

Godington Parish Meeting
Objection to planning application 22/03873/F Padbury Brook Solar Farm by
JBM Solar

Introduction

Godington Parish Meeting (GPM) encouraged village participation and attendance at JBM's meeting and exhibition last year and relayed to the village any information received from JBM (the proposers). It then asked residents for comments. All the comments received by GPM were objections and nobody in the village has expressed any support to GPM for the proposal. Godington Parish Meeting therefore objects to the planning application.

Reasons for Objection

- Cherwell Local Plan Policy ESD5 Renewable Energy

This policy supports renewable energy provision when/if adverse impacts can be addressed. The proposed location for this solar farm is on 147 acres of open countryside and will have an enormously detrimental impact on our local landscape. GPM believes that the screening mitigation measures proposed will not be adequate, will take at least 15 years to have any effect and will in themselves fundamentally alter the character of this open and tranquil countryside. The appropriate native planting is largely deciduous further reducing screening effectiveness for much of the year.

The application is for a 'temporary' development of 40 years which will mean that the vast majority of residents in Godington will have very little prospect of seeing a return to open countryside should planning be granted.

The photomontages provided by JBM do not account for the view during winter months and also appear to minimise the topography of the area and the elevated view points as you enter Godington village.

Footpath 225/6 does not enter the solar farm but will be negatively visually impacted by any such development.

Please see appendix 1 for photographs taken from the start of footpath 225/6 by Godington Hall Farm (view point 5).

- Cherwell Local Plan Policy ESD13 Local landscape Protection and Enhancement

This policy states that proposals will not be permitted if they

- Cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside
- Cause undue harm to important natural landscape features and topography
- Be inconsistent with local character
- Impact on areas judged to have a high level of tranquility
- Harm the setting of settlements, buildings, structures or other landmark features
- Harm the historic value of the landscape

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 and therefore does not adhere to the requirements of ESD5 and 13.

- Cumulative harm to local countryside

The local area has already lost a significant amount of the surrounding countryside to High Speed Rail 2 (HS2) to the North and East West Rail (EWR) to the South East and access to the countryside via footpaths/bridleways is reducing as the construction of HS2 progresses.

Please see appendix 2 for photographs (taken in February 2023) demonstrating the current loss of open countryside along the Public right of way 225/4 North of Moat Farm, Godington.

Bridlepath 225/4 which runs from Moat Farm, Godington towards Chetwode/Preston Bissett is imminently set to close for several years and the other following footpaths near by are also currently closed, most for the next 4 years :-

PB1/9

PB4/5F

PB1/6

TWF/16

TWY/17

TWY/18

TWY/19

CHW/11/1

CHW/18/1

Local residents now have a rapidly decreasing access to the amenity to walk/ride and enjoy their nearby countryside. The visual impact on several existing Public Rights of Way by the solar farm proposal will be severe, as will the tranquillity of the area caused by introduction of noise-generating equipment such as the necessary inverters and battery storage units.

- Construction Traffic and Highway Safety

The construction traffic and safety related to the proposal is also an additional reason for GPM's objection.

Residents have already been severely impacted by the use of the unnamed road that runs from the A4421, across the Mill Road crossroads and then on to Poundon during the construction of the East West Rail compounds at Poundon and Marsh Gibbon. This is the same road which will provide the access to the proposed solar farm.

There have already been long periods of disruption and inconvenience along this road caused by roadworks and lengthy diversions during the construction of multiple temporary passing bays for the necessary HGV movements to the compounds. This was followed by more than a year of heavy HGV traffic. This has resulted in a highway of increasingly poor condition with giant potholes, dangerous cambers and disintegrating verges. At some point when EWR no longer requires

HGV access to their compounds, the majority of the passing bays will be removed, making this road totally unsuitable for the amount of HGV movements required for the construction of the solar farm. According to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) this is likely to happen in Summer 2023 and therefore the applicant's Transport Statement suggesting their access will be off a road with passing bays is incorrect.

The turning off the A4421 onto the unnamed road to access the proposed project and across the Mill Road crossroads down towards the turning to Godington village are also the site of regular accidents particularly in icy weather. Anyone who uses this road regularly will be aware that the applicant's data showing only 2 known accidents within a 500m radius is severely flawed. On very cold days on this ungritted and poorly maintained road there are sometimes 2 per day! On that stretch of road alone at most recent count there are 6 knocked-over road signs because of recent accidents. In addition the application does not reference any accidents at the junction with the A4421, another well known accident black spot. For these reasons, we consider the applicant's highway statement to be deficient and therefore impacts are unsatisfactorily addressed.

At the time of writing this objection, the Highways Assessment from OCC was added to the application documents. GPM is extremely concerned to see that this appears to have been made using Google Streetview images only as opposed to a site visit, which on an application of this potential scale seems most inappropriate and surprising. It says '[I see from Google Streetview that this road has been improved over recent years by widening and the formalisation of passing places...](#)' This shows no actual knowledge of the fact that the passing bays are temporary and all those along the proposed route are due to be removed this year - a plan being worked on by OCC Highways itself. And also shows no knowledge of the dire and dangerous state of the road itself despite GPM, along with Stratton Audley PC, having had several site meetings with OCC to discuss.

GPM urges Cherwell District Council to commission a thorough Transport and Highways assessment which also takes into consideration the cumulative effects of EWR and HS2 prior to making any decision on this application.

- Disruption during construction of the grid connection

This is inextricably linked to the solar farm and will cause large (though admittedly brief) disruption to residents in Stratton Audley village.

Also of concern is the potential disruption caused by more roadworks on the A4421 to connect up to the grid at Skimmingdish Lane which will cause yet more delay and congestion on major arterial routes around Bicester.

- Harm to Residential Amenity

The Planning Design and Access Statement (PDAS) submitted by JBM makes no reference to the settlement of Godington despite this being the closest village to the proposed site and arguably the most impacted local settlement. Godington is also on higher ground than the surrounding area so the entire site will be visible to all those entering and leaving the village or walking the footpaths around the village, particularly during winter months.

JBM have made efforts to discuss the impact of the application to those living close to the proposed site and have made some alterations to the plans on the west side along Mill Road but the relocation of one field of panels away from Mill Road has adversely impacted those that live on the east side in Godington including Godington Hall Farm (mentioned briefly in the PDAS), but especially Merrick Hill Farm (not mentioned at all in the PDAS). Merrick Hill Farm is an already existing equestrian business which gained planning permission for a dwelling (17/01711/OUT & 22/01341/NMA) and for which building commenced in Spring 2022. The owners of Merrick Hill Farm only found out about the planning application at the end of February 2023 as they do not yet live here, have not had an opportunity to consult with JBM and will be hugely negatively impacted visually and potentially financially as this development is very likely to have a substantial detrimental effect on their property value.

They are also very concerned about the noise disruption caused during the construction and its effect on their breeding horses and foals.

With the large numbers of solar panels, oppressive fencing and CCTV cameras, there would be significant harm to the visual amenity of neighbouring properties.

GPM shares the concerns of Stratton Audley PC regarding potential harm from noise particularly given the tranquillity of the area. Countryside unspoiled by noise is increasingly hard to find locally because of huge infrastructure projects such as HS2 and EWR covering huge swathes of local countryside and the large developments going on around our closest towns of Bicester and Buckingham.

- Land Productivity

The farmland involved in this application has been productively and successfully farmed for many years.

The previous owner, who lives in Godington, farmed this land for 22 years until 2022, growing healthy yielding crops for human consumption of wheat, winter beans, spring and winter barley. They confirm that this farmland was classed as grade 3 not 3b.

Indeed the current owner has used its good productivity to justify the grain storage facility applied for in 2022 (22/01503/AGN) citing a higher than average wheat yield to evidence the required size of barn. This seems to contradict the proposer's statement that the land is of 3b classification.

Whilst it is important for our country to have its own supplies of renewable energy it should not be at any cost and on farmland used for the production of food.

- Impact on local businesses

Several local farms have diversified over the years. For example Pool Farm, Stratton Audley has a wedding and corporate events business and Grange Farm, Godington has a number of holiday let cottages. Their main selling point is their location - gaining custom from being in a beautiful rural setting which will certainly be negatively affected by a neighbouring solar farm on such a large scale.

For all these above reasons GPM urges Cherwell District Council to refuse this application.

In the event that CDC approves this application GPM would wish it to impose stringent, binding and specific mitigation measures as planning conditions. We also agree with Stratton Audley PC's mitigation proposals as set out in their objection response, but GPM would like to see the Community Fund paid out every 5 years (adjusted for RPI) for the lifetime of the development.

Appendix 1.

Three photographs taken from the start of footpath 225/6 by Godington Hall Farm (view point 5)

Image 1

Photo taken 6th February 2023

From Footpath at Godington Hall

Grid Reference 51°56'17.0"N 1°05'04.1"W

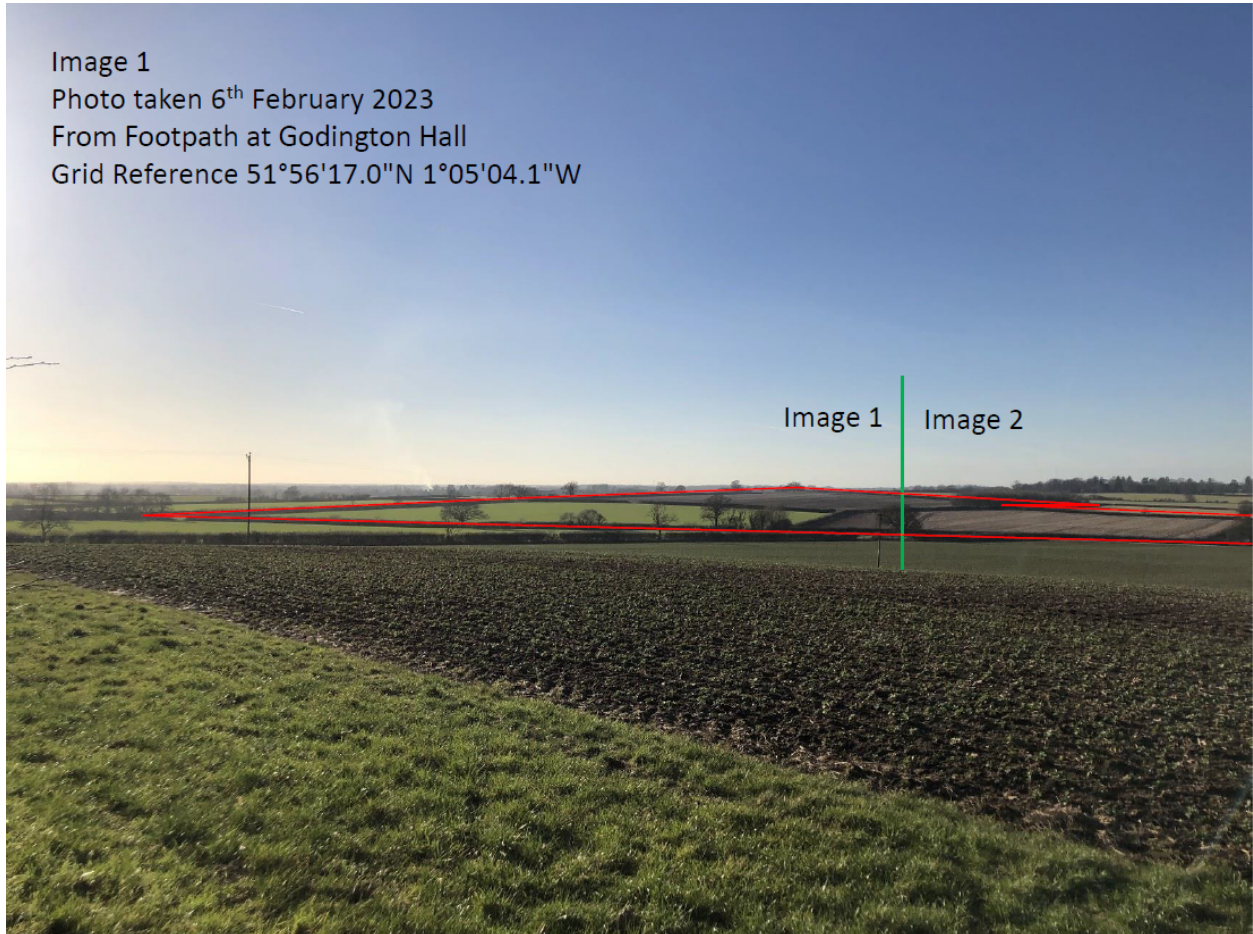


Image 2
Photo taken 6th February 2023
From Footpath at Godington Hall
Grid Reference 51°56'17.0"N 1°05'04.1"W



Image 3
Photo taken 6th February 2023
From Footpath at Godington Hall
Grid Reference 51°56'17.0"N 1°05'04.1"W

Image 3



Appendix 2.

Nine photographs (taken in February 2023) demonstrating the current loss of open countryside along the Public right of way 225/4 North of Moat Farm, Godington











