

WESTON PARISH COUNCIL

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23rd October 2025

North Hertfordshire District Council
Planning Control
Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth
SG6 3JF

Dear Sir or Madam,

Application 25/01947/FP: Battery Energy Storage System, ground-mounted solar farm, associated infrastructure, access and landscaping – Land South of A507 near Cumberlow Green, Clothall Road, Clothall

Weston Parish Council writes to **strongly object** to the proposed development.

While the Parish Council is wholly supportive of renewable energy in principle, it is unanimous in its objection to the use of this particular site, for the following reasons:

1. Green Belt / Rural Policy Conflict

- The North Herts Local Plan (SP1 c.iv) specifically seeks to protect “important landscapes, heritage assets and green infrastructure (including the water environment).” The proposed installation is at odds with each element of that policy.
- A significant portion of the site lies within the Green Belt and the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt, both of which are subject to strict controls on development. Policy SP5(c) states that the Council will “only permit development proposals in the Green Belt where they would not result in inappropriate development, or where very special circumstances have been demonstrated.” Replacing nearly 500 acres of predominantly Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land with a power station and battery storage facility in open, undulating countryside is clearly *inappropriate*. Given that this is one of approximately 40 similar solar applications in Hertfordshire, it is difficult to argue that “very special circumstances” exist in this case.
- Permitting this scheme would set a damaging precedent for further industrialisation of open countryside in the region.

2. Landscape and Visual Impact

- According to Ordnance Survey data, the site elevation ranges from approximately 95m to 135m, forming a valley along Public Right of Way (PROW) 19. This topography means the installation would be visible from virtually all surrounding viewpoints, severely damaging the openness and rural character of the landscape, including views from public footpaths.
- Much of the land is classified as Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, and its loss would contravene national policy protecting high-quality farmland.
- The application includes a diagram showing that much of the substation equipment would reach 13–14 metres in height. Such structures cannot be screened effectively with planting or landscaping and would form a permanent visual intrusion.

Councillors: Alistair Schofield (Chairman), John Cherry (Vice-Chairman), Stewart Clifford, Judith Evans, Matthew Hale, Jacky Jones, Steve Ludbrook, Tim Moody, James Logan

Clerk: Kelly Buckle

- The application is silent on the proposed method of grid connection. Should this require the erection of pylons, it would further harm the landscape.
- The site is overlooked by the Grade II* listed Cromer Windmill, whose historic and visual relationship with open farmland would be fundamentally undermined by this industrial development.

3. Environmental Risk / Health & Safety

- The Parish Council considers that any development of this scale for battery storage should fall under the *Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 2015 (COMAH)*, due to the instability and inherent dangers associated with lithium-ion batteries. This should be addressed at the planning stage to allow for full community consultation.
- The *Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990* and *Regulations 2015* define what constitutes a “hazardous substance.” While there is debate about whether BESS installations meet this definition, the planning authority must still assess the risks of major accidents, including fire, leakage, and contamination.

The 2024 University of Oxford report by Edwards and Dobson, *Remarks on the Safety of Lithium-Ion Batteries for Large-Scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) in the UK*, states:

“Industrial-scale Lithium-ion Battery Electrical Storage Systems (BESS) facilities... must be correctly categorised as potentially ‘Hazardous’, having the potential to create highly dangerous events and produce hazardous substances that pose a real threat of injury or danger to life... and significant damage to the natural environment.”

- The applicant proposes two 223,000-litre water storage tanks for fire suppression. For context, the 2020 Liverpool BESS fire – affecting only one storage container – took 59 hours to control and required over 2 million litres of water. This proposal includes around 200 containers, yet provides no credible explanation of how sufficient water would be supplied and captured in the event of a fire.
- The site lies within the catchment area of the **River Beane**, a globally rare chalk stream and a protected watercourse under the *Water Resources Act 1991*. It is an offence to cause or permit pollutants to enter such waters. Given the sensitive hydrological context, the risks from leakage, contaminated firewater runoff, or other pollution incidents make this site highly unsuitable without significant mitigation. The River Beane also supplies drinking water downstream, so potential contamination poses a serious risk to human health.
- The application fails to identify any exclusion zones or emergency planning measures in the event of an incident. The local population deserves clarity regarding potential consequences. Comparable incidents include:
 - Moss Landing (Jan 2025): 6 km evacuation zone
 - Escondido, USA (Sept 2024): 0.5 mile evacuation; 1.5 mile shelter-in-place order
 - Otay Mesa (May 2024): 1 mile evacuation; 1.5 mile shelter-in-place; fire took 17 days to control.
- The proposed security fencing would fragment habitats. As the site borders the A507, displaced deer are likely to be forced onto the highway, creating serious risks for motorists. If diverted elsewhere, concentrated deer movement across neighbouring farmland would increase crop damage.

4. Public Rights of Way & Community Amenity

- Public Rights of Way crossing or adjoining the site would be reduced to narrow corridors, enclosed by fencing and infrastructure, degrading their amenity and recreational value.

- Local horse-riders have expressed concerns about glint and glare from the solar panels, which cannot be effectively screened due to the undulating terrain. Local homeowners and businesses overlooking the site have raised similar concerns.
- The background noise levels associated with the BESS are unclear and must be properly assessed before any approval is considered.

Weston Parish Council also supports the representations submitted by neighbouring parishes and the many residents who have voiced their concerns. We are the community that will live with the long-term consequences of this decision, and we therefore **respectfully urge North Herts Council to refuse this application in its entirety.**

Yours faithfully,

Kelly Buckle

Clerk and RFO

Weston Parish Council

cc Cllr Steve Jarvis, Leader of the Council, Hertfordshire County Council
Chris Hinchcliffe MP