Written Representation of Joan Bassler

1. Introduction

I am a resident of Malmesbury and an active walker who spends much of my time on the footpaths, lanes, and green spaces around the town and the surrounding parishes. My connection to this landscape is not abstract: it is part of my daily life, my wellbeing, and my sense of belonging. I support the transition to low-carbon energy, but I believe it must be achieved in a way that strengthens communities, protects ecosystems, and respects the character of our countryside.

If we race toward renewable energy targets without recognising the love and connection people feel for their countryside, we risk a future built on the ruins of the very landscapes that hold our communities together.

This Written Representation sets out my concerns about the Lime Down Solar Scheme and explains why I believe large, dispersed solar developments of this kind are not an appropriate or proportionate response to the challenge of delivering Net Zero in the UK. More effective alternatives exist — ones that strengthen home-grown businesses, support the economy, and deliver genuinely sustainable renewable energy without sacrificing the landscapes that sustain us.

2. Landscape, Wellbeing, and a Sense of Belonging

Our countryside has a strong and distinctive sense of place. North Wiltshire is shaped by its open rural character, historic field patterns, pockets of Cotswold stone buildings, and the network of footpaths and informal walking routes used regularly by local residents. This landscape contributes directly to community identity, recreational amenity, and people's wellbeing. Large-scale industrial development in this setting would fundamentally alter the area's character and the way people experience and value it.

As a keen pub walker, I experience the countryside at human-scale with birdsong in my ear — through footpaths, farm tracks, hedgerows, fields, and the quiet continuity of rural life. It cannot be experienced in pictures or on a screen. It is visceral. You have to be in it to feel it and understand it. These landscapes nourish the soul and are part of what makes England distinctive and cherished.

The footpaths, lanes, and quiet rural roads across this area are used daily by walkers and cyclists. They visit the surrounding villages, pubs, cafés, and small businesses. These routes are part of the local economy as well as the local way of life. Large-scale solar developments of this kind would divert visitors away from the area, but more importantly, they risk discouraging local people from getting out into the countryside at all.

The knock-on effects would be significant: reduced footfall for rural businesses, and a direct negative impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of residents who rely on these landscapes for everyday exercise, connection, and respite.

Industrialising these spaces for energy generation risks eroding the very qualities that make rural England worth living in and protecting. In the rush toward Net Zero, we must not destroy these landscapes, because they sustain our communities, strengthen individuals, and already help fight climate change by storing carbon, absorbing carbon, and supporting biodiversity.

Pursuing sprawling solar schemes at the expense of these living systems ultimately harms the very foundations of our own future. In effect, we would be shooting ourselves in the foot.

3. The Unsuitability of Large-Scale Solar in a Small Island Nation

The UK is not China, Australia or the USA. In fact, it's not even as big as California. We are a small island with limited land, a densely interwoven rural-urban fabric, and landscapes that carry cultural, ecological, and historical significance far beyond their physical footprint. Our countryside is not empty space waiting to be repurposed; it is a living system that supports farming, biodiversity, recreation, heritage, and national identity. This was reflected so powerfully in the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics.

Sprawling solar schemes require vast land-take, extensive groundworks, and long grid connections. These release significant embodied CO_2 and disrupt soil systems that currently act as carbon sinks. In many cases, the CO_2 released during panel construction, transportation, and installation may outweigh the near-term carbon savings of the panels themselves. In a country where land is scarce and landscapes do vital climate work, this is a poor trade-off. There are better solutions to our emissions problem.

4. Ecological and Cultural Impacts

The environmental impacts of large solar schemes extend far beyond the carbon footprint of the panels. They alter hydrology, fragment habitats, disturb soils, and displace wildlife. The Applicant's documents often frame these impacts as temporary or reversible, but lived experience and ecological research suggest otherwise. Once a landscape is industrialised, its ecological function rarely returns to its previous state. Equally important is the cultural ecology of the countryside — the relationship between people and place. Landscapes shape identity, wellbeing, and community cohesion. When familiar views are replaced by industrial infrastructure, the loss is not merely visual; it affects mental health, sense of belonging, and the continuity of rural life. For walkers, farmers, and residents, these changes are profound.

5. Better Alternatives Exist

I support renewable energy, but I believe the UK should protect its countryside and prioritise geothermal, rooftop solar, brownfield solar, decentralised local energy systems, and community-scale renewables integrated into existing infrastructure. These approaches minimise land-take, reduce embodied CO_2, strengthen local economies, preserve rural landscapes, and avoid the need for extensive new grid connections. They are far better aligned with the UK's scale, geography, and settlement patterns than large, dispersed solar farms.

6. Conclusion

For the reasons set out above — and those detailed in my Relevant Representation and Comments on Relevant Representations — I do not believe the Lime Down Solar Scheme is an appropriate or proportionate response to the UK's energy needs. It would cause significant ecological, cultural, and landscape harm while delivering limited and uncertain carbon benefits.

We cannot run blindly toward some solar Nirvana. It is time to pause and rethink our journey to Net Zero. There are better solutions that can strengthen Britain's economy and local industry without sacrificing large areas of countryside.

If we reach for renewable energy targets blinkered by dreams of solar expansion, we risk a future built on the ashes of the very landscapes that hold our communities together. Lime Down is one more example of progress pursued at the expense of the countryside that sustains us.

I urge the Examining Authority to consider whether this development represents the right solution for a small island nation whose much-loved countryside is both environmentally vital and culturally irreplaceable.

Respectfully,
Joan Bassler

Note on Use of AI Assistance - I prepared this submission myself, drawing on my own knowledge, experience, and reading of the application documents. I used Microsoft Copilot as a formatting and drafting assistant to help me organise my thoughts, refine wording, improve clarity and present it in an acceptable form. All opinions, arguments, and evidence presented are my own, and I remain fully responsible for the content of this Written Representation.