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<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	<a href="#">P11/E1612/DC</a>
<b>APPLICATION TYPE</b>	MINOR
<b>REGISTERED</b>	4.10.2011
<b>PARISH</b>	THAME
<b>WARD MEMBER(S)</b>	Mr David Dodds Mrs Ann Midwinter
<b>APPLICANT</b>	South Oxfordshire District Council
<b>SITE</b>	Thame Sports And Arts Centre Oxford Road Thame, OX9 2BB
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Installation of solar panels
<b>AMENDMENTS</b>	Drawings 6588-15B, 6588-16C, 6588-17C accompanying amended design and sustainability statement received 20 October 2011.
<b>GRID REFERENCE</b>	469660/205728
<b>OFFICER</b>	Miss S. Green

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application is referred to the Planning Committee as the applicant is South Oxfordshire District Council.
- 1.2 The application site is Thame Leisure Centre, which is shown on the OS extract **attached** as Appendix A. The leisure centre is located to the east of the town adjacent to Lord William’s School. It is accessed from Oxford Road, via the same drive that serves the school. The leisure centre could be described as a building of two halves, with the western side of the building comprising a rather tired structure of red brick with a flat roof, whilst the eastern side, over the swimming pool, is more modern in style, with white blockwork and a sweeping curved roof.

**2.0 PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 This application seeks permission for the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on the roof of the centre. Thames Valley Energy Agency have assessed the site for its suitability and confirmed that, considering factors such as orientation, pitch of roof and shading, the property provides a good opportunity for installing solar PV. The proposed elevation and roof plans, are **attached** at Appendix B. A full copy of the application documents can be found on the website at [www.southoxon.gov.uk](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk).
- 2.2 The amended scheme proposes to install a solar PV system of a maximum 50 kilowatt peak in size as this offers the best returns financially for the applicant. This is equivalent to an area of panels approximately 964 square metres. It is estimated that 294 panels would be needed to cover this area (the exact number is dependent on the final supplier chosen and the size of panel). The expected output is around 41,280 kWh per annum.
- 2.3 The project presents a long term investment for the council due to the Government top up payments through the “feed in tariff” scheme. It is proposed to use the electricity on site which will save on energy costs for the centre. When the electricity cannot be used on site, it will be exported to the national grid in return for which the council will receive an export payment. In addition the proposal would contribute the council’s corporate objective to reduce its own energy consumption.

3.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 **Thame Town Council** – Object to the original scheme. Support the introduction of solar panels, but consider they would be better positioned on the flat roof.  
No comments received on the amended scheme.

3.2 **Neighbours** – No responses

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P00/N0402](#) - Approved (04/10/2000)  
Construction of a health and fitness suite as an extension to the Thame Sports & Arts Centre.

4.2 [P99/N0382/RM](#) - Approved (15/12/1999)  
Construction of a 5 lane swimming pool with ancillary facilities as an extension to Thame Sports and Arts Centre.

4.3 [P98/N0007/O](#) - Approved (15/07/1998)  
Construction of a swimming pool, changing room and associated facilities. Car parking.

4.4 [P80/N0474/OC](#) - Approved (27/10/1980)  
Erection of sports centre (Revised elevations).

4.5 [P79/N0153/OC](#) - Approved (10/07/1979)  
Erection of sports centre together with access road and parking areas.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 **PPS1 Supplement - Planning and Climate Change**  
**PPS22 – Renewable Energy**

5.2 **South Oxfordshire Local Plan Policies 2011**  
G2 – Protection and enhancement of the environment  
G6 – Promoting good design  
D9 – Renewable energy

5.3 **South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2008**  
Section 4.5 – Small scale renewable energy systems

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main planning issue in relation to this proposal is the impact on the character and appearance of the building and surrounding area.

**Impact on the area**

6.2 Renewable sources of energy have an important role to play in reducing the consumption of finite resources and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. The district council encourages renewable technologies and policy D9 of SOLP is supportive of new renewable energy developments subject to them not having a significant adverse impact on the local and wider environment. Policy G2 seeks to protect the district from adverse developments and seeks opportunities to enhance the environment wherever possible.

- 6.3 It is proposed to mount the panels on as much of the flat roof of the red brick side of the building as possible in order to maximise the returns from the scheme. The applicant has confirmed that around the flat roof areas there is a parapet of approximately 0.2m in height. The solar panels would be mounted on a framework at an angle of between 10-15 degrees, towards a southerly direction. This position will optimise the performance of the panels whilst minimising wind load. The maximum height of the panels when mounted on the framework will be 0.3m. Therefore the panels would only be marginally higher than the existing parapet. From street level, given the angle of view upwards that would be required, I am of the opinion that any panels would barely be noticeable, if at all. This part of the building is also not of any particular architectural merit. The panels on this part of the building are therefore considered acceptable.
- 6.4 Further panels are also proposed on the eastern side of the building. The original plans proposed panels covering the majority of the sweeping curved roof over the swimming pool. Your officers consider that this roof sweep does have some aesthetic merit and is a positive feature of an otherwise rather nondescript building. The roof is currently relatively free from roof clutter. It is also very visible, being able to be viewed from the path to the south, the school to the east and from the approach to the leisure centre to the north. Following your officer's advice, the location and number of panels on this side of the roof have been significantly reduced and are now only proposed to be sited towards the top, flatter part of the roof. The panels would at a maximum be 0.3m above the existing roof. However given they would be sited on the highest part of the roof, which is almost flat, any views of them from ground level would be limited, particularly taking into account the perspective. There would be views of the back of the panels from the north, on approach to the centre, however, again from the angle of perspective from street level, and in context of the whole building, I consider that any view of the panels would likely be limited, and would not detract from the appearance of the building as a whole or from the surrounding area.
- 6.5 The area of panels shown on the plans is slightly higher than required for the maximum 50 kilowatt peak size system. It is estimated this size system will require 964 square metres. The plans indicate an additional 111 square metres. This is because the building's roof has yet to be checked for its structural integrity. It is possible that some areas of the roof may not be able to take the panels. It is therefore likely that the number of panels on the building will be less than indicated on the plans, however as already discussed above, the position of the panels in any of the proposed locations would not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the building.
- 6.6 Therefore the proposal would accord with policies D9 and G2 of the SOLP.

**Other considerations**

- 6.7 The centre is surrounded on two sides by car parking and the school grounds. To the south and west is a large playing field and an all weather pitch. Further to the south are the houses of Cedar Crescent, however these are not visible from leisure centre due to boundary vegetation. I do not consider that the proposal would have any adverse impact upon the surrounding land uses and it therefore accords with policy D9 in this respect.

6.8 The government has made it clear that tackling climate change and moving to a low-carbon economy is a key priority. The PPS1 supplement on climate change sets out how the planning system should contribute to reducing emissions and encourage renewable and low-carbon energy generation. Similarly PPS22 encourages the use of small scale renewable energy schemes in both new development and existing buildings. Such developments are key to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. This proposal, whilst small in scale, will help contribute to the Government's target of reducing carbon emissions, and this is a material consideration in favour of the proposal.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 This application is recommended for approval as it is considered to accord with the relevant Development Plan policies. The siting of solar PV panels on the roof of the centre is acceptable and would not adversely impact upon the character and appearance of the building or the surrounding area.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **That planning permission is granted subject to the following conditions:**

1. **Commencement of development – 3 years**
2. **Approved plans**

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