

**Proposed development: Prior Approval - Solar Panels Non-domestic Buildings for Installation of Solar Photo Voltaic (SPV) arrays to roof areas**

**Site address:  
Blackburn Central Library  
Town Hall Street  
Blackburn  
BB2 1AG**

**Applicant: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council**

**Ward: Blackburn Central      Councillors: Councillor Samim Desai  
Councillor Mahfooz Hussain  
Councillor Zamir Khan**



## **1.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION**

### **1.1.1 PRIOR APPROVAL NOT REQUIRED**

## **2.0 KEY ISSUES/SUMMARY OF PLANNING BALANCE**

2.1.1 The Council is seeking prior approval for the installation of roof mounted Solar Photo Voltaic (SPV) system, under Schedule 2, Part 14, Class J of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) on Blackburn Central Library, Blackburn, a Council owned building.

2.1.2 The only planning matters that the Authority are to consider in the determination as to whether prior approval is required are the design or external appearance of the development, including the impact of glare on occupiers of neighbouring land. No other matters are material and cannot be considered as part of this application for prior approval.

2.1.3 The reasons for installing the SPV system, which forms part of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), is to reduce the building's reliance on grid electricity to save money and to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. This will contribute towards the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration to be carbon neutral by 2030.

2.1.4 The proposal is Permitted Development as it conforms to the requirements of Part 14, Class J of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).

2.1.5 Due to the panels being positioned on the top of the flat roof of the building, both glare and the design and visual impacts of the proposals are considered to be acceptable.

2.1.6 Officers are therefore of the opinion that the scheme complies with parts J.1, J.3 and J.4 in this instance and thus it is therefore considered that prior approval is not required.

## **3.0 RATIONALE**

### **3.1 Site and Surroundings**

3.1.1 The application site relates to the roof of Blackburn Central Library, Blackburn, as shown in the photos below.



*Photos taken 25/02/2022*

3.1.2 The building is located within the inner urban area of Blackburn, within the town centre boundary, as defined by the Proposals Map associated with the Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan Part 2, and also with the Northgate Conservation Area, a Coal Low Risk Area, and Article 4 area.

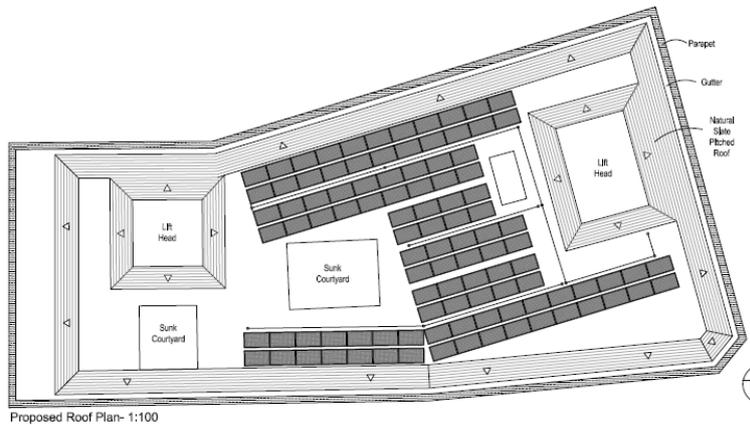
### **3.2 Proposed Development**

3.2.1 The Council, the applicant, is seeking prior approval for the installation of a roof mounted Solar Photo Voltaic (SPV) system. The reasons for installing the SPV system, which forms part of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), is to reduce the building's reliance on grid electricity to save money and to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. This will contribute towards the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration to be carbon neutral by 2030.

3.2.2 Technical information has been provided in respect of the design and capacity of the proposals. The solar panels proposed are TrinaSolar Vertex S Backsheet

Monocrystalline Modules. PRODUCT: TSM-DE09.05, PRODUCT RANGE: 380-395W. The panels will be fitted to the existing pitched roof as shown in Figures 1 and 2 below:

### 3.2.3 Figure 1: Roof plan



### 3.2.4 Figure 2: Elevations



3.2.5 When fixed, all panels will be no higher than 1m above the highest part of the roof (excluding any chimney), and would not be within 1m of the external edge of the roof. The panels will be fixed to the flat roof, and would not be installed on a roof slope which fronts a highway.

3.2.6 Part 14, Class J of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 relates to 'Installation or alteration of solar equipment on nondomestic properties' and part J(c) permits the installation of other solar PV equipment on the roof of a building.

3.2.7 In determining the application, the Local Planning Authority must make a judgement on the criteria set out in Class J.4 (2) of Part 14 of the GPDO which states that:

*Class J(c) development is permitted subject to the condition that before beginning the development the developer must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether prior approval of the authority will be required as to the design or external appearance of the development, in*

*particular the impact of glare on occupiers of neighbouring land.*

### **3.3 Development Plan**

3.3.1 Local policy is provided by the Council's Core Strategy, Development Management policies within the Local Plan Part 2 and the Council's Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance, as such the following policy and guidance is considered most relevant:

#### **3.3.2 Core Strategy (2011)**

Policy CS1: A Targeted Growth Strategy

Policy CS16: Form and Design of New Development

Policy CS13: Environmental Strategy

Policy CS17: Built and Cultural Heritage

#### **3.3.3 Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Document (2015)**

Policy 1. The Urban Boundary

Policy 2. The Inner Urban Area

Policy 7: Sustainable Development

Policy 8: Development and People

Policy 9: Development and the Environment

Policy 11: Design

Policy 26. Town Centres – a Framework for Development

Policy 36: Climate Change

Policy 39: Heritage

#### **3.3.4 Other material considerations**

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPF)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

### **3.4 Assessment**

3.4.1 The proposals constitute 'permitted development' under Class J of part 14 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) subject to the condition that before beginning the development the developer must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required as to the design or external appearance of the development, and in particular the impact of glare on occupiers of neighbouring land.

3.4.2 In addition to this assessment, the following conditions must also be met:

**3.4.3 J.1 Development is not permitted by Class J if:**

***3.4.4 (a) the solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a pitched roof and would NOT protrude more than 0.2 metres beyond the plane of the roof slope when measured from the perpendicular with the external surface of the roof slope;***

3.4.5 Not applicable. The equipment would be installed on a flat roof.

**3.4.6 (b) *The solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a flat roof, where the highest part of the solar PV equipment would be higher than 1m above the highest part of the roof (excluding any chimney)***

3.4.7 The highest part of the equipment would not be higher than 1m above the highest part of the roof (excluding any chimney).

**3.4.8 (c) *The solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a roof and within 1 metre of the external edge of that roof;***

3.4.9 The panels will not be installed within 1m from the external edge of the roof.

**3.4.10 (d) *in the case of a building on article 2(3) land (includes land which is a national park, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a conservation area, The Broads, or a World Heritage Site), the solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a roof slope which fronts a highway***

3.4.11 The site is located on article 2(3) land, within the Northgate Conservation Area, but the solar PV equipment would not be installed on a roof slope which fronts a highway.

**3.4.12 (e) *The solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a site designated as a scheduled monument***

3.4.13 The site does not comprise a scheduled monument.

**3.4.14 (f) *The solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a listed building or on a building within the curtilage of a Listed Building***

3.4.15 The site does not comprise a Listed Building or a building within the curtilage of a Listed Building.

**3.4.16 J.2 Development is not permitted by Class J(a) or (b) if—**

**3.4.17 (a) *the solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a wall and would protrude more than 0.2 metres beyond the plane of the wall when measured from the perpendicular with the external surface of the wall;***

3.4.18 Not applicable. The SPV will not be installed on a wall.

**3.4.19 (b) *the solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a wall and within 1 metre of a junction of that wall with another wall or with the roof of the building; or***

3.4.20 Not applicable.

3.4.21 ***(c) in the case of a building on article 2(3) land, the solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment would be installed on a wall which fronts a highway.***

3.4.22 The solar PV equipment would not be installed on a wall which fronts a highway.

3.4.23 ***J.3 Development is not permitted by Class J(c) if the capacity of the solar PV equipment installed (together with any solar PV equipment installed under class J(b)) to generate electricity exceeds 1 megawatt***

3.4.24 The application is accompanied with the application form and technical data that indicates that each panel will generate 395W. Although a number of panels would be installed, cumulatively the panels would not come close to exceeding this threshold, with the stated maximum combined output being 40.29KW.

3.4.25 ***J.4 (1): Class J development is permitted subject to the following conditions:***

3.4.26 ***(a) The solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment must, so far as practicable, be sited so as to minimize its effect on the external appearance of the building and the amenity of the area; and***

3.4.27 The equipment is considered to be located in the only practicable position considered viably possible without significant effect on the external appearance of the building and the amenity of the area.

3.4.28 ***(b) The solar PV equipment or solar thermal equipment is removed as soon as reasonably practicable when no longer needed.***

3.4.29 It is advised that this condition be added as an informative to the Decision Notice.

3.4.30 ***J.4(2): Whether prior approval of the authority will be required as to the design or external appearance of the development, in particular the impact of glare on occupiers of neighbouring land.***

3.4.31 The roof of the building has a predominantly flat roof which slopes down at all four sides where it meets the vertical wall of the building. The solar panels will sit on the flat roof part of the building, away from the sloping edges. It is considered that the proposal by virtue of its design or external appearance would not be harmful to the visual amenities of the locality, including the Northgate Conservation Area. The proposals are thus in accordance with Policies 8 i.), 11, and 39 of the Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan Part 2.

3.4.32 In relation to the impact of glare on occupiers of neighbouring land, the nature of solar panels is to absorb as much light as possible, and glare would mean

they are ineffective. As technology of solar panels advances, glare is further reduced. The solar panels would sit atop a three storey building in the town centre, and the proposals will not cause any glare issues.

3.4.33 Based on the above, it is considered that the proposed solar PV equipment would accord with the conditions set out in Class J.1 a-f, J.2 a-c, and J.3 of Part 14.

3.4.34 Officers consider that prior approval is not required for the proposals as set out within Class J.4, Part 14 of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (as amended).

### 3.4.32 **Other Matters**

#### 3.4.33 Ground Stability

3.4.34 Paragraphs 178 and 179 of the NPPF are relevant which seek to ensure that a site is suitable for its new use taking account of ground conditions and land instability.

3.4.35 The application site lies within a Coal Authority Low Risk Area. Given the Low risk, and the nature of the proposed development, it is not considered necessary to require the applicants to submit a Coal Mining Risk Assessment, nor is it necessary to consult the Coal Authority.

3.4.36 Given that works will be at roof level there is no need to attach the Coal Authority standard informative as part of any approval.

#### 3.4.37 Air Quality and Climate Change

3.4.38 Local Plan Part 2, Policy 8 iv) requires development within designated Air Quality Management Areas, or result in the declaration of a new AQMA, to be controlled to ensure that air quality is not made worse.

3.4.39 Local Plan Part 2, Policy 36 states:

*“All development must demonstrate how it has been designed to minimise its contribution to carbon emissions and climate change, both directly from the development and indirectly arising from factors such as travel to and from the development.”*

3.4.40 The application site does not lie within an Air Quality Management Area.

3.4.41 Given the scale and nature of the proposed development, it is considered that the proposal will have the potential to make a positive impact on air quality by introducing a renewable energy source and thus reducing the Council's reliance on fossil fuel generated energy. The proposed development supports the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, as required by the NPPF. This will contribute towards the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration to be carbon neutral by 2030.

3.4.42 In line with Policy 9 (2) of Local Plan Part 2: 'Development and the Environment', the proposal will cut emissions of carbon dioxide and so help to mitigate climate change. The proposal constitutes a small-scale renewable energy scheme, in keeping with Policy 36: 'Climate Change', of BwD Local Plan Part 2.

#### **3.4.43 Conclusion**

3.4.44 The Council is seeking prior approval for the installation of a roof mounted solar pv system under Part 14, Class J of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. As the proposals accord with the criteria set out under Class J, the only planning matters that the Authority are able to consider in the determination as to whether prior approval is required are the design or external appearance of the development, and the impact of glare on occupiers of neighbouring land. No other matters are material and thus cannot be considered as part of this application for prior approval.

3.4.45 The proposal is Permitted Development as it conforms to the requirements of Part 14, Class J of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). Officers are of the opinion that the scheme complies with parts J.1, J.3 and J.4 in this instance. It is therefore considered that prior approval is not required.

### **4.0 RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 PRIOR APPROVAL IS NOT REQUIRED

### **5.0 PLANNING HISTORY**

5.1 There is no relevant planning history associated with this site which is considered directly relevant to the determination of this case.

### **6.0 CONSULTATIONS**

6.1 In accordance with Condition J.4(6) of Class J, the Council, the Local Planning Authority, has given notice of the proposed development by Site Notice on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

6.2 A press notice was also published in the Lancashire Telegraph on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

6.3 No representations have been received as a result of this Site Notice or press notice.

### **7.0 CONTACT OFFICER:**

Tom Wiggans, Planner

**8.0 DATE PREPARED: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2022**