

Planning Application - 22/01682/F

Noke

Proposed Solar Farm Development

I have scoured the documents and impact assessment associated with this application, and have attended the developers presentation at Noke Parish Church 7th July 2022.

Despite the national need for alternative energy solutions and my general support for 'green' energy' I consider that the overall harm of pursuing a Solar Farm on this particular greenfield site outweighs the benefit to the public.

Minor alterations to the ground plan and density of the solar panels in order to offer a wider corridor either side of the footpath for increased biodiversity improvement (token newly sown grass species) is insufficient mitigation: the inappropriate choice of site, adjacent to and SSSI, and the principle change of use of this land is the core objection. Solar panel 'farms' and are not strictly agriculture, and are rarely successful sheep grazing - particularly on the wet subsoil which is Otmoor.

Otmoor is one of England's post war natural heritage recovery success stories:

it is England's largest and most important inland wetland and wildfowl habitat. It was cleared and drained post war (not very successfully) with government grants to make it arable. The present use of the land is for Biomass/ Linseed, a suitable crop which in itself serves a purpose toward energy production. In terms of the Environment the success story is to keep this land open, alongside the RSPB Nature Reserve.

Pegasus proposes financial incentives worth £20K pa for the residents of Noke - at what cost of the land, the birds, the environment? Noke is very small, and would I suspect prefer to remain so. It does not have need of 'a community hall', it uses the church to good effect, as we saw at the Green Energy presentation. It has restored the pond, and upgraded their community sports field facility. It wants to be left undisturbed - to remain quiet, and unspoiled.

The fundamental change of use will do nothing to protect the land around it, or enhance Otmoor. In the greater scheme of things, land is finite. **This change of use is not in the greater public interest, and will come at greater cost of reducing natural assets, and damaging wildlife habitats.**

Temporary status planning application (20 years + Conditions) to return this land to arable/ open agriculture/ should it cease to be a solar farm) is not sufficient protection to protect this natural capital for future generations. Solar farms industrialize. Sheep do not graze happily under solar panels. The ground is often very wet, or rock hard. The preparation of the site alone will do irreparable harm to the soil, and Noke Village.

The electricity generated is unlikely to solve the local need, (which part of the Grid do these power lines serve exactly?). Headington substation is unlikely to be able to receive or use power from this source.

The 'Island' of Otmoor is a perfect example of Land that should be left agricultural, or returned to watermeadow, with all the overriding benefits of long term carbon storage and wildlife and natural plant biodiversity.

Manor Farm Noke has been on the market for 5+ years - the owner having failed to find a buyer, is now looking for another avenue of commercial opportunity and business, taking a punt on a solar 'farm'. The lack intention to remain is worrying in itself, and the 30% holding can very quickly be cashed in on, leaving Noke with a 20+yrs Solar farm, with all that that entails. This is not in the public interest.

The proposed site is inappropriate, being part of an Open , Green Belt, green field landscape that frames a view of the 7 churches of Otmoor : Noke, Islip, Oddington Charlton, Merton Murcott Fencott - a view that was painted by Peter Greenham RA (Keeper of the Schools), and is the inspiration of the Chessboard in Alice through the Looking Glass (Lewis Carroll)

It will be highly visible from established countryside walks: the Oxfordshire Way, Beckley, Noke, Islip, Brill, Arncott.

It will be intrusive and detrimental to an existing footpath, potentially making the footpath impassable during winter months (wet boggy land) between two evergreen hedges that in themselves are not in keeping with the local area.

Section 15, paras 174 -188 in the NPPF aim to conserve and protect natural assets. Cherwell District Council has adopted policies which uphold the NPPF, combined with Natural England and SSSI policies, and is legally bound to honour ESD5, the purpose of which is to protect agricultural land and local communities from inappropriate development

To quote a recent statement of Refusal on a Green Belt solar farm: Cherwell District Council needs to take note.

'The proposed solar farm would create an incongruous feature in the landscape and would result in an undesirable intrusion of industrial scale and character into an isolated rural setting to the detriment of the character and appearance of the site and surrounding countryside. As such, the proposal is contrary to policies CSS1, CSQ1 and CSEN1, G2, G4 and C4 and contrary to government guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework and accompanying Planning Practice Guidance.'

I consider that a Solar Park (22/01682/F) so close to the village of Oddington, affecting the edge of Otmoor, will have an irreversible and detrimental effect upon the open farmland and larger wildlife habitat and wetland area of Otmoor .

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