



Planning Application: 3/24/2245/FUL

Proposal: Land West of A507, between Cromer and Cottered for Installation and Operation of a solar farm including co-located energy storage facilities, onsite substation, ancillary infrastructure and landscaping.

To whom it may concern,

Solar projects must ensure best agricultural land is protected for food security

The Parish Council is mindful that in May 2024 the Energy Security Secretary told Parliament that the best agricultural land must be protected for food security. In the face of global insecurity all steps must be taken to strengthen food security as part of the UK's national resilience. Although solar energy does play a key part in securing energy security and net zero targets local planning authorities should protect the "Best and Most Versatile (BMV)" land ensuring that solar projects avoid this quality land and should be developed on brownfield land, contaminated land, industrial land and rooftops so as not to compromise the UK's food security.

The developer's own survey has identified that, according to the Agricultural Land Classification, the majority of the site (78.75%) is graded as BMV land. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out that the economic benefits of this type of land must be recognised and outlines that the availability of land used for food production must be considered when determining if the site is appropriate for solar development. As a consequence a developer must identify why the use of BMV land is necessary and why it is not possible or feasible to locate the scheme on poorer agricultural land. The planning application fails to provide the evidence why this site should be developed over an alternative on land not classified as BMV.

Proposed siting

This is totally the wrong site for a solar panel farm. Rolling fields leading down to the Beane Valley, unspoilt countryside, outside the boundary of the Green Belt and overlooked by a Grade II* listed historic windmill. Access from all directions is from narrow lanes which are classified and signed as unsuitable for HGV's. Right of way[RM1] Cottered 028 footpath and Ardeley 049 cross the land and bridle paths plus historic dwellings surround it. The land proposed is and has been for centuries actively farmed. Why is it considered suitable for a solar farm rather than high grade agricultural land to grow food for the nation as is required? Cottered is a hamlet and has been before the Domesday Book. This proposal will be detrimental to the rural setting, views and Beane Valley as well as the river Beane, a rare chalk stream.



Policy CC3 of the East Herts District Plan on renewable and low carbon energy states that in considering the impact of renewable technologies the council will attach particular importance to maintaining the special countryside character of the rural area, including the preservation of long-distance views from public rights of way. It also states that the Council in considering new developments must consider the impact on the

- environment and historic assets
- visual amenity and landscape character
- amenity of neighbouring residents and sensitive uses

The Parish Council consider that the proposed development would have a significant detrimental impact on all these criteria and full weight must be given to this when determining the planning application.

Roads

The A507 has, only six months ago, had a 7.5 tonne weight limit introduced. It passes through Buntingford and then becomes B1037 which is a very narrow lane rather than road with twists and turns and signage stating that it is unsuitable for HGV's. The B1037 from Stevenage, again stated as unsuitable for HGVs, through Walkern to Ardeley, Cromer and Cottered, is a narrow and a congested road through the centre of Walkern, with a heavy flow of traffic and school children having to cross it, as well as many listed buildings alongside it. This route to the proposed site is totally unsuitable for heavy construction traffic.

River

The River Beane is a rare chalk stream that flows below this proposed site and through to Walkern and then to Hertford. Pollution from the site will flow into this river causing environmental damage all the way along. Water runoff, regardless of any SUDS that may be suggested, will not stop pollution seeping down to the Beane. Runoff from panels will go into the roads around Luffenhall and Cromer and will increase the flooding to land and properties along the valley to Walkern and Watton at Stone. This proposed site is also in Flood Zone 2 and 3. The B1037 was closed as recently as October 24th due to flooding and was further flooding on January 5th 2025.

Let us not make the mistake of taking out-of-date 1 in 100 years information but rather the last 20 years of rainfall, flooding and climate change to land and to the Beane



Effect of the development on the setting of heritage assets in the area.

Cromer windmill, a Grade II* listed post mill built around 1661, is a significant heritage asset and sits on the boundary of the site. Ardley Bury is a scheduled ancient monument including the moated site and fishpond. Moor Green is stated as a historic landmark.

Policy HA1 of the East Herts District Plan specifically states that “Development proposals that would lead to substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset will not be permitted, and the Council will, as part of a positive strategy, pursue opportunities for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment recognising its role and contribution in achieving sustainable development”. Furthermore, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation areas) Act 1990 does require due consideration is given to the preserving of the setting of listed buildings. The courts have held that in this context “preserving” means doing no harm. The industrialisation of the land surrounding the windmill would undoubtedly cause harm to its significance in the landscape and this should be taken into account in deciding whether the site is appropriate for a development on this scale.

Wildlife

Wildlife is being squeezed between these villages as a consequence of the Gresley Way, Stevenage, development and Walkern’s Midsummer Vale development both of which were previously agricultural land and a green corridor for wildlife. Great Ashby 1 and Great Ashby 2, Stevenage, are understood to have planning permission further extending the urban sprawl across towards Cromer and Luffenhall where herds of deer, including rare roe deer, roam and have done since the time of Henry IV. There we also find badgers, foxes, rabbits, hares, many raptors, owls, and pheasants. The bird population, of which the UK is sadly depleted in species, use the fields and woodland abounding this area to thrive. No consideration is given for these or the insect and flora and fauna. Taking the topsoil away and putting in solar panels and batteries that are all pollutants and chemicals will devastate this area and our environment. Green corridors for wildlife will be severely disrupted causing harm to already red listed birds.

Assessment statement and reports

It is hoped that the planning officer and department will read through these and see they are written purely for financial gain. Lots of expensive exercises to tick the boxes. No thought for a more suitable site or the people who live here, our heritage and views and wildlife matter. We hope that common sense prevails.

Landscaping

The proposed solution to the ruination of the views across the Beane Valley is the planting of hedges. Granted this will obscure the view of the solar farm but will do so by removing the view altogether. Hedges take years to be established and can die off in their first few years, are these to be replaced? Mature trees are to be taken down. These take decades to mature and, in the meantime,



where are the insects, birds and animals to go? A metal fence will surround the site - what an eyesore that would be and will cut off the green corridors.

Glare and Noise

Regardless of what may be written, the angle and height of the panels will cause glare to vehicle drivers, cyclists and walkers.

Noise has been written about in many reports, so any expensive document sent saying there is no noise is a waste of money. The humming of that many batteries, transformers, invertors and other accessories will be noticeable and constantly affect the life of residents around.

Technical clarity

It is unclear from the proposal submitted how many panels and of what type/capacity will be installed. The earlier screening application is inconsistent with this application in that a similar output is anticipated from a smaller area. It is worthy of note that in both instances the stated capacity is 0.1MW inside the 50MW limit that would require development consent by the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

End of life

No statements have been submitted on the end-of-life processing of the equipment and how it will be disposed of nor has any statement been submitted on what will happen to the ruined land. Is there to be another lease on the land for both parties to make further money to the detriment of residents, visitors and our wildlife?

Finally, to add a report from another solar panel site is not warranted as each and every development must be considered independently.

It is sincerely hoped that East Herts Planning will see this is an unsustainable, deeply faulted proposal that is in conflict with the Walkern Neighbourhood Plan, Conservation Areas and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Yours sincerely

Walkern Parish Council