

Comment for planning application 22/01682/F

Application Number	22/01682/F
Location	Land North Of Manor Farm Noke
Proposal	Development of a ground mounted solar farm incorporating the installation of solar PV panels, associated infrastructure and access, as well as landscape planting and designated ecological enhancement areas.
Case Officer	James Kirkham
Organisation Name	Dom Holdsworth
Address	The Lodge, Beckley, Oxfordshire, OX3 9UY
Type of Comment	Objection
Type	neighbour
Comments	<p>This application is unsound on the following grounds:</p> <p>(1) DESIGNATED AREAS - GREEN BELT The proposed solar farm falls entirely within the Oxford Green Belt and as such would breach several different paragraphs within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Bearing in mind that the Sandy Acre plot contained a single dwelling place until 2020, and that the current proposal effectively seeks to extend this to three dwelling places: (a) Para 137 of the NPPF states that "the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence." The current proposal is in breach of both of these points ('openness' and 'permanence'). (b) Para 145 of the NPPF states "Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity". Given the proposed solar farm would have a devastating impact on 'visual amenity', 'access', and on biodiversity, Cherwell District Council must reject the application. (c) Para 147 of the NPPF states that "Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved". Enough said. (d) Para 151 of the NPPF states that "When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development." The paragraph states that such projects may be acceptable if they can demonstrate 'very special circumstances'. But project does not. Since the area in question offers no particular benefits above non-green-belt land (i.e. it is no sunnier, nor windier than any other land in the surrounding area), the requirement for special circumstances has not been met and the developers should seek a non-green-belt location.</p> <p>(2) NATURE CONSERVATION (ECOLOGY AND TREES) The proposed 232-acre site removes a large amount of natural habitat from one of Oxfordshire's most fragile ecosystems (Otmoor and the surrounding environs). While there would be some attempt at ecological "enhancement" at the fringes of the site, this really amounts to just modest mitigation, not enhancement. The simple fact remains that pasture covered by solar panels has been ecologically denuded, not enhanced.</p> <p>(3) OTMOOR CONSERVATION TARGET AREA (CTA) The eastern end of the proposed site falls within the Otmoor CTA. Wild Oxfordshire defines a CTA as providing "a focus for coordinated delivery of biodiversity work, agri-environment schemes and biodiversity enhancements through the planning system". The current proposal would irreparably damage the CTA.</p> <p>(4) TRAFFIC This site would be accessed by small, fragile local roads, that are prone to flooding and which currently carry only modest amounts of traffic. This site would place an unacceptable burden on these roads both in the short term (construction traffic) and the long-term (maintenance traffic).</p> <p>(5) CHARACTER OF THE AREA Otmoor and the surrounding area provide one off the largest undeveloped, uninhabited spaces in Oxfordshire.* To wander in this area, as I and my family often do, provides a rare</p>

and almost unique opportunity to lose oneself in Nature and to escape the press of development that is almost everywhere else in evidence.

One cannot deny the need for development (residential, industrial), nor the benefits that accrue. The argument here is simply that such development should take place on already denuded land, or in areas adjacent to developed land.

By contrast this proposal is located right in the middle of one of the finest open spaces in Oxfordshire, or indeed anywhere in Southern England. To permit it to proceed would be an act of almost absurd self-harm. That such a proposal would even come to the table is unimaginable in most parts of the country. I urge Cherwell District Council to show some pride in the landscape that has been entrusted to them and to reject this proposal forthwith.

*(I refer here to the area bounded by the villages of Islip, Noke, Oddington, Charlton, Fencott, Murcott, Forest Hill, Stanton-St-John and Beckley).

(6) IMPACT ON AMENITY

The proposed site sits directly on top of the north-south footpath from Noke to Oddington and directly adjacent to the much-used bridleway that leads from the heart of Otmoor to Oddington. These paths, which I and my family walk on frequently, are a pleasure to use. Apart from their basic amenity (getting one from A to B), they provide a sense of escape, of freedom, a proximity to nature, and an undeniable 'visual amenity' (to borrow the NPPF's phrase). Were the proposed solar farm to be constructed, one's desire (or even ability) to use these paths would be greatly reduced. Such a loss of amenity goes directly counter to Paragraph 145 of the NPPF, requiring local planning authorities "positively to enhance the beneficial use" of Green Belt land, to "[look] for opportunities to provide access", and to "enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity." On that basis, this Proposal must be rejected.

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Attachments