

Name of Applicant Type of Certificate	Proposal	Map/Plan Policy	Plan. Ref Expiry Date
J. H. M. Construction 'A'	Installation of solar panels to former piggery building (retrospective) - Newhouse Farm, Lea End Lane, Alvechurch	GB	B/2007/0511 12/07/2007

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) that permission be **REFUSED**; and
- (b) That Enforcement Action be authorised to secure the removal of the unauthorised development and delegate authority to the Head of Planning and Environment Services in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to select the most appropriate course of action.

Consultations

WCC(HP)	Consulted - view received 22.05.2007 - No objection
Local Plans (Policy)	Consulted 06.06.2007 - Views awaited
Alvechurch PC	Consulted 17.05.2007 - No response received to date
Publicity	1 letter sent 24.05.2007: no response received (expires 14.06.2007) 1 site notice posted 25.05.2007: no response received (expires 15.06.2007)

The site and its surroundings

This application relates to a former agricultural building (know as the piggery) currently under conversion to two residential units. The property lies to the west side of Lea End Lane within a group of buildings collectively known as Newhouse Farm and including three further barn conversions and a farmhouse. The application site is of two storeys with a small single storey lean-to section to the front (west facing) elevation. The building is constructed of breezeblocks with a slate roof. The front elevation at first floor has been timber clad as have the side facing gables. The ground floor of the front elevation has been plastered and painted a cream colour. The rear of the building faces the road and the front looks out onto a central courtyard. A low brick wall demarcates the gardens of the residential units from the courtyard and its driveway. The property is located in recognised area of Green Belt.

The blue line as shown on the submitted location plan appears to include land not owned by the applicant. Amended location plans have been requested. I will update Members at your Committee on this issue.

Proposal

This application relates to the installation of two sets of three solar panels to the front elevation of the building. Each set of solar panels is 3.3m wide, 0.9m high and project from the roof by approximately 0.15m. This application has been submitted retrospectively.

In support of the application, the applicant's agent has stated:

- The application is install solar panels to enhance the energy efficiency of the two dwellings.
- The energy will provide heated water and electricity to the dwellings.
- The solar panels are of standard construction, appearing black from a distance.

Relevant Policies

WMSS QE3
WCSP SD.1, SD.2, CTC.1, D.16, D.38, D.39, D.40
BDLP DS2, DS13, C27, C27c
Others PPS1, PPG2, PPS22, SPG4

Relevant Planning History

B/2002/1081 Conversion of existing 'piggery' to create two dwellings: approved
30.10.2002
B/2002/0664 Conversion of existing piggery to create two dwellings with associated
garages and parking: withdrawn 08.07.2002
B/2001/0482 Conversion of existing piggery to create two dwellings with associated
garages and parking: refused 11.06.2001
B/2000/1181 Conversion of existing barns to create four dwellings with associated
garages and parking (as augmented by plans and information received
28.11.2000 and as amended by drawings received 13.12.2000):
approved 18.12.2000

Notes

The main issues with this application are whether the proposal's impact on the appearance and character of a former agricultural building, whether it represents appropriate development in the Green Belt and if not whether there are any very special circumstances to outweigh the harm. Consideration must also be given to the proposal's potential contribution to sustainable development.

Character and appearance of former agricultural building

Policy C27 of the Bromsgrove District Local Plan sets out the criteria against which proposals for the conversion of existing rural buildings will be assessed. Criterion (d) requires the form, bulk and general design of the conversion scheme to be in keeping with its surroundings and respect local building styles and materials. Further advice on the conversion of rural buildings is given in Supplementary Planning Guidance 4: Conversion of Rural Buildings (SPG4). Paragraph 3.2 of SPG4 states:

Large unbroken roof slopes are often a characteristic feature of agricultural buildings. These should be respected especially as they are often seen at a distance and can dominate elevations. New roof openings will normally be opposed; dormers and upstanding roof lights can bring about a significant change in the character of a farm building. In special circumstances some

alteration of roofs may be allowed, but only to a limited degree on less important slopes.

I acknowledge the application site is not of a vernacular common to traditional agricultural buildings within Bromsgrove District. However, the building does have a number of characteristics associated with rural buildings including its linear form and unbroken roof slopes. I am of the opinion that these characteristics help the building to relate to its setting and the three neighbouring existing redbrick barn conversions. The solar panels dominate the front elevation of the property and destroy the existing unbroken roof slope. This in my opinion has considerable harm on the appearance and character of the building and is also of harm to the building's setting. Despite the front elevation of the building facing away from the road, due to a bend in the road just north of the site, the solar panels are visible from the road. In conclusion, I find the solar panels to be contrary to Local Plan Policy C27 and the provisions of SPG4.

I am of the view that in allowing the solar panels a precedent may be set with regard to similar proposals. This has the potential to be of significant detriment to the traditional and attractive converted former agricultural buildings found across the District.

In granting permission for the conversion of the former piggery building into two residential units under application B/2002/1081, the Council removed the dwellings' permitted development rights for alterations to the external elevations. As such, I am of the view that the dwellings have no fall back position with regard to other possible alterations that could be made to the roof slopes.

Green Belt issues

Policy DS2 of the Bromsgrove District Local Plan in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts sets out the instances where development is considered to be appropriate in the Green Belt. Criterion (c) requires proposals for the re-use of rural buildings to be in accordance with Policy C27. The solar panels are considered to not comply with Policy C27 and as such they are considered to represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Sustainable development

Local Plan Policy DS13 encourages proposed developments to include features that would conserve energy resources. Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable energy (PPS22) aims to encourage the development of renewable energy schemes and sets out the key principles that Local Planning authorities should consider in relation to such developments. Paragraph 13 of PPS22 states

When located in the green belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development, which may impact on the openness of the green belt. Careful consideration will therefore need to be given to the visual impact of projects, and developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances that clearly outweigh any harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm if projects are to proceed.

I acknowledge the solar panels represent a sustainable form of development, which should generally be encouraged by Local Authorities. However, I am of the opinion that the limited environmental benefits of the solar panels do not outweigh the level of harm caused to the character and appearance of a former agricultural building. No very special circumstances have been put forward by the applicant to outweigh the harm.

Conclusion

I am of the view that the solar panels have caused an unacceptable level of harm to the character and appearance of a former agricultural building and its setting. The solar panels represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt and no very special circumstances have been found to justify approval.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) that permission be **REFUSED**

The solar panels destroy an existing large unbroken roof slope, which forms an important character of this formal agricultural building. As such, the development has detrimentally eroded the character and appearance of the building contrary to Policy DS2 and C27C of the Bromsgrove District Local Plan 2004, Policy D.16 of the Worcestershire County Structure Plan and the provisions of Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 4: Conversion of Rural Buildings.

- (b) That Enforcement Action be authorised to secure the removal of the unauthorised development and delegate authority to the Head of Planning and Environment Services in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to select the most appropriate course of action.