

MC/22/0605

Date Received: 7 March 2022
Location: Council Office Gun Wharf
Dock Road Chatham
Proposal: Installation of solar panels on roof with an annual yield of 44.66 MWh, installation of 10 dual EV Charging unit and replacement and installation of waterless urinals.
Applicant: Medway Council
Rebecca Heslop
Agent: Ethical Partnership
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Ward: River Ward
Case Officer: Hannah Rusbridge
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Recommendation of Officers to the Planning Committee, to be considered and determined by the Planning Committee at a meeting to be held on 29th June 2022.

Recommendation - Refusal

- 1 The proposed solar panels would introduce a modern, incongruous, and out of character feature to a prominent elevation of the Grade II listed building and therefore would be harmful to the architectural and historic significance of this building, contrary to Policies BNE1 and BNE17 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 and paragraphs 126, 130, 195, 197, 199, 200, and 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.

Proposal

This is an application for the installation of solar panels on the roof with an annual yield of 44.66 MWh, installation of 10 dual EV Charging unit and the replacement and installation of waterless urinals.

Solar panels

The external works would consist of a 41.4kWp roof mounted solar photovoltaic system on the existing roof with an energy production of 42.9MWh per year to serve the energy requirements of Gun Wharf. The proposal comprises the installation of 8no. new solar panels on the south facing roof on the southern elevation of Gun Wharf.

There are currently 26 sections of 15 solar panels on the south, east and west facing roofs of Gun Wharf, all of which are internally facing. The electricity consumption at Gun Wharf accounts for 71% of the council energy consumption.

Electric Vehicle Charging Points

It is proposed to install 10 dual fast chargers (7kW each) to serve 20 parking spaces in the Gun Wharf car park.

Waterless Urinals

It is proposed to replace the 24 existing urinals in Gun Wharf with microbiological waterless urinal systems.

Relevant Planning History

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| MC/22/0609 | Listed building consent for the installation of solar panels on roof with an annual yield of 44.66 MWh, installation of 10 dual EV charging unit and replacement and installation of waterless urinals.
Decision: No decision yet |
| MC/21/2958 | Application for change of use to the internal SW corner of Level 02 and to 28m ² of area external Level 01 terrace for a plant enclosure to Sui Generis for the installation of Medway County & Family Court to the existing building and Listed Building consent for the internal alterations and installation of new external platform lift from Level 03 Dock Rd to Level 02 Middle Terrace and external plant enclosure at Level 01 to service the Court
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 30 December 2021 |
| MC/21/2959 | Listed Building Consent for change of use to the internal SW corner of Level 02 and to 28m ² of area external Level 01 terrace for a plant enclosure to Sui Generis for the installation of Medway County & Family Court to the existing building and Listed Building consent for the internal alterations and installation of new external platform lift from Level 03 Dock Rd to Level 02 Middle Terrace and external plant enclosure at Level 01 to service the Court.
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 30 December 2021 |

- MC/21/0489 Listed building application for the replacement of waterproofing adjacent to the main entrance to stop water ingress to the basement below incorporating careful removal of existing external features and finishes over the works area - including surface paving / tiling, balustrading, brick walls to ramp and planters, drainage channels + grating, cycle shelters, security gate and fencing and flagpole plinth; removal of existing waterproofing membranes back to the structural slab; core drilling of holes in slab for new drainage runs from perimeter channel along building line; installation of new drainage pipework to connect into existing system in basement; formation of new drainage channel on building line; laying of new screed to falls and application of waterproofing membrane; reinstatement of existing walls, ramp, fencing, flagpole base and surface fixed features - all as existing.
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 14 April 2021
- MC/18/2260 Listed building consent for replacement of existing gas governor
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 21 December 2018
- MC/17/3780 Listed building consent application for the installation of 3 sets of internal fire doors around level 2
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 1 February 2018
- MC/16/4459 Listed building consent for removal of all defective tiles due to structural failure and replacement with new to match original
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 30 December 2016
- MC/15/1596 Listed building application for the provision of solar PV panels
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 24 July 2015
- MC/15/1594 Provision of solar PV panels
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 21 July 2015

MC/12/2423

Application under Regulation 3 of The Town & Country
General Planning Regulations 1992 installation of
security gates and railings
Decision: Approval with Conditions
Decided: 12 December 2012

Representations

The application has been advertised on site and in the press and by individual neighbour notification to the owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties.

No letters of representation have been received.

Historic England were also consulted and raised concerns regarding the impact of the proposed solar panels on the grade II listed building. It was also raised that there seems to be little justification of the harm to heritage significance and little exploration of other less harmful ways to improve energy efficiency. Concerns were also raised regarding the impact of the proposed solar panels on the nationally important naval dockyard buildings including the Store House and Fitted Rigging House as well as the conservation area.

Development Plan

The Development Plan for the area comprises the Medway Local Plan 2003 (the Local Plan). The policies referred to within this document and used in the processing of this application have been assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and are considered to conform.

Planning Appraisal

Background

Gun Wharf is set within the Brompton Lines Conservation Area and was listed as a Grade II listed building of National importance by Historic England in 2015, recognised for the following merits: - architectural interest, quality of internal planning, quality of materials and detailing, structural interest, use of site and quality of setting, and level of survival. The Gun Wharf building was designed by Arup Associates and was constructed in 1976-1978 for Lloyds of London as their administrative headquarters. In 2006, the building was purchased and occupied by Medway Council as a new civic headquarters. The building itself has a reinforced concrete frame with the external walls clad predominantly in red-brown brick. The roofs are covered in grey concrete tiles. The building has a figure-of-eight footprint around two internal courtyard gardens (a lower one on level 2 to the south, and an upper one on level 3 to the north).

Principle

The provisions of Policy CF11 of the Local Plan state that the Council will support proposals for renewable energy schemes when the location, scale and design of the apparatus and associated infrastructure are not detrimental to nature, conservation, or wider landscape and present no significant loss of residential or countryside amenity. Paragraph 154 of the NPPF also supports the applications for renewable and low carbon development.

The application site is listed and is located within the Brompton Lines Conservation Area. The site is visible from Dock Road and from the riverside walk to the west. It is considered that, in principle, the proposal is in accordance with Policies CF11 of the Local Plan and paragraph 154 of the NPPF.

Design

Policy BNE1 of the Local Plan requires development to be satisfactory in terms of scale and mass and should respect the visual amenity of the surrounding area. Policy BNE17 of the Local Plan outlines that development would not be permitted if any alteration to a listed building would be detrimental or unsympathetic to its design, architectural or historical significance and its materials.

Section 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) set out the obligation on local planning authorities to pay special regard to safeguarding the special interest of listed buildings, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 16 of the NPPF sets out how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced. Paragraph 195 of the NPPF states that local authorities, when considering proposals that affect a heritage asset, should seek to avoid, or minimise any conflict between the conservation of the heritage asset and any aspect of the proposal. Paragraph 199 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on a heritage asset, local planning authorities should give 'great weight' to preserving the asset's significance. Paragraph 200 of the NPPF notes that any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification Paragraph 202 of the NPPF states that where harm is caused to a heritage asset, and this is deemed to be less than substantial, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposed development.

Solar panels

Solar panel units currently exist at Gun Wharf and are installed within the internal facing roof slopes of the courtyards at higher levels, so that the visibility of these are restricted. It was the intention, that no other units were to be proposed as additional installations as they would start to have a negative effect on the character of the building in long views and that within the Brompton Lines Conservation Area.

The proposed photovoltaic panels would be highly visible on the externally facing sloping roof on the south facing southern elevation of Gun Wharf. Due to the cumulative impact of the proposed panels and the fact that the roof slope elevation that they sit on is highly visible, it is considered that the proposal would result in the loss of the integrity of the original roof finish, materials, and its original design intention to this Grade II listed building. It is generally not considered sympathetic to a building's appearance to have a solar panel or other equipment fixed to its main elevations. Although not considered the principal elevation, the proposed panels would be visible from the car park, the public footpath leading down to the river, and from the riverside walk facing the building. The prominent siting and tiered roof formation of Gun Wharf also increases the visibility of the proposal. The development would be considered to be contrary to Policies BNE1 and BNE17 of the Local Plan and paragraphs 126, 195, 199, 200, and 202 of the NPPF 2021.

Electric Vehicle Charging Points

The proposal introduces 10 dual fast chargers to serve 20 parking spaces within the car park, to the immediate east of the main building of Gun Wharf. The prominent siting and size of the glass reinforced plastic (GRP) electric enclosure, was questioned given the setting of the listed building, however, this is the only suitable location and size for the GRP enclosure due to the termination of electrical services at this point and the internal requirements of the enclosure.

In accepting the size and siting of the GRP enclosure and EV charging points, concerns are raised regarding the overall design and visual impact of the GRP enclosure. If the application were to be considered acceptable, a condition would be recommended for details of screening to be submitted, to reduce the visual impact of the enclosure on the setting of the listed building. This condition would be placed on the listed building application. With the recommended condition imposed on the listed building application it is considered that the proposal would accord with Policies BNE1 and BNE17 of the Local Plan.

Waterless Urinals

Sustainable and ecological waterless urinals are replacing the original in a like for like position in the existing w/c's. Although the project is minimal in scale, the benefits that come from waterless technology would be welcomed by the Local Authority contributing to their energy saving methods. Therefore, the proposal would not be harmful with regard to design and accords with Policies BNE1 and BNE17 of the Local Plan.

Amenity

Policy BNE2 of the Local Plan states that all development should secure the amenities of its future occupants, and protect those amenities enjoyed by nearby and adjacent properties. The design of the development should have regard to privacy, daylight, sunlight, noise, vibration, heat, light, smell, airborne emissions, activity levels and traffic generation.

Given the proposed siting and scale of the proposed external alterations, it is not considered that there would be a harmful impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties. The proposals are considered to be in accordance with Policy BNE2 of the Local Plan and paragraph 130 of the NPPF.

Highways

It is not considered that there would be any detrimental impact on highways or pedestrian safety and therefore the proposal is in accordance with Policies T1, T2, and T13 of the Local Plan and paragraph 111 of the NPPF.

Conclusions and Reasons for Refusal

The proposed solar panels would introduce a modern, incongruous, and out of character feature to a prominent elevation of the Grade II listed building and therefore would be harmful to the architectural and historic significance of this building, contrary to Policies BNE1 and BNE17 of the Local Plan and paragraphs 126, 195, 199, 200, and 202 of the NPPF.

The application would normally be determined under delegated powers but is being referred for Committee determination by the request of Councillor Gulvin.

Background Papers

The relevant background papers relating to the individual applications comprise: the applications and all supporting documentation submitted therewith; and items identified in any Relevant History and Representations section within the report.

Any information referred to is available for inspection in the Planning Offices of Medway Council at Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR and here <http://publicaccess1.medway.gov.uk/online-applications/>