

From Councillor Sian Berry, Highgate Ward

Support for Planning Applications: 2016/1791/P  
St Anne's Church, Highgate, N6



I am writing to support the proposals for the installation of solar panels on the south facing roof of St Anne's Church in Highgate.

I believe the conservation principles in the Camden policies below are fully supported by the proposals and that, by cutting the carbon footprint of the building and enabling the provision of green energy, the proposals support other Camden planning policies:

- **Preserving and restoring a heritage asset of the area:** DP 24 – securing high quality design, CS14 - promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage
- **Sustainability:** CS13 - Tackling climate change through promoting higher environmental standards, DP22 - Promoting sustainable design and construction, CPG3 – sustainability.

Also relevant are the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which state that a balanced view should be taken of the community benefits and the visual impact of renewable energy:

Paragraph 131 states that authorities should take account of the “the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.”

Paragraph 132 states 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”, and notes that substantial harm to a listed building of any grade should be exceptional.

Where the harm to a designated heritage asset is less than substantial (as in this case), NPPF paragraph 134 advises that “this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.”

I understand that the installation of any new facility on the exterior of an important community building is something for planning authorities to consider carefully, but I also understand that the Diocesan Advisory Committee of the Diocese of London (DAC) supports this initiative. The DAC is the Church’s equivalent of a planning authority with the primary aim of conserving the church’s assets and heritage. The DAC will have considered very carefully the impact of the proposals on the historical importance of the church building, and its view that the proposal will not have a significant impact on the historical integrity of the building should have a strong influence on Camden’s parallel decision. With the DAC’s support in place, I believe it would be a significant decision for Camden not to follow suit and that the determination should be made by the full planning committee not simply officers or the Members Briefing panel.

I also understand that a concern is that the solar panels will spoil views of the church building from Metropolitan Open Land of Hampstead Heath. However, the view of the church from the

Heath is not of the south facing roof but primarily of the spire of the church, with the roof not a significant contributor, especially when leaves are on the trees surrounding the church and the Heath.

Furthermore, the proposed panels are of a similar colour to the roof slating and would not stand out significantly or have an impact on the appearance of the church as a whole. The historical importance of the church building, which has led to its listing lies not in the architecture of the roof area but in its spire, its stained glass and the fact that Sir John Betjeman was baptised there.

I urge the Council to approve these plans. By allowing the church to set an example of generating green energy for the community, the overall benefit to the borough, which has large numbers of buildings suitable for solar panels and community investment, could be very large.

**Because of the important precedent that would be set, and because of the very marginal impact on appearance, I also urge that, if planning officers are minded to reject the plans, it should be referred to the Member's Briefing Panel for review and then taken to committee for a final decision. I also recommend a site visit by committee members.**

**May 2016**