



Strategic Place Planning

Report of Handling

Site Address:	1 Westerton Place, Cults, Aberdeen, AB15 9NS
Application Description:	Installation of solar panels to roof
Application Ref:	220667/DPP
Application Type:	Detailed Planning Permission
Application Date:	6 June 2022
Applicant:	Mr Steve Aitken
Ward:	Lower Deeside
Community Council:	Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber
Case Officer:	Sam Smith

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

APPLICATION BACKGROUND

Site Description

The application site consists of a two-storey semi-detached dwelling with a one and three-quarter storey extension on the east elevation, located in a residential area and the Pitfodels Conservation Area. The dwelling adjoins 2 Westerton Place to the west and a detached dwelling to the east with a south-facing principal elevation that fronts onto Westerton Place; a cul-de-sac that also serves 1 to 5 Westerton Place. The rear elevation bounds a public lane to the north that forms part of the Green Space Network and Urban Green Space that sits parallel to Deeside Way, used as a public footpath. In terms of the roof space, there is an existing rooflight on the roof on the front elevation.

Relevant Planning History

There is one relevant planning application and a further application for tree removal.

Application Number	Proposal	Decision Date
131616	Domestic double garage with first floor accommodation.	31.01.2014 Status: Approved

APPLICATION DESCRIPTION

Description of Proposal

Planning permission is sought for the installation of 13 solar panels on the south-facing roof of the existing dwelling and extension. The proposed panels would each have a width of 1.13m, a length of 1.72m and sit 213mm in height above the existing roof plane and would be finished with black frames.

Amendments

None.

Supporting Documents

All drawings and supporting documents listed below can be viewed on the Council's website at:

<https://publicaccess.aberdeencity.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=RCFTE5BZG4K00>

Solar panel specification
Supporting Statement

CONSULTATIONS

Cults, Bielside and Milltimber Community Council – no comments received.

REPRESENTATIONS

None

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**Legislative Requirements**

Sections 25 and 37(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 require that where, in making any determination under the planning acts, regard is to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan and that determination shall be made in accordance with the plan, so far as material to the application unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Section 64 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 places a duty on planning authorities to preserve and enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas.

National Planning Policy and Guidance

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)

Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS)

Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Roofs

Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Micro-renewables

Development Plan

Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan 2020

The current Strategic Development Plan for Aberdeen City and Shire was approved by Scottish Ministers in September 2020 and forms the strategic component of the Development Plan. No issues of strategic or cross boundary significance have been identified.

Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2017

This Section 16 (1)(a)(ii) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires that, where there is a current local development plan, a proposed local development plan must be submitted to Scottish Ministers within five years after the date on which the current plan was approved. From 21 January 2022, the extant local development plan will be beyond this five-year period. Therefore, where relevant, weight should be given to paragraph 33 of the Scottish Planning Policy (2014) which states: "Where relevant policies in a development plan are out-of-date or the plan does not contain policies relevant to the proposal, then the presumption in favour

of development that contributes to sustainable development will be a significant material consideration”.

The following policies are relevant –

Policy H1: Residential Areas

Policy D1: Quality Placemaking by Design

Policy D4: Historic Environment

Policy R8: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments

Supplementary Guidance

Householder Development Guide (HDG)

Proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2020

The Report of Examination on the Proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2020 (PALDP) was received by the Council on 20 September 2022. The PALDP constitutes the Council’s settled view as to the content of the final adopted ALDP and is now a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The exact weight to be given to matters contained in the PALDP (including individual policies) in relation to specific applications will depend on whether –

- these matters have been subject to comment by the Reporter; and
- the relevance of these matters to the application under consideration.

The following policies are relevant –

Policy H1: Residential Areas

Policy D1: Quality Placemaking

Policy D2: Amenity

Policy D6: Historic Environment

Policy R8: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments

EVALUATION

Principle of Development

The application site is located in a residential area, under Policy H1: Residential Areas of the ALDP, and the proposal relates to householder development. Householder development would accord with Policy H1 in principle if it does not constitute over development, adversely affect the character and amenity of the surrounding area, result in the loss of valued and valuable open space and it complies with the Supplementary Guidance, in this case the Householder Development Guide (HDG).

The proposal would not constitute over development or result in the loss of any open space given that the proposed alterations are to be located on the existing roof space of the dwelling within the existing residential curtilage. The main planning considerations in relation to this proposal relate to the quality of the design and scale of the proposed alterations in the context of any impact it may have on the appearance and character of the surrounding residential area and historic environment. There is also a consideration for the impact the proposal may have on the visual amenity afforded to the neighbouring dwellings and residential area. These matters are discussed in the evaluation below.

Scale, Design and Impact on the Historic Environment

The Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Micro-renewables requires that, before considering micro-renewables, the energy efficiency of a building must first be addressed through

improvements to the fabric of a building. The comments made by the Council's Conservation Officer reiterate this point and further explain that improvements to the thermal efficiency of the dwelling should be explored if micro-renewables cannot be installed in a discreet location. The below assessment has been carried out to determine whether alternative solutions to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling have been sufficiently considered, and whether the proposed solar panels would be discreet in the context of the conservation area and acceptable on this site.

During the assessment of this application, the Planning Service advised that before considering solar panels, the applicant would first need to consider improvements to the fabric of the building to improve the energy efficiency of the building. This included details of the micro-renewables guidance to outline what is expected before considering solar panels. The Council's Conservation Officer has noted that the information submitted does not demonstrate that sufficient upgrades to the dwelling have been made to justify the installation of solar panels. The supporting statement notes that an assessment was carried out by the Energy Savings Trust to justify the proposed solar panels which considered the insulation and energy efficiency of the existing dwelling. However, details of this assessment or adopted energy efficiency measures have not been provided. The Conservation Officer has noted that more could be done beyond individual room temperature control and waste heat reuse from electronics to improve the energy performance of the dwelling. Further to this, the submitted calculations for solar panels have demonstrated the energy these panels could provide but do not reflect the energy needs of the dwelling to justify the need for 13 solar panels. It is considered that further building improvements could be made, resulting in the energy required for the dwelling being reduced and therefore, fewer solar panels than proposed being required.

To determine the effect of the proposal on the character of the area it is necessary to assess it in the context of Policy D1: Quality Placemaking by Design, however this policy recognises that not all development will be of a scale that makes a significant placemaking impact but recognises that good design and detail adds to the attractiveness of the built environment. Policy H1 further expects any works to not have a negative impact on the character of the surrounding area, while Policy D4: Historic Environment requires adverse development impacts to be minimised and for high quality design to be applied in a conservation area to maintain the historic environment and respect the character and appearance of that area. Further to this, Policy R8: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments requires any renewable development to not cause harm to the local environment, landscape character or appearance of the conservation area. Historic Environment Scotland Managing Change Guidance on Micro-renewables and roofs outlines the requirements for solar panels to historic buildings and outlines expectations that any development is to maintain the character of a conservation area in terms of design, materials used and structure.

In terms of design, the micro-renewables guidance expects any solar panels to be placed on secondary roof slopes or a location hidden from main views, avoiding the principal elevation of a historic building so that it does not detract from the appearance of the building and where the principal elevation is south facing, alternative solutions should be sought. In this case, as the proposed panels sit on the principal south-facing elevation of the dwelling and are therefore in direct conflict with the aforementioned guidance. The proposed solar panels on the side extension, however, could be acceptable as this does not form part of the existing historic building, provided they do not detract from the character of the surrounding conservation area. This aspect of the application was discussed during the assessment of this application and the Planning Service requested that the solar panels be removed from the front elevation of the original dwelling and to have the panels placed solely on the roof of the extension instead.

The guidance for Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Roofs recognises the importance of the form and appearance of a historic roof on the character of the historic environment. Supplementary Guidance further expects any alterations to a dwelling to be architecturally compatible in design and scale with the existing dwelling and to not overwhelm or dominate the

existing roof or appearance of the existing dwelling. The proposed black finish of the panels is not considered to disrupt the existing roof covering and would be compatible in colour to reduce the visual impact they would have on the appearance of the surrounding area. However, the panels would protrude 213mm from the roof plane and consist of 13 panels covering a large portion of both the roof of the original dwelling and its extension. As such, it is considered that the development would change the appearance and form of the roof from both the front and side elevations. This is not acceptable on the original dwelling as this roof contributes to the special interest of the historic building and wider conservation area. It has been noted by the Council's Conservation Officer that more discreet solar options are available that would minimise the visual impact of the proposal such as installing solar panels flush with the roof slate or photovoltaic slates that should be considered alongside thermal energy improvements to the building to reduce the number of panels required on the roof space. However, these options have not been pursued by the applicant, as such the Planning Service are required to assess the application based on the information submitted with the application.

In respect to visibility, the Managing Change Guidance expects new roof fixtures for renewable energy developments to be placed where they would avoid main or visible elevations, avoid being visible from the ground level or breaking the profile of the roof or chimneys, this would ensure that any visual impact is minimised. Further to this, Policy D4 and the Supplementary Guidance expects the design of any proposal to respect the appearance and setting of the conservation area. As mentioned, the proposed panels would be placed on the principal elevation, protruding 213mm from roof plane, disrupting the profile of the roof due to their design, thus making them visible on the south and east elevations, both of which can be seen from Westerton Place and Westerton Road. As such, the proposal is considered to be in conflict with this guidance and would duly have a negative impact on the appearance of the wider conservation area, in that the development would impact negatively on the special historic character of the area due to the overwhelming level of development which seeks to cover the entire primary roof slope.

In terms of the surrounding area, there are no other solar panels on visible, principal elevations of any building in the surrounding conservation area. The site at 14 Westerton Road which sits along Westerton Place has solar panels. However, these panels are not visible from Westerton Place or any public view, and sit on the hidden, secondary roof slope of a detached outbuilding on the site, presenting no impact on the historic building or character of the conservation area. This provides a contrasting example of an acceptable solar panel proposal in the Pitfodels Conservation Area.

The Managing Change Guidance outlines the potential of micro-renewable development having a cumulative impact on the historic environment. The proposed panels on the roof of the existing historic building are considered to detract from the appearance of the existing properties along Westerton Place which are formed of similar traditional slate roofs with existing rooflights. If the proposed solar panels were to be installed on the principal elevation of a historic existing dwelling in the conservation area, there would likely be a considerable cumulative effect on the surrounding conservation area and other conservation areas in Aberdeen City. The other properties along Westerton Place have similar south facing roofs, as such the addition of solar panels on these elevations would significantly change the appearance of this road.

Overall, solar panels in the conservation area would only be acceptable where the energy efficiency they offer would outweigh the harm to the character of the conservation area. It has not been adequately shown that other energy efficiency improvements cannot be made to the dwelling and as the proposed solar panels would sit on the principal elevation of the dwelling, they are not considered to be discreet and would therefore not be acceptable. The proposal would therefore not comply with Policies H1, D1 and D4 of the ALDP or the Managing Change Guidance for Micro-Renewables and Roofs.

Amenity and Impact of Renewable Energy Developments

Policy R8 and H1 expects no development to result in the amenity of any neighbouring properties being adversely affected in relation to daylight, privacy or general amenity. As the proposed solar panels would be located on the existing roof plane, it is not considered to impact the daylight afforded to the neighbouring properties or impact upon privacy.

Policy R8 expects renewable developments to not have a negative impact on the surrounding area in relation to the local environment, air quality and the character of the conservation area. Any renewable development should also not impact the amenity of the dwelling. The proposed solar panels would not harm the local environment, air quality or amenity of the dwelling as they would be located on the existing roof of the dwelling and would not impact any valued open space or use of the dwelling. Additionally, there would be no impact on tourism due to the nature of the development. However, it has been identified that the proposal would have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding conservation area due to its location on the visible, principal elevation. It has also been identified that the proposed solar panels could have a negative cumulative impact on the appearance of the conservation area and would therefore be in tension with this part of Policy R8. In addition, the change to the conservation area may impact the neighbouring residents' enjoyment of the area due to the visual change in the historic environment.

Overall, the proposal would not have a negative impact on the neighbouring properties to the site but would cause harm to the character and appearance of the Pitfodels Conservation Area and would therefore not comply with Policy R8 of the ALDP.

Proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan

The Report of Examination does not affect policies in a manner that is relevant to this application. The relevant PALDP policies substantively reiterate those in the adopted ALDP and therefore the proposal is acceptable in terms of both plans for the reasons previously given.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

The proposal has not sufficiently justified the requirement for solar panels and alternative thermal efficiency improvements have not been adequately explored. The proposed panels are not considered to be in a discreet location or in their design as they sit on the principal elevation of a historic building, protruding from the roof slope and would therefore have a negative and adverse impact on the character and appearance of the historic building, as well as the Pitfodels Conservation Area. The overall proposal is therefore not considered appropriate in the context of the site. As such, the proposal is not considered to comply with Policy H1: Residential Areas, Policy D1: Quality Placemaking by Design, Policy D4: Historic Environment and Policy R8: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan, the Householder Development Guide Supplementary Guidance and the relevant policies of the Proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2020 as well as Historic Environment Policy for Scotland, Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Micro-renewables and Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Roofs.