

Dear sirs/madams

Engagement and process

I am disappointed with the lack of in-depth engagement with the communities that border this proposal.

I myself have a 1/2-kilometre boundary with the project and at a very early stage invited Rose Field to visit our nature reserve/farm. I did not receive a reply.

Now that I have seen many elements of the whole process, I realize that the highly skilled proposers who are clearly emboldened by our current governments' intentions, and a biodiversity net gain tool which ironically serves developers far more effectively than it serves nature, I realize that the proposer doesn't feel they need to listen. or at least not after their early pre planned back track on scale to make it look that way. They know there is little we can do under these circumstances and frankly by the end of the process, the complaints I had heard with regards to them "just not listening" were clear. They knew they didn't need too.

Of course my lack of education and natural tendency to be a bit emotive probably makes engaging with me a bit challenging but I am passionate about the wild life and nature in this part of north bucks and like many others have done all I can for many years, to improve it.

Please believe me, the current proposal will be very costly to wild life and nature in so many ways but I have found the process of communicating this very difficult in the hearings, especially when valid comments by professionals are simply batted off by the opposition quoting item has been covered in some subsection of a massive document which certainly for me was not easily accessible. At times just by referring to the BNG appeared to be enough of to satisfy the inspectorate. There was one occasion when the proposer's ecologist slipped a belittling comment to solar actions group ecologist, which demonstrated and confirmed their contempt.

I feel many concerns about wildlife were not properly answered, or not answer at all. This is not surprising given that the inspectorate team did not include an ecologist. I don't understand how this can be considered a hearing without knowledgeable experts at hand who can best interpret the significance of points made, I found the lack of this a huge barrier to me contributing verbally, how can one explain the complexity of habitat needs beyond the depth of bng in this environment.

Site selection

The Claydon estate is the heart of north Buckinghamshire's working nature reserve, it is where working farms and nature still function side by side.

I believe the selection of this site for industrial scale solar is misguided. It is an area where the landscape and features, field sizes and hedges have been largely unaffected during recent years of industrial scale farming. 200-year-old maps demonstrate this clearly, with remnants of ancient woodland intact and rich in wildlife.

This is why we still have rare species such as Bechstein bats and excellent bird and wildlife diversity. This is an area of rich, self-managing diversity and to consider destroying the very heart of it is unbelievably short sighted. Yes, we have new priorities, I agree with the need, but not at such cost. Knee jerk 30-year late decisions will not lead to sustainable outcomes.

Our nature.

There are some instances of numbers of farmland birds increasing in recent years, butterfly s too and evidence that the Claydon's are retaining species we are losing elsewhere. There is an excellent opportunity to further the work of species retention because of the current foundation but also a group of individual local people who have dedicated their time to study and protection of wildlife life in this area. It is my opinion this land should be further protected, not destroyed. And that is exactly what is proposed as far as wildlife is concerned, in spite of ridiculous claims to contrary. In this part of north bucks arable fields are a crucial part of the habitat mix for many species and hugely undervalued in the metrics employed by BNG calculations which I believe may have been based on wide expanses of featureless arable plains of other counties.

This is a landscape where farming and wildlife coexist really well, and is greatly enjoyed by many who live farm or visit the Claydon's , furthermore, our soil type which may not be regarded as prime, does produce excellent crops in drought years, and stays in place in wet years. A soil of choice for the future.

Bechstein bats.

As a rare and protected species of which our true understanding is accepted widely as patchy, I feel the attitude to their protection by rose field has been contemptible. I believe English nature have failed to demand anywhere near enough of a buffer between their known regular habitat and the areas they may frequent without our knowledge at times of marginal insect activity and food source. The original request of fifty metre buffers which I think are totally inadequate anyway, have not been met. These ancient woodland should require at least adjacent fields and hedges to be left intact, that is if one is truly interested in protecting this species, and honestly, even that may not be an enough in my opinion.

A point that was raised during a hearing, was the lack of study on whether bats use

areas where sheep graze or rest to seek food. I understand that studies have proved a link between cattle and bats feeding on insects disturbed or attracted by them, as a farmer who feeds/ checks sheep very nearby, after dark 365 times a year I can report that bats do indeed seek sheep for feeding, though far from daily, there are occasions of marginal insect activity when it gets quite busy, and twice in the last 25 years I've experienced frantic activity around the sheep.

I believe it highly likely that Bechstein's would also demonstrate this behaviour when challenged for food.

Problem is for the likes of all expert ecologist, they seem to have to evidence every request for margin, I would argue that the evidence is clear, we don't have the knowledge or evidence, but instead of leaving a wide margin for bats, rose field challenge the minimum request made.

As long as the boxes received a tick, that's fine for them. Bng is a simple set of boxes for this purpose.

The UK has among the most depleted wildlife in Europe. It is obvious why. And let me say now, the biodiversity nett gain metrics will ultimately be found to be a huge contributing factor in allowing the most damaging onslaught of destruction across our treasured English countryside for years, probably worse than the post war payments for grubbing up trees and hedges. At the same time as this, developers are able to claim huge biodiversity gains which is so clearly Impossible that anyone who cares to question them for a moment can see.

For example, if a 1500 acre solar farm can produce a biodiversity nett gain of 50% then it would follow that if we wish to improve biodiversity across the country by 50 % we just cover it solar panels.

It does not have to be that way, and as mentioned in previous correspondence I am pro solar and on shore wind.

The problem here is one of density and location. There is little space left for wildlife and food production, and the solar arrays fragment the land Scape features to such an extent as to render the high value features such as hedges, ditches and margins pretty much value less.

This project is designed around the desire to build with one landowner rather than consider the need for renewables in the vicinity of east Claydon substation and work up plans from there. It is obvious that wind should be part of the mix here and if for no other reason to balance the electric production throughout the year. The battery storage will

likely be almost redundant in winter which suggest to me that across the country if it's either wind or solar we will be building twice as many battery storage units than we need.

Solar is by far the most damaging renewable to wildlife habitats, farmers' livelihoods and people's enjoyment of the countryside. Of course, there are still some that still can't see the beauty of wind turbines and what they can do for us, or perhaps more likely fear the consequences to house prices, all understandable, but frankly life and food production and wild life can simply continue as usual around them, and that is in my mind what really matters here.

Personally, (like the French government), I don't think solar should be a priority over farmland. Apart from in places where the ground is of little value to anything. Maybe alongside railway lines or motorways or on roofs of houses or factories.

Food security

We should all be in no doubt that UK food production and globally is becoming more and more challenging year on year, and we should be upping production to insure we are closer to self-sufficient and in plentiful years have something we can put by or export. Drought, flooding, and wildfires look like the new norm. Parts of this country may well run out of water in 2027. All signs are there now, but who dares to say it. We've just had one of the wettest winters followed by early hose pipe bans.

Farmland birds

This part of north bucks is becoming a real stronghold for this group with much good work by local landowners.

Meadow pipits and skylark

Good numbers of skylark and meadow pipits over winter on green hill where we managed the pasture for that purpose.

These birds spread out across the wider landscape locally to nest during the spring. Meadow pipits are relied on heavily by the cuckoo which appears to be slightly more successful locally after gradual decline.

I would expect meadow pipits to decline in this development site by around 90% if solar goes ahead. Similar for sky larks.

The reason for these figures is that they nest in large open arable fields in order to remain hard to find for predators and the fact that the crop is undisturbed during the nesting period. The closest I've known them to nest to a hedge is about 50 metres. They are less successful in grass land locally due to grazing, silage cuts and early hay cut.

And I believe it has taken them 30 years to recognize how to avoid our intensive silage operations. These birds rely heavily on successive arable crops on barnwood farm. Typically, I would estimate one pair of either species per 9 to 16 acres. The 10 % remaining I hope may find sites in the new landscape created by the developers, but this will depend on management of these sites. 10% may be optimistic, as sites designated for such will likely already have both.

Cuckoo

I find it hard to estimate the effects on the cuckoo population because the numbers are so small and they may have the ability to adapt. I have for some years known of two regular locations on the Claydon estate where I always hear them, the one closest to my home became two pairs this year for the first time. This may be because bernwode farm has been taken back in hand by Claydon estates who have adopted less favourable conditions for meadow pipits this year across the whole farm by planting it all with beans. So, the extra pair may well have been looking further afield due to beans not suiting meadow pipits.

What I have noticed over the past 25 years is that the cuckoo on all sites is present where arable meets grassland and the call I very rarely heard over grass land always arable. I have created extensive areas which suits hosts for cuckoo eggs but not once has the cuckoo sung here. Meadow pipits do nest in our grassland in small numbers, but it seems to me the cuckoo prefer to use nests in arable fields as they are probably easier to find and access and of course less likely to be disturbed by sheep or cropping. I would guess over the whole project area there may be 5 or 6 pairs which may dwindle to 1 or 2 certainly available host sites will reduce by 80-90% during build and say first few years. I do not expect to hear to hear this bird from my land if work commences.

Snipe and woodcock

I have rarely walked the fields of bernwode farm during day or night without stumbling across these birds. They simply will not be there in future. These wet clay fields provide an important food source for both species.

Lapwings and golden plover

In years past, lapwings nested on bernwode farm. Since then, they returned in Jan and few each year to feed. They may fly 10 or so miles to this site. They are very nervous birds, and I've never managed to get anywhere near them. They fly around for quite some time before landing but have never landed when I've hidden in copses and hedge before they arrive. Winter of 25 26 they came twice that I saw and never landed, I believe this is because there was a digger ditching in adjacent fields for much of the winter.

These birds were described by rose fields ecologists highly mobile in winter inferring that they would just go elsewhere. This may be true in areas where food is plentiful. But not here.

So I would disagree with him on that.

They have wings yes, but the energy used to reach a feeding area in winter in Buckinghamshire is huge compared with the likely benefit. Clearly on the whole they do benefit from this site because they return each year but there are not many suitable sites in this area. I would suggest that they make this journey because they are starving as on 3 occasions one or two birds have dropped out of the flock landed in our wet scrapes near our house and died within day or week of arrival.

In the past 3 or so years I have seen upto 150 sometimes in two separate groups, though most recently about 90.

These birds may perish without this land. There is no scope to mitigate for them. Though it was suggested that an area was earmarked for nesting lapwing. Not sure what they would eat though.

Expect total loss of this species from here.

Owls

We currently have reasonable populations of barn, tawney, and little owl. Short ear owl has also been noted. The project design may produce some enhanced conditions on a small scale for owls. Overall decline is inevitable, enhanced areas will already be owl territory. Establish Barn owl hunting grounds will be diminished and local birds will spend much more time hunting roadside verges with obvious consequences. These birds have large hunting grounds and are very susceptible to starvation.

I've no doubt population will fall overall.

Yellowhammers reed buntings' siskins, green gold, and other finches. Brambling linnet and sparrows.

The bulk of this group have increased in numbers in the immediate area in recent years. A really important part of their diet are spills from harvesting when they build reserves for winter. This opportunity will be lost.

This maybe disputed by rose field, but no account has been taken for the fact that vegetation growing in shade under panels will not produce much useful seed or nectar as both required sunshine and water.

Grey and red legged partridges

This group were part of the real charm of the Claydon's 30 years. You would see them in every village and in-between running or low flying with day old chick, amazing sight to be

seen throughout the Claydon's

They are still here today, tiny numbers but still here, grey and red legged.

Warblers and other songbirds

White throats, chiffchaff, garden warbler and blackcap are doing really well locally, others like willow warbler, reed and sedge warbler less so but they are still present on the Claydon estate. The improved drainage that a solar farm requires will not be beneficial to this group, and as far as I can see no attempt has been made to retain water for wildlife and hold back excess winter flows. Wagtails which could make use of parts of a solar farm will also lack the water element.

Starlings

Great numbers of starling's nest in the Claydon's. By August they start to form slightly larger family groups, feed on pasture and cut arable fields and as the autumn approaches large groups connect pre roosting. We have had a growing winter roost at hogshaw for about 4 years; it reached about 1000 in autumn last year and swelled to about 10,000 by the end of winter. This proved too heavy for the site's vegetation, it collapsed, but notably they stayed local, tried numerous sites on local farms including Claydon lawn area and Bernwode farm ultimately split into 3 or 4 groups. Large numbers worked across the fields Bernwode farm. I have a fantastic 30 min video of the best murmuration I have ever seen. This filmed over hogshaw and Bernwode farm.

Redwing and fieldfare

No surprise here, our high density of hedges, and just enough overgrown ones keep these birds resident here with us all winter long and for me winter would be a sad time without them. The fields of Bernwode farm probably make up 1/4 to 1/3 of their diet at times during the winter.

This will simply disappear; it won't be there. And will impact on them.

Geese and seagulls

We don't see quite so many greylag geese as we have in the past, but they do still turn up from time to time. Bernwode is the farm most likely to receive this visit.

3 species of deer,
badgers, foxes and hares

It's a fact from recent experience of HS2 fencing out wildlife, many will die on the roads. But no account of how these larger mammals benefit biodiversity have been accounted for.

Free movement of these animals across the land Scape is crucial for genetic diversity and good health.

Hot spots are likely to occur on some farms and culling excess will likely result.

I would estimate 70 % will be dead after 2 years of fencing going up, and many will go through periods of extreme stress, as will I and other locals when we come across half dead or stressed deer.