

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 29/03/2023

Ward: Abbey

App No.: 220957 / REG3

Address: 26-90 Reading Bus Garage, Great Knollys Street

Proposal: Installation of solar PV panels and associated equipment at Reading Bus Depot. The PV panels will be situated on the existing roof of the main building at the Depot. It is proposed to install a maximum of 1402 solar PV panels with approximate dimension 1m x 1.75m.

Applicant: Reading Buses Canteen

Deadline: 29/03/2023

extension of time yet to be agreed

RECOMMENDATION:

GRANT

Conditions:

Time Limit (Standard)

Approved Plans

Materials as per application/forms

The solar PV installed on the building shall, so far as practicable, be sited so as to minimise its effect on the external appearance of the building;

The solar PV shall, so far as practicable, be sited so as to minimise its effect on the railway line to the rear of the site.

Informatives:

Positive and proactive requirement

Terms and conditions

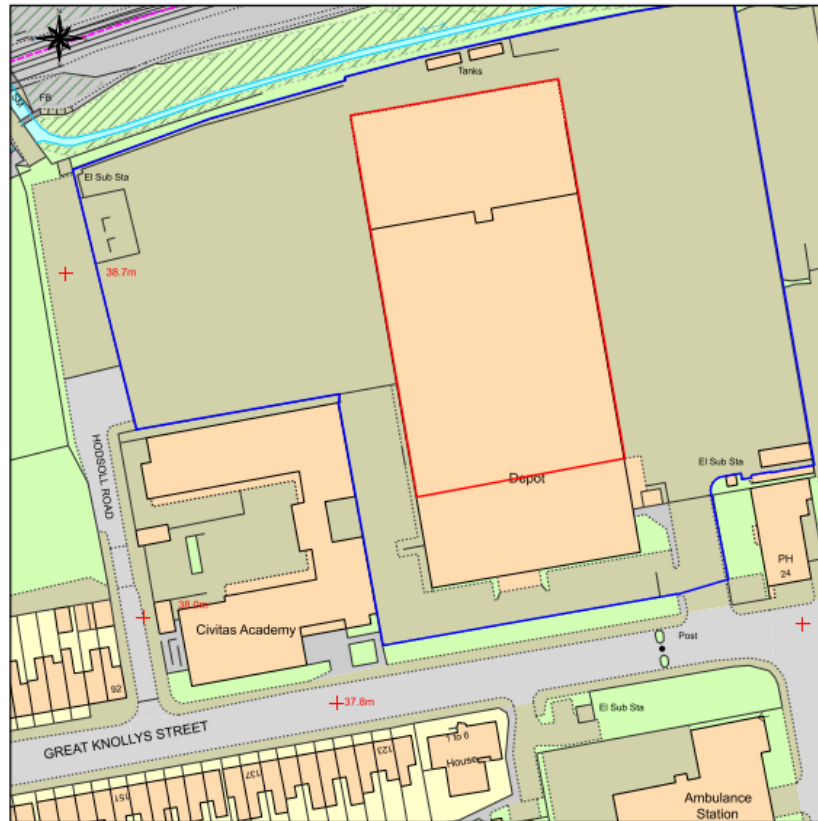
This is a planning permission only and the requirements of other legislation will apply
National Railway Agreement required

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application site is at the Reading bus depot, situated between the railway embankment of the Reading - Basingstoke railway line and Great Knollys Street. The bus depot is a long building, centrally located within the site, running from the front of the site to the railway embankment sited at a higher level at the rear. The height of the bus depot is lower in height next to the railway and is set away from neighbouring buildings. There is a narrow strip of solar panels on a flat roof at the front of the depot along Great Knollys Street.

1.2 There is some vegetation and trees that partially obscure part of the bus depot roof from the railway line.

Site Location Plan



2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal is to install a maximum of 1402 solar PV panels on the sloping existing roof, with associated equipment on the main building at the depot. The PV panels will measure approximately 1m x 1.75m. The proposed PV system will be installed on the existing main bus depot roof and will align with the existing pitch of the roof. The panels will be 95mm above the current height of the roof. The solar PV system would not result in a change of use or footprint of the building.
- 2.2 The renewable energy to be generated by the solar panels will be supplied directly to the bus depot, to increase the amount of renewable energy used on-site in the offices and workshop buildings. Any excess electricity will be exported to the local electricity network and the works will contribute towards Reading achieving net zero carbon operations.
- 2.3 The solar panel will be visible from some public areas, particularly to the railway at the rear of the site. A glint and glare report has been submitted, with consultation sought and feedback received from National rail, stating that there would be a low risk of impact to the railway.
- 2.4 Reading Community Energy Society proposes to install Solar PV panels in collaboration with Reading buses and Reading Borough Council.
- 2.5 Submitted Plans and Documentation:
 - ~~PV roof layout~~
 - ~~PV Mounting elevation~~
 - ~~Location Plan~~
 - CIL
 As received 30 June 2022

Proposed west elevation
Proposed east elevation
Proposed north and south elevation
Existing west elevation
Existing east elevation
Existing north and south elevation
PV Mounting elevation
PV Panel layout
Location plan
Solar Photovoltaic lint and Glare study, Reading bus depot, juju Solar, September 2019, Pagerpower
Text from an email from a Senior Asset Protection Engineer at network rail stating that following a review of the glint and glare report, it 'concluded that it is unlikely that solar panels on the bus garage roof would result in distracting solar glare affecting train drivers'. However that in the remote instance that panels cause a significant distraction, Network rail may ask for remedial measures
Planning statement
As received 5 December 2022

Planning statement - purpose of the application for solar panels
As received 1 February 2023

3. **PLANNING HISTORY**

960015 The erection of a new bus depot, associated car parking and access.
Permitted 23/12/1996
190127 Notification for prior approval for the Installation of Solar PV -
Withdrawn
191009 Notification for prior approval for the Installation of Solar PV -
Refused 9/08/2019

4. **CONSULTATIONS**

4.1 **Statutory**

None

4.2 **Non-statutory**

- RBC Transport Development Control has no objections to the application as the solar panels will have no impact on highway users.
- National Rail have no objections to the proposal. There would be a requirement to engage with the National Rail Asset protection team and to enter into a Basic Asset Protection Agreement, if required with a minimum of 3 months notice before works commence. It is advised that any reflective material or solar panel component should not interfere with the line of sight of train drivers and any potential for glare or reflection of light from the panels that may impact upon signalling **must** be eliminated. The glint and glare study has assessed the possible effects upon railway operations and signals at Reading and Reading West train stations to be low with no mitigation needed. Other issues raised were the distance of the solar panels from the railway, whether any vegetation would be required and consideration of construction traffic.

- RBC Building Control - No objection, although it was advised that before the commencement of works that the applicant investigates whether the roof would be able to structurally support the weight of the solar panels proposed.

4.3 Public

Notification letters were sent to nearby occupants and businesses. A site notice was displayed at the site. No comments have been received.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which also states at Paragraph 11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

5.2 The development plan for this Local Planning Authority is the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019). The relevant policies are:

- CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
- CC7: Design and the Public Realm
- CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
- TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
- TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

APPRAISAL

The main matters to be considered are as follows:

- Design considerations and effect on character
- Safety implications and Impact on the railway line
- Other Matters

Design considerations and effect on character and amenity

- 6.1 Policy CC2 states that proposals will be acceptable where the design of buildings and site layouts use energy and other natural resources appropriately efficiently, and with care and take account of the effects of climate change. The proposal has been designed to produce clean electricity from a renewable source in an attempt to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide created by the building. A large majority of the energy consumed by the building would be provided by the proposed solar panels. The proposal is therefore in accordance with Policy CC2 and TR1 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.
- 6.2 Policy CC7 states that development should be of a high quality design that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which is located. The solar panels are low profile and will be fitted against the roof line of the existing building which is set back from the public realm. Whilst the panels would be visible from the public realm, it is not considered

that the addition of the panels would be detrimental to either the host building or surrounding area. The proposal is therefore in accordance with Policy CC7 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.

- 6.3 The proposed development would not result in harm to the amenity of neighbouring properties in terms of overbearing impact or other disturbance. The proposal is therefore in accordance with Policy CC8 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.

Safety implications and Impact on the railway line

- 6.4 Policy TR1 seeks to ensure an adequate level of accessibility and safety by all nodes of transport, particularly by public transport. Concerns were raised by the case officer regarding the impact of the solar panel on the railway line due to the sloping gradient of the bus depot roof and any potential risks to public safety. The railway line is set at a higher level than the bus depot, with the roof in a line of sight from certain points along the railway line. The height of the bus depot roof is lower at the rear of the site next to the railway and the end of the roof has mechanical equipment that separates the solar panels from the end of the building. To address concerns raised the agent commissioned a Glint and Glare report. Previous prior approval planning applications proposing solar panels have been withdrawn and refused due to a lack of glint and glare analysis or elevations to scale being provided.
- 6.5 The solar panels have been assessed for their impact on the safety of the railway line to the rear, with assessments undertaken of the potential for solar reflections towards receptors at points along the railway line in the Glint and Glare report submitted. Network Rail have reviewed the report and considered the works to be of low risk and have no objections to the works proposed or the proposed location of the solar panels. There are no significant indicators that a risk to network rail has been identified.
- 6.6 If subsequent to the installation of the solar panels, it is found that the solar panels have a detrimental impact on a train driver's field of view, any remedial works would not be covered under the planning permission, if approved. It is strongly advised that the applicant contact the Network Rail Asset Protection team to determine whether a Basic Asset Protection Agreement is required. Any remediation would be subject to alternative Health and Safety legislation and National Rail legislative requirements.

Other Matters

- 6.7 There is an existing tree line and vegetation along the rear boundary of the bus depot and the works will not result in a loss of biodiversity. As such no further planting is proposed, which could detrimentally impact the railway line.
- 6.8 There is sufficient space at the bus depot for the storage of materials and the accommodation of construction vehicles on site. The agent has confirmed that structural surveys will be undertaken to ensure that the roof can structurally support the weight of the solar panels if planning permission is granted before any works commence.

Equalities Impact

- 6.9 In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. There is no indication or evidence

(including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups as identified in the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular planning application. Therefore, In terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The proposed roof mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, are considered to be acceptable. This proposal has been carefully considered in the context of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and supplementary planning documents. The recommendation is shown above. It is advised that the applicant contacts the National Rail Asset protection team before any works commence to ensure that any requirements are undertaken in respect of the safety of users of National Rail. An informative is recommended as this falls outside of relevant planning legislation.

Case Officer: Nathalie Weekes

Proposed Solar PV layout



Glint and glare report train driver receptor locations reviewed p19



Figure 5 - Train driver receptor location

Site photos

