets out their rights in respect to private and family life and for the home. Officers consider that the proposal would not be contrary to the provisions of the above Articles.

The application has also been considered in accordance with Horsham District Council's public sector equality duty, which seeks to prevent unlawful discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people in a diverse community, in accordance with Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. In this case, the proposal is not anticipated to have any potential impact from an equality perspective.

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development:

Policy 36 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) 2015 seeks to ensure that the Council permits schemes for renewable energy (e.g. solar) where they do not have a significant adverse effect on landscape and townscape character, biodiversity, heritage or cultural assets or amenity value.

This application seeks to install ground mounted PhotoVoltaic Panels and associate apparatus. It is acknowledged that the proposal aims to reduce the carbon footprint of main dwelling by the proposed use of renewable energy source. The principal of ground mounted solar panels to support the energy requirement of Needs Farmhouse would be acceptable. However, there are concerns with regards to the proposed location where the panels would have a significant adverse impact on the setting of the heritage assets which is discussed further in the sections below.

Character and Appearance:

Policies 32 and 33 of the HDPF seek to maintain that development promotes a high standard and quality of design in order to enhance and protect locally distinctive characters. The policies also seek to ensure that the scale, massing and appearance of development relates sympathetically with the built surroundings, landscape, open spaces and routes within and adjoining the site, including any impact on the skyline and important views.

Policy 34 of the HDPF states that "The Council recognises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and as such the Council will sustain and enhance its historic environment through positive management of development affecting heritage assets". It expects applications which affect heritage assets to" Make a positive contribution to the character and distinctiveness of the area, and ensuring that development in conservation areas is consistent with the special character of those areas". As well as "Retain and improves the setting of heritage assets, including views, public rights of way, trees and landscape features, including historic public realm features."

Historic England have issued guidance on 'Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency' (2024), which includes advice on solar panels on land associated with a listed building. The application site is within the setting of Needs Farmhouse (and a War Memorial) and the guidance is therefore considered relevant. The guidance sets out that: -

- The installation of panels away from the listed building can often be done without any direct harm to the building's special interest.
- However, consideration will still need to be given to the effect of an installation on the setting of the listed building.
- Where an installation can be made away from the listed building, and would cause no, or less, harm to its special interest, there will be less justification to install panels on the building itself.
- Consideration should be given to reducing the visual impact of ground mounted panels in the setting of listed buildings, for instance using hedges to screen them and designing unobtrusive security measures.

The solar panels would be largely isolated from the main Needs Farmhouse complex of buildings. As part of the site visit it was apparent that traffic was visible beyond the eastern boundary hedge, and it is considered that the solar panels would be more visible than is suggested in the application. There are significant concerns that the proposed siting of the solar panels would interfere with the views of the listed house from Need's Hill and appear as a conspicuous backdrop to the listed war memorial. The war memorial should be recognised as a rural monument and positioned in this location purposefully to be experienced in the countryside. In this context and setting it is considered that the panels would be an incongruous feature within the setting of the listed war memorial and historic house, and within this landscape more generally.

It is considered that the proposed location of the solar panels would have a harmful impact on the setting of neighbouring heritage assets, contrary to the above policies.

It is noted that there is limited information within the submission to set out why this location has been chosen, and why other potentially less sensitive locations could not be brought forward. In particular it appears an alternative location would be potentially available to the south of the converted stable building, where solar panels would be screened from the house by the ancillary building but still enjoy a high degree of direct sunlight. In this location the proposed solar panels would also be out of line of sight from Steyning Road when looking towards the historic house, and the copse of trees as well as the hedgerow would act as a foil when looking beyond the listed war memorial to the west.

Residential Amenity:

Policy 33 of the HDPF states that permission will be granted for development that does not cause unacceptable harm to the amenity of the occupiers/users of nearby properties and land.

It is considered that the nature and siting of the proposed panels and their resulting relationship with adjacent properties would be sufficient to prevent any unacceptable harm to neighbouring amenity, with no evidence to suggest harmful levels of glare would result to adjacent land and properties.

Water Neutrality:

There is no clear or compelling evidence to suggest the nature and scale of the proposed development would result in a more intensive occupation of the dwelling necessitating an increased consumption of water that would result in a significant impact on the Arun Valley SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. The grant of planning permission would not therefore adversely affect the integrity of these sites or otherwise conflict with policy 31 of the HDPF, NPPF paragraph 180 and the Council's obligations under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):

Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) mandates that every development must achieve at least a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), unless the development qualifies as exempt under the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024).

It is likely that the development would be exempt from the requirement to achieve a minimum 10% BNG by reason of

- The development qualifies as 'de minimis' under Regulation 4 of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024. The collective floor area of the proposed solar panel poles would not be greater than 25sqm and there would be no removal or deterioration in biodiversity value of the habitats on the site greater than 25sqm.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

The solar panels have resulted in less than substantial harm to the significance of neighbouring heritage assets, the Grade II Listed Needs Farmhouse and the War Memorial. Paragraph 208 of the NPPF sets out that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The Historic England Guidance Note sets out that any such benefits should be “of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just be a private benefit”. The provision of a renewable source of energy at the site represents a benefit, this would though primarily be a private benefit for occupants of the related dwelling. Further, there is no evidence within the application to set out whether potentially less harmful locations for the solar panels had been considered, together with the reasons for their dismissal, or whether alternative technologies would be preferable.

The proposed development would not preserve, respect or enhance the setting of designated heritage assets and it has not been demonstrated that any public benefit could not be derived from a more sensitive scheme which addresses the concerns raised elsewhere in this report. The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to local and national planning policies.

Recommendation: Application Refused

Reason(s) for Refusal:

1. The solar panels, by reason of their siting, would represent an incongruous feature within the setting of the Grade II listed war memorial and the Grade II Listed Building Needs Farmhouse. The proposal would be unduly prominent that would interfere with views of the listed house from Need's Hill and would appear as a conspicuous backdrop to the listed war memorial when viewed on foot along Steyning Road. The solar panels would have a harmful impact on the special interest of the listed building(s) and would fail to preserve, reflect or enhance their special character and distinctiveness. The are no public benefits which would outweigh the

identified harm. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies 32, 33 and 34 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015) and the National Planning Policy Framework.

POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE STATEMENT

Statement pursuant to Article 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received, in order to be able to, where possible, grant permission.

Plans list for: DC/24/1566

(The approved plans will form Condition 1 on the Decision Notice of all Permitted applications)

Schedule of plans/documents **not approved**:

Plan Type	Description	Drawing Number	Received Date
Supporting Statement	BNG and Ecology Plan and Statement	NONE	06.01.2025
Supporting Statement	Planning	NONE	06.01.2025
Supporting Docs	BNG Metric	NONE	06.01.2025
Location plan		NONE	06.01.2025
Block plan		NONE	08.10.2024
Elevation plan	Front and Back	NONE	08.10.2024
Elevation plan	Side	NONE	08.10.2024
Supporting Statement	Planning	NONE	08.10.2024
Supporting Docs	Data sheets	NONE	08.10.2024
Supporting Statement	BNG Ecology and Plan	NONE	08.10.2024
Supporting Statement	BNG Baseline Report	NONE	08.10.2024

DELEGATED

Case Officer sign/initial Halima Chowdhury Date: 20.02.2025

Authorising Officer sign/initial Guy Everest Date: 03.03.2025