



## Hearing Transcript

<b>Project:</b>	Rosefield Solar Farm
<b>Hearing:</b>	Open floor hearing 1 (OFH1)
<b>Date:</b>	24 February 2026

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## **Rosefield\_Solar\_OFH1\_24FEB**

Created on: 2026-02-24 13:07:00

Project Length: 00:28:50

File Name: Rosefield\_Solar\_OFH1\_24FEB

File Length: 00:28:50

### FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:05:14 - 00:00:37:22

Good afternoon. It's now 130 in time for this hearing. To begin, I'd like to welcome you all to this open floor hearing. The Rose field solar farm project. I just confirmed that everybody can hear me clearly. Thank you. I also confirm that the live streaming and recording of this event has commenced. Yep. Thank you. My name is Richard Morgan. I'm a chartered engineer and fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

00:00:38:05 - 00:00:52:03

I have been appointed by the Secretary of State to be the lead member of the panel to examine this application. I'm now going to ask the other panel member to introduce himself. Good afternoon. My name is Mark James.

00:00:52:05 - 00:00:56:03

I'm a chartered town planner, and I've also been appointed to be a member of the panel.

00:00:57:11 - 00:01:29:04

Thank you. Together, we constitute the examining authority for this application. I'd also like to introduce the members of the Planning Inspectors case team for supporting us today. You may have already spoken with them. We have Rebecca Luxton, case manager for this project, and Melissa Whitlock here in the venue, along with James Leadsom, who is dealing with the virtual side. Case team will be able to answer any questions you may have about today's event and the process in general.

00:01:30:03 - 00:02:00:04

I'll now just briefly deal with a few housekeeping matters. Those attending in person. Everyone, please set all devices and phones to silent. The toilets are located below this room. Follow the signs down the stairs in the foyer and there are no fire alarm drills scheduled for today. If the alarm sounds, follow the routes marked around the room and the directions of the hotel staff.

00:02:01:19 - 00:02:27:07

The agenda has not been prepared for this hearing, because its purpose is to hear the representations of interested parties who have registered to make oral representations, expanding on their written representations to date. The order in which you will be invited to speak will be the list provided to us by the case team, and is based on the order in which requests to speak were received.

00:02:30:13 - 00:03:01:04

Today's hearing is being undertaken in a hybrid way, meaning some of you are present with us at the hearing venue and some of you are joining us virtually using Microsoft Teams. We'll make sure that however you have decided to attend today, you'll be given a fair opportunity to participate. A recording of today's hearing will be made available on the Rose Field Solar Farm section of the National Infrastructure Planning website, as soon as practicable after the hearing is finished.

00:03:01:19 - 00:03:39:07

With this in mind, please ensure that you speak clearly into a microphone stating your name and who you are representing each time you speak. If you're not at a table with a microphone, there's a roving microphone, so please wait for one of those to be brought to you before you speak. A link to the Planning Inspectors privacy notice was provided in the notification for this hearing. We assume that everybody here today has familiarized themselves with this document, which establishes establishes how the personal data of our customers is handled in accordance with the principles set out in data protection laws.

00:03:39:21 - 00:04:18:16

Please speak to the case team if you have any questions about this. Let me briefly explain the purpose of this open floor hearing. Open floor hearings are your opportunity to raise anything directly with examining authority that is important and relevant, and that you think we should know about and consider they're not about a particular issue. The subject of your representation about the proposed development is therefore up to you. Due to the number of parties wishing to speak, we usually set a time limit of five minutes for individuals and eight minutes for representations made on behalf of communities or groups.

00:04:18:29 - 00:04:45:02

I'll indicate when your time is coming to an end. Once you've spoken, I or my colleague may wish to ask you questions. Finally, the applicant will be given an opportunity to respond to any matters raised. Once all speakers have been heard, either orally today or in writing by deadline one which is the 10th of March. Before we hear from any speakers, can I ask who will be speaking for the applicant this afternoon?

00:05:03:06 - 00:05:13:21

Sorry. Amy Stirling. I'm from Pinsent Masons. I'll be representing the applicant today. I believe when I'm given the right of reply, I can move to the table and speak into the mic there. Thank you sir.

00:05:13:23 - 00:05:15:09

Okay. Thank you, Miss Stirling.

00:05:17:11 - 00:05:42:01

I've got a list here of the persons who've registered to speak today. I'll go through this list now to confirm those who wish to speak and whether they're here in person or online. I understand that some of these people may have indicated that they don't wish to speak, but I'll just go through the whole list just to make sure I don't miss anyone. So first of all, I've got Buckinghamshire County Council. Uh, do they wish to to speak at this hearing today?

00:05:53:17 - 00:05:56:06

Daniel Gazelka for the council. Um, no we don't, sir.

00:05:56:12 - 00:06:07:21

Okay. Thank you. And I've got a Mr. David Tibbets, the chair of Hawkshaw Parish Council. Is Mr. Tibbets in the room?

00:06:09:17 - 00:06:23:29

No. Okay. Next. I've got, um, Miss Helen Hamilton and Miss Carlie Tinkler of Claydon Soul Action Group. Does anyone from the action group wish to speak at this hearing today?

00:06:25:15 - 00:06:33:13

Uh, Helen Hamilton from Claydon Solar Action Group. Uh, no, we're not anticipating saying anything at this hearing.

00:06:33:25 - 00:06:38:27

Okay. Thank you. Next on my list, I've got a Heather Paul.

00:06:41:12 - 00:06:43:09

Is Heather Paul in the room?

00:06:46:29 - 00:06:52:03

Okay. And that's this. Paul doesn't want to speak. Okay. Thank you.

00:06:56:24 - 00:07:04:13

Next, I have Mr. Alan Turner speak on behalf of the MP Greg Smith.

00:07:05:18 - 00:07:07:00

Yes, indeed. Thank you.

00:07:07:02 - 00:07:09:06

Okay. Thank you, Mr. Turner.

00:07:10:25 - 00:07:28:25

Then I have Mr. Gareth Williams is in the room. And does he wish to speak on this hearing? No thank you. Okay. Thank you. And then finally on my list, I have Mr. Robert Turner. Do you wish to speak in this hearing, Mr. Turner?

00:07:29:07 - 00:07:31:08

Robert Turner? Yes, I would like to.

00:07:31:12 - 00:07:38:28

Okay. Thank you. Okay. Um, is there anyone else in the room who would like to speak at this hearing today?

00:07:42:14 - 00:07:45:19

No. Okay. Um,

00:07:47:04 - 00:07:57:06

okay. If I can call, um, Mr. Alan Turner, then to the microphone. Um, and we've. Oh, we've given you eight minutes, basically.

00:08:01:08 - 00:08:34:15

Thank you. I have Mr. Mr. Smith wished me to just run through a few of the salient points from his, uh, submission. Um, he sends his apologies today for not being able to attend in person due to commitments at Westminster. I'll be very brief, and a copy of this will is available to hand over for your records afterwards. This commercial project represents a catastrophic loss of food producing agricultural land.

00:08:34:20 - 00:09:16:00

Conservative 1689 acres at least, which threatens both the livelihoods of local farmers and by extension, the local economy through unemployment and loss of access to the land for non farming purposes, especially tourism and the UK's national food security. This would be a devastating blow to the local communities, who are already seriously impacted by the cumulative effects of other nearby megaprojects such as HS2, east west rail, multiple housing developments and new extra large prison.

00:09:17:04 - 00:09:58:21

The rural road network in this part of Buckinghamshire simply cannot take yet another mega project. Thousands of further HGV movements during the construction phase along these crumbling into village roads and lanes, were proved disastrous. Pedestrians and cyclists would be particularly at risk. This is without doubt the wrong place to build such a construction. What makes matters infinitely worse is the sheer inefficiency of solar power in the UK, particularly during the winter months when daylight hours are short and conversely, Electricity demand is at a peak.

00:09:59:11 - 00:10:31:26

A recent independent energy research report concluded that solar power capacity factors, a measure of performance, are as low as 9.5 to 11% across an average year. That is wholly unsustainable in any sense of the word. It is poor value for money, and, I suspect may only be feasible with the aid of subsidies and tax concessions. This application also includes battery storage units.

00:10:32:02 - 00:11:14:20

Yes, this is of extreme concern. Not only do they have relatively low electricity storage limitations between 4 to 6 hours, they are already lagging behind fast moving technological advances and are inherently a huge environmental risk. A 2025 report by the Environmental Hazards and Emergencies Department of the UK Health Security Agency, is damning in its conclusions on safety issues, including fire, the release of toxic gases, contamination, risks of land and groundwater.

00:11:15:00 - 00:11:49:18

Noise levels and electromagnetic fields. And very worrying is the lack of clarity on decommissioning the disposal of thousands of tons of lithium ion battery waste. Toxic and highly reactive, is a vast and extremely expensive undertaking. Who is going to fund this and ultimately, who will be responsible?

Should the site operator no longer be in business? Who will have to pick up the bill? I assume the public purse.

00:11:50:16 - 00:12:18:16

There are, of course, many other reasons why its application should be refused. The impact on wildlife, the natural and visual landscape. The current dire lack of connectivity, capacity to the national grid. And more detail on all of these points is laid out in our formal submission of objection to the inspector. Thank you for taking the time to listen to these concerns. Thank you.

00:12:18:23 - 00:12:20:00

Thank you, Mr. Turner.

00:12:27:03 - 00:12:34:24

If I could invite Mr. Robert Turner to come to the desk there. And for your representation.

00:12:40:22 - 00:12:42:20

What do I need? Is it just that his work.

00:12:45:04 - 00:12:45:19

Is.

00:12:47:10 - 00:12:47:25

Back.

00:12:49:24 - 00:12:55:03

Yeah. So as an individual person, we've allocated you five minutes.

00:12:55:06 - 00:12:57:24

Yes. No, I'm fine I. Yes, I'll

00:12:59:13 - 00:13:39:04

I'm I. Yes. I'm on. Thank you. Um. Yeah. Thank you for this opportunity. Um, I. My name is Robert Turner. Um, I'm a local farmer, I neighbor. Um, the site. Um, and, um, my particular interest. And I'm speaking out today for wildlife, basically. Um, I've lived in this area for 40 years, uh, in various villages and always taken a keen interest in nature.

00:13:39:12 - 00:14:18:03

Um, the last 25 years, I've been managing my own piece of ground, which is relatively small as farms go. Um, managing it largely for wildlife. Um, and my sheep, to some extent, play second fiddle. Um. As time has gone by and I've run out of space on my land. Um, two of my neighbors have allowed me and afforded me, um, the ability to plant continued, um, planting for wildlife and nature, um, increasing biodiversity quite considerably.

00:14:18:12 - 00:14:35:07

Um, and in in the past 15 years, we've planted about three kilometres of hedges, which some of which are quite mature now and are supporting um, increasing numbers of, um, different birds, um, and butterflies.

00:14:37:09 - 00:14:37:29

Um.

00:14:42:07 - 00:14:43:17

I'm concerned

00:14:45:13 - 00:15:04:15

primarily with what I see as a slight deception or mistruths in the representations made as regards the value of the area which is to be developed. Um.

00:15:07:05 - 00:15:39:26

The arable fields and small pasture network across the Plains and Hawkshaw are. Critical habitat for some of the UK's most threatened farmland, birds and butterflies. These include particularly skylarks, meadow pipits, lapwings. Yellow hammers. Wagtails. Woodcock. Snipe. We have all the warblers that one would expect to find in this area.

00:15:41:02 - 00:16:11:06

Um, we have all the owls that we would expect and all of the raptors. Uh, in fact, if you put a pin in the centre of this development within ten miles, you will find virtually every single farm land bird that should be here, here. Um, and the bit that connects the areas where I've lived and known the wildlife is this central hub between Calvert and the Clayton's.

00:16:13:02 - 00:16:45:03

Um, I live in our extended break. I read through Piedmont, uh, b bouts report and there, which I'm sure you'll have read or will be reading. Um, and, you know, I'm emboldened by what I read by then because it really does mirror my own findings. Um, there is something quite unique about our area. Um, originally, a hunting forest formed the central part of it, and remnants of those woodlands are still in place.

00:16:45:24 - 00:17:29:13

Um, the estate that is involved with this development is the Claydon Estate, which was also a hunting Family, and often large estates like this were wonderful at avoiding taking out and grubbing out hedges when it was the fashionable thing to do. When farmers were paid in the 70s, and many of the hedges that were there, which had been removed from other parts of the country, are still here. And I don't know how well you've sort of explored the area, but, you know, the patchwork of fields and the variety, you know, are real important critical habits, habitats.

00:17:29:14 - 00:17:51:22

You know, to some of our most threatened birds, these species rely on farmland, mixed small fields with traditional hedgerows. Industrial scale solar installations will destroy the connectivity of this land.

00:17:52:03 - 00:17:55:16

Mr.. Well, if I could ask you to bring it to a conclusion.

00:17:55:27 - 00:17:57:23

Yes. Okay. Um,

00:17:59:12 - 00:18:30:06

I particularly would, would like the developers to consider other options. Um, it's clear that solar is the worst option from the point of view of farmland. Um, wind turbines, for instance, would create very little damage in terms compared with the solar. Um, one of the things that the Wildlife Trusts have highlighted.

00:18:30:23 - 00:19:09:11

Um, is there they've questioned just about every statistic and every element of, of monitoring that the developers have done and their claims to produce a biodiversity net gain of any sort. Really, is is just almost Ridiculous to consider. It's not really possible because even the bits of land that they are going to enhance, they will already be supporting the likes of skylarks and meadow pipits.

00:19:09:13 - 00:19:36:19

So, you know, any change that happens to those fields will dislodge wildlife that's already there. So I realise my time has come to an end. But my real plea is that, eh, you will look, you know, carefully at the Wildlife Trust's, um, appraisal of this development. Um, but also that the developers might just consider other options which would be far less damaging.

00:19:37:01 - 00:19:39:07

Okay. Thank you, Mr. Turner. Thank you.

00:19:40:25 - 00:19:41:18

Okay.

00:19:43:18 - 00:19:44:03

Thank you.

00:19:45:20 - 00:19:53:04

You would note that, please. Um, okay. Is there anyone else in the room would like to speak at this hearing.

00:19:55:18 - 00:20:00:20

Would you like to come and explain who you are and.

00:20:01:22 - 00:20:02:13

Yeah.

00:20:03:13 - 00:20:36:18

My name is Anya Schaffer. I am a Buckinghamshire councillor for the Buckingham ward, and I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity without preparation to say a few words. I have

listened quite carefully to what the other two speakers have said, and I would like to point to the sheer size of the proposed development. I think the point about wildlife and the connectivity of the sites are really well made.

00:20:36:20 - 00:21:14:11

This is hugely important. The other really important thing is the question of landscape and amenity. Again, this is a very large site. We are not talking about a couple of fields and I think the impact on the landscape and on the amenity will be completely different to that of smaller scale solar farm developments that we have seen. I would like to echo the words we have just heard that there are other renewable energy options available.

00:21:14:17 - 00:21:45:22

I am not for a minute arguing against renewable energy. I think we need it and it is important. But it is also important to consider which forms of renewable energy and which sightings from a strategic perspective for the country are the ones that will work best. Onshore wind is an option, and I would be really pleased if the developers were to consider other options.

00:21:45:24 - 00:22:16:23

I also think from a strategic perspective, which is not necessarily for this development, but I think you have to take into account the strategic energy perspectives of this country. There are better sites for solar installation that is on existing that's not on greenfield sites, that is not on good farmland, but they would be on. Just to throw out a few examples, car parks, large buildings, new builds.

00:22:16:25 - 00:22:30:12

So there are a lot of renewable energy options that do not require the damage to wildlife and the damage to the landscape that a huge solar farm installation of this sort would do. Thank you very much.

00:22:31:24 - 00:22:32:16

Thank you.

00:22:37:19 - 00:22:40:25

Just a final call then, for anyone who would like to speak at this hearing.

00:22:43:09 - 00:22:54:05

No, I can't see any hands. Okay, before I wrap up, then, can I ask, uh, Miss Stirling, on behalf of the applicant. If you'd like to respond to any of the points you've heard.

00:23:04:09 - 00:23:40:07

Yes. Thank you sir. Amy Stirling, on behalf of the applicant. Firstly, I want to thank everyone for their time in attending today. It is an important part of the process that the public have a right to be heard and an opportunity to express their concerns with the project. The applicant has submitted a detailed response to the relevant representations which were submitted, which can be found at application reference PPA 006. And we note that other interested parties now have the opportunity to comment on our comments for deadline one on the 10th of March.

00:23:40:09 - 00:24:25:21

So I wanted to sort of remind everyone of that opportunity which is available to them. Some of the representations which have been made today go to public policy, I would suggest the government is fairly clear. Both the previous government and this government, that there is an established need for solar farms at the scale as it as a national policy statement. Ian one and indeed NPS. Ian one states that all applications for renewable energy schemes are covered by the policy, which includes solar, should be assessed on the basis that the government has already demonstrated that there is a need for the infrastructure which is urgent, and that substantial weight should be given to that need.

00:24:25:23 - 00:24:58:20

So I do understand that in the introductory remarks to the open Board hearing and the plenary meeting this morning, the examining body to examine authority did recognise that we weren't going to re-examine the national policy statements. I do feel some of, perhaps some of the statements made straight and straight into policy. So I wanted to sort of touch on that. That being said, the applicant is obliged and has indeed complied with the mitigation hierarchy sought to avoid and mitigate the impacts of the scheme in delivering the national need and urgency for renewable energy infrastructure.

00:24:58:22 - 00:25:25:12

This ultimately does unfortunately result in localised impacts which have been assessed and mitigation proposed within the environmental statement. Ultimately, the applicant's planning statement, which is application referenced as 0 to 7, finds that the benefits of the scheme outweigh these localised impacts. Turning specifically to the comments which have been made,

00:25:26:29 - 00:26:02:21

Mr. Turner, who spoke on behalf of Greg Smith MP, referenced the impacts on agricultural land. I think it's important to note that agricultural land and minimising those impacts has played a key role in the site selection, and indeed the site has only just over 1.5% best and most versatile land within the outer limits, which is an extremely low percentage for solar DCO schemes that can be found in the Soils chapter EP 055.

00:26:03:00 - 00:26:36:29

In relation to the concerns relating to construction traffic management, the applicant is obliged to comply with its Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan, which will ultimately be subject to the approval of Buckinghamshire Council as the local planning authority, and that is document reference. App. One. Four. One. There is concern around the best safety that has been assessed within the application and found to be not significant, and indeed, the applicant is committed to the Outline Battery Safety Management plan which is referenced.

00:26:37:01 - 00:27:09:24

App 145 I think I can put all of these references within our speaking notes in terms of the biodiversity point in which we heard last from from Mr. Turner, the applicant is as legally obliging itself to deliver a biodiversity net gain. Requirements within of schedule two of the Draft Development Consent Order requires the applicant to deliver at least 40% gain for area based habitats, 17% gain for hedgerows and over 10% for watercourses.

00:27:09:26 - 00:27:45:03

That goes above and beyond the government policy, as it currently is, for insect projects of at least 10%. So the applicant is fully committed to delivering gain. Um, and the only other point I wish to make, just on the point of alternative renewable energy technologies, that was mentioned a few times, the applicant has considered alternative renewable energy technologies, including wind, and its analysis of those alternatives can be found at section 4.5 of chapter four of the EES, which is application reference app 047.

00:27:45:05 - 00:27:55:07

So we have provided a comprehensive written analysis to all of the relevant representations which cover similar themes and will follow up with this information in writing. Thank you.

00:27:56:10 - 00:27:57:18

Thank you, Miss Stirling.

00:28:00:16 - 00:28:31:15

Sorry if there is no other relevant business. May I remind you that the timetable for this examination requires that parties provide any post hearing documents, including any written summaries from individuals who spoke today, if possible, on or before deadline one which is the 10th of March. May I also remind you that the recording of this hearing will be placed on the Planning Secretary's website as soon as possible after this meeting. Thank you all very much for attending today and for your participation.

00:28:31:17 - 00:28:45:04

We will consider all of your representations carefully, and they will inform the examining authority's decision on whether written questions and or further rounds of hearings will be necessary. Thank you. This hearing is now closed.