

Sheringham - PF/22/2901 – Erection of a 396 kWp solar car port and associated infrastructure - The Reef Leisure Centre, Weybourne Road, Sheringham for North Norfolk District Council

Minor Development

Target Date: 3rd February 2022

Case Officer: Mr J Barrow

Full Planning Permission

RELEVANT SITE CONSTRAINTS

- Landscape Character Area: Coastal Shelf
- Approach Routes
- Employment Area
- Settlement Boundary
- Sheringham Park

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

PF/18/1435: Demolition of existing leisure and fitness centre, single storey office and existing skate park. Erection of two storey leisure centre to incorporate swimming pool, fitness suite, wet/dry changing facilities, reception, cafe, plant with car parking, erection of new skate park and associated landscaping - approved

CD/21/1764: Discharge of conditions 14 (west elevation plans), 15 (landscaping) & 26 (ventilation, air conditioning, refrigeration or mechanical extractor system details) of planning permission PF/18/1435 (Demolition of existing leisure and fitness centre, single storey office and existing skate park. Erection of two storey leisure centre to incorporate swimming pool, fitness suite, wet/dry changing facilities, reception, cafe, plant with car parking, erection of new skate park and associated landscaping) – details approved

CD/21/1900: Discharge of condition 18: external lighting details of PF/18/1435 Demolition of existing leisure and fitness centre, single storey office and existing skate park. Erection of two storey leisure centre to incorporate swimming pool, fitness suite, wet/dry changing facilities, reception, cafe, plant with car parking, erection of new skate park and associated landscaping – details approved

CD/22/0646: Discharge of condition 10 (Off-Site Highway Improvement Works including new access, closure of existing access and changes to footway/bus stops) of planning permission PF/18/1435; to allow the temporary access to remain in place until the end of 2024, to help reduce the impact of any construction traffic on day to day operations of The Reef and therefore help mitigate the impact on and disruption to that neighbouring operation – details approved

CDC/18/1435: Discharge of conditions 9 (acoustic), 12 (Traffic Management Condition), 14 (West Elevation), 15 (Landscaping), 16 (Arboriculture), 17 (Materials), 18 (External Lighting),

28 (Ground Improvements), 31 (Temporary Hoarding) of planning permission PF/18/1435 – details approved

CDB/18/1435: Discharge of conditions 4, 5 & 6 (Contamination), 7 (Surface Water Drainage), & 15 (part discharge-Landscaping) of planning permission PF/18/1435 – details approved

CDA/18/1435: Discharge of conditions 4 (contamination), 7 (surface water drainage), 8 (foul water strategy), 9 (acoustic), 10 (phase 2 works), 11 (parking during construction), 13 (refuse storage), 18 (external & car parking lighting), 23 (gradient of vehicular access), 24 (visibility splays), 30 (external lighting) of planning permission PF/18/1435 – details approved

PF/22/1660: 37 suite apartment hotel with associated access, parking and landscaping - Pending Consideration

THE APPLICATION

The application seeks permission to erect a 396 Kilowatt Peak (kWp) solar car port and associated infrastructure on land used as a car park for The Reef Leisure Centre.

It would comprise the erection of three solar car port structures over each of the existing rows of car parking spaces serving The Reef Leisure Centre. The structures would take the form of central supporting pillars, with sloping monopitch roof design, covering the parking bays on either side, and sloping so as to maximise solar energy generation. The roof height of the structures would be approximately 4.4 metres on the north side with the lowest point on the south side being 2.6metres.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

Because the capacity of the development would exceed 250kW.

PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL

Sheringham Town Council - No comments received at time of writing.

REPRESENTATIONS

One in support,

- Highlights the proposed development's energy generation capacity
- Little negative impact on the environment.

CONSULTATIONS

Environmental Health: No objections or comments.

Norfolk County Council Highways: No objections as the highway related conditions of the site would remain unchanged.

Landscape Officer: No objection

- The car park would be contained by both existing, proposed, and approved development within the surroundings.
- Any visual harm is deemed to be mitigated by the benefits of the renewable energy generation.
- Reduction in light spill through providing down lighting under the canopies rather than lighting columns.

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

It is considered that the proposed development may raise issues relevant to

Article 8: The Right to respect for private and family life.

Article 1 of the First Protocol: The right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions.

Having considered the likely impact on an individual's Human Rights, and the general interest of the public, approval of this application as recommended is considered to be justified, proportionate and in accordance with planning law.

CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998 - CHAPTER 17

The application raises no significant crime and disorder issues.

LOCAL FINANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Under Chapter 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the council is required when determining planning applications to have regard to any local finance considerations, so far as material to the application. Local finance considerations are not considered to be material to this case.

STANDING DUTIES

Due regard has been given to the following duties: Environment Act 2021 Equality Act 2010 Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 (S17) Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 (S40) The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (R9) Planning Act 2008 (S183) Human Rights Act 1998 – this incorporates the rights of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK Law - Article 8 – Right to Respect for Private and Family Life Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (S66(1) and S72)

POLICIES

North Norfolk Core Strategy (Adopted September 2008):

SS1 – Spatial Strategy

SS4 – Environment

SS12 – Sheringham

EN2 – Protection and Enhancement of Landscape and Settlement Character

EN4 – Design

EN7 – Renewable Energy

CT5 – Transport Impact of New Development

CT6 – Parking Provision

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021):

Chapter 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development

Chapter 9 – Promoting Sustainable Transport

Chapter 12 – Achieving Well Designed Places

Chapter 14 – Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change

Chapter 15 – Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Supplementary Planning Documents

North Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment SPD (2021)

MAIN ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Whether the proposed development is acceptable in principle
2. The effect on the character and appearance of the area
3. The effect on the amenity of surrounding occupiers
4. Highways

APPRAISAL

1. Principle

Core Strategy Policy EN 7 states renewable energy proposals will be supported and considered in the context of sustainable development and climate change, taking account of the wide environmental, social and economic benefits of renewable energy gain. Proposals for renewable energy technology, associated infrastructure and integration of renewable technology on existing or proposed structures will be permitted where individually, or cumulatively, there are no significant adverse effects on;

- the surrounding landscape, townscape and historical features / areas;
- residential amenity (noise, fumes, odour, shadow flicker, traffic, broadcast interference); and specific highway safety, designated nature conservation or biodiversity considerations.

The proposed development is therefore acceptable in principle subject to consideration of these matters where relevant.

2. Character and appearance

Visually, the proposed structures are not, of themselves, considered to be particularly 'beautiful' and their form follows function in providing a structural frame to support the proposed 966 PV modules.

The site is a designated Employment Area and has a much more urban appearance and feel than the rural landscapes which exist beyond the site's perimeter. The existing surrounding development would provide a good level of screening of the proposed structures, reducing the visual impact of the development within the wider landscape context.

Through orienting the car ports to slope north-south, any glare effects would be focused away from the Norfolk Coast Path route and golf course to the north; both areas where rurality is of particular importance to protect.

The development would have significant other benefits in terms of renewable energy generation, which need to be weighed against what in any event would be limited visual harm in terms of landscape impact. This is particularly important given the Council's declaration of a climate emergency, and the pledge to become net-zero by 2030.

As confirmed by the Council's Landscape Officer, this scheme would not negatively impact on the level of planting approved for the Leisure Centre and in addition, would provide a gain in terms of light spill through the replacement of columns for downlighting under the canopies.

Taking account of the above, it is considered that the proposed development would not result in any significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. It is therefore in accordance with Core Strategy Policies EN 2 and EN 4, Chapter 12 of the NPPF (2021), and the North Norfolk Design Guide.

3. Amenity

Whilst there is often the perception that solar panels create glare, in reality this is not usually the case as glare represents lost sunlight energy. Solar panels are designed to absorb the sun's rays in generating electricity with dark, light-absorbing materials used which are covered with an anti-reflective coating.

In terms of adjacent developments, to the east of the site is existing employment land, with Sheringham Football Club to the south, and residential properties beyond that. The Reef Leisure Centre itself is immediately to the north with the A149 and Sheringham Golf Club beyond that. Each of these relationships is acceptable and would result in minimal negative impacts in terms of glare.

To the east of the site the Council is currently considering an application for an apartment hotel. It is considered unlikely, given the orientation that the amenity of occupiers of these these properties would be significantly adversely impacted.

Residential properties to the south are separated from the car park for The Reef by at least 115m, with Sheringham Town Football Club's pitch creating this distance. The dwellings which could potentially be impacted by solar glare are those positioned to the southern boundary of the football pitch. However, Officers consider it unlikely that the amenity of occupiers of these properties would be significantly adversely impacted from glare.

Officers note that the separation distances between these dwellings and the car park remains the same. The loss of lighting columns is a positive aspect of the scheme.

It is considered that the impact upon amenity would be acceptable in this case, in accordance with Policy EN4 of the Adopted North Norfolk Core Strategy, Chapter 12 of the NPPF (2021), and the North Norfolk Design Guide.

4. Highways

This application would not propose any alteration to existing parking provision, layout, or access arrangements. It would simply provide a cover to the existing spaces. Planning conditions attached to the leisure centre development relating to highways would be unaffected, and as a result the Highway Authority raises no objections.

This application is therefore considered acceptable in terms of parking provision and highway safety in accordance with Core Strategy CT5 and CT6 of the Adopted North Norfolk Core Strategy as well as Chapter 9 of the NPPF (2021).

Conclusion and planning balance

Whilst there would be some very limited harm in terms of potential glare from the panels and the appearance of the development would be functional, it is considered that this would be significantly outweighed by the environmental benefits of this scheme - in particular renewable energy generation (396kWp) which can be utilised to power The Reef Leisure Centre.

The proposal aligns with the Council's pledge to be net-zero by 2030, as well as going some way to address the climate emergency declared in 2019.

It is considered that the proposed development complies with the relevant development plan policies listed above.

RECOMMENDATION

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APPROVAL subject to conditions to cover the matters listed below

- Time Limit for commencement (3 years)
- Development in accordance with the approved plans

Final wording of conditions to be delegated to the Assistant Director – Planning