

# Delegated Report

## Householder Planning Application

|                          |                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Planning Application No: | 20240490                                                                                              |
| Location:                | The Beeches, 5 Sarsens Close, Cobham, Gravesend                                                       |
| Description:             | Installation of a domestic 13 solar panel pv array to the front and side roof slopes of the property. |
| Applicant:               | Mr David Palmer                                                                                       |
| Site Visit Date:         | 19 June 2024                                                                                          |

### Submitted Documents/Plans

Application form  
Photographs  
Technical Specifications  
Heritage Statement  
Drawing no. 71792/01 (Solar Panel Details and Site Plan)

### Relevant Planning History

| Reference | Description                                                                                                                       | Decision  | Decision Date |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 20120985  | Demolition of car port and erection of a canopy on brick piers incorporating feather edged fencing to form replacement enclosure. | Permitted | 22.01.2013    |
| 20120920  | Erection of a single storey rear extension to form an enlarged utility room.                                                      | Permitted | 21.12.2012    |
| 20080319  | Erection of a glasshouse in the rear garden.                                                                                      | Permitted | 29.05.2008    |

### Development Plan

#### Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale and Distribution of Development
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development and Design Principles
- CS20 – Heritage and the Historic Environment

#### Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- T1 – Impact of Development on the Highway Network
- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2023) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years and should then be updated as

necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2023), the Council will also seek to replace these.

#### National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

- Section 2 – Achieving sustainable development
- Section 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
- Section 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
- Section 13 – Protecting Green Belt land
- Section 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

#### Supplementary Planning Guidance

- KCC Solar Policy Position Statement (August 2014)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)
- Planning Practice Guidance Green Belt (2019)
- SPG2 – Residential Layout Guidelines (2020)
- Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guide (2021)
- Cobham Rural Conservation Area Appraisal Supplementary Planning Document (2017)
- Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Renewable Energy Position Statement (last updated 2011)
- The Kent Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2021-2026

### **Consultations, Publicity and Representations**

#### Consultees

*Cobham Parish Council*

No comments received.

#### Neighbouring properties

The application has been advertised by individual neighbour letters to 7 properties, in the press (affecting a Conservation Area) and on site. The overall consultation period expired on 12 July 2024.

One letter of objection was received, with the following comments:

- It is likely there would be a glare from the solar panels that would be experienced by neighbouring properties.
- The proposal would fail to preserve the beauty of the conservation area location.

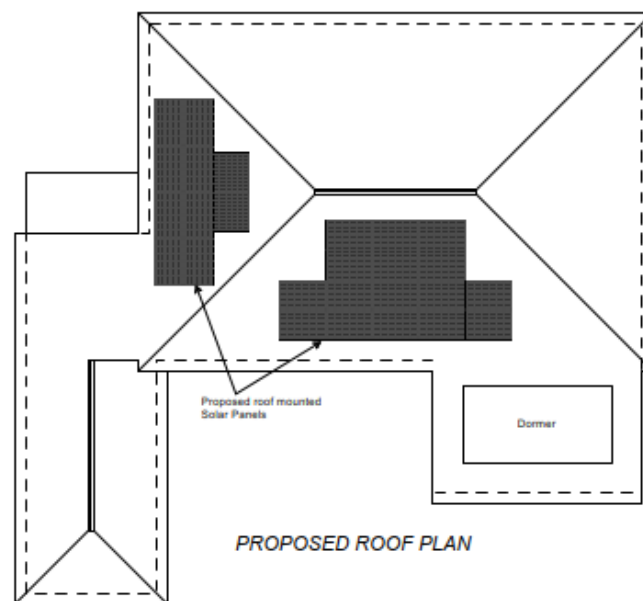
Local Ward Councillors were also consulted, and no responses were received.

### **Officer's Analysis**

#### Proposal

This application is for the installation of a domestic 13 solar panel pv array to the front and side roof slopes

of the property. The front slope faces south-east and the side faces south-west. The panels will be black in colour.



*PROPOSED SIDE ELEVATION*



*PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION*

### Principle Issues

The site comprises a large, detached single storey dwelling on a generous plot, surrounded by other similar properties.

*Current Google Earth Image:*



The site lies within the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL – formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), the Green Belt, in the Ashenbank and Cobham Parkland Landscape Character Area and in the Cobham Conservation Area. Taking these considerations into account, the main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are as follows:

- Principle of development in the Green Belt
- Impact on landscape character
- Impact on character and appearance of the conservation area
- Residential amenity
- Parking and highways

#### Principle of Development in the Green Belt

Green Belts are of great importance. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by preserving the open and permanent characteristics of Green Belts (paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2023). Paragraph 152 of the NPPF 2023 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other

harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2014 prioritises development in the urban area as a sustainable location for development. In the rural area it states that development will be supported within rural settlements that are inset from the Green Belt and defined on the Policies Map. Development outside those settlements (which is the case here), will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in the Core Strategy 2014.

With regards to renewable energy projects, such this proposal, paragraph 156 of the NPPF 2023 is relevant, and this states that elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

Conversely, the newly introduced NPPF paragraph 164 (as of December 2023) requires local authorities to give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements through adaption of buildings. This represents strong in-principle policy support for energy efficiency.

Paragraph 156 of the NPPF 2024 is not specific about which elements of renewable energy projects would comprise inappropriate development. The application proposal is a small-scale array for a single residential property. In this respect, it is relevant to consider the impact of the proposal on openness, which is the main focus of Green Belt policy.

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2023 states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It also states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. Paragraph 001 of the Planning Practice Guidance 2019 on Green Belts looks to assess the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt by taking into account the spatial and visual aspects of a development, its duration and remediability, and the activity levels generated.

The application site comprises a residential curtilage, and the solar panels would be located on the roof of the existing dwellinghouse, The Beeches. The nature of the proposal is such that the openness of the Green Belt would not be affected. In addition to this, the proposal offers environmental benefits through the production of energy through a renewable source, and significant weight should be assigned to this in accordance with paragraph 164.

On this basis, as there would be no harm to the openness of the Green Belt and as the proposal supports energy efficiency and low carbon heating, the proposal is not considered to be inappropriate development, but would regardless be considered acceptable in terms of there being no impact on openness and as a result of the environmental benefits the proposal would provide. The proposal would accord with the requirements of paragraphs 156 and 164 of the NPPF 2023.

### Landscape Character

With regard to the impact on the landscape, paragraph 180 of the NPPF 2023 aims for development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The site lies within the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL - formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). Reflective of paragraph 182 of the NPPF 2023, Policy SD2 of the Management Plan 2021-2026 recognises the need to conserve and enhance the local character, qualities, distinctiveness and natural resources of the KDNL. Policy SD5 states that local renewable and sustainable energy initiatives will be pursued where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the KDNL and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people.

Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Core Strategy 2014 is relevant to this application, relating to green infrastructure. This policy states that the overall landscape character of the Borough will be conserved,

restored and enhanced and that the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (GLCA) 2009 will be taken into account in determining applications. The site is located within the Ashenbank and Cobham Parkland Landscape Character Area.

As the proposed solar panels would be on the roof of an existing residential property in a residential cul-de-sac, the visual impact of the proposal would be limited and localised, and it will not have any adverse impact on the wider landscape character of the area.

### Character and Appearance of Conservation Area

Section 12 of the NPPF 2023 relates to achieving well-designed places and sets out the Government's requirements in relation to design issues. Paragraph 131 emphasises the importance of achieving high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023 seeks to ensure that development will add to the quality of an area, be visually attractive, and sympathetic to local character and history. Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 reflects these aims and requires that new development is well designed and respects the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

The application property lies in a small modern estate development within the Cobham Conservation Area. The NPPF 2023 places great significance on the desirability of sustaining and enhancing heritage assets, and on new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (paragraphs 196 and 203). This is echoed in Policy CS20 of the Core Strategy 2014, which states that the significance of the Borough's heritage assets and their setting should always be preserved or enhanced. Saved Policy TC3 of the Local Plan 1994 also states that development is expected to make a positive contribution to the conservation area.

Whilst the proposed solar panels would be on the most prominent roof slope at the front, as well as at the side, the panels will be black in colour and will blend sufficiently with the dark brown roof of the property. The property is also set well back from the road and is at the end of a cul-de-sac so is not highly visible from a public vantage point. Indeed, the Cobham Conservation Area Appraisal recognises Sarsens Close as a "modern private development more or less hidden from 'outside' view".



On this basis, the proposal would respect the character and appearance of the area and would comply with the conservation requirements of Policies CS19 and CS20 of the Core Strategy 2014.

#### Residential Amenity

The NPPF 2023 states that planning decisions should aim to secure a high standard of amenity for all existing and future users (paragraph 135f). The impact on amenity is also considered with regard to the criteria within Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014, which states that new development should be located, designed and constructed to safeguard the amenity, including privacy, daylight and sunlight, of its occupants, and those of neighbouring properties and land, and avoid adverse environmental impacts.

#### *Future Occupiers*

As the proposal is for solar panels, there are no conflicts with the requirements of paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023 and Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy in respect of the living conditions for future occupants.

#### *Neighbouring Properties*

Due to the nature of the proposal, it would not cause harm to the amenities of neighbouring properties in terms of privacy, daylight and sunlight. A neighbour has raised concerns about glare, but as the panels would be at roof level and on a slope, there is unlikely to be any direct glare caused by them. It must also be noted that the property is detached and well separated from its neighbours. As such, the proposal would comply with Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014.

#### Parking and Highways

The proposal would have no impact on the existing parking provision and access and there would therefore be no adverse parking or highway issues from the proposal, which would comply with Saved Policies T1, T5 and P3 of the Local Plan First Review (1994) and Policies CS11 and CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The proposed solar panels are considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact on the Green Belt, on landscape character, on the conservation area, and with regards to residential amenity and highways matters. The proposal would therefore comply with the requirements of Policies CS11 and CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014, saved Policies T1, T5 and P3 of the Local Plan 1994, and paragraphs 115, 131, and 135 of the NPPF 2023.

(For detailed conditions and informatives, see draft Decision.)

|                      |                      |                     |                                                                                       |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Case Officer:</b> | Mrs Katherine Parkin | <b>Team Leader:</b> | Miss Faye Hobbs                                                                       |
| <b>Signed:</b>       | <i>K. Parkin</i>     | <b>Signed:</b>      |  |
| <b>Dated:</b>        | 22 July 2024         | <b>Dated:</b>       | 23 July 2024                                                                          |