



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 May 2025

by Jonathan Price BA(Hons) DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 May 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/25/3358870

Land north of Prigmore Drive, Mount Road, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7QR

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Miss Ashleigh Boyce (AMP Clean Energy) against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref is DC/24/0971/FUL.
 - The development proposed is construction and operation of a micro energy storage project.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for construction and operation of a micro energy storage project at land north of Prigmore Drive, Mount Road, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7QR in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref DC/24/0971/FUL, subject to the conditions set out in the schedule attached to this decision.

Main Issue

2. The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. As the Council's report outlines, the proposal is for an energy storage system (ESS) on land between Mount Road and Prigmore Drive. The ESS would occupy a gap in thick hedging alongside Mount Road, a principal route serving a surrounding area of residential housing estates. Behind the roadside hedge runs a regional cycle path, which itself is backed by hedging with new housing development beyond. A bus shelter currently occupies part of this gap, served by a roadside footway. Otherwise, the gap contains rough grassland, trodden down by desire lines from the cycle path to the bus stop on the other side.
4. The ESS would be some 2.1 metres in height and 4.6 metres in width. Partially enclosed by a 2.4 metre tall, solid acoustic fence, the total enclosure would be of 5.85 metres width and 3.82 metres in depth. On the roadside the development would extend hard up to the footway, with only a narrow strip alongside the cycleway at the other side to allow for some planting.
5. Visually, the proposal would be of a rather harsh, utilitarian appearance. However, the tall, thick hedging to either side of the gap along Mount Road, as well as that which runs continuously to the other side of the cycle path, would screen the ESS from more distant views. This was particularly evident at the time of my visit, when this vegetation was in full leaf and blossoming. Such screening might be less

efficacious in winter or soon after any hedge trimming. Given this is a well populated and quite highly trafficked area, the apparatus would be a prominent feature in frequent views from adjacent public vantage points. The visual experience would be fleeting for passing motorists and cyclists and more sustained for those on foot or waiting nearby for a bus.

6. The gap already exists, and users of the cycle path experience the loss of hedging for only a brief period, before it ends completely where there is access to new housing. The proposal would prevent the replanting of just a small, existing gap in a hedge which otherwise would continue to perform its role effectively as a green buffer between the highway and cycle route. The stark, utilitarian appearance of the apparatus reflects its function, and it would appear incongruous only in respect of such systems being unfamiliar infrastructure facilities. Nevertheless, it would comprise a prominent and discordant feature in the street scene, harming an otherwise verdant backdrop and where the bus shelter and other items of street furniture have a comparatively lighter and less intrusive appearance.
7. The proposal would inevitably detract from the character and appearance of the suburban street scene, in conflict with Policy CS3 of the 2010 St Edmundsbury Core Strategy and policies DM2 and DM13 of the 2015 Joint Development Management Document (DM). These policies generally relate to protecting the landscape and preserving features which contribute positively to its character and appearance. These remain broadly consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in seeking well-designed places by ensuring development is sympathetic to the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. The adverse visual impacts of the proposal would be quite significant and experienced by a large number of people, given the prominence of the site in a busy, well-populated suburban area. However, this is a small development, screened from more distant views by tall, dense hedging. This means the visual effects would be localised and often fleeting, rather than more far reaching. The overall level of harm would be moderate in this context.

Balance and Conclusion

8. Set against the identified harm are the benefits of the ESS. This facility would contribute to a nationwide project to provide micro-scale energy storage units. Its benefits form part of wider net-zero objectives to reduce carbon emissions in order to tackle climate change. Such energy storage facilities play a supporting role in Government objectives to de-carbonise electricity production by balancing supply and demand in the context of the more intermittent nature of renewable sources, such as wind and solar. By storing excess energy generated during periods of low demand, the ESS would help enable the efficient use of renewable power, reducing reliance on fossil fuels. On this basis, the appellant claims each ESS project saves approximately 5,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide over its lifespan. Policy DM9 is supportive of infrastructure proposals such as this, subject to minimising intrusion and visual impact. The electricity storage would help support the low and zero carbon energy generation encouraged by Policy DM8.
9. Framework paragraph 168 seeks that significant weight be given to the scheme benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and the contribution made to a net zero future, recognising that small-scale projects, such as this, provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

10. To my mind, the benefits of the scheme are significant and sufficient to outweigh the localised harm to the character and appearance of the area. No other sources of harm have been substantiated by the Council, which recommends a number of conditions were the appeal to succeed. These have been considered against the tests set out in paragraph 57 of the Framework. In addition to those which set the three-year time period for commencement and clarify the details approved, further conditions are agreed to be necessary. In the interests of mitigating the adverse impacts on the street scene, a condition requires a scheme of soft landscaping to be carried out. To safeguard the living conditions of nearby residential occupiers, a condition is needed securing the noise mitigation measures submitted. To protect the adjacent hedgerows, a condition requires agreed installation measures. The proposal is exempt from the mandatory requirement to provide biodiversity net gain. The hedge protection and soft landscaping requirements would adequately address biodiversity and so a condition requiring further enhancement measures would not be necessary in this instance.
11. Subject to these conditions, and having taken into consideration all other matters raised, I conclude the appeal be allowed.

Jonathan Price

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents: amended location plan 04.10.2024 Plan 1; amended proposed block plan 06.11.2024 Plan 2 Rev A ; amended proposed equipment details 04.10.2024 Plan 4; amended proposed equipment details 04.10.2024 Plan 5; amended proposed fence 04.10.2024 Plan 6; amended proposed 3D Visual 04.10.2024; amended acoustic assessment (unmitigated and mitigated) 23.08.2024; amended covering letter 04.10.2024; planning statement 10.07.2024; amended life cycle assessment 18.10.2024; product specification system 14.08.2024; acoustic information 17.12.2024; battery noise assessment SLR project no.: 403.065704.00001 revision 3.
- 3) No development above ground level shall take place until a scheme of soft landscaping for the site drawn to a scale of not less than 1:200 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The soft landscaping details shall include planting plans; written specifications (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment); schedules of plants noting species, plant sizes and proposed numbers/ densities. The approved scheme of soft landscaping works shall be implemented not later than the first planting season following commencement of the development. Any planting removed, dying or becoming seriously damaged or diseased within five years of planting shall be replaced within the first available planting season thereafter with planting of similar size and species.

- 4) Prior to bringing into use the development hereby permitted, the noise protection and mitigation works as detailed in the 'Battery Noise Assessment SLR Project No.: 403.065704.00001 revision 3', shall be completed in their entirety in accordance with the approved details.
- 5) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a scheme for the protection of the existing hedgerow on the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall show the extent of root protection areas and details of ground protection measures and fencing to be erected around the hedgerow including the type and position of these. The protective measures contained with the scheme shall be implemented prior to commencement of any development, site works or clearance in accordance with the approved details and shall be maintained and retained until the development is completed. Within the root protection areas, the existing ground level shall be neither raised nor lowered and no materials, temporary buildings, plant, machinery or surplus soil shall be placed or stored thereon. Should any trenches for services be required within the fenced areas, these shall be excavated and backfilled by hand and any hedge roots encountered with a diameter of 25mm or more left unsevered.
