

## **Brightlands, Lewes Road, Horsted Keynes**

### **Planning Application for the Installation of 22 Solar Panels and Battery Storage**

#### **Planning and Design Statement**

##### ***Planning Policy support for renewable energy***

The installation of solar panels on dwelling homes is encouraged by:

- The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015
  - Schedule 2 > Part 14 > Class A – Installation or alteration etc. of solar equipment on domestic premises
- National Planning Policy Framework (2026)
  - Section 5 Meeting the challenge of climate change
  - Section 10 Securing clean energy and water
- Mid Sussex District Plan 2014 – 2031
  - DP39: Sustainable Design and Construction; and
  - DP40: Renewable Energy Schemes
- Mid Sussex District Plan 2021 – 2039 > Submission Draft (Regulation 19)
  - DPS1 Climate Change; and
  - DPS 3 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Schemes
- Horsted Keynes Neighbourhood Plan 2023
  - Policy HK11: Low Carbon Design and Renewable Energy Schemes

**The solar panel installation at Brightlands covered by this application aligns with these policies and satisfies all of the geometric constraints set out in this section A.1 (2):**

For a side wall – not protruding more than 400mm;

For a pitched roof – not protruding more than 200mm; and

For a flat roof – not being more than 600mm above the highest part of the roof.

We had not realised the existence of the A.2(ba) Condition, which applies as Horsted Keynes lies within the High Weald AONB. This requires that panels to be mounted on a flat roof should be notified to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether prior approval would be required. That was an oversight, which has given rise to this retrospective application after inspection by the local planning authority following receipt of an objection from our neighbour. The drawings were available – had we been aware, this would have been very simple to do.

## Design

### AONB Considerations

Brightlands sits well within the Horsted Keynes Built Up Area Boundary, facing into the heart of the village, and with the rear of the property backing onto the gardens of houses on Lewes Road, Jefferies and Boxes Lane. As shown in Figure 1, there are no distant views to or from surrounding countryside which might have given rise to AONB considerations covered by Condition A.2(ba).



Figure 1: View looking west over back gardens - no distant views of flat roof-mounted panels

I cannot know, but it seems reasonable to surmise that, *had the question been put*, the local planning authority would have concluded that there was no AONB issue triggering the need for prior approval of the panels on the flat roof, and that these could have been installed using normal permitted development criteria.

### Flat Roof Mounted Panels

The 6 panels mounted on the flat roof stand up a maximum of 460mm above the roof surface, well below the permitted development limit of 600mm. They are mounted at a 10° slope on a proprietary Van der Valk galvanised steel and anodised aluminium mounting system.



*Figure 2: Black bifacial panels with black frames on Van der Valk mounting system – maximum 460mm upstand*

The panels have the smart modern aesthetic of black frames around black bifacial glass panels. They sit above a dark felt roof. They are not visible from Lewes Road or from any of our neighbours' living rooms, and are barely visible from our adjacent neighbour's garden.

### Pitched Roof Mounted Panels

The 10 panels mounted on the pitched roof stand up a maximum of 110mm above the roof surface, well below the permitted development limit of 200mm. The panels are visible from Lewes Road and blend in well, having the smart aesthetic of black frames around black single sided glass panels mounted on a black slate roof.



*Figure 3: 7 NE facing solar panels on 35° pitch slate roof, viewed from Lewes Road*



*Figure 4: 3 SW facing solar panels on 35° pitch slate roof, viewed from Lewes Road*

### Wall Mounted Panels

The 6 panels mounted on the SW wall stand up a maximum of 60mm beyond the wall, well below the permitted development limit of 400mm for a side wall. They are partially visible from Lewes Road, the colour contrast against the dark / brown tones brickwork varying with the position of the sun.



Figure 5: 6 SW facing solar panels on SW wall, viewed from Lewes Road

It is these panels that appear to have been the source of our Hamsey Cottage neighbour's original objection, despite these panels meeting permitted development geometric criteria. Following a discussion between us, she has e-mailed me to set out her views on this topic:

*"Further to my conversation with Paul on Wednesday, 9th September, regarding both the side elevation and the flat roof solar panel installation, please see the attached images (Figures 6 and 7 below) taken from my property.*

*The images clearly demonstrate the intrusive and unsightly impact that the installations have when viewed from my property. They illustrate the extent to which the panels are visually prominent and adversely affect the outlook from my property.*

*I therefore ask that these visual impacts are considered particularly in terms of their prominence, appearance, safety and effect on my property."*



Figure 6: View from Hamsey Cottage garden - Image 1



Figure 7: View from Hamsey Cottage garden - Image 2

If I may be permitted to address our neighbour's concerns:

- *"..regarding both the side elevation and the flat roof solar panel installation.."* The images above show clearly how little (if any) of the flat roof mounted installation is visible – the most visible element being the end panel of the mounting system.
- *"..intrusive and unsightly impact"* – The 6 wall mounted solar panels are dark against a brick background of dark and brown shades. Before the panels were fitted the brickwork showed its four different phases of construction (see Figure 8). Certainly, the wall mounted solar panels are different from what was there before – they are solar panels, which is permitted development, rather than a mix of brickwork shades - but the contrast is muted and cannot reasonably be considered to constitute intrusive and unsightly impact.
- *"..visually prominent and adversely affect the outlook from my property."* Looked at from the rear, most of these panels sit behind the rear building line of Hamsey Cottage, as shown by Drawing 4: First Floor - Proposed. The images in Figures 6 and 7 are taken looking back up the garden towards the houses. Given the absence of windows on the NE wall of Hamsey Cottage, the geometry indicates that little or none of the panels on the wall are visible from any of the primary living areas in the property. As the two images show, the change is muted, most certainly by contrast with the solar panels that we look to on the

roof of the house behind our two properties. These have a far greater colour contrast (see Figure 9), but that is not a cause for concern – that is our neighbours also seeking to reduce their carbon footprint.



Figure 8: SW wall showing mix of brickwork revealing 4 phases of construction, now concealed by solar panels



Figure 9: High contrast solar panel to roof installation behind our properties – but not a problem!

- “..in terms of their prominence, appearance, safety and effect on my property.”

Prominence and appearance have been addressed above.

- “..safety..”: When we spoke, my neighbour raised a concern about the roof mounted solar panels potentially creating a fire risk to her property. Presumably this concern has been raised by seeing recent alarming media headlines.

The article “Solar Panels and Fire Risk: Separating the Headlines from the Reality” by the Consumer Protection Association (link: [Solar Panels and Fire Risk: Separating the Headlines from... | The CPA](#) ) summarises that:

*“The good news is that when solar panels are properly designed, installed, and maintained, they remain one of the safest and most effective home energy improvements available today.”*

To keep this in perspective, this installation has been designed and installed by a Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) accredited installer and will be maintained properly, which should provide reassurance that it is and will remain safe.



Figure 10: Solar panels and Hamsey Cottage, including its oil boiler flue

- “..effect on my property”: if the inference is that the installation of solar panels on a property devalues an adjacent property, I would contest that in the clearest possible terms.

If the comment refers to visual amenity, I struggle to rationalise, when comparing Figures 7 and 8, how the wall-mounted panel installation can have generated such a strong objection. Yes, it is a change. Yes, it is different, but it is in line with permitted development criteria, and to my mind, and my wife’s mind, it is smart and it is not unsightly.

## **Summary**

We take climate change seriously. Over the past 6 years, we have invested nearly £40k to reduce our carbon footprint, in line with national , district and local planning policy.

Initially that started with the acquisition of an electric vehicle. That was followed by the replacement of our oil boiler by an Air Source Heat Pump, supported by the government’s Renewable Heat Incentive. This latest step, to install solar panels, has been designed to generate clean electricity locally to reduce our demand on and to supply surplus energy to the national electricity grid. Our next step in November will be to replace our remaining petrol engine car by a second electric vehicle.

This solar panel installation, supported by battery storage, minimises our call on the national grid for electricity and helps to balance the grid locally. All of the installation meets permitted development geometric criteria. It has required this retrospective planning application as we inadvertently missed the need to ask the local planning authority to determine if the panels on the flat roof needed prior approval due to AONB considerations.

Our neighbour has raised objections regarding the panels on the SW side of our property, in particular regarding their visual impact. I would contend strongly that the information in this document shows clearly that the panels that have been installed demonstrably meet reasonable thresholds of acceptability regarding their appearance, and as such are an acceptable development which should be confirmed by granting of retrospective planning consent for this installation.