

Formal Objection to Planning Application Ref: 24/02455/FP

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 multiple 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. Preservation 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 under the NPPF. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF prioritises conserving such land for food production. This site currently produces approximately 200 tons of wheat annually, supporting both local and national food security. The application provides no compelling justification for sacrificing productive BMV land over readily available lower-grade options, directly contradicting Paragraph 170 of the NPPF.

2. Green Belt Protection

The site is located within the Green Belt, protected by policies to prevent urban sprawl and preserve rural landscapes. Paragraph 147 of the NPPF states that Green Belt development is only permitted under “Very Special Circumstances” when benefits clearly outweigh potential harm. This profit-driven application offers minimal community benefit and lacks the justification required for industrial encroachment. Approval would set a harmful precedent, risking further erosion of 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 adequate ecological measures to mitigate harm to these populations. Additionally, it may negatively impact local bee populations vital to ecosystem health. Paragraph 180 of the NPPF mandates avoiding significant harm to biodiversity, with mitigation as a last resort. This proposal fails to meet these requirements.

4. Lack of Environmental or Community Benefit

The proposal fails to provide meaningful environmental or community benefits to offset its impacts. The loss of high-quality farmland, Green Belt encroachment, and ecological damage far outweigh minimal gains. There are no provisions to benefit the community, such as reduced energy bills or improved infrastructure. Most profits will go to private investors, while only one local job will be created. Planning Practice Guidance requires “net environmental gain,” which this project does not achieve.

5. Construction Disruption and Flooding Risks

The construction phase will require moving over 6,000 tons of materials, causing significant noise, air pollution, and traffic disruptions. Existing flooding issues (evidenced by photos from 27th September 2024) could worsen due to altered water runoff patterns caused by the solar panels and compacted land. Concentrated water flow from panels, reduced vegetation, and soil compaction increase the risk of unexpected flooding in previously unaffected areas,

particularly impacting the vineyard. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF mandates shielding communities from adverse impacts, yet this application inadequately addresses these risks.

6. Precedent and Cumulative Impact

The approval of this project could lead to further solar farm applications in the area, given the established grid connection. This risks a cumulative industrialisation of the Green Belt, as already evidenced by the approval of the Great Wymondley and Bygrave solar farms. Paragraph 143 of the NPPF advises against such cumulative impacts, which threaten to undermine the Green Belt's openness and rural character.

7. Recent Unanimous Rejection

It is critical to highlight that a similar application for this site was unanimously rejected by the council only 12 months ago. This proposal offers no meaningful changes or additional benefits compared to the previously rejected plan. Reconsidering an unchanged application undermines the integrity of prior decisions and the planning process.

8. Additional Concerns from Detailed Analysis

- **Traffic Management:** Narrow rural roads like Blakemore End Road and Little Almshoe Lane are unsuitable for construction traffic, risking congestion, damage, and safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists.
- **Flooding Risks:** Increased surface runoff due to solar panels and compacted soil may exacerbate existing flooding issues, particularly affecting adjacent agricultural land and the vineyard.
- **Inadequate Community Engagement:** The lack of direct notification to residents and limited consultation undermines transparency.
- **Disruption to Rural Character:** The industrialisation of a scenic rural area permanently alters its character, contradicting Green Belt principles.
- **Alternative Sites Not Considered:** The application fails to justify why less sensitive sites outside the Green Belt were not prioritised, or brownfield sites within a radius of 2 miles from the sub station.
- **Insufficient Mitigation Measures:** Proposed mitigation for biodiversity and drainage issues is inadequate, risking long-term environmental harm.

Conclusion

The proposed solar farm represents an inappropriate use of valuable agricultural land, fails to demonstrate "Very Special Circumstances" for Green Belt development, poses significant ecological risks, and offers negligible community benefits. Combined with the cumulative impact of existing solar farms and the recent unanimous rejection of a similar application, this proposal contradicts the NPPF's core principles of sustainable development, ecological preservation, and community protection.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the council to reject Planning Application Ref: 24/02455/FP.

Thank you for considering this objection.

