

AVENUE ST ANDREW'S, UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, SOUTHAMPTON

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING PLANNING STATEMENT & PHOTOGRAPHS
FOR THE INSTALLATION OF PHOTOVOLTAIC PANELS**

PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE 18/02007/FUL



Key view of the church from The Avenue



View into the site from Alma Road – halls roof in the distance

AVENUE ST ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, SOUTHAMPTON

This statement provides additional supporting information with reference to planning application 18/02007/FUL made for the installation of photovoltaic solar panels on the south slope of the church halls roof at Avenue St Andrew's United Reformed Church.

The application has received widespread local support and has the full backing of the United Reformed Church's own Listed Building Advisory Committee (LBAC), copy of letter attached. Objections have, however, been raised by the Historic Environment Consultant at Southampton City Council which have led to a recommendation for refusal of the application as set out in the Planning application report to committee.

The proposed solar panels will have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the building which is of architectural and historic interest. As such, it is contrary to Local Plan policy HE3 and advice given in the NPPF where "less than substantial harm" should be weighed against public benefit. It is considered that there is insufficient public benefit to offset the adverse impact and therefore the proposal is also contrary to NPPF paragraph 196.

This supporting statement aims to address the objections raised with regard to

- the impact on character and appearance of the listed building and
- the public benefit which the panels offer to offset the 'less than substantial harm' created by installation of the panels

Impact on character and appearance of the listed building

Significance

The impact of any proposed development on a designated heritage asset, in this case a listed building, must always be carefully considered, of key importance is the significance and importance of the asset.

Avenue St Andrew's United Reformed Church was included on the national register of buildings of special architectural and historic interest in May 2000 at Grade II. The list entry highlights its merits in terms of design and construction.

The halls built adjacent to the church in the early 1930s, previously linked at the east end to the church offices, were built in complementary materials but are of lesser architectural merit and are included within the listing only by virtue of their physical connection to the church, now by a link at the west end.

The important visual separation of the two brick buildings, halls and church, has been maintained by the use of an entirely modern, steel framed construction with glass walls and curved stainless steel roof erected in 2002/3.

Significance is defined by Historic England as the value of a heritage asset because of its heritage interest. In this case the heritage interest rests almost entirely in the church building and not the halls. The key question is therefore whether the proposed development will harm the significance of the church building or its setting.

The halls were constructed as a clearly secondary, subsidiary building serving the church and have themselves undergone a large degree of alteration and reordering to serve the current needs of the church and community since 2000. The addition of pv panels to the roof would not harm the character of the halls building.

It is argued that neither the character or appearance nor the setting of the church will be harmed by the addition of pv panels to the halls roof.

The panels are proposed to be fixed to a building which is clearly identifiable as a separate structure, of moderate significance to the setting of the listed building.

Reversibility

It is important to note that the proposed pv panels are an entirely reversible installation which will not cause permanent change or harm to the fabric of the halls building.

Visibility

The panels are mounted on a roof slope facing directly into an internal courtyard; there are limited views of the array from outside the church premises.

The level of visibility, and hence impact, of the proposed panels when seen from The Avenue is demonstrated on drawing 879 30.

Views are gained across to the south roof slope of halls, above the concourse building predominantly from the west side of The Avenue for a distance of around 50m. Glimpses may also be caught from the east side of the road, closer to the west end of the church as shown.

The key, significant views of the church are from the pedestrian crossing at the junction with Northlands Road, from where the panels cannot be seen, and when approaching the church from the south along The Avenue by vehicle or on foot from where there are restricted views of the array.

The dominant feature remains the church building and although the panels may be seen, to varying degrees when proceeding north, the panels are clearly set back from the church.

The east end of the panels would also be briefly visible, deep within the site, from the entrance to the church car park on Alma Road for a distance of approximately 10m.

It is contended that, although panels may be visible from some locations, the integrity, character and appearance of the church building will not be harmed or altered by the incorporation of the panels on the halls roof.

The chosen panels are in black, mounted on a proprietary metal frame fitted as closely as possible to the existing plain tiled roof covering to be as inconspicuous as possible.

Public good

The members of Avenue St Andrew's URC are committed to playing their part in the implementation of the Environmental Policy of the United Reformed Church and church members voted unanimously in favour of the solar development.

The URC policy is an agreed, documented statement of the national URC stance towards the environment in which it operates. It states, '*It is the cornerstone of our intent, as a body of people committed to caring for God's creation, to reduce our carbon footprint, improve recycling, minimise waste and improve efficiencies on finite natural resources in all of our operations.*' Also '*it is now intellectually and morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species.*'

The overwhelming reason to install the panels is in order to generate clean electricity to help combat climate change for the public good. It is the mission of the church to care for the wider community including taking responsibility for combating climate change recently highlighted by the IPCC saying we have ten years to change direction.

The church has acknowledged the importance of government targets in the UK Climate Change Act for example to generate 80% of our electricity cleanly by 2050. Regionally, Hampshire needs to accelerate its own efforts with currently only 1.8% of its own consumption from the county's renewables.

It should be noted that the proposed installation has precedent - solar arrays have been added to many church buildings in recent years following initiatives such as the Church of England's, 'Shrinking the Footprint' environmental campaign, for example Holy Trinity Church, Fareham.

The application has also received the support of the Council's Sustainability Team and appears to support all four priorities of the Council's 2016 Strategy; for example Priority 3 - empowering businesses and communities to take responsibility for their contributions to air pollution.

The church also wish to note that the small regular income which would be generated by the pv panels would assist in maintaining an important community building, widely used by many different groups outside the church, which the congregation is struggling to fund.

This solar development is strongly supported by Outer Avenue Residents Association and many local residents, including those living immediately opposite in Alma Road.

The importance of the Church as a community hub with its Avenue Centre, Rent Bond Scheme and Lunch Club amongst many other supportive activities should be taken into account. As a consequence it is argued that the proposed development may be considered as 'public benefit' offsetting the 'less than substantial harm' which the panels would cause as acknowledged in the planning officer's report.