



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 May 2013

by Olivia Spencer BA BSc DipArch RIBA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 18 June 2013

Appeal Ref: APP/R3325/A/12/2183158

Land at Tengore Lane, Langport, Somerset TA10 9JL

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by TGC Renewables Ltd against the decision of South Somerset District Council.
 - The application Ref 12/01902/FUL, dated 16 May 2012, was refused by notice dated 20 August 2012.
 - The development proposed is a solar PV development including ground based racking systems, mounted solar panels, power inverter stations, transformer stations, sub-station, deer/security fencing and associated access gates, and CCTV/security cameras mounted on free-standing support poles.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character of the landscape and the setting of the Battle of Langport of 1645 Registered Historic Battlefield.

Reasons

3. The proposed solar array would lie within a rural agricultural landscape occupying fields to the east of the designated Battlefield site. The character of the area is predominantly one of agricultural fields enclosed by managed hedgerows within a landscape of low rolling hills. The proposed 9 hectares of solar panels rising to 3 metres in height, inverter stations, sub-station, enclosing 2.4 metre high security fencing and CCTV cameras mounted on poles would substantially alter the character of the land on which it would be sited, introducing a large area of closely grouped engineered structures into what are now open fields. The character of the site as proposed would be more industrial than agricultural. Whilst over time, additional planting in the enclosing hedgerows would help to soften the visual impact of the development, from nearby Tengore Farm it would appear as an obtrusive feature amongst the traditional farmed fields.
4. Public views of the development would be more limited. The panels and sub-station would be set well back from Tengore Lane and the existing roadside hedge would thus provide a good degree of screening. A proposed new hedge within the field, once mature would add to this. The submitted Landscape and

Visual Impact Assessment demonstrates that from long distant views at Windmill Lane Pibsbury, Downslade Lane south of the B3153 and Pitney north of the B3153, Burnt House Lane track, Long Sutton and Culver Hill the development would not be visible. However, from viewpoints within and on the western edge of the designated Battlefield some views to the site would be available and it is to consideration of the setting of the Battlefield therefore that I now turn.

5. The Registered Battlefield is centred on Wagg Bridge which was the focal point of the battle. The opposing sides lined up on the valley slopes either side of the Wagg Rhyne; the Parliamentarians on the east side, the Royalists on the west. Standing in the bottom of the valley, or more particularly on one side looking across its broad gentle sweep, it is easy to imagine the opposing forces gathering, surveying each other and than meeting in combat. The landscape will have changed since the battle with greater enclosure of fields, scattered dwellings, surfaced roads and power lines. A railway embankment too runs along the southern edge of the Battlefield, although it is almost wholly shrouded in mature vegetation. The character of the site is nevertheless quintessentially rural and the valley form clearly readable. These qualities have a particular poignancy and add significantly to an understanding of the site where Englishmen fought each other. As such they are important elements of its significance.
6. Standing near to the bridge at the heart of the Battlefield looking up the eastern slope of the valley to the appeal site, very little of the panels would be seen beyond the site boundary hedge, although moving south along the Rhyne more of the panels would come into view. From higher ground on the western slope of the valley, along a line marking the edge of the designated Battlefield however, a significant part of the western field of panels would be visible. From points along Furpits Lane and the track running south from it, the incongruous forms of the panels and fencing would draw the eye. Raising the height of the lower part of the boundary hedge would help to soften their impact, but this would take time and in winter when leaves are shed, would have limited effect. Further the long term health of this hedge could not be guaranteed.
7. Such relatively small visible areas in a wide landscape may cause little or no harm where for example, travellers on the B3153 may gain brief glimpsed views while passing. But for walkers along the quiet lanes and footpaths on the western slope of the valley, the effect would be to detract from the rural landscape that characterises the Battlefield and its setting. From these public viewpoints I conclude that the proposed development would be seen as uncharacteristic of the landscape and in adversely affecting its setting, harmful to the significance of the Langport Battlefield. The proposed development would thus be contrary to the objectives of Policies EC3 and EH9 of the South Somerset Local Plan.
8. I note that the development is intended to remain for a limited period of 25 years. This does would however reduce the harm caused for the years that it remained in place. Neither this nor a lack of potential harm to archaeological remains by the use of concrete feet on the racking systems would therefore provide positive benefits that would justify the development proposed.
9. The solar farm would provide some 5.82 MWp of renewable energy to the grid each year helping to contribute to the Government's and the Council's targets.

The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) supports the delivery of renewable energy and this contribution is a public benefit that ways in favour of the proposal. However, The Framework advises 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. Battlefields form part of a list of designated heritage assets of the highest significance. The site is one of only 43 battlefields registered by English Heritage and one of only two in Somerset. Whilst harm in this case would be less than substantial, the benefit of renewable energy generation is not sufficient to outweigh the adverse affect that siting the solar farm immediately adjoining the designated Battlefield area, high up on the valley's eastern slope, would have.

10. I conclude on balance therefore that the appeal should be dismissed.

Olivia Spencer

INSPECTOR

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