

Anthony Withers: Objections to Solar Farm

Interested party reference number: [REDACTED]

NOTE: This is a transcript of my presentation. In the NOTES below I have added further comments which time limitations at the hearing did not allow me to express.

Good afternoon

My name is Anthony Withers from Great Staughton and I am a local historian.

My comments today will refer principally to my book *A guide to the walks around Great Staughton*. I will suggest that discussion of the varied walks in this pleasant countryside is inextricably linked to the rich history, heritage assets and archaeology of the area. I will therefore make passing references to my two history books, *Great Staughton and its People* and *A guide to St Andrew's Church*.

First, here is a brief review of how some of the walks and the views will be blighted by this development.

- i) Walk 6 of my book highlights the extensive view north from All Saints church in Little Staughton (which stands elevated), a view that would be blighted by solar arrays. This path then descends along the ridge route from Cretingsbury, the moated manor of Adam de Creting. A history of this manor and its owner is contained in Chapter 7 of *Great Staughton and its People*.

NOTE: Could the inspector walk this path from All Saints church (look North) along the ridge to Cretingsbury.

Walk 6 also starts on the Highway which contains a dozen or so buildings of historic interest as well as the 17C sundial. The path descends to the Church (Grade 1 listed), Place House (Grade 2 listed) and the Town, all the subject of my Guide to the church of St Andrew.

- ii) Little Staughton boasts an impressive network of public footpaths. On the circular walk from the church west to Green End, thence towards the Bungalow and Lodge Farm, walkers will find themselves surrounded by solar panels and their infrastructure. The view towards Swineshead, Riseley and Pertenhall from the fields would be almost totally blighted by solar arrays. Lodge Farm is surrounded by them.

NOTE: May I suggest that the inspector walks this path to understand how views will be blighted.

- iii) Two walks in Great Staughton will be affected. Walk 9 and Walk 1. Walk 9 goes to Hail Weston, returning via the Elms and Kidman's Farm where the solar arrays and the battery storage will be a blot on the landscape. The path passes Rushey Farm where an access road is proposed. This is the site of the Roman villa excavated in 1958-9. Chapter 3 of *Great Staughton and its People* lists the finds and explains the importance of the villa. This whole area is noted for Iron Age and Roman remains (including two bowl barrows).

- iv) Walk 1 in the book is popular with dog walkers. It follows the river Kym from Staughton Bridge and runs alongside the newly discovered and protected Roman settlement. This is a very rare example of a Roman site which has never been built over. I understand that it is proposed to install cabling underneath and over the Roman remains. If so, it would surely represent an act of historical and cultural vandalism.
- v) Finally, some general objections to this scheme. We should be prioritising food security rather than industrialising the landscape. I wonder whether better sites were investigated, ie brownfield sites, transport corridors etc?

In conclusion I would hope respectfully ask the inspectorate to reject this application.

Thank you.

References

Great Staughton and its People: How a Huntingdonshire Village made its Mark on England's History (2023) by Anthony Withers. ISBN: 978-1-739427-1-2

A Guide to the Church of St Andrew by Anthony Withers (community publication 2022)

A Guide to the Walks around Great Staughton by Anthony Withers (community publication 1996)

THE FOLLOWING NOTES AMPLIFY THE COMMENTS I MADE AT THE HEARING

NOTE: Chapter 3 of my book *Great Staughton and its People* focuses on the Roman villa excavated in 1958-9. With the discovery of an entirely unknown Roman settlement on the site this could be an archaeological jewel, giving historians a unique opportunity to investigate the historical links with other nearby Roman towns (Sandy for example) and the network of Roman roads. Plans to install underground cabling on the site would be damaging.

NOTE: The Highway contains many buildings of historical interest which will be affected should HGV traffic is permitted to use this route. Buildings in the Town (church and Place House in particular) will be subject to severe vibration from HGV traffic.

Traffic on the B645. The sharp bend at 'Pigg's Hill' has seen numerous casualties usually involving HGVs. With the projected traffic estimated at several hundred vehicles per week, there will be great concern locally that there will be numerous accidents.

Labour force: will local labour be used or will workers be bussed in from outlying areas? If so the volume of traffic is likely to be intense and the local road infrastructure will not be able to support it.

NOTE: I would like to amplify brief comments about food security. This is good agricultural land which will be lost forever at a time when we need to grow more of our own food. As far as I can see, this development seems to be principally an investment vehicle which will of course bring electricity but will chiefly benefit international anonymous investors.

NOTE: I would also like to know if any other more suitable brownfield sites were investigated. There is a huge amount of development planned for Bedfordshire: east-west rail, Universal Studios, Tempsford new town and this proposal is too much.

NOTE: Like many, I have serious reservations about the [REDACTED] of the supply chain for the solar panels, possibly sourced from [REDACTED]. How will we know whether [REDACTED] has been involved in their manufacture?