
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 November 2020

by Diane Cragg DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 December 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/M9496/W/20/3258600

Blakelow Farm, Bonsall Lane, Bonsall DE4 2PD

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Matthew Gibbs against the decision of Peak District National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref NP/DDD/1219/1280, dated 6 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 5 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is 'ground mount solar PV array'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The full name of the appellant is set out on the appeal form and I have used this in the banner heading above.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the landscape and scenic beauty of the Peak District National Park.

Reasons

4. The Environment Act 1995 sets out the statutory purposes of national parks, including to conserve and enhance their natural beauty. In carrying out these purposes, national parks also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the national park. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in national parks.
5. In this respect, Policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3 and Policy L1 of the Peak District National Park Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document Adopted October 2011 (the Core Strategy) and Policy DMC3 of the Development Management Policies Part 2 of the Local Plan (DM Policies) are consistent with the Framework and with the relevant statutory purposes and duties.
6. Policy DS1 and Policy CC2 of the Core Strategy supports low carbon and renewable energy development or infrastructure provided that it can be accommodated without adverse effects on landscape character. The Framework also supports renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure

- recognising that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and states that applications should be approved if its impacts are acceptable.
7. Blakelow Farm is a tight knit group of stone-built structures set in a relatively domestic landscape with stable buildings to the rear. It is surrounded by pastureland which rises steeply from the back of the buildings. The pastureland boundaries are defined by sparse hedges, stone walls and fencing.
 8. In the Peak District Landscape Character Assessment, the appeal site is located within the White Peak landscape character area, specifically within the landscape character type of Limestone Plateau Pastures. The key characteristics include pastoral farmland enclosed by limestone walls, regular pattern of small to medium sized rectangular fields, isolated stone farmsteads and field barns and open views to surrounding higher ground. The appeal site displays many of these characteristics and is therefore sensitive to change.
 9. A range of timber stable buildings are located to the rear of the building group at the appeal site. The stables have shallow pitched roofs and sit low in the surrounding landscape separated from the adjacent pastureland by a blockwork boundary retaining wall at the rear. The length of the solar PV array would be similar to that of the stable building's rear elevation with an overall width of approximately 4.14 metres. The array would be angled and stand approximately 2.3 metres high, although it is not clear from the evidence at what land level the height is taken from given that the levels across the site east to west vary. I have no drawings before me indicating the existing land levels or cross sections or elevation details of the solar PV array in its context. Nevertheless, I saw during my site visit that due to the proposals siting, height and scale, its separation from the main group of buildings and its location on higher land than the stables it would be a distinct element of the landscape within the field rather than seen as part of the building group.
 10. The solar PV array would be visible in cross section from the public footpath to the east in a limited range of views and would be similarly visible from the road on the approach from the east where there is insufficient intervening structures or planting to restrict views of the appeal site. The structure would not be solid in these views, as the panels are constructed on a frame, and the magnitude of the effect of the development on the landscape would be limited to an awareness of the structure with a small harmful effect on the overall quality of the scene.
 11. The field to the rear of Blakelow Farm is accessible to those who visit the farm, including those on holiday at Blakelow Farm holiday cottages, or those who have access to adjacent fields. The field rises steeply from the appeal site. At a lower level the solar array would dominate views towards the buildings. From the top of the field the solar PV array would appear as a large element in the foreground of the group of buildings. From here the proposal would be a significant feature of the views across the landscape. Because of its overall height, size and its siting on a land level above the farm complex and in part higher than the field boundaries, the solar PV array would appear out of scale and would dominate the surrounding landscape rather than being contained within it. Consequently, the proposal would be a significant intrusion into the landscape setting of Blakelow Farm and would cause localised but significant harm to the landscape and its character.

12. I appreciate that the landscape includes other paraphernalia such as fencing, water butts and feeding troughs. Such features are not unusual or uncharacteristic within pastureland and their placement is generally temporary and reversible. The presence of these features does not alter my conclusions regarding the harm that would arise as a result of the siting of the solar PV array.
13. I accept that the appellant would be willing to provide landscaping, however, no scheme has been submitted to demonstrate that landscaping would allow the proposal to satisfactorily integrate into the surroundings.
14. Overall, the development would have a harmful effect on the landscape and scenic beauty of the Peak District National Park and would conflict with Policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, L1, DS1 and CC2 of the Core Strategy and Policy DMC3 of the DM policies where priority is given to the conservation and enhancement of the National Park and valued landscape character. It would also conflict with the Framework.
15. Further, there would also be conflict with the Peak District National Park Climate Change and Sustainable Building Supplementary Planning Document where it seeks to avoid ground mounted solar arrays outside of the curtilage of buildings.

Other Matters

16. I have considered the other sites that have been brought to my attention. I note that in the case of Lea Cottage Farm¹ the solar array was found not to be an unacceptably conspicuous feature in the landscape because of existing built development and the presence of mature trees. In the case of the Orchard Barn site at Taddington² no effect on landscape setting of the National Park was identified and therefore the scheme has limited comparisons with the appeal proposal. The solar array at Chatsworth Estate³ farm shop is in a different landscape character area and the consideration of landscape impact of that development related to the particular landscape characteristics. I do not find that these decisions provide a justification for the appeal scheme, which must in any case be considered on its own merits.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Diane Cragg

INSPECTOR

¹ DDD/0515/0389

² NP/DDD/0614/0671

³ NP/DDD/1218/1165