

Planning Department
Brentwood Borough Council
Town Hall
Ingrave Road
Brentwood

6 September 2023

Our ref: R8/PC/161

Dear Sir/Madam

Furze Hall, Blackmore Road, Fryerning CM4 0PB

Installation of 120 ground mounted solar panels

On behalf of our client, we hereby submit an application for the installation of a solar panel array comprising 120 ground mounted solar panels on land to the south west of Furze Hall, Blackmore Road, Fryerning.

Proposed Development

The 120 panels would be arranged in two rows of 60 panels. Each individual panel would measure 1.143 metres in width and 1.762 metres in length and would be mounted on a frame measuring 1.1 metre in height. The proposed development would be located on an underused area of land that is currently laid to grass, would be set back from the access road leading to Furze Hall and includes the planting of new hedging along the south eastern boundary of the site (which runs parallel to the access road).

The proposal would deliver renewable energy which is supported, in principle, by Local Plan Policy BE03 and paragraph 158 of the National Planning Policy Framework (“the Framework”) which states that small-scale projects for renewable energy provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and that applications should be approved if their impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

The solar panels would be located on an area of land that is surrounded by open fields which are owned by the applicant. Existing mature soft landscape features screen the site from wider views along its northern and southern boundaries. The proposed solar panels are therefore relatively well screened from public views and any impact on the surrounding area would be localised. There is also a significant distance to the nearest residential dwellings to the south of the site which would help reduce any potential impact on their amenities.

post Real8 Group, Arise, Alan Cherry Drive, Chelmsford CM1 1SQ

REAL8 REAL8
INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES LTD
PLANNING LTD

Development within the Green Belt

The site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt as identified in the Adopted Policies Map where local and national planning policies seek to prevent urban sprawl and keep land permanently open. Section 13 of the Framework establishes the national policy objective to protect the Green Belt. The aims of Green Belt Policy MG02 within the Brentwood Local Plan 2016-2033 are consistent with those of the Framework in this regard.

Paragraphs 149 and 150 of the Framework define different types of development that would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposed solar panels would not comply with any such provision and therefore, would be deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Paragraph 147 and 148 of the Framework state that inappropriate development in the Green Belt is, by definition, harmful. Such development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It continues that very special circumstances will only exist if the harm to the Green Belt by its inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The proposed solar arrays are relatively modest and are well screened from public views, thus reducing the overall scale of the development. The solar panels are proposed to be in place for a temporary 40-year period. They would then be fully demounted, and the land returned to its former condition at the end of its use. As such, the proposed development is not a permanent form of development. The impact on the openness of the Green Belt would therefore be reduced, with the site ultimately reinstated to its former open character.

Paragraph 158 of the Framework clarifies that when dealing with planning applications, planning authorities should not require a developer to demonstrate a need for low carbon or renewable energy projects, and, as set out above, should recognise that even small scale projects, such as the proposal can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Paragraph 151 of the Framework however acknowledges that when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

The proposal would provide enough power to address the current needs of the house, resulting in a carbon dioxide displacement and therefore help combating climate change. The delivery of sustainable energy raises substantial benefits in favour of the proposal. These

benefits are recognised in local and national policies and guidance, in accordance with the Climate Change Act of 2008, which seek to increase the use and supply of renewable and low-cost energy and to maximise the potential for suitable such development. The delivery of suitable renewable energy projects is fundamental to facilitate the country's transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate. These identified benefits demonstrate very special circumstances.

The location of the proposed solar panels has been carefully assessed with the proposed location being relatively unobtrusive; the development would be well contained within existing and proposed landscaping features which, combined with its modest scale (height), would ensure that the development would not have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt. In this context, the harm to the Green Belt would be clearly outweighed by the benefits identified above and therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposed development exist.

Impact on Historic Environment

S66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that, when considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, special regard shall be had to the desirability of preserving the building or setting or any features of special architectural interest which it possesses. The Framework defines the setting of a heritage asset as the surroundings in which the asset is experienced. The proposal has the capability to affect a designated heritage asset.

As a result of the existing and proposed soft landscape features along the boundaries of the site, combined with the nature of the proposed development and its limited scale, it is considered that the proposal would preserve the significance of the nearby listed buildings and their setting and would therefore accord with the aims of the Act. The less than substantial harm caused by the proposed development would be offset by the separation distance to the heritage assets, the existing and proposed intervening soft landscape features along the site's boundaries and the limited scale of the proposed development. It would therefore also comply with Local Plan Policy BE16, which requires proposed development within the setting of a listed building to not adversely affect its significance, including views to and from the building.

Other Matters

Due to the location and nature of the development, the proposed solar panels would not result in any materially harmful impact on the residential amenities of the nearest neighbouring occupiers. Similarly, the proposal would not have an impact on the Public Right of Way network or highway matters.

Conclusion

The above has shown that the proposed development demonstrates very special circumstances which clearly outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness. The proposed solar panels array would not cause any significant impact on the visual amenity of the surrounding area or negatively affect the historic environment nor would the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers or highway safety be significantly or materially affected. Consequently, the proposed development complies with local and national planning policies.

We trust that the information submitted is sufficient and allows you to determine the application. If you have any queries in respect of the documentation submitted, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Real8 Group

8