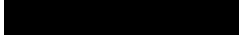


WYMONDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

16 Cedar Avenue, Ickleford, SG5 3XU


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By Email to:

Ben Glover
Planning Control
North Herts District Council

12 June 2025

Dear Mr Glover

PLANNING APPLICATION REF: 24/02455/FP - PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF A SOLAR ARRAY AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE AT SPERBERRY HILL ON LAND TO THE SOUTH OF WYMONDLEY SUBSTATION - UPDATED GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT

As the District Council is aware, Wymondley Parish Council is opposed to the Sperberry Hill Solar farm as we fear our parish will be surrounded by Solar and the green belt distinction between our towns lost.

We have seen the latest letter from the applicant of the 27 March, together with their technical note 01, and wish to offer our views on their grey belt arguments.

The 12-page technical paper is very clear on one thing; the developer is very concerned that relying on “very special circumstances” is not going to provide the result that they want. After two refusals on this important green belt land they are making clear their only hope is to try to spin the grey belt argument to achieve their consent.

Our contention is that this land in no way fulfils the intention of the government’s grey belt designation. We also fundamentally disagree that the green belt principles do not apply.

The applicant is making the argument that if this was deemed grey belt land then purpose (c) and (e) of the green belt are excluded and, in their opinion, purposes a b and d are not applicable. Again, we fundamentally disagree with this conclusion.

Finally, we will reference glaring omissions in the paper, most particularly making no reference to the safeguarded land to Stevenage West and the additional importance given to the green belt beyond.

The most important role for the green belt still remains relevant here to stop the cohesion of towns. For North Herts its very characteristics are traditional market towns and garden city interspersed with villages, hamlets and farmland.

Our grave concern is that North Herts will end up as one huge conurbation with Stevenage Hitchin and Letchworth swallowing the villages and hamlets, resulting in the very character of the district being destroyed.

We contest purpose (b) of the green belt “to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;” remains very relevant for this land.

It is necessary to review the development and planning consents of recent years to understand the lands importance:

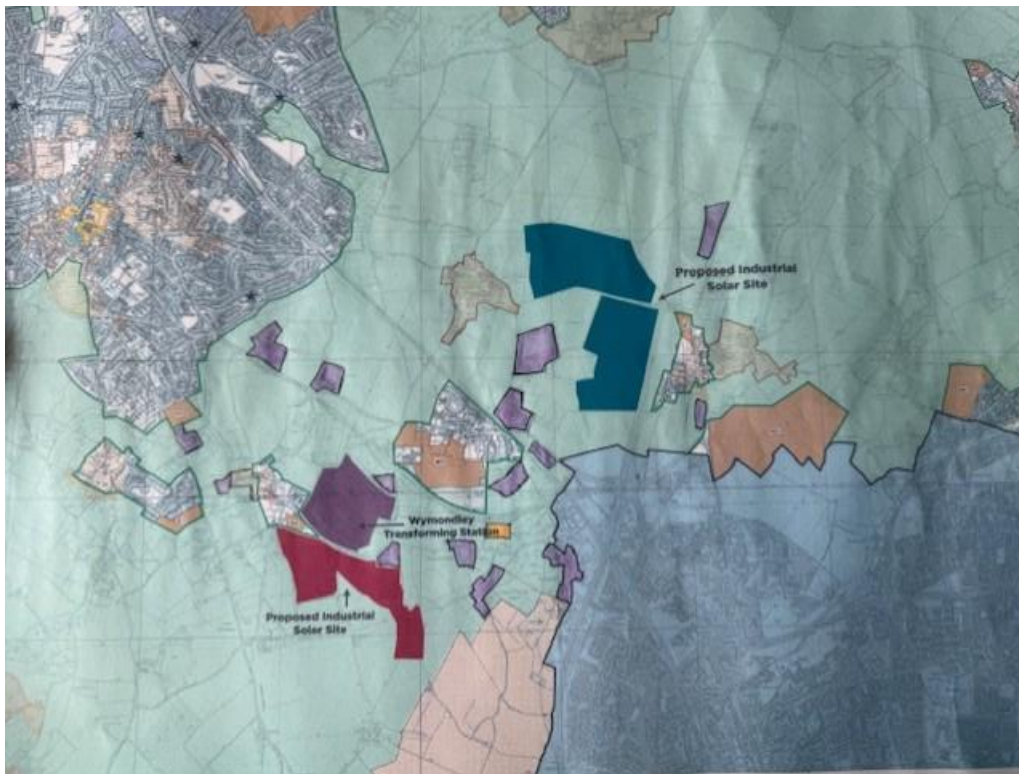
- From the Hitchin direction the building on Pound farm, on site now, effectively removes separation of St Ippolyts from Hitchin.

From Stevenage there are three prongs of development diminishing the effective separation from the villages and hamlets:

- From the northern flank Forster Park directly abuts the development that North Herts has consented in principle wrapping around Graveley
- Graveley will abut the 200-acre Great Wymondley Solar Array removing for the next 40 years any separation of Stevenage from Graveley, Little and Great Wymondley from the north east.
- Little Wymondley has had the green belt rolled back to allow the construction of 300 homes which are at outline consent stage which together with the substation and oil depot brings continuous development to the northern edge of Redcoats Green.
- From the south west Stevenage has already breached the A1M with the development of Franklin’s Gate which now creates continuous development to the Hamlet of Todd’s Green.
- Add the proposed BESS scheme between Todd’s Green and Redcoats Green another separation falls.
- Finally, the proposed development runs from Redcoats to Lower Titmore Green which itself will then adjoin Stevenage when the safeguarded land is developed to the west of Stevenage.

The proposed Sperberry Solar Array to Redcoats south and east, to the south of St Ippolyts and to the west of Lower Titmore Green would then create continuous development from Hitchin to Stevenage. This emphasises the great importance that this high-quality agricultural land with open views across the valley has to maintain North Herts very character and stop the cohesion of the towns.

This is shown very clearly graphically on the map below.



The Solar arrays are marked in dark green and red with the proposed BESS scheme in orange. The Stevenage west safeguarded land is marked in cross hatched red. The plan also highlights the hamlets and other development in the area that is washed over by the green belt but is all part of the built environment that would be part of the merging of the towns.

From the above, it is we trust clear that this land is by no means grey belt with purpose (b) most clearly applying. If indeed it is conceded that this land is grey belt the same would apply to all the other remaining vestiges of the green belt in the vicinity.

This application is about the preservation of North Herts fundamental character that the NHDC stands by and the local plan supports in section 2.2, for example:

“North Hertfordshire is characterised by a number of small to medium sized towns with a range of facilities and smaller settlements located within open countryside”

It makes a nonsense of the applicant’s contention that only some 2% of green belt land is being lost. It is not a percentage game but rather the strategic location of the land that is fundamentally important as has been seen on the map above.

We would now consider the issues around safeguarded land and the green belt. The green belt to the west if the A1M has been rolled back and land in Stevenage and North Herts been safeguarded for future development beyond the current plan period.

There is potential for at least some 5000 homes.

This is not some distant idea, the Stevenage current plan period is to 2031 and North Herts 2031, with both subject to interim review.

This large scale developments could potentially take place within the next decade.

One of the core aspects of safeguarded land is the importance of the green belt that wraps around it.

The NPPF definition of safeguarded land is:

“Safeguarded land is **land between the existing urban area and the inner boundary of the Green Belt** that may be required to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the period of the Local Plan.”

It is explicit in the above that the Green Belt must remain intact to afford the protection of the countryside beyond the safeguarded land. Converting this land to grey belt which would be the effect of accepting this developer’s view, would make a nonsense of the whole safeguarded land principle at Stevenage West.

No mention is made of this in the applicant technical paper with good reason, as it blows away the myth that this land can be considered Grey Belt.

So, to summarise, this land is critical green belt for the reasons of purpose (b) of sec 155 of the NPPF.

We trust that NHDC will dismiss this audacious desperate attempt by the developer to jump on the Grey Belt bandwagon and rightly consider this application on its merits of “very special circumstances” in the Green Belt and to which all our previous arguments apply.

Yours Sincerely

Sandra Weir

Sandra Weir
Clerk to Wymondley Parish Council