

I am submitting a formal objection to Planning Application Ref: 24/02455/FP for the proposed solar farm on agricultural land south of Wymondley Substation and Sperberry Hill in St Ippolyts, Hertfordshire. This objection is based on concerns regarding agricultural preservation, Green Belt protection, environmental impacts, and the absence of “Very Special Circumstances” necessary for Green Belt development under planning law.

1. Protection of Agricultural Land and Food Security

The proposed site occupies Grade 2 and Grade 3a agricultural land, categorised as “Best and Most Versatile” (BMV) farmland by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 174 of the NPPF specifies that development should favour lower-quality land whenever possible. The site currently produces approximately 200 tons of wheat annually, supporting both local and national food security. Converting this productive farmland to an industrial solar site directly contradicts Paragraph 170 of the NPPF, which emphasises conserving BMV land for food production unless there are compelling justifications. This application fails to provide a valid case for prioritising BMV land over readily available, lower-grade options.

2. Inappropriateness of Development in the Green Belt

The site lies within the Green Belt, protected by policies aimed at preventing urban sprawl and preserving rural landscapes. According to Paragraph 147 of the NPPF, Green Belt development is limited and permitted only under “Very Special Circumstances” when benefits clearly outweigh potential harm. This application, primarily profit-driven, lacks the environmental and community benefits required to justify industrial encroachment on protected land. Approval would set a dangerous precedent, likely encouraging further industrialisation and diminishing the countryside’s open character.

3. Impact on Local Wildlife and Ecology

The development site is home to protected species, including barn owls, bats, and raptors, protected under the UK Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The application lacks sufficient ecological measures to minimise impacts on these populations. Additionally, the development could harm local bee populations, vital to local ecosystems. Paragraph 180 of the NPPF mandates avoiding significant harm to biodiversity, with mitigation as a last resort. This application fails to meet these protections.

4. Lack of Demonstrated Environmental or Community Benefit

The solar farm offers minimal environmental or community benefit, especially considering the loss of high-quality farmland, Green Belt encroachment, and ecological impact. The proposal lacks provisions to benefit the community meaningfully, such as lowering energy bills or improving infrastructure, as most profits will go to private investors, while only one local job is created. Planning Practice Guidance emphasises “net environmental gain,” yet proposed gains are minimal compared to agricultural, ecological, and community losses.

5. Construction Disruption and Long-Term Impact

Constructing the solar farm would require moving over 6,000 tons of materials, causing significant noise, air pollution, and traffic that would impact residents and wildlife for an

extended period. Additionally, we have documented existing flooding issues (photos from 27th September 2024), which could worsen due to altered water runoff and land surface permeability. Water quickly runs off solar panels in a concentrated manner rather than absorbing into the soil, leading to increased runoff during heavy rains. Combined with reduced vegetation, soil compaction, and the construction of access roads, this could lead to pooling or unexpected flooding in previously unaffected areas. We are particularly concerned about runoff affecting nearby areas, such as the Vineyard. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF mandates shielding communities from adverse impacts, yet this application inadequately addresses these risks.



6. Precedent and Future Expansion Concerns

Approving this development could lead to further solar farm applications in the area due to the established grid connection, which would lower expansion costs. This risks a cumulative impact that erodes the Green Belt's openness, as advised against in Paragraph 143 of the NPPF. Allowing this project may trigger a chain reaction of industrial encroachment into rural landscapes, undermining Green Belt protections and straining local resources.

In summary, the proposed solar farm misuses valuable agricultural land, fails to demonstrate “Very Special Circumstances” for Green Belt development, poses significant environmental impacts, and lacks adequate community benefit. This project contradicts the NPPF’s core principles of sustainable development and fails to balance energy goals with agricultural, ecological, and community preservation. Therefore, I respectfully urge the council to reject Planning Application Ref: 24/02455/FP.

Thank you for considering this objection.