

Officer Report

Case Reference: PL/2026/0003
Location: St Paul's Church, Edenfield Road, Norden, Rochdale, OL12 7SJ
Proposal: Renewal of heating system and the installation of roof mounted PV solar panels and air heat source pump
Recommendation: Refuse
Officer: Aimee Bovaird

Site

The site is located at St Paul's Church, Edenfield Road, this is a Grade 2 listed building with a graveyard on the site. The church was built in 1859-61 to designs by George Shaw. The church has a large spire, dual pitched slate roofs and is finished in coursed local stone. The church sits on elevated ground above Edenfield Road at the front of the site.

Proposal

The application seeks planning permission for the installation of roof mounted solar panels on the southern roof slope and an air source heat pump.

Relevant Planning Policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 66 of the above Act states that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority, or as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Chapter 16 – Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

Places for Everyone (PfE) Joint Development Plan

JP-P1 Sustainable Places

JP-P2 - Heritage

JP-S1 Sustainable Development

JP-G8 A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

SO3 Improving design, image and quality of place

C1 – Delivering the right amount of housing in the right places

P1 - Improving Image

P2 - Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage

P3 - Improving design of new development

G3- Renewable and low carbon energy developments.

G7- Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity

T2 Improving accessibility

DM1 – General development requirements

Representations

Letters of notification have been sent out to surrounding properties and a site notice displayed in the vicinity. Two comments have been received supporting the application. The comments supported the environmental benefits of the proposed development.

Consultations responses

Conservation Officer

Object. The proposed development will result in less than significant harm to the designated asset and would neither preserve nor enhance the special interest of the building.

The Victorian Society

Object on the proposed developments high visibility and would harm the significance of the building.

Historic Buildings and Places

No objections

Historic England

No comments

Principle of Development

The proposed dwelling is within the Defined Urban Area, as designated under the Proposals Map of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP). New development, wherever possible and appropriate, should be concentrated within the urban area in order to support urban regeneration and to protect the countryside.

The site is within the defined urban area and such interventions to improve the energy efficiency and reduce the carbon footprint of buildings is generally supported by the CS, PfE and the NPPF.

Heritage

When making a decision on all listed building consent applications, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires a local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Preservation in this context means not harming the interest in the building, as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged.

‘Significance’ with regard to heritage assets is defined by the NPPF as:

‘The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.’

The setting of a listed building is defined by the NPPF as:

‘The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.’

NPPF paragraph 210 sets out that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
- b) The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

NPPF paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

This is reiterated at a local level by Rochdale CS policy P2, which seeks to protect the borough's heritage. This policy seeks to conserve, enhance and promote key heritage assets, which includes all listed buildings.

The application proposes solar panels on the south facing sloping roof, this elevation fronts the highway, the solar panels will be highly visible when travelling both directions on Edenfield Road. The church is in set on an elevated position above the highway, this combined with the footway around the church sets it apart from its surroundings. This contributes to the church being in view from long ranges. It is from these long ranges that the architecture of the church can be appreciated as it dominates the landscape. The dwellings opposite the church and views from Shepherd Street will have a clear view of the solar panels in the context of the church and its setting.

The proposed solar panels would be on the most visible slope and larger of the two dual pitched roofs. There would be little screening of the solar panels throughout the year, large trees are in situ either side of the church cementing it as a dominant feature. However, these do not shield the front elevation from being visible.

The proposed solar panels would have an impact on a prominent listed building, introducing modern features will clash with the historical architecture and have a negative impact on the building and immediate character of the area. The solar panels will obscure the slate roof, the modern feature would appear at odds with the appearance of the church.

The planning statement sets out that the solar panels will be dark in colour to mitigate the visual impact, this is acknowledged however as the Conservation Officer has set out in a previous pre app response they will have a different finish size and colour to the slates below and would dominate the principal roof slope. The application sets out the solar panels can be removed therefore are considered reversible, however the lifespan of the solar panels is approximately 20 years. This will result in a level of harm that is not temporary.

The submitted design and access statement advises that "the structural loadings and fixings have been considered in the panel design, with both implied and wind loadings being considered and spread by the supporting framework." No details have been provided of the structural loadings, and this would need to be assessed to ensure the solar panels could be installed without resulting in further harm.

The proposed air source heat pump would be located to the rear of the church, this would not be seen from the highway, however would be seen from within the church grounds. This could be mitigated with landscaping. Further details could be controlled by condition if the application was to be approved. The Conservation Officer has set out that the Air Source Heat Pump would result in a very minor level of less than substantial harm.

Public benefit

Paragraph 215 of the NPPF sets out that where proposed development will lead to less than substantial harm of a designated heritage asset it should be refused unless the public benefits outweigh the harm. The public benefit of the solar panels is predominantly for

people who use the church, the submitted Heritage Statement sets out the need for a new heating system. This would result in improved comfort for users and would be an energy efficient option. Policy G3 of the Core Strategy seeks to promote renewable, low and zero carbon energy generating developments. The policy also sets out harm to the setting of the heritage asset should be minimised and appropriately mitigated. Due to the location and setting of the church it is not thought mitigation measures would reduce the prominence of the solar panels. The Church is considered a significant heritage asset, and the public benefit will not outweigh the harm, as a result of this the proposed development is considered unacceptable.

In conclusion the proposed development would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, this due to the visual prominence of the solar panels and their incongruous modern appearance on the front elevation of the church. The solar panels will not preserve or enhance the Church's special architectural interest; this is a matter given great weight. The public benefit derived from the installation of solar panels in the form of decarbonisation attracts significant weight in accordance with paragraph 167 of the Framework and therefore does not outweigh the negative impact of the proposed development on the designated asset. The proposed development does not comply with Policies P2 and DM1 of the Core Strategy, Policy JP-P2 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and relevant policies of the NPPF.

Other Matters

It is not thought the proposed development will have an adverse impact upon highways and pedestrian safety given its perpendicular arrangement relative to Edenfield Rd.

In respect of nearby residential occupiers, given the Church's elevated siting, steep roof slope, proximity and directly facing arrangement, in the absence of an assessment to indicate otherwise, the impact of glare upon the facing residences at nos.705-713 (odds only) Edenfield Rd cannot be discounted and therefore the application fails to demonstrate compliance with policies G9 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policy JP-P1 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Recommendation: Refuse

Refusal(s) (2)

- 1 By reason of their prominent siting and appearance, the installation of solar panels would give rise to a visually intrusive and harmful addition to the Grade II Listed St Paul's Church that will result in less than substantial harm to the special historic significance of this designated asset and will not preserve or enhance the Church's special architectural interest. The identified public benefits are not considered to be of such value as to outweigh the resulting harm and the proposals fail to comply with Policies P2 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policy JP-P2 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 2 By reason of the siting, height and orientation of the proposed installation of solar photovoltaic panels, and their proximity to the facing residential properties of nos. 705-713 (odds only) Edenfield Road, in the absence of an appropriate assessment, it is not considered that the application is able to sufficiently discount an adverse impact upon the amenity of the occupiers of these properties from glare associated with the proposals. The application therefore fails to comply with the contents of Policies G9 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, the Policy JP-P1 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 1 The proposal would not improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area nor does it comply with the development plan and therefore does not comprise sustainable development. There were no amendments to the scheme, or conditions which could reasonably have been imposed, which could have made the development acceptable, and it was therefore not possible to approve the application.

For avoidance of doubt the decision relates to the following plans and documents:

- 2
- Location Plan
 - Proposed Site Plan 24-050-205
 - Proposed Sections 24-050-031 A
 - Proposed Roof Plan 24-050-211 A
 - Proposed N&W Elevations 24-050-220 A
 - Proposed S&E Elevations 24-050-221 B
 - Existing and Proposed Boiler Room 107.24.M3
 - Design and Access Statement 24-050
 - Heritage Statement 24-050