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Site Address: Meadow Bank Whitehough Head Lane Whitehough Derbyshire SK23 6EJ High Peak

Comments by: Victor Wright

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Submission: Neither

Comments: HPK/2023/0330 (04/08/2023)

Installation of 5 residential solar panels

Applicant : Victor Wright

Agent : Louise Metcalfe : Positive Energy

Meadowbank

Whitehough

SK236EJ

28 Nov 2023

INTRODUCTION

Additional comments by the applicant in response to the HPBC conservation officer advice of 23 Oct 2023

Quote :Due to this proposal being situated within the main core of Chinley and Whitehough Conservation Area, I encourage the location of solar arrays to be focused on the rear of this roof only so as to lessen visual clutter within the setting of the vicinity.

The applicant notes and supports the planning authority's responsibility to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of designated areas, through conservation area appraisal, designation and management.

The following comments should not be construed as a criticism of the planning process. Rather, they are focused solely on the definition of solar panels as :visual clutter.

The applicant suggests that a green energy system, professionally designed and installed by an accredited company to an approved British Standard and technical specification, as detailed in the application, constitutes a suitable development within the setting of the vicinity.

The application is a conservation plan which is capable of being achieved in conservation area.

THE ENERGY CONTEXT

The National Planning Policy Framework, combined with the Government's drive to achieve carbon net zero, allows for alternative approaches to energy generation installations which may be equally acceptable, provided they are demonstrably compliant with legislation and planning policy objectives in proportion to the importance of the asset. This philosophy also applies equally to conservation areas.

There are over 10,000 conservation areas in England, and every local authority has at least one. Some local authorities, such as Bath, Islington and Westminster, have over 50% of their housing stock in conservation areas. There are 32 conservation areas in the High Peak and nearly 300 in Derbyshire, of which the Peak National Park form the majority.

Research by the University of Warwick and the CAGE Research Centre, has calculated the extent to which planning restrictions are deterring homeowners from making their homes more energy efficient.

The 239 English local authorities calculated an energy efficiency gap of homes in conservation areas, found that the 2 million properties inside conservation areas could save between 17,000 and 21,500 GWh in energy per year and between 3 and 4 million tonnes of CO2 emissions per year if they were retrofitted to the highest standard.

THE FUTURE OF FOSSIL FUELS

In 2025 there will be an outright ban on gas boilers for new-build homes. This will be superseded in 2035 by a gas boiler ban on existing homes, so that new boilers that run on natural gas will not be sold after this time, forcing homeowners to transition over to a more efficient heating system, rather than simply replacing an old gas boiler.

In the UK therefore, the vast majority of the population must look for alternatives to traditional central heating for their homes within the next decade. This also includes the 2 million householders who live in conservation areas.

With no community-based heating systems on the horizon in the High Peak and without a dramatic change in UK strategic policy, we will be left as individual consumers to make our own choices within our own budgets and come up with solutions that work in our own homes within the next ten years.

This creates a very critical timeline of which all local authorities are already aware of and will increasingly have to respond to, both as social landlords and as planning authorities.

 

MEADOWBANK ENERGY PROFILE

The applicant is currently faced with the prospect of replacing a 20-year-old and repeatedly failing, end-of-life gas central heating system, in what is a rapidly changing energy market. The cost of energy for Meadowbank in 2022/23 was £5,000.

As Meadowbank does not benefit from a footprint large enough for an earth-source heat pump, biomass, wind power or a stand-alone photovoltaic system, the solution that appears best suited for this property is an air-source heat pump combined with solar power and battery storage to provide 3,750 KWh per annum. This would provide an ability to feed back into the national grid and it is envisioned that this would largely take Meadowbank off-grid for long periods whilst achieving zero carbon emissions. The combination of air-source and PV is becoming a fairly typical solution for an average UK medium sized property. The planning approval required for Meadowbank will be a situation that is becoming increasingly common across all UK planning authorities.

The most recent data suggests that the average carbon footprint for fossil fuels per household in the UK is just over 8 tonnes per year. This is still a considerable way off our 2050 carbon neutral goal.

By installing a combined air/solar system which is designed to achieve an energy neutrality of approximately 75% immediately after installation, this is better than the UK government's next step intentions that requires a

national 57% emissions reduction by 2030.

Quotations have been obtained for an air-source heat pump installation by British Gas which will supply all central heating and domestic hot water needs. This will be coupled to the solar photovoltaic (PV) system.

In essence, the power derived from the solar system drives the air heat pump and excess electricity is fed back into the National Grid.

PROPOSED SOLAR INSTALLATION

However, the Meadowbank carbon footprint can only be reduced by making full use of a solar array that is designed and installed to maximise the daylight hours.

Having a house where the principal roof faces East (catches the morning/midday sun) and a rear aspect (catches the afternoon/evening sun) means that a system of 5 panels on the back roof (permitted development) and 5 on the front roof (planning approved) is the most efficient design.

When the conservation officer suggests the PV system is installed solely on the West roof, on the basis of perceived visual clutter, then this may be an opinion that does not take into account the energy conservation aspects of the application. By not installing PV panels on the most efficient South Easterly roof aspect is to effectively deny access to efficient solar generation for half the year.

It is for the case officer to balance both the objective and subjective elements of the plan submitted by the applicant as well as the opinions of all the consultees of which the conservation officer is one.

THE CONSERVATION AREA IN CONTEXT

In Historic England's national survey of 2017, conservation areas were recorded as 'at risk' by local planning authorities through pressure for a variety of reasons; vacancy, decay or damage.

Much of the change and loss of heritage does not arise because of new development, it arises out of neglect.

Chinley and Whitehough are predominantly 20th century developments, with a much smaller core of typical gritstone construction and very few listed buildings. Although Chinley blossomed in the early 20th century into an important junction for passenger services travelling across the Pennines, the village expanded into its present form and was no longer a small settlement of scattered farmsteads, settled pasture and woodlands. Today, all modern development within Chinley is contained within the area outside the Peak National Park boundary (Stubbins Lane).

The local conservation area, established in 1990, is comparatively large but only a small part of it is defined as having a village relationship to the surrounding landscape.

Whitehough is no different to any other High Peak village in that building traditions and settlement patterns have been superimposed on the original footprint over time, each era adding its own unique character to the townscape of each area. However, change is inevitable and often beneficial in a way that conserves and enhances the character and appearance of historic areas.

The local borough and county authorities also have a responsibility for conservation areas related to the treatment and condition of roads, pavements, street furniture, public spaces and traffic management generally. So, there is already a wide variety of works in the public realm introduced by various authorities. Much of this already meets the definition of 'visual clutter' in the conservation area. This of course depends on each individual's perception of what constitutes visual clutter.

WHAT IS CLUTTER?

The applicant believes and can demonstrate, in conjunction with the installer, that a single array of 5 solar panels on the front aspect has minimal impact on the cumulative effects of change in comparison to the many other more significant examples of 'visual clutter' in Whitehough; satellite dishes, microwave transmitters, roof-mounted stainless steel wood-burning chimneys, cooking extract flues, street furniture, intruder alarms and

surveillance cameras, the recently installed web of fast-fibre telegraph poles with overhead power wires, the Trans Pennine main railway line, National Grid pylons which are visible from all parts of the village and the daily traffic congestion and parking pressure commensurate with the cafés, outdoor dining facilities and busy licensed premises/hotels and the constant hum of Stephanie Works and the A6 bypass. Conservation is challenged by all the senses.

Having said that, the car with its associated parking requirement and the frequent HGV traffic (despite the 7.5-ton limit) probably constitutes the most significant visual clutter in the village.

Looking in more detail at one example of visual clutter let us consider the velux style rooflight.

A 10-minute walk around Whitehough reveals that approx. 25 velux rooflights are visible from the public space. This does not include other rooflights that are not visible to the public but can be seen by neighbours. Many of these are on the principal or side elevations of properties which front the highway in the conservation area, regardless of whether they do, or do not, have planning permission or permitted development rights.

I use this last example, not to denigrate any home owner who has a velux window as part of a loft conversion but I use this example as it is relatively easy to compare a modern solar panel with a velux window in terms of visual clutter.

CONCLUSION

The applicant shares the commitment to maintaining the aesthetic integrity of the Conservation area. The proposal by local company Positive Energy has been meticulously designed to the best industry standard to ensure minimal visual impact, with the solar arrays discreetly positioned on both the front and rear of the roof. The selection of the materials and colours has been carefully chosen to complement the existing architecture, creating a harmonious integration with the existing slate roof.

Placing solar panels on both front and back of the property is a deliberate choice aimed at maximising the efficiency of the system. This approach allows the panels to harness sunlight throughout the day, optimizing energy production while still respecting the unique character of the surroundings.

This local company's emphasis on this dual placement reflects a dedication to reduce visual clutter within the core of the Chinley & Whitehough Conservation area. Positive Energy have experience within similar settings and acknowledge the importance of preserving the unique character of the surroundings. They have taken specific measures to align the proposal with these values, which are evident in the technical documents attached to the application.

Importantly, the environmental benefits of the solar installation cannot be understated. By harnessing sustainable energy, the proposal contributes to a reduction in carbon emissions, aligning with broader national and local plans for a greener, more sustainable future.

In addition to a commitment to visual aesthetics, there is an assurance that the proposal complies to all the relevant planning regulations and guidelines. A comprehensive review has been undertaken to ensure that the installation meets or exceeds the set standards.

Furthermore, the applicant has actively engaged with the local community to gather feedback and address any concerns. Positive responses have been received from neighbours who recognise the importance of transitioning towards renewable energy sources.

No public objections have been raised since the application was submitted on 4th August 2023 and one letter of support has been received.

The local Parish Council and the Highways Authority have raised no objections.

If the HPBC Planning Authority require any additional clarification or wish to view a PV panel of the type that will be used in the installation then please do not hesitate to contact the Agent or the Applicant.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Victor Wright, Applicant

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