

Notes for 9th June meeting

Good Morning

My name is Sandra Kelsey and I am the Treasurer and Publicity officer for North Beds Ramblers, as well Publicity officer for the Bedfordshire Area Ramblers. I am here to represent the Ramblers, Britain's Walking Charity.

Speaking on behalf of the Ramblers I would like to reiterate that the points raised in my original objection have not been answered by the applicant.

North Beds Ramblers, 1 of 4 Bedfordshire Ramblers Groups, host 7/8 group walks for approx. 30 people each month throughout Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. All four Bedfordshire groups plus a number of other walking groups, located in the area and neighbouring counties, regularly walk in the area we are discussing today.

This unique area is known as the North Bedfordshire Wolds. Though much of the surrounding county is quite flat, this specific area features gentle, rolling hills and a rural landscape, offering sweeping views. This largely unspoiled pocket of the countryside spans remote, traditional villages and is popular for its scenic walking routes, such as the North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail.

The joy of walking with such beautiful uninterrupted views cannot be measured or quantified, neither can a value be placed on the asset this area offers to large numbers of the population as a free and accessible resource.

Why is walking important?

Walking for pleasure can be a solo or group pastime.

We may walk to improve our fitness but people walk for many other reasons. Walking for pleasure is about the experience, the views, the connection with nature, to enjoy peace and quiet. It is well accepted that walking provides huge benefits to everyone's health and mental wellbeing.

Group walking can also offer the means to make new friendships which has added benefits.

We have a personal insight into the positive effects of group walking – one of our members, forced to give up work through mental ill health was encouraged to join a walking group by his therapist. He joined us, walks with us regularly, his mental and physical health have improved immeasurably and for this he pays tribute to his “walking family”.

How will our walking be affected by this development?

Walking in rural areas by necessity, makes use of the extensive network of footpaths/bridleways and by ways. Walking on narrow rural roads, without pavements,

is extremely dangerous, as such our group specifically avoids road walking where at all possible.

There are an estimated 4km of Bridleways and 11 km of footpaths directly affected by this proposed development. These figures are specific to the development located within Bedfordshire. There are, of course, many other Public Rights Of Way affected in neighbouring Cambridgeshire. Many more kilometres will be indirectly affected by the destruction of their views

During the construction and after the completion we may well have footpaths and bridleways left, but the damage will be enormous.

The scale of the development will permanently damage this area. Who wants to walk through fields of glass panels, along lines of security fencing, especially as the panels will be higher than many of our walkers? Who wants to stand on the top of the ridges and view acre upon acre of glass?

For less experienced walkers, navigation has been easy using the copious stand out Yellow topped way markers and our distinctive landmarks - particularly the Church spires

You always know where you are in the Wolds by the Churches – but no more if this development takes place. Instead, we will simply be funnelled down metal screened footpaths with limited views.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there will be planting of trees to screen the development these will take years to mature, block the views and in the cases such as BW37 halve the entire view.

Let us consider the area covered by site B. It is possible to plot a 5 mile circular route without ever leaving the development!

Why would anyone want to plan or take a walk in an industrial waste land? No one I would suggest and this is what will be left- corridors of high fencing though field of glass. Hardly the stuff of dreams!

Given the stresses and strains of this world, the reliance on screens and technology the value of free exercise, fresh air and nature, especially bird song, should not be underestimated nor squandered in this manner.

The roads around the sites under consideration are very narrow and any additional heavy construction traffic will adversely affect the small rural communities and those wanting to visit the area for walks.

I am aware that no accompanied visit has been made to see the area by the Examiner. Given the beauty and rural nature of this area I trust an unaccompanied visit has been made to it see first-hand and appreciate the devastation that is being proposed. How can a rational judgement be made without experiencing the area personally?

If it were proposed to build a solar farm of this scale in the Cotswold there would be, I suspect a National outcry. I would like the Examiner to ask why then is it acceptable to build in the North Bedfordshire Wolds!