

REPORT FOR INDEPENDENT INSPECTOR

23 Field Lane



1. Matter for Consideration

1.1 The applicant subject of this appeal sought – PV Panels to side elevation

2. Background

2.1 The subject property is a freehold property. The surrounding area is designated as **Heritage Character Area**.

2.2 The property has been the subject of the most recent applications:

Nature of Works	Outcome
Two storey side extension	1991 Approved
Tree Works	2005 Approved
Replacement timber windows (heritage grant)	2009 Approved
Removal of conifer hedge and replacement with shrubs	2010 Approved
Demolition of existing outhouse, erection of single storey rear extension to include removal of 2 side windows & replacement of 1 window with	2010 Approved

new doorway	
Three rooflights to rear extension	Approved 2021

- 2.3 Planning Permission is not required from North Hertfordshire Council.
- 2.4 Location plan and Photographs are available in **Appendix A**.
- 2.5 The bundle contains the relevant documentation referred to in the statement.

3. Application

- 3.1 An application was submitted for three PV Panel Arrays to the south side gable roofline of the original building and a later modern two storey extension.
- 3.2 The proposed design of the arrays consisted of 5 panels to the original side roofline, an additional panel to the rear of the link element to the modern extension but still on the original building and 7 panels to the later modern roofline.
- 3.3 The HAC decided to make a split decision at their meeting on 21st October 2022 and the paperwork was issued on 25th October 2022.
- Approved plans were issued for the array to the later extension, as well as a single panel to the rear of the original roofline as it was felt this was masked by the link roofline between the two gable roofs. This amounts to 8 PV Panels
 - Refusal was issued for the remaining PV array of 5 panels to the side gable
- 3.4 The applicant sought a review by the AMC. The AMC met on 19th January 2023 and upheld the decision of the HAC. The HAC confirmed the refusal at its meeting of 10th February 2023.

4. Scheme of Management and the Design Principles

- 4.1 The Scheme of Management under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 in the covenants section at point 6 states:

Restriction on further development

6. Any owner shall not carry out any development redevelopment or alteration materially affecting external appearance of the enfranchised property or of any building or structure thereon save with the written consent of the Corporation (which shall not be unreasonably withheld) and in accordance with plans drawings and specifications previously submitted to and approved by the Corporation. Any such development redevelopment or alteration shall be made in accordance with the approved plans drawings and specifications and shall be carried out in a good substantial and workmanlike manner with sound and proper materials.

4.2 The Design Principles for PV Panels has been updated as a joint document for Heritage and Modern Character Areas. A copy is included in the bundle of documents.

4.3 The Design Principles state: -

The installation of Photovoltaic (PV) panels is usually acceptable providing that they adhere to the following guidelines:

Acceptable Installation in the HCA

- Panels should be positioned on rear roof pitches, on rear outbuildings, or as a ground array in back gardens
- The design of the array must be balanced and symmetrical. rectangular and straight-lined installations will be required

Unacceptable Installation in the HCA

- Panels should **not** be located on any street facing roof pitches
- Panels should **not** overhang the roof slope

The Design Principles go on to state –

- Installations placed on outbuildings, like this, represent viable alternatives to an unsuitable rear roof pitch in the HCA. As with main roof arrays, balanced design is key

5. Issues

5.1 No 23 Field Lane is sited gable end onto Field Lane. In 1991 consent was granted for a two-storey side extension which mimicked the design of the original gable ended building.

5.2 Field Lane is at the heart of the early Garden City, dating from the 1920s. Central characteristics of Letchworth Garden City are the steep plain tiled rooflines which complement the rich roughcast render. The roofline is considered a very important design feature of the Garden City and there is concern that the installation of PV panels diminishes the overall rhythm and strength of this important characteristic.

5.3 The side elevation of 23 Field Lane is a strong element of the streetscene. 25 and 27 Field Lane are bungalows and as such the side elevation of 23 is more visible from the pavement, creating a focal point which only intensifies the need to retain the strength of the simplistic red plain tiled roof as an important constant of the Garden City and its character.

5.4 The application was submitted, as HAC and HAS were re-considering the advice on PV arrays as more the HAS were seeing an increase in applications and it was felt that the existing advice was outdated.

5.5 This application was taken as an AOB to the September HAC meeting where Officers were requested to discuss alternative locations for the PV array. The overriding concern being the impact that the array would have on the special characteristics of the Garden City.

5.6 The Case Officer discussed various options for re-siting the panels to the

- rear, or on an available outbuilding or as a standalone array in the garden, if there was available space.
- 5.7 The homeowners' pointed out that to the rear of the property was a treeline which would inhibit the use of PV panels to the outbuilding and the garden was considered too small for a ground-based array. There was no obvious location on the single storey rear extension to house the PV array. Another possibility would be to increase the amount on the later gable roof, which was further set back from the street, but the manufacturer was concerned about the weight load on the roof structure.
- 5.8 The Case Officer reported back to the October HAC meeting and the HAC met with the homeowner. The HAC concluded that a compromise could be reached. The rear modern gabled roofline was sufficiently set back into the site alongside the rear of the original gable roof to allow PV panels. However, it concluded that the original gable roofline was very visible and that a PV array on this element would have a detrimental impact on the streetscene.
- 5.9 The HAS team are tasked with ensuring the character and appearance of the estate of Letchworth Garden City is not harmed. The work around PV panels highlights an important challenge that the HAS team and the Foundation are facing, having to balance conflicting demands on the Garden City.
- 5.10 The HAS recognised that the existing Design Principles were too prescriptive for the increased demand and as such have significantly relaxed the guidance.
- 5.11 The 2015 Heritage Character Area Design Principles state: -
- *panels must not be positioned on the street facing elevations of a building or be visible from the street;*
 - *location should be on rear roof slopes and be as inconspicuous as possible. The panel installation must not dominate the building;*
 - *solar hot water panel installations should not normally exceed 6 square metres in area;*
 - *PV panel installation should be rectangular in shape with no fragmented edges and located on one roof plane only.*
 - *Multiple 'pepper potted' installations are not acceptable;*
 - *The panels should cover no more than 60% of the roof plane area and should be 0.6m from the edge of any roof plane, including the ridge.*
- 5.12 The 2022 guidance although still requiring panels to not be positioned on street facing elevations or visible from the street have increased the amount to 100% on rear facing roof pitches as well as allowing arrays on more than one rear roofline.
- 5.13 The HAS determined the application as a compromise to allow a significant amount of PV panels whilst still retaining the important character and appearance of the Garden City.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The Heritage Foundation appreciate the desire of the homeowner to utilise PV Panels as part of a push towards more sustainable living but remain concerned about the cumulative impact to the Heritage Character Area of allowing PV panels on very visible street facing elevations and the precedent that this may set.
- 6.2 Overall, it is our view that the application represents a clear breach of the Design Principles, which have been carefully formulated to avoid this type of alteration. The application fails to preserve the character and appearance of the existing property and the Heritage Character Area.
- 6.3 It is therefore respectfully requested that this appeal is dismissed.

Appendix A – Location plan and photographs



23 Field Lane



Rear of house without rooflights which were consent in 2021

View of the roofline to 23 Field Lane walking from Sollershott East



View of Field Lane – showing the rhythm of the plain tiled roofline, complementing the roughcast render walls and tree lined verges

