

Comment for planning application 22/03873/F

Application Number	22/03873/F
Location	Land North And Adjacent To Mill Lane Stratton Audley
Proposal	Installation and operation of a renewable energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with a switchgear container, inverter/transformer units, Site access, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.
Case Officer	Rebekah Morgan
Organisation Name	Camilla Scarf
Address	Oldfield Farm, Mill Lane, Stratton Audley, Bicester, OX27 9AN
Type of Comment	Objection
Type	neighbour
Comments	<p>Impact of proposed Solar Farm on Oldfields Farm and its Residents</p> <p>In March 1997 we made our home in rural Stratton Audley; here we have enjoyed a respectful, rewarding partnership with the immediate landscape, flora and fauna. We've appreciated nearly 10,000 days in a haven of quiet, mostly uninterrupted rural life - there has been change, certainly, but nothing that has spoilt this very special corner of north Oxfordshire.</p> <p>When considering whether to grant permission for a solar farm on the agricultural land adjacent to Oldfields Farm, Oldfields House, Pool Farm, and the village of Godington, it is imperative that the impact on adjacent residents is fully understood by the planning authority.</p> <p>For Oldfields Farm, it would mean that views from the south facing windows would change from rolling farmland interspersed with hedgerows and trees to include incongruous and somewhat industrial solar panels. It would mean that the ambient peace, the delightful background chatter of birdsong and animal calls would be diminished by the ever present hum created by solar panel inverters. Will the familiar rustle of leaves being agitated by the wind soon be drowned out by the whistle of air passing around hundreds of solar panels?</p> <p>Landscape Impact</p> <p>If the solar farm were to go ahead, the Landscape character would be subject to dramatic and unprecedented change.</p> <p>There is an extremely popular footpath included in the site which runs adjacent to Oldfields Copse in the northern section. From the footpath there are spectacular, open, almost panoramic views out across the natural undulations reaching up to Godington ridge. This footpath currently provides an unrivalled opportunity to appreciate the rolling landscape of Padbury Brook River Valley. The open fields, together with Oldfields Copse, provide an important wildlife habitat - diverse species abound and are frequently and readily seen when walking here.</p> <p>If the solar farm were to go ahead, the footpath would be hemmed in by the new hedge and treeline installed to mask the view of the solar panels. The proposed prison-style fence would be completely out of character in this otherwise rural and unspoilt area. The development would represent an industrial development in the very heart of our rural idyl. The cumulative impact on residential amenity cannot be overestimated. The immediate area has already been subject to noisy and disruptive development to accommodate HS2 and East West Rail. A nearby footpath and bridleway that previously formed a much loved and often enjoyed circular route in the Godington / Chetwode parishes have been affected by the HS2 development that now runs through it, changing forever the ability to enjoy from home that particular peaceful walk in a tranquil haven. To the south of Stratton Audley and Godington, East West Rail has also been disruptive, changing forever the character of a swathe of land.</p> <p>Agricultural Land</p> <p>I understand that the tests undertaken to ascertain the quality of the agricultural land have graded it as 3B - however, from 1997 the land has produced a viable crop for the landowner in spite of the soil quality. When farmed sympathetically, it is economically productive to use the land for agriculture and to produce food grade crops from it. The current landowner purchased the land with a view to farming it, but prefers the substantial returns available by</p>

turning the land over to a solar farm. It is my belief that solar farms can be sited on land close to the communities they will serve and not by depriving a rural community of the landscape and environment they cherish.

Noise

The noise generated by the plant will undoubtedly impact the residents living adjacent to the development.

The noise impact assessment predicts that the development would increase prevailing noise levels by more than 10dbB during the daytime and 21dB at night - this represents a significant loss of amenity value to residents who have chosen to live in this particular area to enjoy a life away from background hubbub. Indeed, we have tolerated extremely poor infrastructure (slow rural broadband, no phone signal, no mains water or drainage, frequent power cuts etc) because we value the tranquillity of rural living above the convenience of modern life. Put simply, we are not conditioned to living alongside the background noise levels this development could produce.

If the development were to be given planning permission, local residents must be protected by formal conditions that seek to reduce any increase in noise - is there mitigation available that can keep noise levels in line with currently prevailing levels?

Construction

If the project were to be given planning approval, I would request that the construction process and impact on nearby residents be minimised by imposition of the strictest possible conditions. Please consider imposing restrictions on the method of installation and hours of work permitted, noise pollution during construction, the access points to the site, the reinstatement of any damage to roads, the strict preservation of all existing and established trees and hedgerows which would not allow such trees and hedges to be thinned or lowered.

Compensation

We understand that JBM have offered to compensate the residents of Stratton Audley village with a fund of 200,000 and Godington with a fund of 50,000. A JBM representative has offered 10,000 to each of Oldfields Farm and Oldfields House in recognition of the impact on these two properties. However, this amount is in no way adequate compensation for the loss of amenity value, nor does it get close to the recommendation by the House of Commons Select Committee that communities living near new wind turbines and onshore solar farms should receive a 100% discount on their energy bills.

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Attachments