

**Open Floor Hearing 1 – 17.3.26 p.m.**

**Statement by Alan Wheeler B.Sc (Est. Man.), Dip.T.P., M.R.T.P.I. (retired)**

**Interested Party Reference number:** [REDACTED]

*(I am a retired Chartered Town Planner who worked for the former Bedfordshire County Council Planning Department and was responsible for managing the Council's interests in environmental and countryside issues.)*

---

I do appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

**I have strongly objected** to the proposed development, which should be refused for many reasons. Today I am concentrating on its **unacceptable damage to the highly valued local landscape**.

I would draw your attention to what is said in each of the relevant Local Plan Supplementary Planning Documents which are material considerations and referred to in the applicant's Environmental Statement\*. These documents are the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2020 and the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document 2022

The applicant's summary of these is short and carefully chosen. It **does not** include these assessments:-

In the Bedford document Sites A and B are in Riseley Clay Farmland sector, of which it says:

“A rural, peaceful area with a remote feel.”

“The often level to gently undulating topography and the large landscape scale results in long views, fringed by wooded horizons...”

“The lightly developed character and dispersed settlement pattern creates an often remote, isolated landscape character.”

Development guidelines say:

“Conserve open views across the rural landscape which are vulnerable to change from large scale development including renewable energy.....”

“Ensure proposals for solar farms and associated infrastructure are appropriately integrated into this tranquil and rural setting.” - **which this proposal clearly is not.**

In the Huntingdonshire document Sites C and D are in the Southern Wolds sector, and it states:

“The gradual loss of traditional features of the agricultural landscape are also affecting the landscape character of the Southern Wolds.”

The scale of the development proposed in this application is overwhelming. This proposal alone would cover 1,900 acres. It would span six miles end to end. We must also consider the two existing solar sites and the two other solar farm sites recently granted planning permission in the locality. These smaller schemes linked by East Park Energy would create a solar corridor of 2,800 acres. **This proposal would fundamentally change the very valued local landscape and settlement character of the area for very much the worse.**

**It would devastate peoples’ views of the local landscape** from homes, local roads and rights of way. There would be installed close to 700,000 solar panels 3 metres high - visible from our rolling countryside surrounding the sites. The proposed natural screening – so-called ‘green infrastructure’ of woodland and woodland belt planting and 3 metre hedgerow planting – is not likely to be effective. Planting often fails (and has at the existing local solar sites), and even if it’s successful, it takes years to mature. If the screening planting does succeed, it will radically change the local landscape. If it fails, the views of acres of solar panels will radically change the local landscape.

Our countryside is widely enjoyed by walkers, horse-riders and cyclists, both local and from further afield. East Part Energy state that the proposal is not expected to result in the loss of any public right of way but the nature of the footpaths and bridleways through the solar farms will be radically different and far less attractive to that experienced at present, as will views from the rights of ways on the higher ground surrounding the proposed solar panels.

**To summarise: this proposal would cause unacceptable damage to the highly valued local landscape.**

Thank you.

\*Environmental Statement Volume 1 – Main Report Chapter 5: Landscape and Visual - Table 5.6 – Assessment LCAs baseline summary.