

## Open Floor Hearing

My name is Ann Kennedy and I am the Chair of the Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum – known as BOBLAF. I am also a volunteer with the British Horse Society.

I wish to talk about the impact of this development on rights of way. I am speaking today behalf of both BOBLAF and the British Horse Society.

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So, Mr Sword, when you hear reference to rights of way users, please remember that these are real people who use this network of routes for their physical and mental wellbeing – this boy is just one of them.

This massive development will impact a very large number of public rights of way – it is estimated that about 20km of rights of way will be directly affected plus many many more indirectly. The effects on these paths will be felt during construction, throughout the operational phase and in perpetuity.

Today, I want to focus on one aspect of the application - the fact that, should the development be approved, no significant additional public access is proposed. This is despite repeated requests from several interested parties and despite very clear guidance in both national and local policy that such additional provision should be provided. I refer in particular to paragraph 2.10.36 of EN-3.

Solar farms are industrial developments that bring no benefit to local residents - on the contrary, they impact very negatively on the immediate area around their homes and communities. Provision of rights of way enhancements is one way which could benefit residents and lessen the negative impact of the project if it is approved.

Both BOBLAF and the BHS has pressed for additional access throughout the consultation, and I have offered to work with the developer to assist in providing a coherent set of proposals. Bedford Borough Council has also made several suggestions for enhancements to the network in their representations, many of which were also made to the Applicant during consultation.

The possibility of providing additional public access has been ignored by the Applicant, seemingly because the landowners refuse to countenance such access. There appears to be no recognition of the damage being done to this important community asset – an excellent rights of way network – and a refusal to seriously consider actions to mitigate the damage.

For example, the BHS proposed (and both BOBLAF and the Council supported) that a link should be provided from the road by Lodge Farm in Little Staughton to the B660 in Brook End. This would provide an important off-road link in an existing incomplete equestrian circuit and would save 3.6km of more dangerous road work for riders. It could be achieved by upgrading some footpaths.

I can arrange for maps of the various suggested improvements to be provided as a follow up to this hearing.

To me, it speaks volumes that in the glossary; in defining 'green infrastructure' the Applicant has removed from the NPPF definition the reference to the health and wellbeing benefits for local and wider communities. Apparently, these benefits are not deemed important!

In short, it is my belief that the Applicant has intentionally ignored the potential to deliver enhancements to public rights of way and to provide new opportunities for public access.

This may well be at the landowners' behest but the failure to recognise the harm done to this important community resource and the failure to seek to redress that harm, makes this development, in my view, unacceptable.