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26/07/2024

For the attention of: Alice Johnson

Ref: DC/24/1000 - Architectural Plants Limited Stane Street North Heath West Sussex

Thank you for consulting us on the planning application for the erection of a ground mounted Solar PV System

This letter sets out our consultation response on the landscape impact of the application and how the proposal relates and responds to the landscape setting and context of the site.

Summary

Not supportive on landscape grounds	
Supportive subject to attached recommendations and / or conditions	X
Further information required prior to determination	
No landscape comments / does not wish to comment	

In summary, from a landscape perspective, while we are satisfied with the proposals in general, we would encourage further landscape elements in line with LCA guidance to better assimilate the proposals within the landscape.

Context

The site is located approximately 4.5km north of Pulborough and accessed off Stane Street (A29). The boundary of the South Downs National Park (SDNP) is approximately 1.5km west.

There are a number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) located around the site, notably footpath 1305 located approx. 250m to the north of the site and footpath 1984 located approx. 280m south of the site.

The wider landscape comprises small to medium sized enclosed arable and grazing fields with moderate clusters of woodland throughout. The associated nursery polyhouses are located to the west and Brinsbury College to the south-west comprising of a combination of barns, buildings and car parking. Hepworth Brewery and associated buildings is located across the A29.

Planning Context

Horsham District Planning Framework

The Horsham District Planning Framework (2015) (HDPF) Proposals Maps identifies the site as being located outside the defined built-up area boundary and therefore designated as countryside. Policy 26: Countryside Protection sets out a presumption against development unless for agriculture, forestry

minerals, quiet informal recreation or ensures the sustainable development of rural areas. The Policy also states that development permitted must be of a scale appropriate to its countryside character location and must not lead, either individually or cumulatively, to a significant increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside and/or conserves, and / or enhances, the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area in which it is located.

Policy 25: 'The Natural Environment and Landscape Character' sets out that development proposals will be required to protect, conserve, and enhance the landscape character, taking into account areas identified as being of landscape importance, the individual settlement characteristics, and maintains settlement separation.

Policy 31: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity requires development to contribute to the enhancement of existing biodiversity and should also be compliant with Policy 33: Development Principles which states that proposals should be distinctive in character, respect the character of the surrounding area (including its overall setting, views and green corridors) and, where available and applicable, take account of the recommendations/policies of the relevant Design Statements and Character Assessments.

Landscape Character

The 'National Character Area' (NCA) as defined by Natural England which identifies the site as lying within LCA 120: Wealden Greensand. At county level, the site is defined as lying within LW5: Southern Low Weald of the Landscape Character Assessment of West Sussex. Land Management guidelines for this LCA include: *Establish new hedgerow and hedgerow tree planting alongside major roads such as the A29 and A24 to blend with existing woodland and hedgerow patterns and along lanes to mask the visual impact of pylons.*

Locally, the site lies within F1: Pulborough, Chiltington and Thakeham Farmlands Landscape Character Area (LCA) of the The Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment (2003). Key relevant characteristics of this LCA include; partly wooded scarp, leafy sunken lanes with sandstone exposures. Introduction of suburban features along the A29 is identified as a key issue within the LCA. Planning and land management guidelines within this LCA include improving the landscape along the A29 approach to Pulborough.

The A29 forms part of the original C55 mile long roman road connecting London to Chichester and is preserved in various locations where the original road can be found and some sections utilised as a public bridleway. The section between Billingshurst and Pulborough retains the roads earliest known name of Stane Street first recorded at 'Stanstrete' in 1279 according to Place-Names of Surrey (1934).

Review of submitted information

The application has been supported by a Design and Access Statement (dated: March 2024) which describes hedging on the boundary which will remain and states that no adverse impact on the rural landscape.

While it is accepted that the hedge will offer some screening from the A29, it is currently managed at a low height and therefore it could be possible that views will be gained from receptors along the road. Furthermore, there is potential that views could be possible from the PRoW 1305. However, within the context of the site it is not considered that this would be adverse from the PRoW given the distance and low height of the panels.

A revised Block Plan has been reviewed which indicates a 'Plant Room' but no further details have been submitted. There are some concerns regarding the height and materiality of this building within the open landscaped frontage of the nurseries.

Recommendations

While we accept the panels are low in height and unlikely to result in substantial visual harm if the roadside hedge is managed at 1.5m+, we do have concerns regarding the location of the plant room in

close proximity to Stane Street (A29). No details of this feature have been supplied therefore we are unable to be fully sure of the likely effects, though having made assumptions that this feature will be no taller than 2m in height. The siting is of particular concern given LCA guidelines state the importance of improving the landscape setting of the road.

While we do not deem it necessary to undertake a Landscape Visual Assessment, we would advise that the impact of this feature should be further reduced by more sensitive siting, and careful choice of materials and colours. Currently this is positioned in a prominent, open location and would perhaps have less effect if relocated further away from the road, towards the nursery compound. Additionally, planting could be used to screen the plant room from the A29.

If minded for approval, we recommend securing these details by condition to retain the existing positive visual frontage of the site:

1. PRIOR TO COMMENCEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT: LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE PLAN

No development shall take place until a Landscape Maintenance Plan, including schedules and specifications for all soft landscape areas, together with a timetable for the lifetime of the panels has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Landscape Maintenance Plan shall include details of the arrangements for its implementation and establishment and secure the height of boundary hedgerow to be maintained at a minimum of 1.5m. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Landscape Maintenance Plan.

If you have any queries regarding the above matters, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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Senior Landscape Consultant

Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of Horsham District Council
Please note: This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.