

ASHTON HAWKER - [REDACTED]

My name is Ashton Hawker. I represent a long-established family farming business based in Hullavington.

I am here to register our strong objection to Lime Down Solar Park proposal, focusing specifically on the damaging economic impact on our business, other local farms local employees, and the wider local businesses

The proposal includes compulsory acquisition of land we own and 100 acres we rent. In addition, we currently buy 800 tons of locally grown grain and 1,000 tons of straw from one farm signed up to the Lime Down alone.

The Government constantly encourages Farmers to become more sustainable. And yet in this instance it is totally the reverse! The reduction in local availability of grain and straw, for ourselves and other any other livestock producers in the immediate area will disappear.

Sourcing from further afield, not only adds substantial cost by way of staff time, fuel, wear and tear on machinery, but makes it difficult to secure enough feed for livestock due to cost constraints.

It increases a farm's carbon footprint.

Reducing admission is something we are constantly working towards in conjunction with the high-end supermarket we supply. Sustainability and food security is our goal.

This impact potentially jeopardises our ability to fulfil our supply contract for milk and beef. That contract represents generations of investment. If we cannot perform, we lose the contract. Our business becomes unviable.

We are not just a farm. We support a wide network of local contractors, merchants, vets, and service providers, the potential knock-on effect will be felt across the immediate local economy.

We employ 11 local staff and 10 to 20 seasonal roles every year. Should we be forced to downsize, redundancies will be unavoidable.

Beyond that, our farm runs apprenticeship schemes and student placements. We train young people in vital rural skills. That pipeline of talent will end. In a time when we desperately need to attract young people into agriculture, this proposal shuts that door.

Wiltshire Council's own analysis predicts the loss of up to 20 agricultural jobs – which I consider a big under estimation should the scheme gain approval. The Council has formally objected, citing 'substantial negative impact' on the local economy.

The government's energy security strategy says we must protect the best agricultural land for food security. Lime Down does the opposite. It removes productive land undermining food security and rural livelihoods. 33% of the principal scheme and 75% of the cable route is graded as 3a. "best and most versatile land". As a Farmer I cannot understand why this land will be sacrificed. We have very successfully farmed predominantly grade 3b land on this farm since 1952!

In the 1950's and 60's around 50% of all London's milk was supplied from the rich farmland of North Wiltshire – my farm included. We now produce in excess of 6 million litres of milk and 300 tons of beef per year, supplying a high-end supermarket. A fact we are very proud of.

We are not anti- solar. We installed a 100-kilowatt rooftop system over a decade ago demonstrating our commitment to renewables. But this local area already has an overwhelming concentration of large-scale ground mounted solar, with more already approved in the pipeline or about to be developed. This rapid expansion is suffocating productive farmland and destroying long established supply chains.

I ask the Planning Inspectorate to fully investigate the economic harm this scheme will cause. Not just to my family business, but to every worker, every apprentice, every local supplier who depends on the land in this area.

Once this land is gone, the jobs are gone, and the skills are gone. That damage cannot be undone by solar panels.

Please reject this proposal.

Thank you