PLANNING STATEMENT

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT
INCLUDING HERITAGE STATEMENT

NOVEMBER 2023

8.61kW GROUND MOUNTED SOLAR PV ARRAY FOR DOMESTIC USE

RIVERFORD HOUSE, ST. STEPHENS HILL, LAUNCESTON, CORNWALL, PL15 8HN

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Pollard Architectural Ltd have been instructed to act on behalf of the Applicants 'Mr and Mrs Harrison' in preparing a planning application for the provision of an 8.61kW ground mounted solar PV array for domestic use at Riverford House, St. Stephens Hill, Launceston, Cornwall, PL15 8HN.

The Applicant retains the legal freehold ownership of the site, and therefore has control over the full extent of the land, including a right of access.

The property comprises a single dwelling, together with a range of outbuildings and a paddock, which slopes gently down from north to south. No agricultural activity is undertaken on the property, the paddock used as recreation area in association with the main dwelling, Riverford House.

Mr and Mrs Harrison are keen to make Riverford House energy self-sufficient and carbon neutral at least, and to this end are seeking to introduce solar pv panels. They have considered and discounted adding solar pv panels to the roof of the house and outbuildings for a number of reasons, both practical and more importantly aesthetic, especially as the dwelling is within the Conservation area and shares a boundary with a 'Listed Building'.

In their view, a more logical and efficient solution is to locate a ground-mounted PV solar array in the paddock, to the west of the main dwelling. Their rationale is that the paddock is too small to be put to any viable agricultural use and can continue to be used for recreation and is ideally suited to harvest green energy to meet the property's domestic needs – and indeed, if possible, to export surplus to the grid.

The proposed solar pv array comprises a single row of panels mounted on metal frames, angled and orientated to face south to benefit from maximum solar exposure. The posts supporting the frames will be set into a flood resilient hard standing. The solar array is thus an impermanent, temporary and reversible form of development, allowing the land to revert to its former state if and as required. Indeed, even during the lifetime of the array, the area immediately surrounding the array itself will continue to be used as a domestic paddock area.

The generating capacity of the array (8.61kW) has been determined to meet the domestic needs of Riverford House going forward, including the ability to charge electric cars. Any surplus energy produced would be stored firstly on site within a battery storage array to be sited within the main dwelling and secondly exported to the national grid.

This document should be read in conjunction with attached supporting drawings, details and justifications found within the accompanying information etc.

2335-01	Location Plan
2335-02	Existing Block Plan
2335-03	Proposed Block Plan
2335-04	Proposed Elevations

Planning Statement (Design & Access Statement)
Completed CIL Liability Requirement Form

Access:

Given the small-scale form of development the proposed access is considered to have a negligible impact upon the highway network.

The Development Plan and Other Material Considerations:

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (July 2021) and complementary National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) comprise the government's national planning policy and guidance.

Paragraph 7 of the NPPF sets out that "*The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development*."

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF explains that, in a planning sense, sustainable development has three overarching objectives; an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective. It explains that these three objectives are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways, so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable stating:-
"…*For decision-taking this means:*
c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."
3.5 Paragraph 2 of the NPPF also identifies the primacy of the development plan, advising that "*Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework must be taken into account in preparing the development plan, and is a material consideration in planning decisions*…" The planning law referred to in this paragraph is s38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and s70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

Further references will be made to the NPPF throughout this Statement.

The Development Plan and Other Material Considerations:

The Development Plan

For the purposes of paragraph 2 of the NPPF, the development plan in this case comprises the Cornwall Local Plan (2016)(CLP).

The following policies of the CLP are relevant to the consideration of this application:-

- Policy 1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- Policy 2 - Spatial Strategy
- Policy 14 - Renewable and low carbon energy
- Policy 16 – Health and wellbeing
- Policy 23 - Natural environment
- Policy 24 – Historic environment
- Policy 26 - Flood risk management and coastal change
- Policy 27 - Transport and accessibility

Other Material Considerations

The NPPF and complementary National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) are important material considerations. These will be referenced where necessary in this Statement.

The Development Plan and Other Material Considerations:

Planning Issues

The government's stance on the delivery of renewable energy projects is set out in para 152 of the NPPF which states:

"The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure."

Para 155 is also of note, stating:

"To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, plans should:

a) provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts);

b) consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and

c) identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers."

Attention is also drawn to para 158, which states:

"When determining planning 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. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas."

Cornwall Council's stance on renewable and low carbon energy is set out in Policy 14 of the CLP which begins:

"1. To increase use and production of renewable and low carbon energy generation development proposals will be supported that:

a. maximise the use of the available resource by deploying installations with the greatest energy output practicable taking into account the provisions of this Plan."

It can only be concluded that the government's emphasis on the delivery of renewable energy projects will be further strengthened following the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26).

That said, it is recognised that the infrastructure and apparatus necessary to produce green energy can itself have adverse impacts, notably, on occasion, an adverse landscape or visual impact, and the consideration of applications for renewable energy projects thus necessitates a balancing exercise, vis-à-vis the three objectives of sustainable development.

The development proposed is inert, comprising factory-produced solar PV panels, cabling, etc., fitted to a metal supporting structure. The posts supporting the array are typically set within a hard standing on the ground and form a semi-permanent base. The entire array is impermanent and can be removed from the site at the end of its life.

For these reasons, it is difficult to foresee that the development will have any direct or indirect effect on these habitats, or that the specialist advice of an ecologist is required.

For these reasons, it is submitted that the proposal is consistent with Policy 23 of the CLP insofar as it requires that "Development should conserve, protect and where possible enhance biodiversity and geodiversity interests and soils commensurate with their status and giving appropriate weight to their importance."

Turning to consider the landscape and visual impact of the proposal, attention turns again to Policy 23 of the CLP, 23(1) which sets out that "Development proposals will need to sustain local distinctiveness and character and protect and where possible enhance Cornwall's natural environment and assets according to their international, national and local significance."

In this case, having regard to Policy 23, the proposal meets an 'identified local need'; providing heat and power for Riverford House. With regard to Policy 14, the proposal is clearly of 'very small scale', being sized to meet the domestic needs of the property.

The development requires no reprofiling or remodelling of the site and involves no permanent buildings or construction. The array will merely be sited on the existing slope of the land, with the posts supporting the array fastened within an impermanent hardstanding. As stated, the development itself is impermanent, and removeable.

We are aware that Cornwall Council has granted permissions for ground-mounted solar pv arrays for temporary periods, e.g. for 25 years, confirming the Council's view that such development is considered to be temporary and impermanent.

Accordingly, the development will have no material or lasting impact on landscape character.

Finally, to return briefly to the environmental objective of sustainable development, it should of course be recognised that this goes beyond the consideration of the aesthetics of landscape beauty, and also takes account of the impact of renewable energy production on combatting climate change. In this regard, para 158 of the NPPF reminds us that "even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions."

Heritage Statement:

A review of documented histories of the Property and adjacent/surrounding areas, reveals little of significance recorded, though the following information has been recorded on the Historic England website:

3 St. Stephens Hill, Launceston - 1206722 | Historic England https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1206722
5 St. Stephens Hill, Launceston - 1196007 | Historic England https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1196007
8 St. Stephens Hill, Launceston - 1297866 | Historic England https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1297866

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The property is situated in a rather unassuming position on Launceston's St. Stephens Hill, an attractive location which has a high aesthetic appeal complemented by a number of buildings with high historical value including several designated assets within 50 metres of the property. The property, albeit in an attractive setting, is that of a modern construction completed 2005/2006 with finishes complementary to those of surrounding properties as can be seen in the images below..

IMAGE 1: Front Elevation from St. Stephens Hill

IMAGE 2: Further view to St. Stephens Hill

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In their view, a more logical and efficient solution is to locate a ground-mounted PV solar array in the paddock, to the west of the main dwelling. Their rationale is that the paddock is too small to be put to any viable agricultural use and can continue to be used for recreation and is ideally suited to harvest green energy to meet the property's domestic needs – and indeed, if possible, to export surplus to the grid. The proposal will further improve the property suitable for today's needs and those of future users and prepare it for decades to come.

The proposed solar PV array comprises a single row of panels mounted on metal frames, angled and orientated to face south to benefit from maximum solar exposure. The posts supporting the frames will be set into a flood resilient hard standing. The solar array is thus an impermanent, temporary and reversible form of development, allowing the land to revert to its former state if and as required. Indeed, even during the lifetime of the array, the area immediately surrounding the array itself will continue to be used as a domestic paddock area.

IMAGE 3: Rear Elevation

IMAGE 4: Further Rear Elevation

The generating capacity of the array (8.61kW) has been determined to meet the domestic needs of Riverford House going forward, including the ability to charge electric cars. Any surplus energy produced would be stored firstly on site within a battery storage array to be sited within the main dwelling and secondly exported to the national grid.

In this case, having regard to Policy 23, the proposal meets an 'identified local need'; providing heat and power for Riverford House.

With regard to Policy 24, the proposal is clearly of 'very small scale', being sized to meet the domestic needs of the property.

Conclusion:

The key issue in the consideration of this application is whether the proposal amounts to sustainable development. Paragraph 7 of the NPPF identifies that there are three mutually dependant objectives to sustainable development; it should fulfil an economic role, a social role and an environmental role.

In this case, the proposal will clearly meet the economic objective, providing employment during the construction process and, by creating free, green energy, avoiding the costs of fossil fuel production and, indeed, the costs of climate change.

The proposal will meet the social objective by supporting employment during the construction process and thereafter for maintenance purposes. Moreover, through the production of green pollution-free energy that helps cut greenhouse gas emissions and combats climate change, the proposal will support improved health and wellbeing.

Finally, in terms of the environmental objective, it has been seen that the proposal will have no material impact upon landscape character or the area's scenic beauty as it is enjoyed by the general public. The proposal is, of course, also intended to create green energy to help combat climate change; and para 158 of the NPPF reminds us that "even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions."

Having regard to the above, the proposed development should clearly be regarded as sustainable development in accordance with para 8 of the NPPF. The development also offers net gains across each of the three objectives (economic, social and environmental) as per the requirement of this paragraph.

It has also been clearly demonstrated above that the proposal complies with the policies of the Cornwall Local Plan.

Given the foregoing, mindful of s38(6) and the presumption in favour of development that accords with the development plan as well as the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out at paragraph 11 of the NPPF, We trust the Local Authority will support this proposal and look forward to a favourable outcome.

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