

Appeal Decision

Site visit made 20 June 2023

By Ruth Reed BA DipArch MA PGCertEd PPRIBA HonAIA FRIAS

An Independent Scheme of Management Inspector
Appointed by the Heritage Foundation Letchworth Garden City

Decision date 27 June 2023

Appeal Reference RR/2023/015

23 Field Lane, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 3LF

- The appeal is made by _____ against refusal of consent under the Scheme of Management of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation for the application submitted on 11 August 2022.
 - Consent for the scheme was refused in part by the Heritage Foundation's Householder Applications Committee on 21 October 2022. It was reviewed by the Advisory Management Committee on 19 January 2023 and the decision to refuse in part was upheld.
 - The development proposed is PV Panels to side elevation (5 panels).
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Decision

1. The appeal against the refusal of part of an application for PV panels to the side elevation is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The original application was for an array of 7 panels on the side elevation of the side extension to the house, one to the rear portion of the side elevation on the main house and 5 panels on the front part of the side elevation to the main house.
3. The array of 7 panels on the side elevation of the side extension and one to the rear portion of the side elevation on the main house were approved. The 5 panels on the front part of the main house roof were refused in a split decision and this refusal is the subject of this appeal.
4. Reference has been made by the appellant to the national and local planning context, heritage guidance from Historic England, and Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third edition), published by the

Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. The decision is made solely on the basis of the Design Principles set out by the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation which generally indicate what will and will not be acceptable. However, each case is made on its own merits based on the character of the property and its context.

5. During consideration of the application the Heritage Foundation issued updated guidance on photovoltaic panels in November 2022. The decision is based on this guidance and the Guidance for Heritage Character Areas.

Main Issues

6. The main issues in this case are the impact of the proposals to the character and appearance of the house itself, and the impact on the street scene and the character of the area.

Reasons

7. 23 Field Lane is a detached house facing gable-on eastwards to the street. It is situated in a Heritage Character Area but is not a Home of Special Interest.
8. The new guidance on photovoltaic panels limits the location of panels to rear roof pitches, the roofs of rear outbuildings and ground arrays in back gardens. With the exception of a single storey rear extension with rooflights, there are no rear facing slopes on the house to accommodate photovoltaic panels. The outbuilding is shaded by trees and a ground mounted array in the garden is unacceptable to the appellant. Both these options would have less impact on the character of the area and the house itself than a side roof mounted array.
9. The compromise agreed by the Foundation was to approve panels mounted on the side roof of the extension which is set further back than the main house and on the rear of the main side roof. Both these locations are visible from some locations in the immediate area and will have some impact on the character of the area.
10. Specifically, the main roof is visible from the footpaths to either side of Field Lane when walking north from the junction with Sollershott East and from the road approaching the house in this direction. It is also briefly visible between 12 and 14 Sollershott East. At this point the single panel approved for the main roof would be visible.
11. The panels approved for the extension roof and the single panel on the main roof would be visible from view-points close to the house from Field View but

would be obscured by trees and other properties from more distant points looking northwards on Field View.

12. Panels on the front part of the main roof would have considerably more impact on the appearance of the house and the appearance of the area than the ones approved. The curve of the road, the position of the house forward from its neighbours and the lower roofs of the bungalows south of the house make the side elevation of number 23 a significant element in the street scene of Field View. The street trees only partly screen it and reduce the impact.
13. Introducing flat glass panels to a significant proportion of a plain tile roof would have a significant adverse effect on the character and appearance of the house. Permitting an array in such a visible position would have a negative impact on this Heritage Character Area where the roofscape is a significant component of the Arts and Craft style that is largely unchanged.
14. The appellant drew my attention to elements not in accordance with the Design Principles on the street and examples of arrays visible from the street elsewhere in Letchworth. The history of consents in the immediate area is not known to me but these may pre-date the Design Principles or been decided on a case-by-case basis based on the degree of impact on the Heritage Character Area or be subject to enforcement that I am unaware of. As they are not photovoltaic panels, they are not directly relevant to this case and only serve to illustrate the very specific nature of decision-making.
15. The examples of photovoltaic panels submitted with the appellant's evidence are either not in the Heritage Character Area, have historic precedent as replacement for older arrays or are subject to enforcement. None serve as justification and precedent for introducing more panels into the street scene of Field View.
16. The case for moving away from fossil fuels is compelling and has been taken into account by the Heritage Foundation in re-drafting the Photovoltaic Panels Guidance. There has been further compromise by the Heritage Foundation in permitting panels on the side elevations in this particular situation. In terms of the Design Principles, I consider that there is no justification for additional panels that would have a significant negative effect on the house and the street scene.
17. It is understood that the 8 panels approved would not give a good return in electricity saved over the cost of installation. However, the economic case is not part of the considerations that are part of the decision making based on the Design Principles and I have been unable to give this any weight.

Conclusions

18. Having read the submissions and seen the site and its context again, I conclude that the proposed additional 5 photovoltaic panels would not be in accordance with the Design Principles. The negative impact on the street scene and on the character of the house are not in accordance with the Design Principles for Heritage Character Areas. The appeal is dismissed.

Ruth Reed

Independent Scheme of Management Inspector