

STONESTREET GREEN SOLAR POWER DEVELOPMENT – INDEPENDENT RESPONSE TO LVIA

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**Thank you** for the opportunity to speak this morning, from the perspective of **Outdoor Enthusiasts** – walkers and runners, and also cyclists – people who are **inspired, refreshed, and more relaxed**, by experiencing outdoor activities in peaceful countryside.

There is increasing recognition of the **importance of exercise** in an attractive setting, in providing benefits for physical and mental health.

It counteracts the **negative effects on our health** of a modern sedentary lifestyle, and can thereby reduce the **growing pressures on our health service**, as well as on the need for social care of the elderly.

The **network of Public Rights of Way** makes a crucial contribution to achieving these benefits, by:

- **providing access** through the rural landscape
- **giving walkers the confidence** to take off-road routes, in a semi-natural environment
- giving access to scenic **viewpoints**, and
- often providing a **shorter route** to a destination than the alternative on tarmac

**These opportunities are typified** by rights of way through the countryside around Aldington, particularly the well-used network of paths north of the village, extending north-west across the East Stour Valley to Mersham, and east towards Aldington Church.

I'm a member of a **Tuesday Walking Group**, an informal group of friends from Aldington, Mersham and the surrounding area.

We would **normally be out walking NOW**, but several of us are here this morning, because of our concerns about the Proposed Development.

We are from the **older segment of society**, seeking to enjoy each other's company in attractive surroundings, and to counteract the effects of ageing.

**The Applicant** does not seem to appreciate what it is that walkers enjoy, through their pastime. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment does recognise the significant visual effects on users of some Rights of Way, at least initially.

But it argues that the **proposed landscaping** will mitigate the visual effects gradually over a period of 15 years.

**Those using the paths, however, will still be immersed** in a sea of metal and glass and massive battery enclosures. The aesthetic and psychological benefits of walking will have been eradicated, and replaced by feelings of frustration and anger.

**And for those on the roads and village streets**, the views of the landscape will be obscured as they travel through green tunnels. If they can catch a glimpse through a field entrance, they will see that the landscape has been entirely transformed to an industrial expanse.

The Applicant also contends that a few short sections of **new paths** will improve connectivity, without recognising that many existing, ancient, paths would lose their coherence, their direct lines replaced by irritating zigzags.

It's hard to make this out from the **large-scale technical plans** in the Application, but it's more obvious from exhibition panels used during Consultation.

For many of us, the Proposed Development would entail an externally imposed, **opportunistic and profit-driven** blighting of the villages and their setting, rather than what we do need: a **carefully-planned approach** to development of renewable energy, where possible incorporated in our built infrastructure.

**These points are expanded** in the "Independent Response to the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment", submitted by Aldington and Bonnington Parish Council. It takes account of the Neighbourhood Plan made last year, and explains how several locally significant views from Public Rights of Way would be negatively affected.

**The submission concludes that the Applicant has:**

- a. **underestimated** the expectations of people wanting to experience the countryside – in particular, users of the network of Rights of Way throughout the site – and
- b. **overestimated** significantly the mitigation benefits of the proposed landscaping and planting, which will in fact obscure the attractive long-distance views that characterise the area.

**The Applicant** has sought to present the changes to the landscape, and to the network of re-routed Rights of Way, as generally positive ones.

We ask the **Planning Inspectorate** to question these assumptions and take full account of the perspectives of those who enjoy and value the local rural environment, and the opportunities for healthy outdoor activity that it provides.