

P/2011/0273/PA

Preston Ward

Occombe Farm, Preston Down Road, Paignton

Installation of solar photovoltaic panels on the roofs of 5 agricultural barns

Site Details

Occombe Farm is located on the north side of Preston Down Road adjacent to the junction with Cockington Road. The site comprises agricultural fields and a complex of buildings including barns, farm shop, café and educational facilities. The farm is within a Countryside Zone and an Area of Great Landscape Value, a SSSI and Nature Reserve are located approximately 90m to the north of the site and a Flood Zone is approximately 180m away.

Relevant Planning History

1980's/90's Various applications
P/2001/0968 Construction of new farm buildings and visitor centre with associated servicing and parking, vehicular and pedestrian access – Approved
P/2004/1394 New farm shop/café/educational centre and temporary consent for mobile home for stockman – Approved
P/2005/0730 New farm shop/café/educational centre with under-build – Approved
P/2005/2003 Single storey extension to storage barn – Approved
P/2007/1797 Formation of education/visitor reception building – Approved
P/2009/0436 Formation of 2 new farm buildings - Approved
P/2010/1295 Construction of timber storage building to store chipped timber – Approved. 26.01.2011

Relevant Policies

Saved Adopted Torbay Local Plan 1995-2011:

LS Landscape Strategy
L2 Areas of Great Landscape Value
L4 Countryside Zone
BES Built Environment Strategy
BE1 Design of New Development

National

PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
PPS22 – Renewable Energy

Proposals

This application proposes the addition of photovoltaic (PV) panels to five of the agricultural barns. The panels will sit close to the roof slope and are to be fitted landscape rather than portrait; this means that they take up much of the roof slopes of these barns. Information has been requested from the applicants in relation to the specification of the PV panels and in particular the glare that they may create.

Consultations

None

Representations

None received

Key Issues/Material Considerations

The key issues relate to the visual implications of the proposed panels upon the Countryside Zone and

the Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) along with the agricultural character of the barns.

Policy L2 states that within AGLVs development will only be permitted where it will maintain or enhance the special landscape character of the AGLV. Policy L4, regarding Countryside Zones, lists certain types of development which will be permitted provided that the rural character, wildlife habitats and historic features are not adversely affected. This includes development required for forestry, horticulture and agriculture.

PPS22 states that increased development of renewable energy resources is vital to facilitating the delivery of the Government's commitments on both climate change and renewable energy. The addition of the proposed PV panels would be concomitant to this vision. However PPS22 also states that in areas with special designations, planning permission for renewable energy projects should only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the objectives of the designation will not be compromised by the development. In addition, any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated would remain to be outweighed by the environmental, social and economic benefits.

This development could be seen as a flagship for renewable energy projects in Torbay, due to its prominent position and linked sustainability, therefore the appearance, glare and prominence of the proposal are extremely important aspects to consider.

The information submitted as part of the planning application shows that the roofs of the barns will largely be covered by panels. Although the barns were originally designed to have a rustic farm feel the addition of PV panels is likely to be something which will be more of an occurrence on commercial buildings in the future. However, notwithstanding the rural location, it is considered that provided their appearance can be minimised, by being positioned as close to the plane of the roof slope as possible and by using anti-glare panels, it is considered that their addition would be acceptable. The addition of the panels is also considered to be supplementary to, and coherent with, the overriding farm-based business and this runs alongside the recent approval for a new barn to store chipped timber for use in biomass boilers. Overall, provided the specification of the panels is acceptable, it is considered that this would be an appropriate type of development within the Countryside Zone.

The proposed panels, due to their location on the roofs of the barns in a prominent position, will be visible within the landscape and from Preston Down Road & Cockington Road but will not largely be visible from Hellevoetsluis Way (A380) (which is over 200 metres away and well shielded by a change in level and boundary foliage). Their impact on the rural character of the area will be acceptable provided the measures previously mentioned (i.e. anti-glare panels which are as close to the plane of the roof as possible) are implemented.

Sustainability – The proposal looks to facilitate the supply of energy in a sustainable fashion.

Crime and Disorder – No issues

Disability Issues – No issues

Conclusions

Subject to the submission of the detailed specification of the panels and details of suitable anti-glare measures, the proposal is acceptable in terms of the visual impact on the Area of Great Landscape Value. It is considered that a suitable balance between the production of sustainable energy and the visual character of the area has been created. As such the proposal is compatible with the local and national planning policy framework including policies LS – Landscape Strategy, L2 – Areas of Great Landscape Value, L4 – Countryside Zone, BES – Built Environment Strategy, BE1 – Design of New Development, PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas & PPS22 – Renewable Energy. Recommendation: Approval; subject to the receipt of satisfactory specification of the panels and details of suitable anti-glare measures.

Recommendation:
Approval