

Chair, Members,

My name is Christian de Coulon. I own Whatley Manor, one of the region's leading luxury hotels, I sit on the board of environmental foundations, and for many years I competed internationally as a professional event rider. My livelihood depends on this landscape, and my experience gives me firsthand knowledge of both rural road safety and the value of the countryside.

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Let me be absolutely clear: I am not opposed to solar energy. At Whatley Manor we have heavily invested, and still do, in sustainability because we believe businesses have a duty of care to reduce their environmental impact. Renewable energy is essential to our future.

This proposal however is the industrialisation of more than 3,000 acres at the southern gateway to the Cotswolds, within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

That designation exists because this landscape is exceptional. Once an industrial development of this scale is imposed upon it, that protection becomes little more than words on paper.

The applicant asks you to believe the impact on the rural economy will be limited. I fundamentally disagree.

Tourists do not travel here to look at substations, security fencing, CCTV, access roads and thousands of acres of solar panels. They come because this landscape is beautiful, tranquil and internationally recognised.

That beauty sustains livelihoods. You cannot separate this landscape from the people whose livelihoods depend upon it. It supports farmers who have shaped and cared for this land for generations. It supports hotels, pubs, restaurants, cafés, holiday cottages, farm shops and countless local businesses whose success depends on people wanting to experience this countryside.

I find extraordinary that Whatley Manor, one of the area's most significant hospitality businesses with over 100 employees, does not appear to have been meaningfully assessed in the applicant's socioeconomic impact work, nor have we been consulted. If a business of our scale can be overlooked, what confidence should this committee have that the wider economic impacts have been properly understood?

As someone who has spent a lifetime on rural roads, I am equally concerned by the construction impacts. These roads were never designed to sustain heavy construction traffic. The consequences for horse riders, dog walkers, cyclists, walkers, residents and visitors are obvious. Road safety is not a theoretical concern—it is a daily reality.

This decision today is about more than energy generation. It is about whether nationally protected landscapes genuinely deserve protection, whether rural livelihoods matter, and whether future generations inherit the southern gateway to the Cotswolds—or an industrial energy estate.

There are more appropriate places for large-scale solar development.

I therefore urge you to refuse this application.

Thank you.