Pentland

Planning Design and Access Statement

Installation of Solar Panels on Agricultural Building

Beechenhill Farm

Ilam

Staffordshire

DE6 2BD

John Scott BA (Hons) MCD MRTPI

Pentland Ltd.

1 Introduction

1.1 This statement is submitted in support of a planning application for the installation of solar panels on the south-facing roof slope of a modern agricultural building at Beechenhill Farm, Ilam. The application has been submitted by Pentland Ltd on behalf of Sue and Terry Prince, and their daughter and son-in-law, Alex and Rob Gray, of Beechenhill Farm. The statement also includes a design and access section, as required by Section 42 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and as set out in Circular 01/2006.

1.2 The statement addresses the planning issues that are raised by the proposal. It concludes that installation of solar panels on a modern agricultural building is an appropriate way of providing renewable energy in this location without causing harm to the character and appearance of the site, the listed buildings, or their landscape setting and that it would be in accordance with the planning policies set out in the National Park Authority's Local Plan, the emerging Core Strategy, and Government guidance in PPS22.

2 Application site and planning history

2.1 Beechenhill Farm is a working dairy farm with ancillary visitor uses that lies between Ilam and Stanshope. It is located approximately 2km north of Ilam and is situated approximately 150 metres to the west of the road. The farmhouse and several barns are Grade II listed buildings. They are well detailed limestone buildings under blue clay tile roofs, with a range of modern agricultural buildings to the rear (north). In addition to the dairy farm, Beechenhill Farm provides bed and breakfast and self-contained visitors' accommodation in the attached barns, together with educational school visits. A public right of way runs up the access track and then to the north of the farmhouse and barns.

2.2 The primary business activity of Beechenhill Farm is organic dairy farming, B&B and self-catering cottages and an art and consultancy business. Beechenhill Farm also hosts visits for the National Park Authority's educational service.

2.3 Planning History: The site has a relatively lengthy planning history, but only the following application is relevant to the current proposal:

- Installation of micro-generation equipment, approved 16 January 2009 (ref. no. NP/SM/1108/0983). This involved the installation of a waste wood burner, a small underground bio-digester, which is to be installed later this year and the installation of a small solar capture system comprising solar panels on a frame mounted on the roof of one of the agricultural buildings, which has been replaced with the solar panels proposed in the current application.

3 The Proposed Development

3.1 This application proposes the installation of a system of solar panels on the south facing roof slope of a relatively modern agricultural building which is located to the rear of the barns which adjoin the eastern end of the farmhouse. This building is of standard single span, steel frame construction with corrugated sheet roofing and timber side panels above blockwork walls.

3.2 The solar panels would be installed by Skyshades, a Huntingdon based company. This is a company which specialises in lightweight, thin film flexible solar power solutions. This system involves bonding solar film to lightweight metal panels. It can be installed where traditional glass panels cannot be used, such as fragile or awkward shaped roofs and canopies. In the case of Beechenhill Farm, the lightweight nature of the system means that it can be installed on an existing agricultural building roof, which would otherwise be too fragile to accommodate a traditional Solar PV system without substantial additional supports being installed. The systems work in daylight not direct sunlight, so they are ideally suited to the UK climate. Skyshades estimates that an installation using thin film photovoltaics will generate up to 16% more electricity per Kwp installed than traditional panels. (based on PVsol). All installations come with a 25 year performance warranty and are MCS accredited to take advantage of the Government's feed-in tariff.

3.3 The proposal involves the installation of two 22m lengths of solar PV material, 2.8 metres deep, on the south facing slope of the building. One would be installed just below the ridge of the building, above the sky lights and the other would be installed below the skylights; they would both run from the west gable to a point approximately 2 metres short of the east gable, as shown on the submitted drawings.

3.4 A sample of the material used for the construction can be supplied if required. A copy of the Skyshades brochure, which describes the system in more detail, has been submitted with this application. Details of the company's products can also be found on their website: http://www.skyshades.co.uk.

3.5 This is an image of the roof at Beechenhill Farm, with the panels indicated in blue:

4 Planning Policy

4.1 The Development Plan for the area is the East Midlands Regional Plan (EMRP) and Peak District National Park Local Plan, adopted in 2001. The Structure Plan is no longer a part of the Development Plan as it was superseded by the EMRP in March 2009. We understand that the Structure Plan policies will remain as material considerations to assist in interpreting and understanding Local Plan policies.

4.2 The Authority's Core Strategy was the subject of an Examination in April 2011 and the Inspector's report was published in July 2011 and the Authority is now considering its response. The Authority has now produced a reworded provisional version of the Core Strategy which is due to be adopted at an Authority meeting in October 2011. This contains a policy on renewable energy development which is relevant to the proposal at Beechenhill Farm:

> ***CC2: Low carbon and renewable energy development***
>
> *A. Proposals for low carbon and renewable energy development will be encouraged provided they can be accommodated without adversely affecting landscape character, cultural heritage assets, other valued characteristics, or other established uses of the area;*
>
> *B. Cumulative impacts of low carbon and renewable energy development within the National Park and visible beyond its boundary must be taken into account;*
>
> *C. Where proposals do not compromise the valued characteristics of the National Park the Authority will also take into account the economic, social and wider environmental benefits of renewable and low carbon development.*

4.3 We consider that the relevant policies are Local Plan policies LC4, LC6, and LU4. The relevant Regional Spatial Strategy policies are policies 6, 10, 12, 24, 25, 30 and 31. In the interests of brevity these policies are not quoted in full in this report, but we assume that the Authority will have regard to them in determining the application. The key Local Plan policy on Renewable energy is policy LU4, which includes provisions to permit the development of a renewable energy source provided that the development and ancillary works can be accommodated without harm to the valued characteristics or other established uses of the area.

4.4 Planning Policy Statement: *Planning and Climate Change* and the Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1), states planning authorities should ensure that any local approach to protecting landscape and townscape is consistent with PPS22 and does not preclude the supply of any type of renewable energy other than in the most exceptional circumstances.

4.5 Planning Policy Statement 22: "*Renewable Energy"* sets out the Government's policies on renewable energy. The provision of renewable energy sources is actively encouraged by PPS 22, provided that there is no adverse impact on the valued characteristics or other established uses of the area. Broadly speaking, the Government aims to achieve substantial reductions in carbon dioxide emissions (60% by 2050) and relies on renewable energy to make a 'vital' contribution. The PPS advises that "*renewable energy developments should be capable of being accommodated throughout England in locations where the technology is viable and environmental, economic and social impacts can be addressed satisfactorily"* and that "*the wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects, whatever their scale, are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining whether proposals should be given planning permission."* With regard to sites within nationally recognised designations (such as National Parks) PPS22 says "*planning permission …. should only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the objectives of designation of the area will not be compromised by the development, and any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by the environmental, social and economic benefits*."

4.6 In addition the Core Strategy and Local Plan policies, the Authority has also adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on *"Energy: Renewables and Conservation"* (October 2003). Chapter 3 states that technologies that are more likely to be compatible with policy by virtue of their scale, resource base and appearance include solar photovoltaic cell or panels. Paragraph 4.6 of the SPG states:

> ***"****Opportunities for insertion of PV panels may nevertheless be found on non-public faces, or on the inside channel of double-pitched roofs (see Para 4.24). On listed*

buildings and in Conservation Areas particular care should be taken not to undermine the traditional materials. PV tiles are now becoming available in styles, which simulate traditional materials. The NPA wishes to encourage innovative solutions such as this, provided it can be demonstrated that their integration with traditional materials can be achieved in a way that does not cause unacceptable harm to the valued characteristics of the National Park. The amount of reflection from a panel or tiles can make a critical difference to their acceptability. From a visual and conservation perspective non-reflective surfaces or those that match closely the amount of reflection on existing roofs work best. It is important to note that there is no loss of efficiency by using non-reflective material".

4.7 Paragraphs 4.11 to 4.13 also contain advice which is relevant to the proposal at Beechenhill Farm, as follows:

4.11 Applications could be sought on remote farms where normal electrical connection would be very expensive or difficult to install. It may be difficult to obtain planning permission if the PV panel was to be very large, or was visible from a long distance, or if it was considered to undermine the local building traditions.

4.12 Farms in the PDNP commonly have a mix of traditional and modern outbuildings, along with larger, utilitarian modern buildings, with most of these being constructed from timber, pre-cast concrete or corrugated materials.

4.13 Installation of solar panels on these roofs may not cause greater visual impact than roofs constructed from other modern materials, they may even improve the appearance of some buildings.

4.8 In addition to this, The Government published the Draft National Planning Policy Framework on 25 July 2011. The draft NPPF contains a number of references to the presumption in favour of sustainable development, and the need to support economic growth through the planning system. These have previously been trailed in the Written Ministerial Statement on "Planning for Growth". Whilst the Draft NPPF is a consultation document and therefore subject to potential amendment, it gives a clear indication of the Government's "direction of travel" in planning policy and is therefore a material consideration is determining planning applications, particularly those which are related to sustainable development.

5 Key Planning Issues

5.1 This application is seeking permission for the installation of solar panels based on the Skyshades system of a lightweight, thin metal panel solution which involves bonding solar film to a lightweight metal panel and then fixing it to the existing roof sheets. The key issues raised by this application are considered to be:

- Whether the proposal accords with Government and National Park Authority policies with regard to the provision of renewable energy;
- Whether the proposal would cause any harm the character, appearance or amenity of the site and its surroundings, including the character and appearance of the listed buildings at Beechenhill Farm;

5.2 The principle of installing small scale, micro-renewables on the site at Beechenhill Farm is considered to be entirely consistent with both National and local policies which seek to encourage the development of renewable energy. As recently as July 2011 the Government has restated the aim of meeting its ambitious renewable energy targets in the UK Renewable Energy Road Map. The renewable energy generated at Beechenhill Farm would be used at the farm and would allow the applicants to reduce their energy bills and their use of electricity produced by carbon-based fuels. As this is a working farm the energy bills are significant out-goings.

5.3 Beechenhill Farm specialises in eco-tourism and it was recently a finalist in an international award for sustainable holidays. The family are developing a range of low landscape impact, renewable energy solutions to demonstrate to tourists and other businesses. This is an important distinguishing feature of their business and the proposed solar panels are an important part of this.

5.4 The proposal is a form of sustainable development which is encouraged in PPS1 and PS22 and in the emerging National Planning Policy Framework, which is currently a draft consultation stage. It also follows the Authority's own policies and guidance renewable energy, subject to the impact of the development not outweighing the environmental benefits of green energy.

5.5 The second issue is therefore whether the proposal would have an unacceptably harmful impact on the site and its setting, particularly the listed buildings. As described in section 3 above, the proposal involves installing thin panels on part of the south facing roof slope on the agricultural building to the rear (north) of the farmhouse and attached barn. The panels would be laid over the existing roof sheets, with a length of 22 metres and a depth of 2.8 metres. The thin joining strips can be powder coloured to suit the National Park Authority's requirements. The material is non-reflective, unlike most conventional solar panels or tiles. Moreover, the Skyshades system does not have the metallic framing to each panel which is often seen on solar panels, drawing attention to them, the dark solar film covers the entire metal panel. The proposed system will therefore be much less conspicuous than a conventional solar panel system. In this situation it would be a non reflective material in a dark, colour. It would therefore have very little impact on the appearance of the building.

5.6 The fact that the agricultural building sits behind the traditional house and barns, albeit at a higher level, means that this roof slope is not prominent. From within the farmyard to the south of the farmhouse and attached barns, the roof slope to the rear is not visible (because of the intervening buildings), so the solar installation would have no impact on the setting of the listed buildings from this angle. Part of the roof slope is visible over longer distance views from the south east, on the Ilam to Stanshope road. From this angle there is a short section of road and footpath where the eastern end of the south-facing roof slope on which the system would be located is visible. However, the design of the system, covering most of the upper and lower sections of the roof with a dark coloured, non-reflective material, will ensure that the installation will not be unduly prominent or conspicuous. It is likely to appear as a newly roofed section of modern agricultural building to most observers. Consequently it would not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the landscape or on the setting of the listed buildings at Beechenhill Farm, in accordance with Core Strategy policy, and Local Plan policies, particularly LC6 on listed buildings and LU4 which covers renewable energy. This conclusion was also reached by the Authority when the application for the installation of a solar capture system was approved on an adjacent roof in 2009; in that instance the proposal was for a system which stood proud of the roof on a framework.

6 Conclusion

6.1 In conclusion, the proposed solar installation is considered to be an acceptable, low-key way of providing a source of clean renewable energy on this working farm in a manner which would not adversely affect the landscape setting of the buildings and the character, appearance and setting of the listed buildings at Beechenhill Farm.

6.2 We therefore consider that the proposal is in accordance with provisional Core Strategy policy CC2, Local Plan policies LC4, LC6 and LU4, the Authority's SPG on renewable energy developments, and with Government guidance in Planning Policy Statement 1 and Planning Policy Statement 22 and with emerging Government policy on sustainable development in general and renewable energy in particular. We therefore ask that you approve this application, subject to appropriate conditions.

John Scott BA (Hons) MCD MRTPI
Head of Planning
Pentland Limited