

Diocese of St Albans
Parishes: Ardeley | Benington | Cottered + Throcking | Walkern

Ardeley St Lawrence, Ardeley
Rector, The Revd. Mark Bailey The Rectory, Cottered, Buntingford, SG9 9QA
Telephone: 01763 281052 - [REDACTED]
Churchwarden, Mrs Jackie Hayward. [REDACTED]
Parochial Church Council Secretary, Dr Julie Tyers. [REDACTED]

30 September 2025

For the attention of Case Officer: Ben Glover, Senior Planning
Officer, Major Projects

North Hertfordshire District Council
Planning Control & Conservation
Council Offices, Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

By Email only

Dear Sirs,

APPLICATION: 25/01947/FP

AT: Land South Of A507 Near Cumberlow Green, Clothall Road, Clothall, Hertfordshire.

PROPOSAL: Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), ground mounted solar farm, associated infrastructure, access and landscaping.

This letter is written to object to the above application on behalf of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St Lawrence Church, Ardeley. St Lawrence church is both a place of worship, and a community resource, for residents of Ardeley, Cromer, Luffenhall, Moor Green and Wood End (the Parish).

The church of Ardeley, St Lawrence through its PCC strongly objects to this application, for the reasons outlined below. Whilst we support initiatives that contribute to the replacement of fossil fuels through renewable energy, the PCC firmly believes that this proposal severely impacts several beneficiary groups to which this Church owes a legal and moral duty. These groups include hundreds of Church members, neighbours and visitors, all of whom live or work in and enjoy the countryside surrounding the Church.

The proposal if granted will have at least 5 major impacts, namely:

1. Damage to the area's heritage.

Government Guidelines for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy state that:

- (a) the use of non-agricultural land should be encouraged rather than greenfield land,

- (b) care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting, and acknowledges that a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset, and
- (c) the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections and that such farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes.

Locating this proposed industrial solar farm & BESS across ancient areas of habitation and agricultural land would damage the heritage assets of this region of Hertfordshire. These areas had significant occupation by the Romans, whose road crosses the site. A third of Luffenhall homes are listed buildings, which have benefited from careful and sustained application of your planning policy for "rural areas beyond the green belt". Residents choose to live in this area and take pride in maintaining its heritage, so that they and visitors from afar can benefit.

Hertfordshire's only surviving windmill, Grade 2* in Cromer, dates back to 1681 and is one of the oldest in the UK: a windmill has stood here for over 800 years. Visitors travel many miles to see this windmill. In 1964, a local appeal saved this windmill, which Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust have since restored to its current glory. It is now open regularly to educate young people, and its setting in open agricultural fields is part of its story.

Historic England's publication The Setting of Heritage Assets Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition) refers to "change to built surroundings and spaces", "change to skyline, silhouette", "lighting effects and 'light spill'", "change to general character (e.g. urbanising or industrialising)", "changes to public access, use or amenity", all of which are potential impacts of the proposal.

The proposal would introduce incongruous geometric forms on a huge scale into the landscape, disconnecting the heritage assets from their settings and causing further harm by erecting new barriers through landscaping proposals, which will change and block longstanding views.

2. Damage to rights of way

Parish residents have chosen to live here because they love this countryside. Currently, people can walk, jog and cycle safely. Ramblers, cyclists and runners also come from other areas like Stevenage and Buntingford as a break from town life. This proposal would utterly destroy the public amenity provided by the three footpaths crossing and adjoining the land, industrialising and undermining its essentially rural character.

3. Safety concerns.

The long development phase of this proposed solar & BESS site will also impact road safety for residents and visitors. The roads are already challenged by the increase in commuter traffic cutting through between the A10 and the A1. During construction, the

local lanes would bear a heavy load. Since August 2024, the A507 has had a 7.5 ton weight restriction.

The construction route is through the village of Cottered. As well as the increase in noise and pollution and the huge negative effect on the Conservation area, the proposed timings of the deliveries greatly impact on the residents of Cottered with noise and vibration at unreasonable times of the day. The village has no street lighting increasing the safety risks to pedestrians. There will also be harm to the tourist businesses within the village and surrounding area with the huge increase in HGV traffic.

The development includes 23 acres set aside for a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and electrical substation metres from the residents of Luffenhall and Cumberlow Green and presents a serious safety risk. Large lithium-ion battery installations are known to carry the risk of thermal runaway, which can lead to fires or explosions that are extremely difficult to control and may release toxic fumes. The site could be vulnerable to groundwater pollution, and there are no clear plans for safely containing water used to fight fires. On top of that, drainage issues haven't been properly addressed, which could lead to flooding or contamination.

These are not abstract concerns — they have occurred in other locations, sometimes with devastating consequences. In a rural setting with limited emergency response capacity, the risks are amplified and must be taken seriously.

4. Prime agricultural land loss.

The proposed development area is on open land that has always been in arable production and never left fallow. The agricultural land classification survey instructed by Lightrock Power Ltd concluded nearly 40% of the land falls into the BMV category - grade 2 and grade 3a agricultural land classification and is described by Natural England as the 'best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land.

A strong farming tradition has existed in the Parish for centuries, and long term food security now requires that this be maintained. 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. The PCC supports government solar initiatives to place solar panels on brown-field sites, disused military bases and warehouses roofs where possible, as a means of limiting agricultural land loss.

5. Precedent for future development

This is the second of several proposed solar farms and BESS sites in the local area, and its approval would set a dangerous precedent. The Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Guidance (August 2023) highlights the importance of assessing the cumulative impact of multiple solar projects in the same area. The Westfield Energy Conservation park is part of a wider pattern of development that risks overwhelming the local environment, agricultural land, and heritage assets, leading to a sprawling industrial site that would exacerbate its negative landscape and community impact. For instance, a separate proposal for a 200 acre solar farm adjacent to this one has been submitted to East Hertfordshire Local Planning Authority for planning permission.

Please confirm receipt of this letter, and confirmation of the date that this application will be considered.

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Dr Julie Tyers.

Dr Julie Tyers
Secretary, Ardeley, St Lawrence PCC