

Planning Application for the Installation of Ground-Mounted Solar Panels

Land South of Hesselton Road, Bradfield St
George

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Planning Application for the Installation of Ground-Mounted Solar Panels

Land South of Hessett Road, Bradfield St George

Client: The Rougham Estate

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1.0 Introduction and Summary

- 1.1 This planning statement is written in support of an application for the installation of ground-mounted solar panels near the village of Bradfield St George. This is a small development of solar panels which will be positioned in the corner of a field on a ground-mounted frame which will provide a source of renewable energy.
- 1.2 Both local and national planning policies support the need for low-carbon energy production. As stated in the West Suffolk Joint Development Management Policies Document, *“small-scale projects can provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.”*
- 1.3 The proposed solar panels will not harm the landscape they are a small development in a discreet location in the corner of a field, measuring approximately 0.08 ha. The site is well screened by a large woodland to the south, east and west and a hedge to the north. The nearest road to the site is Hesselton Road to the north which is approximately 160 metres from the site and is an unclassified rural road. The view of the solar panels from Hesselton Road will not be prominent as a native hedge has recently been planted by the applicant along the roadside. This hedge will mature and will screen the view across the field towards the proposed solar panels. It is also proposed that a hedge is planted along the north and east boundary of the site as shown in the proposed site plan. This hedge will provide further screening and will have a positive landscape and ecology impact.
- 1.4 There is a restricted byway which runs to the east of the site. This byway is positioned behind a well-established, tall hedge and so there are no views towards the application site from this byway. This byway will not be interrupted by the installation or operation of the solar panels.
- 1.5 The land is currently used to grow arable crops. This use has a low ecological value as the land is regularly ploughed and the crops harvested. With the proposed development grassland and wildflowers will be allowed to grow on the land around and beneath the solar panels which will provide foraging habitat for local wildlife. The hedges which are proposed on the north and east boundaries will also provide additional habitat.
- 1.6 There are two houses nearby to the site, the house Broadleas 140 metres to the north of the site off Hesselton Road and Freewood Cottage which is 60 metres to the

southwest set amongst woodland. Due to the discreet positioning of the development and proposed hedgerow screening, there will be no impact on the amenity of these nearby houses.

- 1.7 This application is for a small solar development. The position of the proposed solar panels has been carefully considered to ensure there is no impact on the wider landscape and the proposed planting will mitigate any minor impact which would have been caused. National and local planning policies support the development of sources of renewable energy; therefore, we look forward to receiving confirmation of support from the local planning authority.

2.0 Description of the Application Site, the Surrounding Area, and the Proposed Development

Description of the Site and the Surrounding Area

2.1 The application site is located in the corner of a field near the village of Bradfield St George in West Suffolk as shown in Figure 2.1.

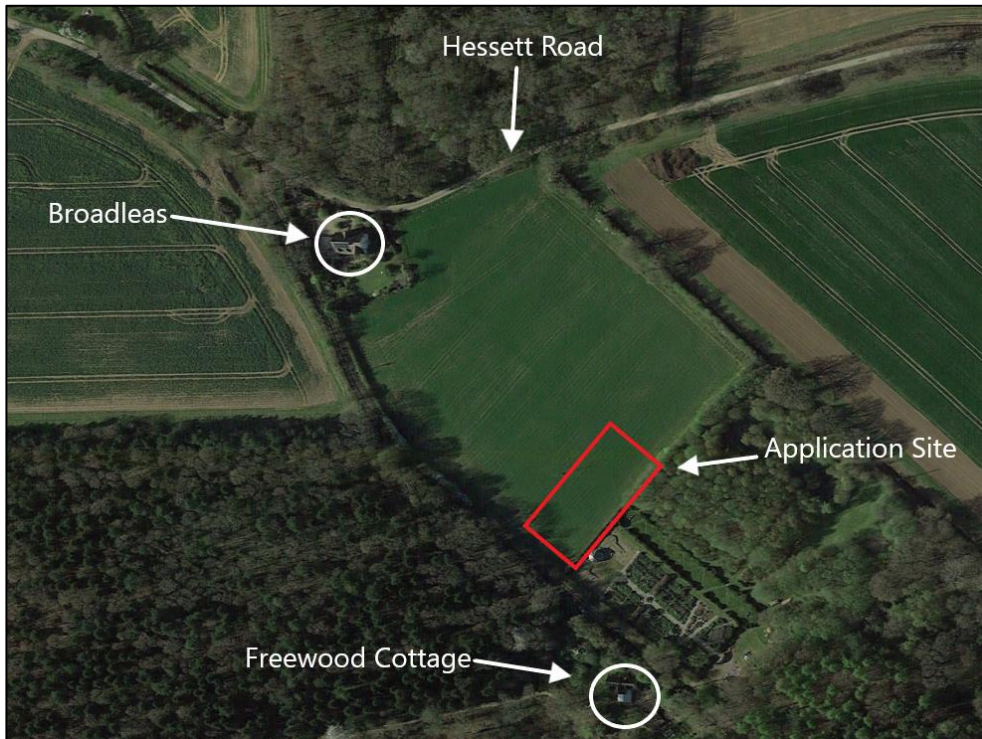


Figure 2.1 - Aerial Image of Application Site and Surroundings

2.2 The site is in a discreet location with thick woodland to the south, west and east. To the north are agricultural fields, beyond which is the house Broadleas and Hessett Road which is an unclassified rural road. A hedge has recently been planted by the applicant on the southern side of the road. The property Freewood Cottage is located to the southwest of the application site set amongst woodland and behind well-established vegetation.

2.3 The west Suffolk constraints map has been reviewed regarding the site; this is shown in Figure 2.2. This map confirms that no constraints are affecting the site such as;

- It is not in a conservation area;
- It is not subject to an Article 4 Direction;
- There are no nearby Tree Preservation Orders;

- There are no listed buildings or ancient monuments on the site or nearby;
- The site is not subject to any landscape or ecological designations i.e. a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation, a Stone Curlew, Woodlark or Nightjar buffer zone or a Special Landscape Area.
- The site is in Flood Zone 1, an area with a low probability of flooding.



Figure 2.2 - West Suffolk Planning Constraints Map

Proposed Development

- 2.4 This application proposes the installation of a ground mounted solar panel array.
- 2.5 The panels will be orientated to face southwards to ensure that they receive the highest amount of sun exposure and operate as efficiently as possible.
- 2.6 UK Power Networks have confirmed their agreement to the installation of these solar panels at the site.
- 2.7 The solar panels proposed are Hyundai Solare HG Series panels. The full specification is included within this application. These panels utilise shingled technology which generates ultra-high efficiency even when there are low levels of sunlight. The panels measure 1899mm x 1096mm.
- 2.8 A hedge is proposed around the northern boundary of the site. This will provide screening of the site of views from the north from the property Broadleas and Hessett Road.

2.9 This hedge would be a native mix such as 50% hawthorn, 25% blackthorn, 15% field maple, 2% holly, 2% wild privet, 2% guelder rose, 2% dog rose and 2% buckthorn. This would be planted at a spacing of 20-30cm, approximately 3 plants for every metre of hedge.

3.0 Planning Policy

3.1 This section assesses national and local planning policies which are relevant to this proposal. National planning policy is contained within the Nation Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF), while local planning policy is contained within the Joint Development Plan Management Policies 2015 (JDMPD), the St Edmundsbury Core Strategy 2010 (Core Strategy) and the Rural Vision 2031 (Rural Vision).

Principle of Development

3.2 Sustainable development is a core principle of the NPPF which is set out in Chapter 2. One of the three overarching objectives set out in Paragraph 8 is the environmental objective which specifically supports *“mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”*

3.3 Chapter 14 of the NPPF is entitled *“Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change”*. This chapter specifically supports the development of renewable energy sources as put forward in this application. Paragraph 155 states that plans should *“seeks to increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy.”*

3.4 Paragraph 158 goes on to state that;

“when determining applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should;

*a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even **small-scale projects** provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and*

b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.”

3.5 Therefore, there is strong national planning support for the proposed development of a small-scale solar array.

3.6 The local development plan also supports applications which seek permission for renewable energy development. JDMPD Policy DM8 concerns proposals for the *“generation or recovery of low carbon or renewable energy”*. This policy sets out that proposals will be encouraged subject to the following criteria:

“a) Proposals will be required to demonstrate the new carbon saving benefit they will create.” The proposal will provide a source of renewable energy. In June 2023 the

National Grid ESO reported that 54% of the country's energy was generated from fossil fuel sources, with 36.9% of electricity being generated by gas¹. Therefore, this development will help to reduce the reliance on carbon fuels.

"b) proposals will be required to include a landscape and visual assessment" – this requirement has been addressed in the Landscape Impact section below.

"c) where appropriate the proposal includes the provision for mitigation and compensation measures, such as habitat enhancement or relocation" The proposed location of the solar panels is in the corner of an existing agricultural field currently used to grow crops. As such this is not a high-value ecology habitat. The proposal includes the planting of additional hedgerows which will be a habitat enhancement and the land around and beneath the solar panels allow grassland and wildflowers to grow which will provide a habitat for biodiversity.

- 3.7 The principle of the proposals is therefore supported by both local and national planning policies.

Landscape Impact

- 3.8 As set out above, JDMPD Policy DM8 states that a landscape and visual assessment of a proposal should be undertaken. JDMPD Policy DM13 also requires that development should not harm the character of the landscape or landscape features.

- 3.9 The application site has been proposed as it is in a well-screened location away from any prominent views in the area. There are thick woods to the south, east and west of the site. To the north and northeast of the site are agricultural fields.

- 3.10 The nearest road is Hessett Road which is a rural lane 160 metres to the north of the site. There is an existing hedge which has recently been planted by the applicant along the northern edge of the field which follows the road which can be retained by condition if required.

- 3.11 To the west of the site is an access track which runs from the property Freewood Cottage to Hessett Road. This track is also a restricted byway so provides the public with a right of way by foot, horseback, or bicycle.

- 3.12 The view of the site from the road and house to the north and from the byway to the

¹ ESO - Great Britain's monthly electricity stats [Great Britain's monthly electricity stats | ESO \(nationalgrideso.com\)](https://nationalgrideso.com) Accessed 25.07.2023

east and south has been carefully considered. The proposed location is the furthest distance away from the road reducing the prominence of the development.

3.13 The view from Hessett Road towards the site can be seen in Figure 3.1



Figure 3.1 - View from Hessett Road South

3.14 As can be seen, the application site is positioned against the dark backdrop of the woods behind it. A hedge has been planted along the roadside which will provide screening of the application site. This application proposes another hedge on the north and east boundaries of the site which will provide further screening of the site from the road.

3.15 The solar panels are proposed to face south, away from the road so there will be no glare from the panels towards the road. As shown on the submitted side elevations of the panels, the panels will be 2.4 metres high at their highest point and so will not be prominent in the landscape.

3.16 Figure 3.2 shows the view from the bridleway to the west of the site.



Figure 3.2 - View from the Bridleway

- 3.17 As shown in this photo, the hedge which runs alongside the bridleway is very mature and blocks any view of the application site.
- 3.18 Therefore, the proposed development of solar panels will not harm the local landscape. They are positioned in a discreet location where there are minimal views. The proposed hedgerow planting will further reduce the impact of the solar panels and will provide attractive screening which will contribute to the landscape setting.

Ecology Impact

- 3.19 JDMPD Policy DM2 requires that development does not adversely affect; *“sites, habitats, species and features of ecological interest”*. DM13 also requires that development does not have an adverse impact on wildlife.
- 3.20 The current use of the site for growing crops has a low ecological value as it is regularly ploughed and the crops harvested. The proposed use of the land for solar panels includes hedgerow planting around the northern boundary which will provide new habitat for local wildlife.
- 3.21 On the land around and beneath the panels grassland and wildflowers will be allowed to grow which will provide habitat and foraging land for wildlife.

3.22 This new use, combined with the proposed planting will benefit the ecology on the site.

Residential Amenity

3.23 As set out above, the residential property Broadleas is located approximately 140 metres to the north of the site and Freewood Cottage is 60 metres to the southwest. JDMPD Policy DM2 requires that development should not adversely impact residential amenity.

3.24 Broadleas is 140 metres away from the solar panels, so there is a sufficient separation that the panels will not be prominent. The panels will also face to the south, away from this property so there will be no glare towards this house.

3.25 The proposed planting will further soften any view of the back of the panels and so there will be little change to the existing view in this direction from Broadleas and the residential amenity will be unaffected.

3.26 Freewood Cottage is set amongst thick woodland. There are no views towards the site from this property, and the drive which follows the bridleway is completely screened by the mature hedge.

3.27 Therefore, there is no adverse impact on the amenity of either of these nearby houses.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 This planning application is for a small-scale development of ground-mounted solar panels in a discreet location in the corner of a field. The panels will be mounted on a frame which will be secured to the ground using ground screws.
- 4.2 These solar panels will provide a source of renewable energy. Local and national planning policies strongly support the development of low and no-carbon power sources such as solar panels and recognise that small-scale developments such as this can have a positive impact on reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
- 4.3 The solar panels are proposed in a discreet location in the corner of a field with woods on three sides. Views from the road and house which are 160 and 140 metres to the north will be softened by hedge planting around the northern boundary. The panels will also face away from the house to the north and the road and so there will be no glare on sunny days. Due to the positioning of the solar panels and the proposed planting, there will be no adverse impact on the landscape.
- 4.4 The proposed use will have a beneficial impact on ecology. The existing use of the field for crop cultivation does not benefit ecology as the field is regularly ploughed and the crops are harvested. The proposed use will allow grass and flowers to grow between and beneath the solar panels which will provide foraging habitat. Additional hedge planting will provide further habitat for ecology around the northern border of the site.