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North Hertfordshire District Council
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Email: planning.control@north-herts.gov.uk

Dear Planning Officer

Objection to 24/02455/FP - Proposed Solar Farm Measuring 35.5 Hectares with Associated Battery Storage and Ancillary Infrastructure

I am writing to strongly oppose this re-submitted planning application, previously referenced as 22/00709/FP, which was rejected by NHDC approximately one year ago. This proposal remains inappropriate for Green Belt and lacks justification under planning policies. Furthermore, it would also harm the village's rural character and visual appeal, and it conflicts with local landscape policies. As detailed in my previous objections, deploying this solar installation on productive farmland presents serious risks to both our environment and community, and these risks significantly outweigh any potential benefits.

Contravention of National Policy Concerning Solar Farms

The national policy indicates that solar farms should blend in naturally with their environment. This proposal fails to achieve that objective and will instead have a substantial negative visual impact on the local area.

- Policy SP11 - Natural resources and sustainability - *“Support proposals for renewable and low carbon energy development in appropriate locations”.*
- Policy NE12 - Renewable and low carbon energy development *“Proposals for decentralised energy schemes associated with development of the strategic sites allocated in the Plan will be encouraged subject to an assessment of the impacts.”*

Also, the proposed solar development is not on an allocated strategic site.

Reduced Net Environmental Benefit of Solar Panel Manufacture and Disposal

A crucial aspect to consider must be the origin and lifecycle of solar panels. Most solar panels are manufactured abroad, often in China, where production frequently depends on coal-fired energy. This practice reduces the net environmental benefits of solar energy.

Solar panels also have a poor recycling record as they contain materials that are difficult to dispose of responsibly. This includes storage materials like electromagnetic and toxic lithium batteries, which pose environmental hazards. Current disposal and recycling methods are underdeveloped and the likelihood that these panels will end up in landfills or remain on-site is high.

Lithium Storage - a Toxic Health Hazard

A significant risk associated with solar installations is the potential for fire or explosion. Solar panels and lithium-ion battery storage systems pose serious fire hazards, especially during high temperatures or system faults. Such incidents have been reported worldwide - fires in solar arrays can be challenging to contain and control, endangering local farmland, crops, wildlife habitats, neighbouring properties and residents. These critical safety issues must be considered.

Unrelenting Noise Pollution Disturbing Nearby Residents

The inverters and cooling systems used in solar fields emit a constant hum or buzz, disturbing nearby residents and wildlife in this otherwise quiet rural area. Over time, this background noise will erode the tranquillity that nearby residents once enjoyed in their homes, impacting their mental well-being. This noise pollution will also diminish this area's natural rural appeal for the local community and visitors alike.

Food Security and Agricultural Viability Supports Global Sustainability

The proposed development is sited on a significant parcel of greenbelt land, classed as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. This location is inappropriate for large solar farms. Our reliance on local food production must be safeguarded, particularly as we increasingly recognise the importance of self-sufficiency in times of global disruption. Diverting farmland from food production reduces our capacity for domestic food security and undermines this vital priority.

Food self-sufficiency reduces overseas deforestation to grow food and the carbon footprint associated with importing food via air or shipping transportation - it supports global sustainability.

Major Traffic Disruption on Rural Lanes

Sperberry Hill and the surrounding lanes are narrow, rural roads with many pinch points that cannot accommodate two-way traffic. Cars frequently need to stop and give way, and larger

vehicles often bring the lane to a complete standstill. Key junctions, such as the B656 / Sperberry Hill junction, are highly constrained for even the smallest of vehicles.

The construction of a solar farm of this size and scale will require transporting tons of materials to the site using articulated lorries. The associated workforce will also bring a variety of construction vehicles. This will inevitably lead to enormous traffic congestion and air pollution along these small country lanes, substantially disrupting the entire local community. Furthermore, it will also damage local lanes and roads, and increase accident risk.

Disruption of Local Residents and Their Right to Enjoy Their Own Homes

Ongoing construction activities will significantly disturb and disrupt the daily lives of many residents living near this development.

Negative Environmental and Ecological Impact

The environmental implications of this proposal are considerable. Agricultural land supports biodiversity, from essential pollinators to native plants and animals, all of which are vital to maintaining the health of our soil and ecosystems. Solar installations disrupt these delicate habitats, reducing biodiversity and weakening soil quality, water retention and ecosystem resilience.

Solar installations can alter sun exposure, moisture levels and surface temperatures, leading to consequences for local plants, animals and an area's microbiome.ⁱ This proposal will also cause the loss of hunting grounds for a significant population of Red Kites, which are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Industrialisation of the Rural Landscape, Damage to Heritage Character and Loss of Visual Amenity

The UK's rural landscapes are highly valued for their beauty and the mental health, recreational and tourism benefits they provide to the public. This backdrop also supports our local businesses, such as country hotels and pubs, by attracting people to the area. Local policy NE5 (development in the countryside) says that developments must not have *an adverse effect on the appearance or character of the landscape*.

The size and scale of this proposed solar farm make it a major industrial development. Stock fencing and CCTV are not in keeping with the character of St Ippolyts or its open surroundings. Installing acres of solar panels, battery storage containers and other necessary equipment on-site will severely impact the visual amenity of this Green Belt landscape, obstructing views of open countryside. The proposed solar farm will transform these acres into something resembling a prison enclosure. This development will overwhelm the area and cause significant and irreversible harm to the countryside, heritage assets, Green Belt and agriculture of St Ippolyts and surrounding villages.

Risk of Farmland Not Being Reinstated

Reinstatement of this land will be costly and an enormous risk should this company fail. Should this ill-considered proposal be approved, the costs to remove all the equipment must be guaranteed in advance to ensure that NHDC can oversee the land's reinstatement should the company go into liquidation or lack the finances after the planning consent expires. Without such measures, enforcing the removal of the equipment will be virtually impossible.

To conclude, I trust the council will carefully consider the points I outline above and the objections made by others in the community. I urge the council to once again reject this application as wholly and entirely inappropriate and instead seek a more suitable location to help support our sustainable energy needs.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Else

ⁱ <https://sfamjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1751-7915.13620>