

I attach a separate copy of my oral submission to the Open Hearing on 25/2/25. In addition, I should like to request that the Applicant/s respond to the following issues from my oral submission that I don't feel were addressed by their representatives at the end of the meeting:

1. The issue of construction, maintenance and decommissioning traffic navigating the narrow pinch points on Station Road, including in particular at the bridges by Evegate Mill.
2. The lack of consultation over the scale and siting of batteries and associated infrastructure across the site.
3. The insufficiency of the proposed compensation and the absence of any discussion of the generated energy benefiting local customers.

**Sheila Garrard (Interested Party no. 20050316): Oral Submission,
Stonestreet Green Solar Open Hearing, 25/2/25**

My name is Sheila Garrard. I'm a resident and, for nearly 20 years, a member of the informal group of Tuesday walkers.

I'm going to talk about the impact of this development in terms of footpaths, views, traffic, physical safety and general well-being.

Most residents return to the parish via Station Road, by car. Sharing a common sentiment, already expressed by others this morning: south of the railway line, one can look across the valley to the village on the Ridge, across towards Bank Road, also on high, and further west to Mersham, and appreciate the open, rolling, rural landscape and the feeling of homecoming. Under these proposals, this view of the landscape will be gone. And I mean gone forever, for, after 40 years, even if the panels are cleared away, this landscape will no longer be visible – because of the trees and tall hedges that are proposed to be planted 'in mitigation'.

And that's just the impact from the car! Our informal Tuesday walking group are keeping as fit, well and happy as we can through our local walking. But will we want to walk locally, among or beside metal panels, between tall wire fences and tall trees or hedges, without our views? NO! That's because a country walk is not just about putting one foot in front of the other – it's about a particular sense of place. Why else would we choose a rural walk over a pavement walk? So, this development will be an active discouragement from taking local exercise.

And so to the concept of mitigation, defined as: 'to make less oppressive'; 'to moderate the severity of something'. I don't think any resident, any walker, would agree that obliterating our views, and making us drive and walk through narrow green corridors, in any way makes the solar installation less oppressive or moderates the severity of the loss of the rural views that we love.

Turning to construction and traffic: Schedule 6 to the draft DCO shows that most of the main routes in and out of Aldington will be affected: Station Road, Calleywell and Goldwell Lanes, the

single track, Bank Road. How are we to be protected from the inevitable accidents, or large, stuck, vehicles, at the two narrow bridges near Evegate Mill? There was a car, somehow at 90 degrees to the road, actually through the hedge, just north of there, yesterday! (Most) locals drive cautiously at these two single-track bridges. Outsiders under time pressure – delivery vans, construction traffic – do not. NFU Mutual's 2024 *Rural Road Safety Report* [based on Dep't of Transport data] concludes that there is 'Disproportionate Danger on Rural Roads'. It is a short, but incisive, report, and I respectfully urge the Examining Authority to take it into account.

The safety issue leads me to the proposals regarding electricity storage and the location of batteries across the site. There is significant evidence of the fire hazard of lithium batteries. Given the narrowness of the lanes leading into Aldington, it will be challenging for the emergency services to arrive quickly at storage sites located deep within the complex. And the dreadful fire recently at Handen Farm highlighted the extreme pressure of demand on the local water supply. I do not consider that the Applicant has consulted adequately on storage. At the Mersham village hall event in 2023 they were unable to show me a scale depiction of the storage and batteries in situ on a plan.

In conclusion, I'll turn to compensation. Evolution Power's website states: 'The company carefully selects sites to minimise local impact', and that it, 'looks to target sites where there are opportunities to provide energy to local customers'. The Applicant provides no evidence of doing either of these. The energy's destined for the grid at Sellindge converter station and could, I suppose, end up in France! Residents will suffer disruption from both the installation and the eventual dismantling of this industrial site, from the excavation of multiple footpaths and roads to lay the cables, and from the construction traffic associated with it. The level of financial compensation proposed, to be split among three separate communities, is just a derisory, tokenist gesture. And the Applicant has given no clarity as to how the community benefit fund will be protected and enforced once they, surely inevitably, sell the project on.

The industry news source, *Solar and Storage Extra*, quoted a spokesperson from the Dep't for Energy in September 2024 saying that, 'Where communities live near clean energy infrastructure, they should benefit directly from it.' The same article describes the Chief Executive of Solar Energy UK as saying that 'the industry is developing a "community benefits" framework with the Government, explaining that payments would be based on the size of the development and made annually over the project's lifetime'.

I respectfully urge the Examining Authority, should this unwelcome project be given the go-ahead, to ensure that residents are fairly treated by any existing or future guidelines on compensation.

Thank you for listening.