

Report to	<b>Planning Committee</b>
Date	<b>11 July 2011</b>
By	<b>Head of Planning</b>
Local Authority	<b>Chichester District Council</b>
Application Number	<b>11/01574/FULNP</b>
Application	<b>Erection of solar photovoltaic panels ground mounted</b>
Address	<b>The Stewards House, Bignor Park, Bignor</b>
Purpose of Report	<b>The application is reported to Committee for decision.</b>

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**Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to grant planning permission for the reason and subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 8.1 of this report.**

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## **1. The Proposal and the Site**

- 1.1 The application site comprises a field located at the northern end of the grounds of The Stewards House, Bignor, Pulborough. The main dwelling is a Grade II listed building and the field is currently used for animal grazing. A bridleway is located approximately 50 metres to the north of the site and access to the paddock is obtained from the south.
- 1.2 There are no buildings within the boundary of the application site. The north east boundary of the field is defined by a drainage ditch, beyond which is an area of deciduous and evergreen woodland. The southern and western boundaries of the paddock are enclosed by woodland and the northwest boundary is defined by fencing with isolated tree growth.
- 1.3 The proposal is for a 13kW ground mounted solar photovoltaic array located on racks 30.77 metres in length. The PV panels would be positioned at an angle of 25 degrees, at a height of 2.2 metres above ground level on metal frames, facing south. The PV panels would be treated with a non-reflective coating to minimise solar glare.

## **2. Consultations**

- 2.1 Landscape consultant – long distance views have not been fully assessed but given the wooded character of the landscape and additional planting proposed the impact is likely to be very limited.

## **3. Representations**

- 3.1 Sutton and Barlavington Parish Council – Support, provided:
  - the panels are not seen from the road, the bridle path, or the South Downs pathway;
  - the reflection of the panels could be a nuisance if seen from above.

## **4. Relevant Planning History**

- 4.1 None relevant.

## 5. Planning Policy Context

- 5.1 The two statutory purposes of the SDNP designation are:
- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas; and
  - To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas
- 5.2 If there is a conflict between these two purposes, conservation takes precedence. There is also a duty to foster the economic and social wellbeing of the local community in pursuit of these objectives. Government policy relating to National Parks set out in PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and Circular 20/10 is that they have the highest status protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. Conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside, must, therefore be given great weight in development control decisions.
- 5.3 In addition, the following national planning policy documents are relevant to this application:
- PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development
  - Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change – Supplement to PPS1
  - PPS22 : Renewable Energy
- 5.4 Applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan in this area is the South East Plan and the Chichester District Local Plan First Review (1999).
- 5.5 The South East Plan was adopted by the Secretary of State on 6 May 2009 and supersedes RPG9. The Coalition Government's revocation of the South East Plan in July 2010 has been found to be unlawful so the document currently remains part of the development plan. The intention to revoke it is a material consideration. Policies of relevance to this application include:
- Policy C2: The South Downs. The policy states that the purposes of the designation should be a material consideration in the making of any planning decision that would affect it.
  - Policy CC1: Sustainable Development. The principal policy objective is to achieve and maintain sustainable development in the region.
  - Policy CC2: Climate Change. The policy seeks to reduce the region's carbon emissions by at least 25% below 1990 levels by 2015 and 80% by 2050.
  - Policy CC3: Resources Use. The policy seeks to adapt existing development to reduce the use of energy, water and other resources and to change the behaviour by organisations and individuals.
- 5.6 Chichester District Local Plan First Review (1999) relevant policies are:
- Policy RE1 Development in the Rural Area
  - Policy BE11 New Development must not detract from its surroundings and will be assessed for its impact on the setting of the landscape.
  - Policy BE14 Wildlife Habitat, Trees, Hedges and Other Landscape Features
  - Policy BE16 Energy Conservation

## 6. Planning Assessment

### Sustainable Development

- 6.1 Renewable energy is central to the Government's strategy to tackling climate change. The South East Plan contains policies which support and promote renewable energy and sets targets for the use of renewable energy to ensure that the region contributes to national targets. Policy CC2 of the South East Plan seeks to reduce the region's carbon emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2015, and by 2050, this target increases to 80%. Policy support is

therefore given to organisations and individuals to adapt and to use renewable forms of energy, in order to reduce the consumption of finite resources and reduce carbon emissions (policy CC3). Policy BE16 of the Adopted Chichester District Local Plan seeks to encourage energy conservation and energy efficiency, but no specific targets or measures are identified. In this regard, the proposal for the erection of ground mounted solar photovoltaic panels for domestic use is supported in principle and meets the objectives of national and regional planning policy.

#### Impact on the character and appearance of the SDNP

- 6.2 Mature deciduous and evergreen trees would largely screen views of the panels from the public highway, which is located 40 metres to the east of the site, although glimpses of the panels may be possible during winter months when there is less tree cover. The plans indicate tree planting along the north eastern boundary to provide additional screening. To the south and west, no public views of the PV panels would be possible, as a belt of mature trees and woodland encloses the site to the south and west. Given the height, length and size of the PV array, it would be possible to view the rear of the PV panels from the public bridleway to the north of the site, as there is limited tree cover and isolated tree growth along the boundary. Additional planting is proposed on the northeast boundary, which when matured, would largely screen views. This could be secured by planning condition.
- 6.3 In relation to longer distance views, limited information has been submitted by the applicant to demonstrate how the proposed solar PV panels would impact on the landscape character of the National Park. The landscape in this area of the National Park is typified by areas of heathland and woodland, with public access at Lord's Piece, Barlavington Estate, to the north and east of the site. Given the level of tree cover immediately surrounding the site, there would be no views of the PV panels from publicly accessible land on higher ground to the north and east at Lord's Piece.

#### Impact on Residential Amenity

- 6.4 There are no neighbouring properties within the vicinity of the application site. The proposal would have no impact on residential amenity.

### **7. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 7.1 The proposal is for renewable energy generation for domestic use that is not considered to harm the special landscape character of the SDNP or the amenities of neighbouring properties. The proposal is therefore in compliance with national planning policy and policies contained within the South East Plan and Chichester District Local Plan (First Review).

### **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 It is recommended that Planning permission be granted for the following reason:

The proposal is for a renewable form of energy generation for domestic use that will contribute towards nationally and regionally set targets to reduce carbon emissions. The solar photovoltaic array is modest in size and the site is well screened and additional planting of appropriate species can be secured by condition solar photovoltaic array will not therefore have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the landscape in this part of the SDNP. The proposal therefore complies with national policy guidance set out in PPS1, Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change – Supplement to PPS1, PPS7, PPS22, policies C2, CC1, CC2, CC3 of the South East Plan and policies RE1, BE11, BE14 and BE16 of the Chichester District Local Plan (First Review) 1999.

subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall commence within three years of the date of this permission.

*Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and County Planning Act.*

- 2) The development hereby permitted shall not commence until trees and shrubs of species to be approved by the South Downs National Park Authority in writing have been planted along the east and northwest boundaries, as indicated on drawing no DWG001.. Any trees or shrubs that die or become diseased within a period of five years following planting shall be replaced in the next planting season with a similar size and species.

*Reason: To ensure that the natural beauty of the SDDNP is conserved and enhanced in compliance with policies RE1 and BE14 of the Chichester District Local Plan (First Review) 1999.*

## **9. Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 9.1 It is considered that the proposal does not raise any crime and disorder implications.

## **10. Human Rights Implications**

- 10.1 This planning application has been considered in light of statute and case law and any interference with an individual's human rights is considered to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised.

### **JIM REDWOOD Head of Planning**

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Appendices	Location Map
SDNPA Consultees	Monitoring Officer & Senior Solicitor.

#### Background Documents

Observations of Sutton and Barlington Parish Council  
PPS1

Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change – Supplement to PPS1  
PPS22  
PPS7

Chichester District Local Plan First Review 1999  
South East Plan 2009