



Planning, Design and Access Statement

Lower Laines Farm, Cuckfield



Proposed installation of a solar photovoltaic panel array within field to serve the farm and its associated buildings

at

Lower Laines Farm, Cuckfield

Planning Statement

on Behalf of

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is a Planning, Design and Access Statement prepared to accompany a Full Planning application for the proposed installation of a ground-mounted array of 40No. solar photovoltaic panels, within a field adjacent to the cluster of farm buildings at Lower Laines Farm, Newbury Lane, Cuckfield.
- 1.2 Lower Laines Farm occupies approximately 18 acres of land between Newbury Lane to the north, and the A272 Cuckfield Bypass to the south. There exists a cluster of farm buildings to the east of the holding, where a track leads northwards towards Newbury Lane.
- 1.3 The site gently slopes south towards the A272, with the selected site for the panels being perfectly suitable for the proposal.
- 1.4 This statement sets out the planning case for the proposed installation, with the following conclusions being drawn:
 - a) The proposed panels have been sited to allow them to be clearly associated with the farm property, yet ensure they remain respectful of the property's sensitive rural setting;
 - b) The proposed panels are to be mounted in portrait format on a proprietary galvanised metal frame system, with screw-driven fixings to minimise their impact on biodiversity;
 - c) The proposed panels are of the monocrystalline (low-reflectivity) type and will be sited within an area of land currently overgrown and occupied by old machinery and tractors, ensuring productive farmland is not being lost for renewable power generation;
 - d) The proposed setting for the panels is well screened on all sides, mostly with a mix of both new and established hedge planting;
 - e) The topography of the site allows the panels to be hidden below one's line of sight, assisting in minimising their visibility from the wider area;
 - f) The Biodiversity Net Gain assessment confirms that a gain in excess of 10% will be achieved;
 - g) An outbuilding within the existing cluster of Farm outbuildings will be used for the siting of the batteries, which will provide electricity storage when the power generated exceeds the power used;
 - h) The number of proposed panels has been determined by means of a detailed assessment to ensure they are optimised for the electricity use of the Farm;
 - i) The proposed panels will not be visible from any neighbouring properties, and will therefore not have any detrimental impact upon the amenity of the neighbours;
 - j) The proposals will significantly reduce the reliance on fossil fuels for the Farm's energy use, estimating a CO2 reduction of approximately 4,117 kg/year.

2. Use

- 2.1 The proposed solar photovoltaic panels will be used to generate renewable electricity for the farm on which they are to be sited.

3. Amount

- 3.1 The proposals include the following:
- a) The installation of 40No. solar photovoltaic panels on a ground-mounted galvanised metal framing system;
 - b) The installation of battery storage within an existing outbuilding to harness the electrical energy generated, storing it for use at a later time;
 - c) The installation of an electric vehicle charging point.

4. Layout

- 4.1 The layout of the solar photovoltaic panel array is straightforward and can be viewed on the accompanying drawings. The panels are arranged in portrait in 2No. rows of 20 panels. The overall length of the array is 22.8m.
- 4.2 The batteries will be located within part of the existing outbuilding, therefore concealed and having no impact on the existing building layout.

5. Planning Statement / Scale

Planning Policies

- 5.1 There are a number of planning policies relevant to this application. As set out in the pre-application advice received, these include:

Mid Sussex District Plan

DP12 – Protection and Enhancement of Countryside
DP26 – Character and Design
DP38 – Biodiversity
DP40 – Renewable Energy Schemes

Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan

CNP4 – Protect and Enhance Biodiversity
CNP5 – Protect and Enhance the Countryside

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF has a number of policies that are relevant to these proposals, with Paragraph 152 stating that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate through renewable and low carbon energy.

Relevant Planning History

- 5.2 The most recent relevant planning approval granted for farmstead is listed as follows:

DM/15/2623 - *The construction of a single storey oak framed barn with artificial slate roof and timber weatherboarding for the purpose of protecting hay bales from the weather, with mono pitch lean to for use as a log store – APPROVED*

Pre-Application Advice

- 5.3 Pre Application advice was sought in respect of these proposals, and a response was received by email on 26th March 2025 (Ref: DM/25/0181). The response, the transcript of which is provided below, is broadly very positive:

Thank you for your enquiry relating to the above and apologies for the delayed response. The proposal is for 40 solar panels and battery storage at Lower Laines Farm Newbury Lane Cuckfield RH17 5AA.

The application would be assessed against the local development plan which consists of the Mid Sussex District Plan (MSDP) and the Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan (CNP). The Mid Sussex Design Guide SPD (MSDG) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are considered to be material considerations. I have listed the relevant policies below:

MSDP:

*DP12 – Protection and Enhancement of Countryside
DP26 - Character and Design
DP38 – Biodiversity
DP40 – Renewable Energy Schemes*

CNP:

*CNP4 – Protect and Enhance Biodiversity
CNP5 – Protect and Enhance the Countryside*

Principle

Policy DP40 of the MSDP states that development for renewable energy schemes will be permitted provided adverse impact can be made acceptable, with particular regard to landscape and the appearance of existing buildings. Also in regard to ecology and biodiversity, including protected species. The site would be relatively well screened and I recommend that the proposed panels are of a modest scale and are as low to the ground as possible to limit the views of them from the wider area. They would be sited away from the existing buildings within the site. Information would

need to be provided to demonstrate that the proposal would have an acceptable impact on ecology and biodiversity. Subject to the above the principle of the proposed solar panels could be acceptable.

Character and design and impact on Countryside

Policy DP26 of the MSDP states that proposals need to demonstrate that the development addresses the character and scale of the surrounding buildings and landscape. Policy DP12 of the MSDP requires development conserve or where possible enhances the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District. A similar ethos is contained within policy CNP5 of the CNP.

The land on which the proposed panels are to be located is relatively well screened from the public views within the surrounding area. Limited details of the panels have been provided however I recommend that they are of a modest scale and are as low to the ground as possible to limit the views of them from the wider area. Additional planting around the panels may also soften their appearance. Subject to the detailed design of the proposal it is my informal opinion that the proposal would address the character and scale of the surrounding buildings and landscape and conserve the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District.

Biodiversity

Policy DP38 of the Mid Sussex District Plan seeks to ensure development:

“Protects existing biodiversity, so that there is no net loss of biodiversity. Appropriate measures should be taken to avoid and reduce disturbance to sensitive habitats and species. Unavoidable damage to biodiversity must be offset through ecological enhancements and mitigation measures (or compensation measures in exceptional circumstances)”

Information would need to be provided to demonstrate that the proposal would have an acceptable impact on ecology and biodiversity.

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to planning and land management that leaves the natural environment in a better state than it was before. BNG will deliver measurable improvements for biodiversity by enhancing or creating new habitats in association with development. The requirement for BNG does not alter the existing legal requirements and protections for the natural environment such as protecting important habitats and species.

Biodiversity net gain is already referenced in the NPPF para 186 d) and opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of the design of the scheme especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Non-major developments for planning permission granted in England, with a few exemptions, have to deliver a minimum of 10% BNG under the Environment Act 2021. BNG is calculated using the approved Biodiversity Metric which measures the biodiversity value of habitats in ‘biodiversity units’ as a proxy for nature. The Biodiversity Metric is used to assess how a development might change the biodiversity value of a site. It can help to inform the design, layout and management of a site to support biodiversity. You are also advised to apply the mitigation hierarchy in your proposed development as set out in NPPF paragraph 186 a) and note the principle of additionality.

Below is a link to the Council's website with advice on the BNG requirements.

<https://www.midsussex.gov.uk/planning-building/biodiversity-net-gain/>

Conclusion

Whilst limited details of the proposal have been submitted it is my informal opinion that subject to the detailed design, its impact on any protected species or biodiversity and the compliance with BNG legislation, that the principle of the proposal could be acceptable.

A supplementary email was received in respect of the EV charging point, which was an item that also formed a part of the pre-application submission:

In terms of the EV charging point, Class D, Part 2, Schedule 2 of the GDPO permits the installation of electrical outlet for recharging vehicles, provided the outlet and its casing would not:

- Exceed 0.2 cubic metres,
- Face into and be within 2 metres of a highway.

Class E, Part 2, Schedule 2 of the GDPO permits the installation of electrical upstand for recharging vehicles provided the upstand and the outlet would not:

- Exceed 2.3 metres in height from the level of the surface used for the parking of vehicles,
Be within 2 metres of a highway, result in more than 1 upstand being provided for each parking space.

Planning Principles

- 5.4 Two MSDC policies directly relevant to the installation of renewable energy systems are **Policy DP39: Sustainable Design and Construction, and Policy DP40: Renewable Energy Schemes**. The latter states that development proposals for new renewable and low carbon energy projects...will be permitted provided that any adverse local impacts can be made acceptable, with particular regard to:

- Landscape and visual impacts, including cumulative impacts, such as on the setting of the South Downs National Park and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now National Landscape), and the appearance of existing buildings;
- Ecology and biodiversity, including protected species, and designated and non-designated wildlife sites;
- Residential amenity, including visual intrusion, air, dust, noise, odour, traffic generation, recreation and access.

The purpose of these policies is to support the development of appropriate new renewable energy that will improve the quality of life for those living in,

working in, or visiting the District, while seeking to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the area.

With reference to the above points:

- The panels are proposed to be sited on land to the west of the existing cluster of farm buildings. Their proximity allows them to be clearly associated with the Farm holding, yet ensuring the array remains respectful of the site's rural setting;
- The existing planting to the eastern, western, and southern boundaries, ensures they are naturally screened from wider view. The topography of the site, whereby the land gently slopes downwards, allows the panels to be screened from the north. Their proposed siting will also ensure they remain unseen from the nearest public right of way, footpath 8aCU;
- The site sits outside the High Weald National Landscape, and is not visible from its boundaries, therefore having no impact upon its character or setting;
- The number of panels has been determined by means of a detailed desktop study by a reputable renewable energy installer. This study looked at the cost and payback periods for varying numbers of panels, along with their associated savings in CO2 emissions. Not only is the quantum the optimum for serving the needs of the Farm holding, but it is also visually of a scale in keeping with its rural setting.

The pre-application advice agrees that the site is relatively well-screened, and recommends that the panels are positioned as close to the ground as possible to limit views of them from the wider area. The accompanying sectional elevation drawings illustrate that the panels will have a low impact on their setting.

With reference to planning policy DP26, the proposals will not have any impact upon the amenity of the neighbouring properties, owing to the panels being sited out of view from any of the neighbouring properties. The removal of the existing machinery and farm paraphernalia from the land on which the panel will sit, will represent a visual enhancement and affords the opportunity to introduce biodiversity enhancements.

In this case the proposal is for 40No. ground-mounted solar panels which would serve an individual Farm holding. Therefore, the principle of development is considered acceptable.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- 5.5 This application submission is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) report, and also a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report. Both reports have been prepared by Environmental Assessment Services Limited.

The PEA report explains that *'the site (as existing) comprises the northeast corner of a small field which has been used for market garden (non-cereal) crops and more recently agricultural storage. The grassland has been identified as modified grassland, dominated by species common to nutrient rich soils which have been subject to mechanical damage and compaction. Within the proposed PV panel installation area there is also a small patch of transplanted garden planting, which is to be removed as part of the proposal. Cabling associated with the panels is to run south from the PV panels to an existing track, and east along the track to an existing outbuilding / barn which is to be utilised to house the batteries. There is to be no significant alteration to the barn as part of the proposal.'*

In terms of the impact the proposal will have on the existing site and its ecology, the PEA explains that *'the proposed installation will cause a temporary disturbance to the grassland and cable route during installation, however, once installed there will be no significant habitat loss. The PV panels are to be mounted on frames above the grassland. This will result in additional shading of the grassland but, given the low ecological value of the grassland, this is not considered likely to have a significant ecological impact.'*

As the site is generally considered to be of low ecological value and the proposed installation is considered to be low impact, there remains a low-level potential risk of harm to amphibians and reptiles, and possibly nesting birds, for which the PEA recommends protection measures. These protection measures include timing works outside of the active/nesting season, or maintaining the existing grassland with a short sward to discourage use of the grassland leading up to and during the installation works. Post installation, the grass length may be increased to restore and improve the habitat for wildlife.

The BNG report confirms that a gain of **23.71%** will be achieved following the implementation of the proposed enhancements. The PEA explains that the *'proposed installation will retain the majority of habitats as existing, with the exception of the removal and replacement of a small area of transplanted garden planting with modified grassland to be delivered in a similar condition to that of the surrounding grassland. The garden planting is deemed inappropriate within the habitat setting. Five conifers were planted along the northern boundary of the field in 2023. These trees are yet to reach maturity, with a stem diameter of less than 75 mm (7.5 cm) and hence have been excluded from the baseline calculation. However, as these trees mature they will offer some ecological net gain which has been included within the metric calculation.'*

The proposals are therefore able to demonstrate compliance with planning policy DP38 of the Mid Sussex District Plan.

Design

- 5.6 The panels will be mounted upon a proprietary 2-in-portrait galvanised metal ground mount system, with as elegant a design as possible to minimise component variations. The frame will have the silver appearance of

galvanised metal. Ground screws will anchor the framing system into the ground, minimising its disturbance of the ground. The front leading edge of the panels will sit approximately 400mm above the finished ground level, with the uppermost leading edge being approximately 2.5m above the ground.

Sustainability

- 5.7 The localised generation of electricity from a renewable source is incredibly sustainable, and calculations suggest that the system will achieve a CO2 reduction of 4,117 kg/year. The ability to store the electricity in batteries ensures this energy can be used by the farm even when the panels are not generating power.

6. Landscaping

- 6.1 As explained in paragraph 5.5, above, the grassland has been identified as modified grassland, dominated by species common to nutrient rich soils which have been subject to mechanical damage and compaction. Within the proposed PV panel installation area there is also a small patch of transplanted garden planting, which is to be removed as part of the proposal.
- 6.2 The transplanted garden planting is to be replaced with *modified grassland to be delivered in a similar condition to that of the surrounding grassland., since the garden planting is deemed inappropriate within the habitat setting. Five conifers were planted along the northern boundary of the field in 2023. These trees are yet to reach maturity, with a stem diameter of less than 75 mm (7.5 cm), and as these trees mature they will offer some ecological net gain which has been included within the BNG metric calculation.*

7. Appearance

- 7.1 The panels will be mounted upon a proprietary 2-in-portrait galvanised metal ground mount system, with as elegant a design as possible to minimise component variations. The frame will have the silver appearance of galvanised metal. Ground screws will anchor the framing system into the ground, minimising its disturbance of the ground. The front leading edge of the panels will sit approximately 400mm above the finished ground level, with the uppermost leading edge being approximately 2.5m above the ground.
- 7.2 The elevation drawings illustrate how the panels are respectful of the site's topography, and will not be visible from the wider surroundings.
- 7.3 The panels are therefore able to demonstrate compliance with policy DP26 of the Mid Sussex District Plan.

8. Access

- 8.1 The proposals do not in any way affect access into or within the site or the existing outbuilding.

9. Sustainability

- 9.1 The localised generation of electricity from a renewable source is incredibly sustainable, and calculations suggest that the system will achieve a CO₂ reduction of 4,117 kg/year. The ability to store the electricity in batteries ensures this energy can be used by the farm even when the panels are not generating power.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 This statement has set out the planning case for the proposed installation, with the following conclusions being drawn:
- a) The proposed panels have been sited to allow them to be clearly associated with the farm property, yet ensure they remain respectful of the property's sensitive rural setting;
 - b) The proposed panels are to be mounted in portrait format on a proprietary galvanised metal frame system, with screw-driven fixings to minimise their impact on biodiversity;
 - c) The proposed panels are of the monocrystalline (low-reflectivity) type and will be sited within an area of land currently overgrown and occupied by old machinery and tractors, ensuring productive farmland is not being lost for renewable power generation;
 - d) The proposed setting for the panels is well screened on all sides, mostly with a mix of both new and established hedge planting;
 - e) The topography of the site allows the panels to be hidden below one's line of sight, assisting in minimising their visibility from the wider area;
 - f) The Biodiversity Net Gain assessment confirms that a gain in excess of 10% will be achieved;
 - g) An outbuilding within the existing cluster of Farm outbuildings will be used for the siting of the batteries, which will provide electricity storage when the power generated exceeds the power used;
 - h) The number of proposed panels has been determined by means of a detailed assessment to ensure they are optimised for the electricity use of the Farm;
 - i) The proposed panels will not be visible from any neighbouring properties, and will therefore not have any detrimental impact upon the amenity of the neighbours;
 - j) The proposals will significantly reduce the reliance on fossil fuels for the Farm's energy use, estimating a CO₂ reduction of approximately 4,117 kg/year.

11. Appendix A – Site Photographs



