

Good morning. My name is [REDACTED], and I am speaking as Chair of Pertenhall and Swineshead Parish Council. The Parish Council strongly objects to the proposed East Park Energy development and asks the Examining Authority to recommend refusal. Our objection relates not only to the elements within our parish but to the entire proposal and its cumulative impacts across neighbouring parishes.

First, the scale of the development between Swineshead and Hail Weston is overwhelming. When combined with two existing solar farms and two recently approved schemes, it would create a solar corridor of approximately 2,800 acres, highly visible from homes, roads and well-used rights of way in the higher parts of our parish.

Second, the proposal would lead to the loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land. Around 74% of the 1,900-acre site is Grade 2 and 3a farmland, meaning highly productive land would effectively be removed from agriculture for more than 40 years, including construction and decommissioning periods.

Third, there is a lack of evidence that alternative locations have been properly considered, despite solar being a flexible technology capable of deployment on brownfield land, rooftops, car parks and transport corridors.

Fourth, national planning policy is clear. The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to protect BMV agricultural land. The National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure EN-3 states that where agricultural land must be used, poorer quality land should be preferred, and previously developed or brownfield land should be prioritised.

Fifth, local planning policy is also a material consideration. The Bedford Local Plan 2030, particularly Policies 56 and 57, identifies suitable locations for renewable energy as areas of lower-quality agricultural land, built-up areas and previously developed land. The current proposal fails to meet these policy tests or properly address the required impacts.

Sixth, the visual impact on landscape character would be significant. Around 700,000 solar panels, up to three metres high, across 1,900 acres, together with fencing, lighting, CCTV, inverters, substations and battery infrastructure, would industrialise an open rural landscape. Proposed screening planting is uncertain and would itself alter the character of the countryside.

Seventh, the development would significantly affect the settlement pattern and nearby dwellings. Villages that currently sit within open farmland would instead be surrounded by solar infrastructure, with some homes within 100 metres of solar infrastructure and fencing.

Eighth, there are concerns about the historic environment and heritage assets. Archaeological work has already revealed extensive prehistoric and Roman remains beyond the protected Roman town site, and the development may affect the setting of several Grade I listed churches, including that at Little Staughton.

Ninth, the construction phase would cause major disruption. A construction period of around three years would involve thousands of HGV movements on narrow and ill-equipped rural roads, many currently in poor condition, and the repetitive noise of pile-driving approximately 250,000 posts to support the panels.

Tenth, the scheme could have a significant impact on the natural environment, enclosing habitats behind security fencing and potentially damaging existing ecological areas, including sites that support rare wildflowers.

Eleventh, the proposed battery energy storage system, consisting of around 100 container-sized lithium-ion units, raises legitimate concerns about fire and explosion risks, which are documented internationally.

Twelfth, there are concerns about increased flood risk, particularly along Pertenhall Brook, which already floods after heavy rainfall. Solar panel layouts may accelerate runoff compared with cultivated farmland.

Thirteenth, the proposal would significantly affect public rights of way and recreational use. Although routes may technically remain open, their character would change dramatically as they pass through fenced infrastructure, and during construction many would be adjacent to heavy construction traffic.

Fourteenth and finally, there are the long-term effects on local residents. Communities face years of disruption followed by at least 40 years living with this development, creating significant anxiety about the future of their environment, their homes and their way of life.

For these reasons, based on national policy, local policy, environmental protection and community impact, Pertenhall and Swineshead Parish Council respectfully asks that development consent for East Park Energy be refused.

Thank you.