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Committee Date: 04/02/2010 Application Number: 2009/04444/PA  
Accepted: 21/10/2009  
Target Date: 16/12/2009  
Ward: Moseley and Kings Heath

St Mary's Church St Mary's Row Moseley Birmingham B13 8HW

Installation of 42 no. photovoltaic solar panels to the south facing nave roof.

Applicant: St Mary's Moseley PCC  
St Mary's Church St Mary's Row Moseley Birmingham B13 8HW  
Agent: Professor John Dowell  
57 Oxford Road Moseley Birmingham B13 9ES

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Recommendation

**Refuse**

#### Proposal

Consent is sought for the installation of 42 photovoltaic solar panels on the south nave roof of St Mary's Parish Church.

The total area occupied by the solar panels would measure 21.3m in length and 2m in depth following the existing plane of the roof. The solar panels would be mounted on the roof and would project 70mm above the tile surface.

The applicant has stated that the solar panels would help contribute to energy saving within Moseley and would make modest contribution to Church funds.

St Mary's Church benefits from ecclesiastical exemption thus no listed building consent is required.

#### Site & Surroundings

The application site comprises Grade II listed St Mary's Church located within the Moseley Conservation Area.

The Church was originally built as a chapel in the parish of Kings Norton in the fifteenth century and has been subject to significant subsequent rebuilds, enlargements, and alterations.

The west tower is an early sixteenth century addition and the main body of the church was rebuilt in 1780 and altered between 1823 and 1824 by Thomas Rickman. JA Chatwin added the north aisle in 1886, and enlarged the chancel and erected a side chapel in 1897. The nave and the south aisle were rebuilt in 1910 by PB Chatwin. Further reconstruction of the Church was carried out between 1952-1954 following war damage.

To the north and west of St Mary's Church are the Church grounds with traditional 2 storey terrace dwellings adjoining the northern boundary while to the south and west of the Church are 3 storey retail properties fronting St Mary's Row.

The land slopes downwards from east to west along St Mary's Row to the junction with Alcester Road

#### Planning History

None relevant.

#### Consultation/PP Responses

Site and press notices, local residents, Residents Associations, and local Councillors notified - Objections received from the Victorian Society and from the Chantry Road and Park Hill Residents Associations. 22 letters of support from local residents, Councillor Ernie Hendricks, and Lynne Jones MP.

Objections received include the solar panels would detract from the harmonious and unified appearance of the south elevation of the Church; the panels would be particularly noticeable from Wake Green Road and Oxford Road; and the reflective surface would be damaging to the pre-nineteenth century building surrounding St Mary's Church.

Comments received from the Chantry Road and Park Hill Residents Associations state that although the principle is considered acceptable, concerns are raised regarding the visual impact of the solar panels on the appearance of the Church.

22 letters of support received from the Moseley Forum, the Moseley Society, Sustainable Moseley (SusMo), and local residents. The letters of support state that Churches are a beacon of the community and should set good examples of stewardship, the solar panels would be a form of sustainable development, the proposed solar panels would comply with English Heritage guidelines, there would be limited views of the solar panels, and the solar panels would not detract from the building or the Moseley Conservation Area.

Letter of support received from Councillor Ernie Hendricks stating that the proposal complies with PPS1 by way of reducing energy use and emissions – thereby addressing some of the issues associated with climate change. The church has become the hub of a wider strategic funding initiative to reduce the overall carbon footprint of a number of community and residential buildings in the area

Letter of support received from Lynne Jones MP stating the proposal would be an important step forward in the City's aims and the aims of local people to provide for a substantial reduction in CO2 emissions; the panels would be visible from a few limited areas within the surrounding streets and would be subtle in appearance; the solar panels fall within English Heritage guidelines; any potential damage to the character of the Church would be outweighed by the benefits of the scheme

#### Policy Context

Birmingham UDP 2005

Moseley Conservation Area

PPG 15

Grade II listed building

### Planning Considerations

The main issue for consideration is whether the proposed solar panels would adversely affect the architectural or historic character of a Grade II listed building, and whether they would adversely affect the character and appearance of the Moseley Conservation Area.

Although St Mary's Church has been significantly altered over time, the extensions and alterations have been undertaken with the intention of enhancing the architectural appearance of the Church within the heart of Moseley Village. The northern side of St Mary's Row is dominated by St Mary's Church which is set back and raised above street level. As well as displaying attractive architectural features, the church has historical importance dating back to the fifteenth century. It is considered that any alterations to St Mary's Church should, in line with guidance set out in PPG 15, preserve or enhance the appearance of the Grade II listed building and the Moseley Conservation Area.

St Mary's Church has an elevated position which dominates the northern side of St Mary's Row. St Mary's Row slopes down towards Alcester Road from the railway line to the east. The most impressive views of the Church are from the eastern end of St Mary's Row towards Wake Green Road and from Oxford Road to the south-east. There are also lesser views of St Mary's Church roof from along the southern side of St Mary's Row, Church Avenue and from the alleyway leading to the car park accessed off Alcester Road.

Although there is tree cover along the railway embankment to the east and 2 large trees along St Mary's Row, there are still clear views of St Mary's Church all year round from the surrounding area due to its elevated position. The proposed solar panels would be clearly visible through the trees for up to 6 months with clear uninterrupted views of St Mary's Church and the south nave roof from Oxford Road, both the northern and southern side of St Mary's Row, and the entrance to Church Avenue. Thus it is considered that the proposed solar panels would detract from the character and appearance of the Moseley Conservation Area, especially considering the prominent elevated position St Mary's Church occupies in the heart of Moseley Village.

The south nave and south aisle roof are covered in high quality Westmoreland slates which are clearly visible from these areas. My Conservation Officer considers that the visual impact of the photovoltaic solar panels and the loss of the roof slates would detract from both the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the architectural character of the Church.

The modern and reflective materials of the solar panels would be a stark and unwelcome contrast to the existing matt stone and slate materials of St Mary's Church. The reflective surface of the solar panels would have an incongruous appearance which would be particularly noticeable during periods of sunlight. The modern and reflective materials of the solar panels would be inappropriate and would adversely affect the architectural appearance of this important Grade II listed Church.

It is also considered that the proposed solar panels, due to their size, siting, and appearance, would unduly dominate the nave roof and would significantly detract from the appearance of the south nave roof and St Mary's Church. The solar panels would extend for almost the entire length of the nave roof and would extend to within 70cm of the nave ridge. My Conservation Officer considers that the solar panels, due to their length and depth would

adversely alter the character and appearance of the nave roof and St Mary's Church and recommends refusal of the scheme.

Whilst it is noted that the proposed photovoltaic solar panels would be a more sustainable energy resource and would contribute to energy saving within Moseley it is considered that this is not sufficient justification to allow inappropriate development on a Grade II listed building and within Moseley Conservation Area.

#### Sustainability

Neutral.

#### Conclusion

The proposed solar panels would form an unwelcome and incongruous feature on the south nave roof adversely affecting the architectural appearance of Grade II listed St Mary's Church and detracting from the character and appearance of the Moseley Conservation Area accordingly.

#### Recommendation

That planning permission be refused.

#### Reasons for Refusal

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- 1 The proposed solar panels by virtue of their size, siting, and appearance would adversely affect the character and appearance of this listed building. As such the solar panels would be contrary to Policies 3.8, 3.10 and 3.25 of the Birmingham UDP and PPG15.
  - 2 The proposed solar panels by virtue of their size, siting, and appearance would not preserve or enhance the character of the Moseley Conservation Area. As such the solar panels would be contrary to Policies 3.8, 3.10 and 3.27 of the Birmingham UDP, the Moseley Conservation Character Appraisal adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and PPG15.
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Case Officer: Bhupinder Thandi