



Chris Hinchliff

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Jonny Wilks
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Dear Jonny,

Thank you for getting in touch with me regarding your application for the proposed Beane Valley Solar Farm, and for the offer of a meeting.

I appreciate your taking the time to send me the application documentation, which I have read in detail with interest, but also with growing concern across multiple areas.

To start, I am concerned by the type of land on which you propose to develop. By your own assessment, 78.75% of this application would be constructed on high-quality, best and most versatile agricultural land, which the national planning policy clearly states should be avoided for renewable energy projects. Sheep grazing and other biodiversity initiatives will hardly make up for the loss of productive arable farmland.

The proposed scheme would also have a significant bearing on a landscape which is characterised by minimal impact from the built environment. This project would introduce incongruous industrialisation into a much-loved area of countryside, including a well-used right of way which traverses the site. Your own photos show that, from many aspects, the impacts on the landscape will be both significant and indeed damaging to a large area of the countryside in a way that will not be mitigated.

Furthermore, your own application documents note that the East Herts District Council Plan policy for rural areas beyond the greenbelt covers the proposed site and refers to it as “valued countryside” where development should be “compatible with the character and appearance of the rural area.” This will not be the case for a scheme covering hectares in steel, glass, significant fencing, and widespread use of CCTV.

Similarly, your documents refer to the Buntingford community neighbourhood area plan, which covers the area and discourages applications that would encroach on the River Beane – an internationally significant chalk stream.

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Above all, it is clear to me that this scheme would irredeemably tarnish the rural nature of the countryside communities of Cottered, Cromer, and their neighbours. For the residents who live in these villages, this scheme would not just blight the landscape but unavoidably undermine the sense of place that is an essential part of their home.

If you proceed with this application and it is approved, you will be imposing profound harm on the communities surrounding the proposed site and doing so in direct opposition to both local and national planning policies, as well resident's views.

Your website refers to the need to tackle fuel poverty and high energy costs. These objectives would be more effectively and fairly undertaken through rooftop solar schemes providing renewable electricity directly to homes and businesses, rather than via speculative applications that are ultimately going to feed into wholesale energy markets influenced by international commodity prices.

In any case, ground-mounted solar developments should take place in locations where they enjoy the support of the local community and on land that is not best suited to growing crops, which are vital to Britain's food security.

For these reasons, I urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to withdraw this application and seek more suitable sites, where you can work in collaboration with local communities rather than in opposition to them.

I recommend that you engage in a full consultation with local residents to jointly identify possible sites for alternative scale developments or different technologies, which would require less extensive industrial land use change, that could have genuine local backing.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Hinchliff

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