



18<sup>th</sup> January 2025

East Herts Council  
Development Management (Planning)  
Wallfields  
Pegs Lane  
Hertford  
SG13 8EQ

By email

Dear Sirs

APPLICATION: 3/24/2245/FUL

AT: Land west of A507 between Cottered and Cromer

PROPOSAL: Installation and operation of a solar plant, including co-located energy storage facilities, online substation, ancillary infrastructure and landscaping.

I write in response to your letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2024.

Ardeley Parish Council opposes this proposal in the strongest possible terms.

The council is wholly in favour of renewable energy as a replacement for the wholesale use of fossil fuels. However, this proposal, despite the developer's greenwashing, would have hugely detrimental effects on this fragile area and it is difficult to imagine a worse location for a solar plant.

The proposal if granted will:

- Damage the heritage and amenity of this beautiful corner of Hertfordshire

- Ruin the rights of way enjoyed by many

- Harm the ecology of the area

- Be detrimental to sustainability

- Cause glint and glare to motorists on busy roads and to local dwellings

- Cause heavy construction vehicles to use very unsuitable roads and lanes during installation and maintenance

- Transgress government guidelines for the siting of renewable energy facilities.

Cottered and Cromer are ancient areas of habitation and agriculture. There was a significant Roman occupation here and a Roman road crosses the site. Many of the local farms are centuries old. A third of properties in Cromer are listed buildings and the villages have benefitted from a careful and sustained planning policy as appropriate for the 'rural area beyond the green belt.' House extensions have been modest and few homes built. Planning applications have only been

approved where they blend with or enhance the vernacular. It would seem inconceivable that a planning application for an industrial site could be approved here!

The proposal would see solar panels installed in the fields surrounding Cromer's ancient windmill, the last surviving post-mill in Hertfordshire. The panoramic views of unspoilt cornfields and farmland, both from and of the windmill, would be ruined. It would be impossible to screen the panels with hedging or trees as they would never grow tall enough. The solar plant would be rampantly and obtrusively visible from all directions and from a great distance, transforming a beautiful vista of open undulating countryside into an ugly desolate black expanse, crammed full with industrial generating equipment.

This proposal would utterly destroy the public amenity provided by the two footpaths crossing the land. These are enjoyed by ramblers and residents as well as by people living in Stevenage and Buntingford, seeking a break from the towns. Who would wish to walk their dog or enjoy a stroll through an industrial wasteland? There is much concern these days about mental health; the blighting of this particularly attractive and obvious site can only be detrimental to public mental wellbeing.

The proposal is awful ecologically. Mixed farming, grazing and agriculture, which predominate around here, is essential for wildlife. Hedgerows and set-aside strips are the perfect environment for a huge variety of creatures. Unfortunately, bird numbers have dropped in recent years, partly due to farm mechanisation and loss of habitats, so the industrial development of these fields will be another loss for them. You won't hear larks here if this goes ahead! Large herds of fallow deer, greater than a hundred head, roam this area. Their grazing has already been constrained by more rural housing developments and by fenced rewilding just north of the A507. This project would further constrict their movements and result in even more deaths on local roads. The developers assert that sheep grazing would continue, but with little grass between the hard metal and glass structures, this seems little more than PR spin.

There are also concerns about the impact on the River Beane chalk stream. Significant effort and cost have gone into maintaining this rare feature of our landscape. The developers overlooked this in their application.

The development is clearly detrimental for sustainability. The developers claim that they are low-grade fields but they have been constantly farmed with high yields for centuries. England has less productive farmland now than at any point in the last 80 years. Every acre lost, every ton of grain not produced will have to be imported. This may well come from a country with lower standards and burn fossil fuel as it is transported across the globe. This is clearly not a sustainability project; it is a development designed to make as much money as possible from the land and energy prices. A true sustainability development to help address climate change would see solar plants installed on brown-field sites, disused military bases, the side of transport links, the roofs of warehouses, etc. but these would be at a higher cost and therefore of less commercial interest to developers and speculators.

This is not even a good site for solar! A significant proportion of the proposed site is north facing and will only be able to warrant a low density of panels. These will have to be raised up even further as will those in the wet areas around the chalk stream- how high is not even specified in the application which only speaks of 'typically....'

The A507 is a fast road and the Cumberlow Green Road to Cromer carries significant traffic too. There will inevitably be a dazzling reflection and glare from the solar panels on to traffic using

these roads, causing a distraction and danger to motorists. The A507 is also popular with motorcyclists and there have been many accidents along it. This installation will only make matters worse. Glint and glare will intolerably affect some houses, particularly those on Cromer Heath; even the developer acknowledges this.

During construction, the local lanes will bear a heavy load. The Cumberlow Green Road and the road between Cromer and Cottered are both very narrow, single width in places, and both are 'unsuitable for HGVs'. The A507 has a 7.5 ton weight restriction.

Notably, the proposal is contrary to Government Guidelines for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy. These clearly state that 'the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections' and that they 'can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes', which this site clearly is. They also say that the use of 'previously developed and non-agricultural land' should be encouraged, rather than of greenfield land. The guidelines continue, 'great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their influence, including the impact on views important to their setting... a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset.'

In conclusion, both on behalf of the community which we serve, and those who come here from further afield, we beseech you not to allow this developer to ruin this unspoilt and conspicuous area of historic countryside, the loss of which would be a devastating tragedy. The ecological, aesthetic and environmental cost of so doing would far, far outweigh any supposed gain put forward under what is clearly, a false flag of sustainability.

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Lorna Ewen.

Lorna Ewen  
Clerk to Ardeley Parish Council