

Field Cottage
Treacle Lane
Rushden
Herts SG9 0SL
30th September 2025

To: North Hertfordshire District Council Planning Department

Dear Sirs

Re: Application 25/01947/FP - Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and Solar Farm, Land South of A507 near Cumberlow Green, Clothall

My objection and concerns regarding this application is the detrimental impact on the local community, the countryside landscape, loss of habitat, noise and safety concerns, and I do believe it does conflict with planning policy.

My reasons for my objection:

Countryside Landscape and Visual Amenity changes

The proposed is for a 187.3 hectare (463 acres) solar farm. The application will provide extensive rows of solar panels, security fencing, over 850 battery storage units and enormous power transformers. This will permanently alter the rural character and create an industrial landscape. This area is currently an agricultural landscape valued for its intrinsic scenic beauty and tranquility, qualities which national policy seeks to protect.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), chapter 15 requires planners to recognise "the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside". The North Hertfordshire Local Plan policy NE2 states, 'Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that have to respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape character area and have regard to the guidelines identified for built development and landscape management and do not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the landscape character area in which the site is located and are designed and located to ensure the health and future retention of important landscape features.

Transforming nearly 1,000 acres of farmland (when combined with the adjacent "Beane Valley" proposal in East Herts and other speculative adjacent developments) into a solar power complex would fundamentally degrade the visual amenity of the area.

The proximity of the two proposed sites will have a cumulative effect on the landscape, and it's heritage such as the Grade 2* Cromer Windmill (Hertfordshire's only surviving historic windmill),

four local conservation areas with many listed buildings within close vicinity and the Old Roman Road which runs through the middle of the proposed development.

East Hertfordshire Landscape Officer has already objected to the sister proposal next door, stating the plans "are not landscape-led and give rise to significant adverse landscape and visual effects". This site, just across the road in North Hertfordshire features gently rolling terrain visible from public roads and footpaths. The introduction of reflective panels and industrial equipment would be most incongruous in rural views. Even if landscaping (e.g. hedgerow planting) is proposed it will be insufficient to screen this site especially given the elevated and sloping nature of the terrain which is a characteristic of this area. In short, the proposal would cause significant harm to landscape character and visual amenity that cannot be adequately reduced by planting.

This is effectively a generational loss of landscape. The long-term blighting of the views and character of the countryside for several decades cannot be justified by claiming the development is temporary. It would be the defining land use here for the majority of many residents' lifetimes.

Loss of Agricultural Land and Food Security

The development would occupy productive agricultural fields, including 38% (according to the developers survey) best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land in grades 2 and 3a. All of the grade 2 and 3a land will be developed on.

Government policy is clear that areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality". At nearly 200 hectares, this is a large area to be removed from food production. High-grade farmland and beautiful countryside as this application site are not suited to industrial scale solar plants.

Removing these fields from agricultural use for decades undermines local and national food security. Taking such land out of food production "is not a sustainable solution", and that solar panels ought to be sited on brownfield land or rooftops instead wherever possible. At a time when both food security and renewable energy are national priorities, this proposal chooses to sacrifice one for the other, rather than seeking a balanced approach using poorer land

Biodiversity and Habitat Impacts

The proposed site encompasses a large area of countryside that currently supports wildlife. The landscape includes hedgerows, field margins, and fallow areas that provide habitat for various species. Notably a wild deer herd in and there are likely many small mammals, birds, and insects some of which are protected and priority species including bats, badgers, skylarks, yellow wagtails, and red kites. The construction and operation of the solar farm could significantly disrupt these habitats, through vegetation clearance, soil disturbance, and the installation of security fencing that could impede animal movement. The scale of the development raises the risk of fragmenting habitat connectivity across the landscape.

Open arable fields are often important for ground-nesting farmland birds such as skylarks, lapwings, and meadow pipits. The introduction of solar panels across most of the fields will remove

the open space these ground-nesters require. Mitigation fields in this application are provided however these are described as poor-condition grassland, which may not meet ecological requirements without intensive management.

The current proposal lacks these commitments, raising concerns about long-term effectiveness. The Ecological Impact Assessment acknowledges the loss of nesting habitat due to fencing and solar panel installation. Without robust mitigation, this could result in a net loss of Skylark breeding territories, contrary to Biodiversity Net Gain principles. There should be an independent review of ecological, arboricultural, and noise mitigation strategies to ensure that they are robust.

The Environment Act 2021 mandates 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for new developments. While the application may include a biodiversity metric calculation showing a net gain, it may well fail to achieve the promised ecological value through the lack of effective enhancement of watercourses or landscape features. Some species cannot be mitigated for example, lighting and noise from the BESS compound could disturb nocturnal wildlife (bats, owls), and fencing will exclude larger mammals such as deer. There is also cumulative impact of two huge solar projects back-to-back will amplify habitat loss and pressure on wildlife corridors across a broad area (nearly a known combined 1,000 acres that is under threat).

This proposal poses significant risks to local biodiversity. It would displace protected and priority species and irreversibly alter the ecological character of these fields. This conflicts with Local Plan Policy NE4, which requires development to "appropriately protect, enhance and manage biodiversity" and deliver net gains for nature. This application would undermine the government's goal of halting nature's decline.

Noise Pollution and Loss of Tranquility

The inclusion of a large Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) compound and numerous inverters/transformers means this development will generate significant noise. This potential noise output is utterly at odds with the current quiet rural soundscape of the area (as confirmed by the applicants background noise survey). Importantly, these systems can operate day and night - cooling equipment may run continuously during warm weather or periods of battery activity, including nighttime hours when background noise in this countryside is very low. There are nearby residential properties (e.g. at Cumberlow Green itself and in Clothall/Rushden villages) which could be affected, especially during quiet nights. The continuous hum and fan drone from the BESS, transformers, inverters and associated equipment will degrade local amenity. Even if it meets minimum regulatory limits, it will destroy the tranquility of the countryside that residents currently enjoy. This loss of quiet is a material planning concern and the NPPF states that 'decisions should mitigate and reduce potential adverse impacts of noise on health and quality of life'.

In addition to operational noise, the construction phase will bring heavy machinery and increased HGV traffic on local roads (including the A507 and smaller lanes) for many months. This will create noise, dust and general disturbance for the community. Given the scale of the proposed development, there will be hundreds of HGV movements bringing in panels, batteries, transformers and site materials (as confirmed by the Road Access Statement). The rural road network is not suited to this volume, and the A507 itself - while a main road - would see slow-moving construction vehicles entering/exiting, potentially causing noise and safety issues for villages along its route (this after a recent weight reduction has been imposed on the A507).

There is no firm commitment to noise limits meaning residents would have little protection if noise exceeds predictions. Without such safeguards, there is risk of excessive noise levels, particularly at night. There are clearly unresolvable noise and disturbance impacts on residents and the countryside.

. Health and Safety Risks of Battery Storage (Fire and Pollution)

The Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) component presents a serious health and safety concern. Lithium-ion battery installations, especially of this scale, carry a known risk of thermal runaway leading to fires or explosions. Such fires are difficult to control and can burn intensely, releasing toxic fumes. Local residents are understandably fearful about the prospect of a large battery compound near their homes and villages given this is unregulated and new technology with a proven risk of fire, explosion and toxicity."

How will a battery fire be extinguished or contained? What volume of water would be needed, where would contaminated fire-water runoff go and what about the risk of contaminated water vapour in the fire fumes? This is especially important considering the proximity of the River Beane, the underground chalk aquifers that are the source of this area's water and large local conurbations (supplied by daily water extraction by local water companies) and the proximity of Cumberlow Green, Cottered, Rushden and other villages that lie North East and East of the proposed site and would be susceptible to fumes being spread on predominantly westerly or south westerly winds.

The proposed site is in a rural area where many properties may rely on wells or groundwater, and nearby streams feed local ecosystems. A battery fire can produce highly contaminated water runoff (from firefighters' efforts and from chemicals released). The site sits on the banks of the River Beane Valley and is approximately 10m higher than the river itself, just to the south of the site.

Ground water vulnerability, firewater containment risk, surface water drainage concerns and unconfirmed battery chemistry means that the BESS element introduces an unacceptable risk of fire and pollution that could endanger local residents, first responders, and the environment.

Impact on Local Community and Amenity

This application will have a profound negative impact on the local community's well-being and amenity. This part of North Hertfordshire for its peace, open views, and access to nature. The proposed development would severely diminish those qualities - replacing green fields with metal and machinery. Public rights of way across or adjacent to the site would be transformed from pleasant footpaths through open countryside to paths flanked by security fences and endless rows of panels, making them an uncomfortable and scary places to walk. The enjoyment of our local area for recreation, dog walking, and scenic appreciation would be greatly reduced. The character of Rushden/Clothall and other nearby hamlets is quiet and rural. Introducing what is essentially an industrial facility will erode the rural amenity that residents currently have, and that they expected to continue under the protections of countryside planning policies.

This objection is not happening in isolation. There is widespread community opposition to the solar farm proposals in this area. Over 1,000 objections were lodged against the adjacent Beane Valley scheme in East Herts, an astonishing number that shows how strongly the community feels. Parish councils of multiple villages (Clothall, Rushden, Weston, Sander Wallington, etc.) have come

together in concern. If both East Herts and North Herts applications were approved, this community would find itself virtually surrounded by solar farms - an enormous cumulative burden in terms of landscape, traffic, and loss of amenity. The Planning Practice Guidance on renewables specifically advises councils to consider cumulative landscape and visual impacts. Here the combined effect would be to transform our entire locality into an energy generation zone, a prospect the community finds unacceptable. Renewable energy schemes must be sensitively located and fair to communities, not just parachuted into attractive landscapes because the land is available

Conclusion

The proposed solar farm and BESS clearly conflicts with multiple development plan policies and national guidance. There is no doubt that renewable energy is a public good and that action on climate change is imperative. But this application the harms are specific and acute: a treasured local landscape lost, biodiversity disturbed, residents subjected to risk and noise. This is simply not the right location for this application to be approved for all the above reasons

Yours Sincerely

James Fairley

