

Long Close
Great Wymondley
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15th August, 2022

Dear Planning Inspectorate (c/o Alison Dyson),

Ref: Planning Inquiry - Solar Array, Great Wymondley, Herts
Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/N/23/332321

Interested party statement

1. Statement of interest

My name is Jessica Simpson (professional name: Jessica Butcher MBE). I'm a resident of Great Wymondley village. I live in the heart of the village with my husband and three children aged 6, 8 and 9 less than half a mile from the proposed development. We moved here in 2015, selecting its peaceful, beautiful rural location as our long-term family home and the perfect place to raise our family - whilst still allowing good access to our professional lives in London. During our years here, we've invested significantly in community initiatives such as the renovation of our historical village church, renovation to our own listed, heritage property, and in fostering strong relationships within the incredibly close-knit village community.

Professionally, I have been working in the consumer-tech industry in London for the last 20 years - building up, consulting-to and investing-in fast growth technology businesses - for which I was awarded an MBE in 2018. I also sit on the board (as a 'Commissioner') of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the arms-length-body regulator of the UK's Equality Act. This gives me a good insight into the workings of national government, (if not 'local') and I am deeply aware of the importance of both ESG and DE&I initiatives that are of such high concern to government and civil society to tackle both environmental risks and persistent social injustice.

I am also Chief Marketing Officer at 'Sweatcoin' - one of the most successful British health technology companies of the last decades - founded to combat the pandemic of inactivity that has afflicted the western world in modern times and is the key driver of the many of the leading causes of death which afflict our health system (e.g. cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes).

2. Concerns with regards to the above planning application

I join the vast majority of my neighbours in objecting strongly to the above application for a solar array in the close vicinity of the village.

Our village is a quiet, beautiful environment surrounded by fields through which a vast network of walking and cycle paths can be found. It is rich and diverse in protected wildlife, with a series of schemes set up to support and improve the number of deer, badgers, hares, red kites, barn owls and a wide variety of small birds, plus wildflowers, endangered butterflies and insects.

These surroundings were our primary motivation in moving to the area. We stretched our personal finances and made huge personal sacrifices to be a part of and support this green-belt oasis, in close proximity to a wonderful market town and to London transport connections (which have been heavily invested in to attract commuters such as ourselves).

As a family, we make multiple-daily use of the Hertfordshire Way and the many paths around the proposed site. My husband and I are both joggers. My children have learnt to ride their bikes on these paths - and, without pavements in our village, they represent the only opportunity for them to cycle. We enjoy all the routes at weekends with visiting friends and frequently bump into neighbours and visitors from nearby towns- dog-walking, horse-riding, exercising, or simply enjoying the sights, sounds and smells of the landscape.

We are devastated by the prospect of this landscape blighted by the proposed development. The development will dramatically affect the high leisure usage of this area at a time when, as a nation, we are more obese, unhealthy, stressed and depressed than ever before. It is not an overstatement to say that during covid these routes and paths were a lifeline for the local community. With 65% of the UK population currently categorised as 'obese' and a massive 10% of the NHS's budget going toward treating the largely-preventable condition of diabetes, regular exercise has never been more important to the nation's health. The efficacy of daily outdoor walks for tackling mental health conditions is also well-evidenced by charities such as MIND.

Such open land, free of ugly fences, CCTV and battery storage facilities is absolutely critical to the wellbeing of the local community and the many visitors that travel from nearby towns to enjoy the open, safe footways. Local schools send students on Duke of Edinburgh award scheme expeditions from Wymondley Wood Centre on Willian Road up to the Hertfordshire Way and beyond using the footpaths across the village. They learn orienteering with the many junctions and deviations taking them across the wonderful Green Belt to the north and east of the county before making their way back to Wymondley Woods Centre as a circular walk. The local primary school walks young students on nature walks along our footpaths where the openness provides wonderful scenery and a sense of history - learning about farming in the area since the Middle Ages. The ancient finds are exciting for young and old - such as pieces of tile and pottery which lie on the surface of the edges of the footpaths- or ancient arrowheads from the Roman soldiers walking to Ermine Street (Grt North Road), crossing what is now our Green Belt here.

The sheer facts of the scale of the development speak to how unrecognisable this landscape will become- fundamentally altering not only the scenic joy of the area but the wildlife ecosystem for decades to come: 108 football pitches worth of land containing 160,000 solar panels - accompanied by 7.2 km of security fencing, 47 buildings, 2.1 km of roadway and 40x 4m high posts with CCTV cameras on. Even if the aesthetic impact were to be acceptable (which it is not, undoubtedly deterring the many 1000s of annual users and with

the proposed landscaping taking over a decade to become established), the impact on the wildlife ecosystem cannot be understated. We are also hugely worried about the impact of the noise reflection from the A1M affecting all within a one mile radius (the whole of Great Wymondley village).

Indeed, distances from the proposed development to the following locations/ facilities are as follows: 5m (max) from the Herts Way; 200m from the Recreation Ground; 200m from community orchard; 400m from the grade 1 listed church; 400m from centre of the village; 400m from the nursing home; 250m to Graveley school. There are c.75 listed buildings (including ours) less than one mile from the development.

The site forms a vital function as open countryside for agriculture, leisure, health and for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Designated protected land, such as this should categorically not be used for development which is highly damaging to the landscape, the rural character and the local history and heritage.

This is not, as has been derogatively claimed by a local councillor, a 'nimby' protestation. As parents of young children we are incredibly alert to the environmental challenges that climate change presents and understand and support the need for more renewable energy sources that not only better support the environment but reduce our reliance on overseas energy. We join our intuitively green-minded, altruistic neighbours in being very active and dedicated to doing everything we can to support environmental initiatives and the biodiversity of our community. As a community, we have introduced a community garden and the rewilding of a section of the churchyard and the encouragement of wildflowers in the orchard we planted on the recreation ground. As a family, we have given over a high percentage of our garden to rewilding; we are proactive with our recycling; and on our daily walks, we litter-pick habitually to ensure the health of the local wildlife and the beauty of the natural environment.

We strongly oppose the proposed development and urge the inspectorate and all decision-makers to do the same for the benefit of the environment and the health and happiness of the local community and its many 1000s of regular visitors to this beautiful land.

Jessica Simpson (Jessica Butcher MBE), Great Wymondley resident