

Application Number:	P/FUL/2021/03942
Webpage:	https://planning.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/
Site address:	Symondsbury Primary School, Mill Lane, Symondsbury, DT6 6HD
Proposal:	Installation of roof mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and associated infrastructure.
Applicant name:	Dorset Council – Assets and Property
Case Officer:	Huw Williams
Ward Member(s):	Cllr Dave Bolwell, Bridport Ward Cllr Kelvin Clayton, Bridport Ward Cllr Sarah Williams, Bridport Ward

1.0 Reason application is going to committee

The application is made by Dorset Council and relates to land that is part-owned by Dorset Council. The application is reported to Committee in accordance with Dorset Council's Constitution.

2.0 Summary of recommendation:

That the Committee would be minded to refuse planning permission for the reason set out in section 17.0 below and recommends that the Head of Planning determines the application accordingly.

3.0 Reason for the recommendation:

The recommendation is made taking account of:

- (i) the nature and details of the application proposal;
- (ii) information submitted in support of the application;
- (iii) the development plan;
- (iv) national planning policy and guidance;
- (v) consultation responses; and
- (vi) other material planning considerations set out in this report.

Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The application has been publicised affording those consulted and the public adequate opportunity to make representations about the application.

In response to submitted representations, the application has been amended by the withdrawal of proposals for the installation of solar panels on the southward facing

roof plane of the original school building. The proposed development (as amended) would:

- (i) detract from the character and appearance of the Grade II listed school building;
- (ii) detract from the character and appearance of the designated Symondsburry Conservation Area;
- (iii) detract from the character and appearance of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and
- (iv) detract from the setting of other listed buildings in the near vicinity of the application site,

resulting in a minor-moderate level of less than substantial harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed school building, to further less than substantial harm to the heritage significance of other nearby listed buildings and to further less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the area contrary to Policies ENV1, ENV4, ENV10 and COM11 of the adopted West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan (2015) and contrary to Policy L1 of the made Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036 (2020).

The harms associated with the proposed development would not be justified or significantly outweighed by the public benefits associated with the development. With no material considerations warranting the determination of the application other than in accordance with the development plan, planning permission should be refused.

4.0 Key planning issues

Issue	Conclusion
Principle of development	The development plan is supportive of solar energy generation provided that the benefits of the development significantly outweigh any harm.
Impact on character, appearance and heritage significance	Harm to character, appearance and setting of the school resulting in low-moderate levels of less than substantial harm to heritage significance.
Balance between harm and benefits	The harm to heritage significance and other harms would not be justified or significantly outweighed by the public benefits associated with the proposed development.

5.0 Description of Site

Symondsburry Primary School is located on the southern side of Mill Lane in the heart of the village of Symondsburry, adjacent to the junction of Mill Lane and Shute's Lane and to the junction between Mill Lane and Duck Street.

The School Site is shown edged red on the submitted Location Plan and extends to approximately 0.31 ha. It is located entirely within the designated Symondsburry Conservation Area and also within the designated Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The original school building dates from 1868 and is constructed of Lias stone under a plain tile roof. A rear block of the building comprises the former Schoolmasters house. The original building has been extended to both its rear (southern) and western side, the lateral additions being the larger and comprising a 1950s detached building that is now connected to the original school by a joining link building constructed in the 1990s, all constructed with rendered walls and stone detailing. The building as a whole is Grade II listed (NHLE 1287599).

To the south of the school building are the school playing fields, beyond which is the Grade II* Ilchester Arms public house (NHLE 1216501).

To the west of the School Site in Shute's Lane is a Grade II listed telephone box (NHLE 1271543) and on the opposite side of Shute's Lane, is the Grade II listed Rectory Cottage (NHLE 1216503), a detached residential property, beyond which is open countryside.

To the north of the School Site on the opposite side of Mill Lane is the Grade I listed St. John the Baptist Church (NHLE 1216336) and a number of associated Grade II listed buildings including the churchyard wall, gate piers and gates (NHLE 1216429), the churchyard steps and raised pavement (NHLE 1216430), and the Symondsbury War memorial (NHLE 1427997). Adjacent to the churchyard on its eastern side are the Grade II listed gate piers at the entrance to Symondsbury College (NHLE 1216433) and the adjacent Grade II listed stables and implement shed at Manor Farm, Mill Lane (NHLE 1216293).

To the east of the School Site is a row of terraced residential properties (Manor Cottages), Duck Street and the Grade II listed Symondsbury House beyond (NHLE 1216290).

6.0 Description of Development

Planning permission is sought for the installation of roof-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and associated infrastructure.

As originally submitted the application sought permission for the installation of 84 solar panels in 6 arrays. However, further to concerns expressed by Symondsbury Parish Council and following a bat survey, the application was amended by the withdrawal of panels originally proposed in 2 arrays on the southern roof plane of the original school building, leaving 4 arrays providing a total of 44 panels.

The arrays would be installed on 2 flat roof surfaces and 1 sloping plane of the side extension and on the southern roof plane of the extension to the rear of the former Schoolmasters house.

Each panel would be of a monocrystalline (all black), half-cell design with a black frame and white backsheet.

On the pitched roof planes the panels would be mounted to lie flush with the roof profile, would be set back from the roof peaks to avoid increasing the overall height of the building and would be wholly contained within the existing roof area.

On the flat roofs, the panels would be mounted in frames with the panels tilted 10 degrees up from the horizontal.

7.0 Relevant Planning History

Submission of the applications follows informal pre-application discussions regarding the proposal and informal consultation with Dorset Council's Senior Conservation Officer who noted:

- (i) that the addition of solar panels to the main roof would be unlikely to be supported;
- (ii) that the low section of pitched roof which adjoins the central flat area should be avoided owing to its visibility and potential to distract from the main building; and
- (iii) that the proposed small section on the west-facing pitch of the modern rear extension behind the main school building would also be unlikely to be supported.

An associated application has been submitted seeking listed building consent and is the subject of a separate report recommending that listed building consent be refused (Application Reference: P/FUL/2021/03943).

8.0 List of Constraints

The School Site is located within the designated Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty ('the Dorset AONB') and within the designated Symondsburry Conservation Area.

In the exercise of any functions under the planning Acts with respect to any buildings or other land in a Conservation Area special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), local planning authorities must have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.

As noted above, the school building is a Grade II listed building (NHLE 1214877) and there are a number of other listed buildings in the near vicinity.

In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

9.0 Consultations

Consultees

1. Ward Members – Bridport Ward

No response received.

2. DC Conservation & Design Officer

Responded to associated application for listed building consent on 9th December 2021 advising that the location, number and appearance of the proposed solar panels are considered to impact on the heritage asset's aesthetic and historical values, so eroding this key listed building's significance and the setting of it and the neighbouring heritage assets, thus impacting detrimentally on the Group's Value and the overall historic streetscene of the settlement and wider AONB. Further commented that:

“... the scheme fails to give great weight to the conservation of these heritage assets in line with NPPF para 199, which states that where high status assets exist, such as the church and inn, the greater the weight should be.

NPPF para. 197 also states that there should be a desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets as well as new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Where harm arises, as in this case, it should be weighed against public benefit. It is acknowledged that solar panels will contribute a benefit to the financial costs of the school in the long term, however, the extent of visual harm fails to preserve or enhance the settings of the surrounding heritage assets and is considered to be of a level that cannot in this specific case, be sufficiently outweighed by public benefit.

It is recommended the scheme is considerably modified and that further information is provided in regard to the queries raised in regards the flat roofed areas in order for a fully informed decision to be made in relation to these.”

Further commented that from both the public domain within the Conservation Area and from the curtilages of the listed school, inn and Church it is clear that there are a large number of vantage points providing sightlines to the single storey elements, as well as the main listed building elements including sections of its valley and that from the churchyard, due to its raised level, also provides oblique glimpses of the flat roof surface of the modern, northern link building.

Specifically in relation to the flat roofed areas, commented that there is some scope for panels in these areas in principle, but identified a need for further information in relation to the means of fixing and securing the panels and clarification as to the implications for visibility.

3. Symondsburry Parish Council

Responded to original proposal with a detailed objection concluding that the proposals would result in substantial or more than substantial harm. The response noted that the key area of concern was the panels on the pitched roofs areas and strongly suggested that applicants consider installing a ground level solar panel array adjacent to the south elevation of the school in the vicinity of the step change in level by the playing area.

Representations received

The application was advertised by site notice displayed on 22nd October 2021.

Total – Objections	Total - No Objections	Total – Comments
0	0	1

Petitions Objecting	Petitions Supporting
0	0
0 Signatures	0 Signatures

Representations have been received from an owner of land within and around the School Site noting an omission by the applicant to provide notice of the application, but confirming that they are content for the application to be considered and expressing support for the application proposals which they consider will enhance the conservation area and that any damage will be more than outweighed by the public benefits in supporting the school and reducing carbon emissions.

10.0 Relevant Policies

Development plan

- (1) West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Adopted Local Plan 2015 ('the Adopted Local Plan'):
 - INT1. Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development;
 - SUS2. Distribution of Development;
 - ENV1. Landscape, Seascape and Sites of Geological Interest;
 - ENV2. Wildlife and Habitats;
 - ENV4. Heritage Assets;
 - ENV10. The Landscape and Townscape Setting;
 - ENV12. The Design and Positioning of Buildings;
 - ENV13. Achieving High Levels of Environmental Performance;
 - ENV16. Amenity; and
 - COM11. Renewable Energy Development.
- (2) The Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036, May 2020 ('the Made Neighbourhood Plan'):
 - Policy CC4 Neighbourhood Renewable Energy Schemes;
 - Policy HT2 Public Realm;
 - Policy L1 Green Corridors, Footpaths, Surrounding Hills & Skylines; and
 - Policy L2 Biodiversity.

Other material considerations

- (1) National Planning Policy Framework, July 2021 ('the NPPF'):
 - Achieving Sustainable development – paragraphs 7-14;
 - Decision making – paragraphs 38-59;

- Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change – paragraphs 152-173;
 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment – paragraphs 174-188; and
 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment – paragraphs 189-208.
- (2) Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan ('the Dorset AONB Management Plan'):
- C3 Necessary Development is Supported.
- (3) Bothenhampton, Bradpole, Symondsburry & Walditch Conservation Area Appraisal, December 2007.

11.0 Human rights

The Human Rights Act 1998 imposes an obligation on public authorities not to act incompatibly with the European Convention on Human Rights. The articles/protocols of particular relevance are:

- (i) Article 6 - Right to a fair trial;
- (ii) Article 8 - Right to respect for private and family life; and
- (iii) The First Protocol, Article 1 - Protection of Property.

The recommendation made is based on national and adopted development plan policies, the application of which does not prejudice the Human Rights of the applicant or any third party.

12.0 Public Sector Equalities Duty

As set out in the Equalities Act 2010, all public bodies, in discharging their functions must have "due regard" to this duty. There are 3 main aims:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected; and characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where participation is disproportionately low.

Whilst there is no absolute requirement to fully remove any disadvantage the Duty is to have "regard to" and remove or minimise disadvantage.

The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Having considered the information presented in the application, consultation responses and the prevailing planning context, I am satisfied that the proposed development would have no material impact on individuals or identifiable groups with protected characteristics.

13.0 Financial benefits

What	Amount / value
Material Considerations	
Carrying out the proposed development would have a minor beneficial impact on the local economy through associated expenditure and employment.	Unknown
Information submitted in support of the application indicates that operation of the solar panels would likely result in energy cost savings and a potential revenue stream.	Unknown
Non Material Considerations	
By definition, non-material financial considerations are not relevant to the determination of the application.	Not material

Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) provides that in dealing with an application for planning permission the authority shall have regard to:

- (a) the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application,
- (b) a post-examination draft neighbourhood development plan, so far as material to the application,
- (c) any local finance considerations, so far as material to the application, and
- (d) any other material considerations.

For the purposes of section 70(2) “local finance consideration” means:

- (a) a grant or other financial assistance that has been, or will or could be, provided to a relevant authority by a Minister of the Crown, or
- (b) sums that a relevant authority has received, or will or could receive, in payment of Community Infrastructure Levy.

To be material to the determination of an application of planning permission, a local finance consideration must have the potential to help make development acceptable in planning terms.

It is understood that funding for the installation of the proposed solar panels has been secured under the Government’s Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. However, as such grant funding is not provided in order to make development acceptable in planning terms, such that the potential receipt of grant funding is not material to the determination of the application.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) operates in the former district of West Dorset, but the proposed development is not of a form liable to CIL.

Accordingly, there are no known local finance considerations that are material to the determination of the application.

14.0 Climate Implications

Paragraph 152 of the NPPF provides that:

“The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.”

The application proposal is focussed on harnessing a renewable source of energy and forms part of Dorset Council’s wider estate decarbonisation strategy. The proposed development would make a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Information submitted in support of the application as amended indicates that the proposed development would have a generating capacity of 15 kilowatts (kW) equating to a saving of approximately 3,570 kg in carbon dioxide emissions (CO₂e) per annum.

15.0 Planning Assessment

The main issues in the determination of the application relate to:

- (ii) the acceptability in principle of the proposed development;
- (iii) the impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Dorset AONB and on the Symondsby Conservation Area;
- (iv) the impact of the proposed development on the character, appearance and heritage significance of the school building and on the setting and heritage significance of other listed buildings in the vicinity; and
- (v) whether any harms associated with the proposed development are significantly outweighed by the public benefits associated with the proposed development.

Policy Context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) provides that if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The School Site is located entirely within the parish of Symondsby where the development plan includes the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Adopted Local Plan 2015 (‘the Adopted Local Plan’) and the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036 (the Made Neighbourhood Plan’). The term material considerations is broad in scope but includes national planning policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (‘the NPPF’) as well as supplementary planning policy and guidance documents.

The proposals map of the Adopted Local Plan shows the School Site as located:

- (i) within the designated Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

- (ii) within the designated Symondsburry Conservation Area; and
- (iii) outside of the defined settlement boundaries.

The School Site is not subject to any site specific land use policy or allocation.

The NPPF provides that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (paragraph 7) and that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives – economic, social and environmental – which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways, so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives (paragraph 8). Paragraph 38 of the NPPF provides that local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive way and further states that decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

Policy INT1 of the Adopted Local Plan states that there will be a presumption in favour of sustainable development that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

Policy SUS2 of the Adopted Local Plan provides that outside defined development boundaries, development will be strictly controlled, having particular regard to the need for the protection of the countryside and environmental constraints, and be restricted to specified form of development. Such development is identified to include:

- alterations and extensions to existing buildings in line with their current lawful use;
- educational/training related development; and
- proposals for the generation of renewable energy or other utility infrastructure.

Policy ENV1 of the Adopted Local Plan provides that the plan area's exceptional landscapes will be protected, taking into account the objectives of the Dorset AONB Management Plan and that development which would harm the character, special qualities or natural beauty of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Beauty, including their characteristic landscape quality and diversity, uninterrupted panoramic views, individual landmarks, and sense of tranquillity and remoteness, will not be permitted. Policy ENV1 of the Adopted Local Plan further states that development should be located and designed so that it does not detract from and, where reasonable, enhances the local landscape character. Amongst other matters, Policy ENV10 of the Adopted Local Plan provides that all development proposals should contribute positively to the maintenance and enhancement of local identity and distinctiveness and that development should be informed by the character of the site and its surroundings.

Policy ENV4 of the Adopted Local Plan provides that the impact of development on a designated or non-designated heritage asset and its setting must be thoroughly assessed against the significance of the asset and that development should conserve and where appropriate enhance the significance. Policy ENV4 further states that any harm to the significance of a designated or non-designated heritage asset must be justified and that applications will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Policy HT2 of the Made Neighbourhood Plan states that proposals that have a negative impact or “harm” the qualities of the public realm as identified in the Neighbourhood Characteristics of the plan will not be supported.

Policy L1 of the Made Neighbourhood Plan states that proposals must preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Dorset AONB and that proposals that do not preserve and enhance the AONB will not be permitted.

Policy COM11 of the Adopted Local Plan provides that proposals for generating heat or electricity from renewable energy sources (other than wind energy) will be allowed wherever possible providing that the benefits of the development, such as the contribution towards renewable energy targets, significantly outweigh any harm. Policy COM11 of the Adopted Local Plan further states that permission will only be granted provided:

- (i) any adverse impacts on the local landscape, townscape or areas of historical interest can be satisfactorily assimilated;
- (ii) the proposal minimises harm to residential amenity by virtue of noise, vibration, overshadowing, flicker, or other detrimental emissions, during construction, its operation and decommissioning;
- (iii) adverse impacts upon designated wildlife sites, nature conservation interests, and biodiversity are satisfactorily mitigated.

Policy CC4 of the Made Neighbourhood Plan states that proposals for individual and community scale renewable energy will be supported subject to the considerations outlined in national policy and guidance.

Paragraph 158 of the NPPF provides that when determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should:

- a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
- b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.

In relation to planning for renewable and low carbon energy the Government’s online Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) comments that increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses and further states that planning has an important role in the delivery of new renewable and low carbon energy infrastructure in locations where the local environmental impact is acceptable (NPPG ID Reference 5-001-20140306).

The NPPG further provides that:

“The National Planning Policy Framework explains that all communities have a responsibility to help increase the use and supply of green energy, but this does not mean that the need for renewable energy automatically overrides environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities. As with other types of development, it is important that the planning concerns of local communities are properly heard in matters that directly affect them (Reference ID: 5-003-20140306).”

In relation to the particular planning considerations that relate to active solar technology (photovoltaic and solar water heating), the NPPG comments that installations are often permitted development but where a planning application is required, factors to be borne in mind include:

- the importance of siting systems in situations where they can collect the most energy from the sun;
- need for sufficient area of solar modules to produce the required energy output from the system;
- the effect on a protected area such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or other designated areas; and
- the colour and appearance of the modules, particularly if not a standard design (NPPG Reference ID: 5-012-20140306).

Policy C3 of the Dorset AONB Management Plan supports renewable energy production where compatible with the objectives of AONB designation. The relevant objectives relate to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.

Principle of Development

Having regard to the location and nature of the of the proposed development, there is no in-principle land use objection to the application proposal.

Environmental Impact and Public Benefits

The application site is not located within a statutorily designated nature conservation area and no adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites, nature conservation interests or biodiversity are anticipated. A bat survey has been undertaken, with panels now proposed only on areas of the school roof identified as holding negligible potential as bat roosting habitat.

The proposed panels are of a standard manufactured design with a black frame and a white backsheet. On most roof coverings, black-framed panels tend to be less visually intrusive than those with uncoated metal frames. Mounting panels close to or flush with roof planes as proposed can also assist to visually integrate the panels and pre-existing built fabric, moderating visual impact.

Solar panels are designed to absorb rather than to reflect light and are typically less reflective than standard glazing. Taking account of the design of the proposed panels and their proposed positioning, material impact on residential amenity by reason of glint, glare or any other emission is unlikely.

The school building is a Grade II listed building and hence a designated heritage asset. The significance of the school derives principally from the architectural and historic special interest of the building fabric.

The School Site is located within the Dorset AONB and within a highly sensitive historic area at the heart of the Symondsburry Conservation Area and in close proximity to the high status Grade I listed church and its associated Grade II listed churchyard walls, steps, tombs and War Memorial, along with the Grade II farm buildings of Manor Farm to the north; Grade II Old Rectory Cottage and phone

box to the west; Grade II Symondsburry House and boundary walls to the east; and Grade II* Ilchester Arms to the south.

The setting of the listed school building comprises the core of the settlement, where the school is experienced in the context of the Grade I listed church and the Grade II* listed Ilchester Arms. Both buildings endow the setting with high levels of architectural and illustrative value. The settings of many of the designated assets in the near vicinity of the school overlap and together they are of significant group value.

A Heritage Statement has been submitted in support of the application that considers the impact of the originally proposed development on the character, appearance and heritage significance of the school and the Symondsburry Conservation Area as well as the implications for the heritage significance of other designated assets elsewhere within the Conservation Area and for the cultural heritage of the Dorset AONB.

In relation to impact on the listed school building the Heritage Statement notes:

“The installation of the solar panels to the historic roof planes of the school building and school house detract from the experience of the roofscape in the context of the church adjacent and also causes a modernising effect which is out of character with the architectural character of the School building. The presence of installed panels to the school extension, by virtue of these being located in the main to the flat roof surfaces, is less visually intrusive. Restricting the solar panels to the south plane of the school building means that in views from street level a section of these are occluded by the roof plane of the school house, which reduces their visual impact. The solar panels are only minimally experienced to the Mill Street elevation and will be most evident in views north across the playing fields towards the Church. Whilst the architectural and special interest of the school building will continue to be legible, and the proportions of the roofscape retained, the proposed panels will be an obviously alien feature in the context of the roofscape, and the harm they occasion is considered to be in the minor/moderate range of less than substantial.”

In relation to other listed buildings, on account of change within their setting, the submitted Heritage Statement identified minor or very minor harm to the significance of the Church, the Ilchester Arms and to Rectory Cottage.

In relation to impact on the Grade I listed Church, the submitted Heritage Statement records that:

“As identified in the above assessment of the Primary School, the proposals are considered to cause a level of minor/moderate harm to the significance of the School Building, and this impacts on the setting and significance of the Church building as it detracts from the legibility of the historic group and the visual coherence of the asset’s setting. Whilst the Mill Street elevation of the school, experienced from within the churchyard, is only minimally affected by the proposals, the view of the southern roof planes of the School in the context of the Church will be quite evidently altered and its historic character

lessened. In terms of harm to the significance of the Church, it is considered that the harm is minor in extent.”

In relation to impact on the Symondsburry Conservation Area, the submitted Heritage Statement records that:

“As identified above, the proposals are considered to generate levels of minor and moderate harm to a key group of buildings within the Conservation Area, and as a result the character and appearance of the Conservation Area will be harmed. Levels of harm in regard to Conservation Areas have to be assessed having regard to the conservation area as a whole, and it is noted that there are many areas within the conservation area, and the views from Colmer’s Hill, which will not be impacted by the proposals. In this regard it is considered that the harm to the conservation area properly sits within a low level of less than substantial harm.

Having regard to the content of the submitted Heritage Statement and to the comments submitted by Dorset Council’s Conservation and Design Officer it is apparent that installation of solar panels to the historic roof plane of the former schoolmasters house would have a modernising effect that would be out of keeping with the architectural character of the School building and would detract from the experience of the roofscape in the context of the church and other listed buildings. By virtue of being located in the main to the flat roof surfaces, presence of solar panels on the side extension to the original school building would be less visually intrusive and less harmful to the character of the building, but would still be detrimental to the character and appearance of the building and its setting.

Paragraph 189 of the NPPF is clear that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations. National policy is equally clear that:

- (i) 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 (NPPF paragraph 199);
- (ii) that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification (NPPF paragraph 200);
- (iii) where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use (NPPF paragraph 202); and
- (iv) the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application and that in weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset (NPPF paragraph 203).

Amendment of the application by the withdrawal of proposals for panels on the southern roof plane of the original school building reduced consequent harm to heritage significance but a minor-moderate level of less than substantial harm to

heritage significance remains and is to be given great weight in decision making. Consideration should also be given to the options for reducing harm to heritage significance.

The carbon savings associated with the installation of proposed solar panels would make a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and associated cost savings and income could be to the benefit of education services and the continued use of a historic building for the purpose for which it was constructed. On site electricity generation would also make a minor contribution to energy security. Accordingly, there are meaningful public benefits to be weighed against the harms associated with the proposed development.

Having carefully considered the environmental implications of the application proposal, in my opinion, the harm to the character and appearance of the Symondsby Conservation Area, to the Dorset AONB, to the character, appearance and heritage significance of the school and to the setting and heritage significance of other listed buildings in the vicinity is not clearly and convincingly outweighed by the associated public benefits. It is also apparent that there is potential for a considerable element of the potential public benefits to be realised with less impact on the character and appearance of the building and its setting and with less impact on the heritage significance of the school and other listed buildings in the near vicinity.

The proposed development is therefore contrary to Policies ENV1, ENV4, ENV10 and COM11 of the Adopted Local Plan and to Policy L1 of the Made Neighbourhood Plan.

With no material considerations warranting the determination of the application other than in accordance with the development plan, planning permission should be refused.

16.0 Conclusion

Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the reasons set out above and summarised in section 17.0 below, the proposed development is contrary to the development plan. With no material considerations warranting the determination of the application other than in accordance with the development plan, planning permission should be refused.

17.0 Recommendation

That the Committee would be minded to refuse planning permission for the reason set out below and recommends that the Head of Planning determines the application accordingly.

Reason

- (1) The installation of solar panels as proposed would have a modernising effect on this Grade II listed school building (National Heritage List Entry 1287599) that would be out of keeping with the architectural character of the building

and would detract from the experience of the roofscape in the context of the Grade I listed St. John the Baptist Church (National Heritage List Entry 1216336) and other listed buildings and thereby:

- (i) detract from the character and appearance of the listed school building;
- (ii) detract from the character and appearance of the designated Symondsburry Conservation Area;
- (iii) detract from the character and appearance of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and
- (iv) detract from the setting of heritage significance of other listed buildings in the near vicinity of the application site,

resulting in a minor-moderate level of less than substantial harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed school building, to further less than substantial harm to the heritage significance of other listed buildings including the Grade I listed Church and to further less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the area contrary to Policies ENV1, ENV4, ENV10 and COM11 of the adopted West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan (2015) and contrary to Policy L1 of the made Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036 (2020). The harms associated with the proposed development would not be justified or significantly outweighed by the public benefits associated with the development.

Informative Notes

- (1) The following plans and drawings submitted as part of the application were considered by the local planning authority:
 - (i) Drawing Number 01 dated 20/08/2021 and titled SITE PLAN;
 - (ii) Drawing Number 02 dated 20/08/2021 and titled LOCATION PLAN;
 - (iii) Drawing Number 05 dated 16/09/2021 and titled PROPOSED EAST AND WEST ELEVATIONS;
 - (iv) Drawing Number 06 dated 16/09/2021 and titled PROPOSED NORTH AND SOUTH ELEVATIONS; and
 - (v) Drawing Number 07 dated 20/08/2021 and titled ROOF PLAN.
- (2) In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, as the local planning authority, Dorset Council takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions. Dorset Council worked with the applicant/agent in a positive and proactive manner by providing a pre-application advice service.
- (3) Further information relating to this decision may be viewed online through the application webpages accessible by entering the application details at <https://planning.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/>.