Ms Lindsey Stuart
East Lindsey District Council
Tedder Hall
Manby Park
Louth
Lincolnshire
LN11 8UP

Our Ref: 70070079-034

7 November 2022

Dear Lindsey,

FULL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR ROOF-MOUNTED PV PANELS ON TWO CREW SHEDS AT KEAL FARM, BLUESTONE HEATH ROAD, SOUTH ORMSBY, LN11 8QR

We write to submit an application on behalf of our client, the South Ormsby Estate, to seek planning approval for roof-mounted PV panels on two agricultural buildings that gained prior approval on 19 September 2019 (LPA ref: N/160/01234/19). The prior approval application sought to establish the siting, design and external appearance of the two agricultural buildings, which were required to provide winter housing for cattle.

Alongside this letter, the application is accompanied by the following documents:

- Planning application forms and ownership certificates; and
- Planning application drawings prepared by Takero Shimazaki Architects ("T-sa").

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Keal Farm ('the site') is situated within the South Ormsby Estate, near to South Ormsby Hall (which is Grade II* listed), within the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty ('AONB') and South Ormsby village.

The site is the operational centre of the Lincoln Red agricultural business on the South Ormsby Estate and is also operated as a farm, supporting agricultural buildings and associated agricultural land. There are no listed buildings within the site, nor is it located within a Conservation Area. The site is situated within Flood Zone 1, an area of the lowest probability of flooding. Access to the farm is gained via an existing access point onto Bluestone Heath Road, which serves the farmhouse to the west and agricultural yard to the east.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

The South Ormsby Estate is on a mission to achieve holistic sustainability and has sought to undertake a range of improvements and upgrades to the existing building stock in order to improve overall efficiency and incorporate sustainable energy measures. The proposed addition of roof-mounted PV panels to the two agricultural buildings towards the east of Keal Farm are requested to ensure that the development contributes towards the wider goals of the Estate. It is intended that the PV panels will generate power for use within the existing farming enterprise. Any additional supply will be fed back into the grid.

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The agricultural buildings are located on Bluestone Heath Road and are set behind dense vegetation, which separates the buildings and the highway. The two agricultural buildings were granted prior approval on 19 September 2019 (LPA ref: N/160/1234/19) and were required to provide winter housing for cattle.

The position and size of the two agricultural buildings provides an ideal opportunity to support an array of solar panels which would be used to generate (and store) energy for use within the farm and the wider estate, with any excess being fed back into the grid. Therefore, PV panels are proposed to be located both sides of the roof slopes (eastern and western elevations). To support the PV panels, inverters will be located to the south of the agricultural buildings, facing away from the road.

In addition to the PV panels and associated inverters, two external, wall-mounted cabinets are proposed to house the distribution equipment, as well as the intake, meter and western power related equipment. The cabinets are proposed to be located on the eastern side of the existing store towards the western side of the site. This position will not be visible from the highway as it is behind the existing road-fronting Dutch barn.

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

All planning decisions are taken in accordance with Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). In this context, the Development Plan comprises the East Lindsey Local Plan (adopted 2018) and the other material considerations including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and supporting National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).

The key material considerations for this application are:

- Design;
- Landscape; and
- Sustainability.

Principle of Development

The PV panels will be located on both roof slopes of the two agricultural buildings. The existing buildings are modern in appearance, as they have slate blue metal sheet walls and grey fibre cement sheeting to the roof. The buildings are also around 30 metres from the road and are set back behind mature trees along the roadside boundary. The agricultural buildings are also next to another modern agricultural building, which means that the PV panels will not appear out of place within the surrounding environment.

The proposed PV panels are requested in order to ensure that the agricultural buildings contribute towards the overall drive to achieve holistic sustainability within the Estate. This is in accordance with Paragraph 8 of the NPPF and Policy SP2 of the Core Strategy, as the Estate has undertaken work to upgrade and improve the sustainability of the new and existing building stock over recent years. The proposed PV panels will ensure the development is sustainable in the manner described in Paragraph 8 of the NPPF and the introduction of low carbon energy sources demonstrates clear environmental benefits of the development.

The existing agricultural buildings already support and improve the agricultural functionality of the Estate and the wider rural economy, demonstrating clear social and economic benefits associated with the development. This is supported by Core Strategy Policy SP13 and NPPF 84, which seek to support a prosperous rural economy.

Part 14 of the Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order (2015) allows the installation of solar equipment on non-domestic premises under Class J. The principle of solar panels on such buildings in the AONB would be supported in principle, where these do not front a highway. However, in order to maximise the efficiency of the PV installation, the arrangement of panels on the roof, which will extend closer than 1m from the edge of the roof, means that the proposal will fall outside of the allowance for permitted development in this instance and will require full assessment as part of a planning application. However, it is considered that the permitted development allowances along with the approval of other PV installations elsewhere on the South Ormsby Estate, indicate that the principle of this proposal is acceptable in this location.

Design

Paragraph 130 of the NPPF and Strategic Polices 10 and 11 of the Core Strategy require the highest standard of design by adding to the overall quality of the area, being visually attractive and sympathetic to local character and history, maintaining a strong sense of place and creating places that are safe, inclusive and accessible.

The existing agricultural buildings are modern and sit within a modern farming context where the PV panels will not detract from the appearance of the buildings or look irregular when installed on the roof. The PV panels will be installed on both slopes of the roofs and will be viewed within the context of the surrounding modern agricultural buildings.

The proposed panels are dark in colour and will therefore be visually recessive within the landscape. The PV panels will be on both sides of the roofs, which face east and west with the highway to the north. This means that there is some potential for the PV panels to be visible from the Bluestone Heath Road, but the dense vegetation in between will largely shield the PV panels from public views from the road.

The existing agricultural buildings (and the entirety of Keal Farm) are a significant distance from any residential development and therefore, in terms of design, the proposal complies with Policy SP10 of the Core Strategy and Paragraph 130 of the NPFF, which encourage development to be well-designed, sustainable and to not harm residential amenity.

Further to this, as part of ongoing works across the Estate to restore the landscape, planting works have been undertaken around Keal Farm in order to support its integration into its wider surroundings and to soften the views of the site from outside, ensuring the proposed development will be sympathetic to its setting. These landscaping works include heavy standard tree planting, feathered tree planting, hedgerow planting, boundary treatments and associated works.

Following previous advice from Natural England (in their response to planning permission ref: N/098/01711/15), roof-mounted PV panels have been chosen instead of ground-mounted panels in this case, as they can often be carried out without causing significant landscape impacts within the AONB. The installation of roof mounted PV panels outlined here complies with SP23 of the Core Strategy, which aims to ensure that the District's landscapes are protected, enhanced, used and managed to provide an attractive and healthy working and living environment.

Overall, the proposed PV panels are considered to represent appropriate development for the site in relation to design and the proposals comply with the requirements of SP10 and SP11 of the Core Strategy and Paragraph 130 of the NPPF.

Landscape

Paragraphs 176 and 177 of the NPPF give great weight to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs. SP23 of the Core Strategy protects the distinctive landscape character of the District. The highest level of protection is given to the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB due to its landscape quality. The distinctive landscape of the AONB should not be compromised by development proposals.

The minor changes to the agricultural buildings through the addition of PV panels to the roof will not harm local landscape features or the distinctive character of the area. The design changes as a result of the proposals are considered minimal and acceptable within the largely agricultural context of the site. The Officer's report for the prior approval of the two agricultural buildings (LPA ref: N/160/01234/19) outlines that the materials used in the design of the buildings help assimilate them with the existing cluster of buildings, which reduces the overall visual impact on the sensitive rural location. This proposal and the minor aesthetic changes proposed to the appearance of these buildings is not considered to alter this assessment and the proposals would fall in line with SP23 of the Core Strategy and Paragraphs 176 and 177 of the NPPF.

Sustainable Development

Renewable Energy

SP27 of the Core Strategy outlines East Lindsey District Council's policy relating to renewable energy and low carbon energy. The policy outlines that small scale renewable energy development will be supported where the impact, when weighed against the benefits, is not considered to have an unacceptable impact on residential amenity, cultural or historic features or areas of local landscape quality.

The installation of PV panels on the roof of the agricultural buildings will not affect residential amenity, cultural or historic assets or the local landscape and setting. The two agricultural buildings are already located on the site and the installation of PV panels will not significantly alter the visual impact of the agricultural buildings.

The NPPF further supports the application as Paragraph 152 outlines that planning decisions should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, which includes the support of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. The addition of PV panels to the roofs of the agricultural buildings will, therefore, aid the Estate in moving towards a low carbon future.

Estate-Wide Sustainability

The installation of PV panels is in line with the wider strategy for the Estate, which has the vision of creating a sustainable future for the community of South Ormsby. Much of the Estate's work is to improve the social and economic sustainability of the area by creating rural jobs and restoring heritage assets to their former significance.

However, as outlined in Paragraph 11 of the NPPF and Policy SP2 of the Core Strategy, sustainable development requires a holistic approach and comprises economic, social and environmental sustainability. As such, the Estate is seeking to ensure that buildings across the Estate are upgraded to improve their energy efficiency. In the case of agricultural buildings, where improving energy efficiency is not possible, the installation of PV panels will be able to ensure that the Estate continues to promote sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The addition of roof-mounted PV panels on the two agricultural buildings at Keal Farm will help to facilitate the South Ormsby Estate's vision to achieve holistic sustainability. The design of the PV panels will not appear out of place on the building or within the setting of Keal Farm.

The proposal represents the positive upgrading of the agreed agricultural building, which will result in improvements to the overall sustainability of Keal Farm and the wider South Ormsby Estate. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with the relevant policies of the East Lindsey Core Strategy and the relevant policies of the NPPF.

We look forward to receiving confirmation that this application has been received and validated. In the meantime, should you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me (07795 922435 / anna.brindle@wsp.com).

Yours faithfully

Anna Brindle
Associate Planner