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Application Reference No. : SMD/2024/0452

Site Address: Land Adjoining New House Farm Luzlow Lane Bagnall Staffordshire ST9 9JZ Stoke-On-Trent

Comments by: Victoria Louise Shepherd

From:

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Submission: Objection

Comments: Objection to Planning Application SMD/2024/0452: Solar Panel Farm

Dear Council Planning Department,

I am writing to express my strong objection to Planning Application SMD/2024/0452 regarding the proposed construction of a solar panel farm in our area. While renewable energy is crucial for combating climate change, this particular project poses a significant number of issues which will have long-lasting and detrimental effects on the local environment, the community, and the infrastructure. Below, I outline the key objections to the proposed solar panel farm.

1. Destruction of Greenbelt Land

The proposed solar farm is located within Greenbelt land, which serves an essential purpose in preserving the countryside, protecting natural habitats, and preventing urban sprawl. The Greenbelt is vital to maintaining the character of rural communities, providing a space for nature to thrive and offering local residents areas of recreational and aesthetic value.

A solar farm will irreversibly damage the landscape, replacing the natural green fields with an industrial infrastructure of glass and metal. The installation of panels, fencing, and associated equipment such as transformers and battery storage facilities will permanently scar the land. Once this Greenbelt land is lost, it cannot be recovered, which directly contravenes the core objectives of the Greenbelt policy under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Furthermore, Greenbelt areas are often essential wildlife corridors. The disruption caused by construction, increased footfall, and vehicular access during the installation and operational phases could significantly harm local ecosystems, particularly for species that rely on the openness of the landscape. Such large-scale development risks harming local flora and fauna, some of which could be protected species.

2. Impact on Local Wildlife and Biodiversity

Solar farms, despite their potential to support low-carbon energy generation, can severely impact local biodiversity. The site's large footprint will involve clearing vegetation, possibly altering the water table and drainage patterns. Local species, particularly ground-nesting birds, mammals, and insects, may lose valuable habitats, while the glare from solar panels can confuse or harm migratory birds.

The operation of the solar farm may require frequent maintenance, which involves human presence and machinery that can further disturb wildlife. There is a risk of local ecosystems being fragmented by the installation of security fencing and barriers, reducing the ability of species to move freely across the landscape.

3. Visual and Landscape Impacts

The installation of a large solar panel farm will drastically change the rural landscape. The proposed development is likely to consist of rows upon rows of metal panels that will be visible from significant distances. This will have a negative visual impact on local residents, visitors, and those who value the beauty of our natural surroundings.

The reflective nature of solar panels can create visual disturbances, particularly in areas where uninterrupted natural views are part of the region's attraction. The industrial appearance of the installation, coupled with the noise from inverters and transformers, could severely degrade the rural character of the area.

4. Traffic and Infrastructure Strain

The construction of the solar farm will necessitate a considerable number of large vehicles to deliver materials, solar panels, batteries, and associated infrastructure. These vehicles will not only cause disruption to local traffic but could also damage roads and verges that are not designed to accommodate such heavy loads.

Local roads may be narrow and unsuited for heavy construction traffic, leading to possible road blockages, deterioration of road surfaces, and increased risks of accidents. Furthermore, construction traffic can cause considerable inconvenience to local residents and businesses, particularly in rural areas with limited transport infrastructure.

During the operational phase, ongoing maintenance will likely continue to increase traffic in the area. Any need for replacement parts or repairs will necessitate additional vehicular access, exacerbating traffic concerns.

5. Noise Pollution

During both the construction and operation phases, the proposed solar farm may generate significant noise. Heavy machinery and vehicles during construction will create temporary but substantial disturbances. Once operational, the farm's inverters and transformers can produce constant low-level humming sounds, which may disrupt the tranquillity of this rural area.

Residents in the vicinity of the solar farm will likely suffer from a reduction in the peaceful enjoyment of their properties and surrounding environment due to these industrial noises, particularly if such sounds persist through the night or early morning.

6. Flood Risk and Drainage Issues

The scale of the solar panel installation may affect the natural drainage systems within the area. By covering large swathes of ground with impervious solar panels, the development may change the way rainwater is absorbed into the ground. Runoff from the panels, combined with any hard infrastructure for maintenance roads, can exacerbate the risk of flooding, especially in areas already prone to waterlogging.

Flooding risks are a serious concern, particularly given climate change predictions. The proposed site should undergo thorough hydrological assessments to determine whether the increased surface runoff could cause issues downstream, such as erosion, flash flooding, or overburdened drainage systems.

7. Hazards of Battery Storage Systems

Large solar farms often include battery storage units to capture and store excess energy generated during daylight hours. These battery systems, while beneficial for energy storage, pose their own unique risks. They can be prone to malfunctions, overheating, and even fires, which are difficult to extinguish and can release toxic fumes into the environment.

Given the rural location, emergency services might face significant delays in responding to any such incidents, which could result in greater environmental and health impacts for nearby residents. The storage of large quantities of high-powered batteries should be scrutinised for safety, environmental, and community health implications.

8. Energy Inefficiency and Alternatives

The UK has various alternative areas where solar installations can be integrated without the need to destroy Greenbelt land or disrupt rural communities. Rooftop solar installations on commercial and industrial buildings, brownfield sites, or even car parks offer viable alternatives that could generate comparable energy without the adverse impacts associated with this proposal.

Given the significant land required for the solar panels, the efficiency of this project should also be questioned, particularly in a country like the UK where sunlight is variable. The overall carbon savings may be offset by the

ecological and infrastructural damage caused by the installation.

9. Devaluation of Property

The proposed solar farm is likely to negatively affect property values in the surrounding areas. The industrialisation of rural landscapes and the accompanying noise, traffic, and visual blight are all factors that could deter potential buyers, resulting in long-term financial harm to local homeowners.

Conclusion

While the goal of renewable energy generation is commendable, the proposed solar panel farm under Planning Application SMD/2024/0452 is not suitable for this location. The environmental, infrastructural, and community impacts outweigh the benefits of installing this solar farm in the proposed Greenbelt site.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the council to reject this application on the grounds of:

The destruction of protected Greenbelt land,

The negative impact on local wildlife and biodiversity,

The irreversible damage to the rural landscape and visual amenity,

The strain on local infrastructure and traffic,

The noise pollution and associated impacts on the local community,

The increased flood risk and drainage issues,

The hazards posed by battery storage systems,

The availability of more suitable alternative locations, and

The likely devaluation of local properties.

I trust that the council will take these concerns seriously in their decision-making process and prioritise the preservation of our natural environment, the wellbeing of local residents, and the integrity of the Greenbelt.

Yours sincerely,

V, Shepherd

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