

Land at Legacy, Bronwylfa Road, Wrexham, LL14 4HY

Planning Application for Solar PV installation

Supporting Statement

April 2014



Unit 3
The Old Dairy
Yanworth
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL54 3LQ

tel: 01285 721072

Document check/issue record

Version	Approved for issue	Issue to	Date
1	PD	JE/RH for info	31.3.14
2	PD	Planning	31.3.14

Contents

1. Purpose of this statement	4
2. Energy legislation and policy	4
3. The Development Plan	5
4. Wrexham planning policy	6
5. Summary and Conclusions	7

1. Purpose of this statement

This Statement has been prepared to accompany a full planning application by Wrexham County Borough Council (hereafter referred to as Wrexham CBC) for the creation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) installation on land at Legacy, Bronwylfa Road, Wrexham, LL14 4HY.

The Legacy site is located approximately 4 km west of Wrexham off the B5426 Bronwylfa Road.

The proposed development would enable the generation of circa 3 MW of energy from a renewable source. This equates to enough power for 800 – 900 homes.

The proposal is described more fully in a Design and Access Statement which accompanies the application.

This Statement reviews the proposal in relation to relevant planning policy and guidance.

2. Energy legislation and policy

European Union

The European Union Renewable Energy Directive was published in April 2009 and commits member states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels. Targets are outlined in relation to energy from renewable sources, and the UK is legally bound to realise 15% of energy from renewable sources by 2020.

UK

The UK Government published a UK Renewable Energy Strategy in 2009 and UK Roadmap in 2011 which set out the path to achieve the UK's target. This Roadmap has since been updated and the 2013 update confirms that the previously set target was not met and that only 2.4 GW capacity of solar had been installed at the end of June 2013, compared with an estimated potential capacity of 20GW. The 2013 Roadmap update observes that there is significant potential for further development of solar PV.

The UK 's strategy for solar power was recently set out in the "UK Solar PV Strategy: Roadmap to a Brighter Future" (October 2013). This confirms the importance of solar power and the contribution it can make to providing renewable energy. The Government is keen to see renewable energy installations that are developed sustainably.

Wales

Technical Advice Note 8 – Planning for Renewable Energy (2005) states in paragraph 3.15:

"Other than in circumstances where visual impact is critically damaging to a listed building, ancient monument or a conservation area vista, proposals for appropriately designed solar thermal and PV systems should be supported."

The Welsh Government's Energy Policy Statement, Energy Wales: A Low Carbon Transition (2012) confirms the Welsh Government's commitment to delivering an energy programme which contributes to reducing carbon emissions. Planning Policy Wales (Edition 6, February 2014) confirms that planning policy at all levels should facilitate delivery of both Energy Wales: A Low Carbon Transition (2012), and UK and European targets on renewable energy".

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 6, February 2014) makes clear (in paragraph 12.1.4) the Welsh Government aims relating to achieving infrastructure necessary to achieve sustainable development objectives. The objectives include:

"to promote the generation and use of energy from renewable and low carbon energy sources at all scales and promote energy efficiency, especially as a means to secure zero or low carbon developments and tackle the causes of climate change".

3. The Development Plan

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 6, February 2014) (PPW) confirms (in Paragraph 4.2.2) that the planning system provides for a presumption in favour of sustainable development to ensure that social, economic and environmental issues are balanced and integrated, at the same time, by the decision-taker in taking decisions on individual planning applications. Regarding the taking of planning decisions, PPW notes that:

"In line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development (see 4.2) applications for planning permission, or for the renewal of planning permission, should be determined in accordance with the approved or adopted development plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations could include current circumstances, policies in an emerging development plan, and planning policies of the Welsh Government and the UK Government. All applications should be considered in relation to up to date policies" (Para 3.1.2)

Paragraph 2.7.1 of PPW advises:

"Where development plan **policies** are outdated or superseded local planning authorities should give them decreasing weight in favour of other material considerations, such as *national planning policy*, in the determination of individual applications. This will ensure that decisions are based on policies which have been written with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development"

The site falls within the area covered by the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan 1996 - 2011 (UDP). This remains in place as the proposed replacement, the Wrexham County Borough Local Development Plan 2013 – 2028 is in preparation and adoption not expected until December 2016.

Relevant policies within the UDP are considered in Section 4.

4. Wrexham planning policy

Relevant policies of the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan 1996 -2011 are: PS2; PS12; GDP1; EC2; EC4; EC5; EC12 and EC13.

The proposal in relation to each of these is considered below.

Strategic Policies

PS2 requires that development must not materially detrimentally affect countryside, landscape/townscape character, open space, or the quality of the natural environment.

PS12 supports proposals for the generation of energy from renewable sources provided that the wider environmental benefits are not outweighed by any detrimental impacts on the landscape, public safety, and the local environment.

The development proposed is a temporary use of land for solar PV. The design has been informed by specialist surveys and reports, including an ecological report, Flood Consequence Assessment, tree survey, and a Landscape and Visual Appraisal. Further, the DAS confirms that no local objections were raised during consultation and that the site access arrangements are acceptable to the Highway Authority. As a result, the scheme has been shown to be acceptable.

Policy GDP1 identifies criteria which all new development should meet.

Provision of energy from renewable sources is fundamental to meeting sustainability targets. The scheme proposed will provide circa 3 MW of electricity. The site can be accessed safely via an agreed route (as described in the DAS accompanying the application). It is not subject to any designations which would preclude or limit the development proposed. There are no unacceptable impacts in relation to the landscape, visibility or settings of listed buildings (see Landscape and Visual Appraisal). The solar installation will not result in flooding (see Flood Consequence Assessment) and the site can continue in agricultural use. All trees are retained and landscape and biodiversity enhancements are included in the proposal.

Policy EC2 permits development on agricultural land of grades 1, 2 or 3a only if it does not lead to the irreversible loss of that land.

The site is recorded by Wrexham CBC as subject to levels of wetness which make it highly unlikely that one of these 3 grades may apply. The land will only partly be used for solar equipment as areas between, around and underneath panels will continue in agricultural usage. No land is lost and following decommissioning, all of the site can return to agricultural use.

Policy EC4 seeks to protect hedgerows and trees, and development which would result in loss or significant damage to valuable trees, important hedgerows or ancient woodland is not permitted.

All trees on the site and around the perimeter are retained. The proposal includes additional planting, management of existing hedgerows, and introduction of buffer zones/strips to enhance the biodiversity value of the site.

Policy EC5 relates to Special Landscape Areas. This is a local designation indicating that the quality of the landscape has been assessed to be of high value. However the

designation covers extensive parts of the countryside surrounding Wrexham rather than reflecting the immediate site area. The solar PV installation is proposed on fields which are crossed by many large pylons and further visually influenced by several other large man-made items associated with the extensive Legacy substation. The Landscape and Visual Appraisal shows that the landscape and visual impact of the proposal is acceptable and the design includes measures to enhance the landscape.

Policies EC12 and EC13 concern development and flood risk, permitting development only if there is no unacceptable flood risk.

The site lies beyond the 1:1000 year fluvial flood zone. The design of the scheme includes measures to mitigate against the possibility of increased water run-off from the panels, therefore there are no unacceptable adverse impacts on the water environment due to surface water run-off.

5. Summary and Conclusions

It is proposed to use land at Legacy to generate solar energy. This is a renewable source of electricity and as such strongly supported by energy policy at European, UK and Welsh levels.

The installation would produce circa 3 KW, sufficient to power 800 – 900 homes.

Land between, around and underneath the solar panels will continue in grazing usage and there is no loss of agricultural land.

Surveys, assessments and reports submitted to inform the design and assess the proposal include:

- A Landscape and Visual Appraisal
- An ecology report (extended Phase 1 habitat survey)
- A Flood Consequence Assessment
- Tree Survey (to BS 5837: 2012)

In addition, consultation has been held locally and with the Highways Authority.

All this work confirms that:

- the site is suitable for the use proposed
- there are no unacceptable impacts, and
- the scheme offers significant benefits, particularly:
 - renewable energy generation
 - landscape and biodiversity enhancements , particularly retention of all trees, hedgerow management and planting, and wildlife buffer zones.

The scheme has been shown to be in compliance with relevant policies of the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan 1996 -2011 and should therefore be approved.