

LIME DOWN SOLAR PROJECT – EN010168

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Interested Party / Registration ID: [REDACTED]

Project: Lime Down Solar Project

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Submission: Deadline 7 – Post-Hearing Submission

Grittleton House

I spoke at the Issue Specific Hearing in September regarding the potential impact of the proposed development, and particularly the proposed construction compound, on Grittleton House.

I would like the following to be recorded as a written summary of my oral case and to provide further information following the matters raised by the Examining Authority during the hearing.

Grittleton House and its business

Grittleton House is a Grade II* listed Victorian country house which has been in our family ownership for more than 50 years.

The House operates as an established wedding and events venue. We currently host approximately 50 weddings each year, averaging around 120 guests, and the business supports approximately 15 full-time and 30 part-time members of staff.

Couples commonly book their weddings one, two and sometimes three years in advance.

The historic House cannot be separated from its setting for the purposes of our business. Couples choose Grittleton House because of the House, gardens, grounds, views, atmosphere and exclusivity of the estate. These are fundamental parts of the product we sell.

Our principal concern remains the proposed construction compound immediately in front of Grittleton House.

Its potential impact is not confined to one viewpoint. It would potentially be seen and/or heard from important areas of the House and grounds used by couples and their guests, including ceremony and dining rooms, bedrooms, the main staircase, existing wedding lawns and our new wedding lawn.

Couples are able to marry in different locations across the estate. The impact therefore needs to be considered in the context of the operation of Grittleton House as a whole.

Timing of engagement with Grittleton House

During the hearing, the Examining Authority questioned why meaningful engagement with Grittleton House was only now taking place when the Examination was already only months from closing.

This reflects one of our principal concerns.

Prior to the hearing, meaningful communication with us regarding these specific impacts had been extremely limited.

We welcomed the meeting which took place with representatives of the Applicant the day before the hearing and the subsequent discussion during the hearing. However, there has been no further communication with us since.

This is particularly concerning because several of the possible mitigation measures discussed appear to depend upon close and continuing communication between the Applicant and Grittleton House.

If ongoing communication is itself intended to form part of the mitigation, there needs to be a clear mechanism setting out who communicates with whom, how much notice is required, who has authority to alter planned works and how any agreed restrictions would be implemented and monitored.

At present, we cannot see how this would work in practice.

Matters discussed at the hearing – no agreed mitigation

A number of possible ways of reducing the impact upon Grittleton House were discussed during the hearing.

We welcomed those discussions.

However, it is important to distinguish between **possible mitigation which was discussed and mitigation which has actually been agreed and secured.**

We left the hearing without concrete answers or agreed mitigation to our principal concerns.

For a business accepting weddings several years in advance, informal assurances about what may be possible during construction do not provide sufficient certainty.

Size of the construction compound

It was discussed that the compound could potentially be made smaller.

We would strongly welcome this, but no reduced footprint has been agreed with us.

This is extremely important.

Unless a reduced footprint is formally agreed and secured, our understanding is that the area currently identified on the plans remains available for the Applicant to use.

A discussion at the hearing about possibly reducing the compound is therefore very different from a committed and secured reduction in its size.

If a smaller compound is relied upon as mitigation of the impact upon Grittleton House, its revised footprint should be identified and secured.

Screening and existing vegetation

There was no proposal presented to us for additional mitigation planting or screening specifically to screen the compound from Grittleton House.

Reference was made during discussions to the hedge in front of the tennis court.

This is our existing hedge. It screens our tennis court; it does not screen the proposed compound from Grittleton House.

There was also discussion about a small number of existing trees. These are approximately four to six individual trees rather than a continuous screen or barrier. Views are available between them and, as deciduous trees, their screening value is substantially reduced during the winter when they are not in leaf.

We therefore do not consider that the existing vegetation provides effective screening of the proposed compound.

Importantly, even if construction activity were stopped temporarily on a wedding day and there was no construction noise, **the visual presence of the compound would remain.**

If screening is required to mitigate the effect of the compound upon Grittleton House, an appropriate and effective screening proposal needs to be identified and secured.

Stopping works on wedding days

The possibility of stopping or restricting construction activity on wedding days was discussed.

We would obviously welcome measures which protect weddings from construction noise and activity.

However, the practical arrangements remain unclear.

The onus appeared to be upon Grittleton House to provide its wedding calendar so that the Applicant would know when weddings were taking place.

We can provide our wedding dates. However, we need clarity about precisely what activities would stop, for how long, how this would be communicated and how the arrangement would be secured.

There is also a wider issue.

Grittleton House does not operate only on wedding days.

We conduct showrounds throughout the year for prospective couples who are deciding whether to hold their wedding here. Those couples may be considering spending a significant amount of money and booking a wedding one, two or three years into the future.

We also hold planning meetings and other events.

It is difficult to understand how a major Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project could simply stop whenever we have a wedding or an important prospective-customer visit unless there is a properly planned and workable mechanism for doing so.

Stopping construction noise also does not remove the visual impact of the compound.

If cessation or restriction of works is relied upon as mitigation, the details need to be established and secured rather than left to informal arrangements once construction has begun.

Vehicle movements and reversing alarms

The possibility of vehicles operating without reversing, thereby avoiding reversing alarms, was also discussed.

Again, we would welcome any measure which genuinely reduces noise.

However, if this is to be relied upon as mitigation, it needs to be demonstrated that it is operationally practical given the layout and intended use of the compound.

If avoiding reversing movements forms part of the mitigation for Grittleton House, that measure should be demonstrated to be achievable and then secured.

January and February working

It was suggested that some of the works could potentially be undertaken during our quieter period in January and February.

However, during discussions it was also openly acknowledged that weather and ground conditions during those months can restrict the work which can actually be undertaken.

We therefore remain unclear how meaningful this suggestion is as mitigation.

We also understand that other affected parties have requested that disruptive works close to them should take place during January and February.

There therefore needs to be a realistic assessment of how much work can actually be moved into this period.

If January and February working is being relied upon as mitigation for Grittleton House, we need to understand:

- what work can realistically be undertaken during those months;

- what work cannot;
- what happens if weather or ground conditions prevent that work taking place; and
- whether delayed work would subsequently move back into our main wedding season.

We cannot plan a business taking bookings several years in advance around an informal intention to undertake work during particular months.

Heritage, economic viability and the future of Grittleton House

A particularly important matter was raised by the Examining Authority during the hearing regarding the heritage assessment and the need to consider the **ultimate viable use of the heritage asset and the economic factors affecting that viable use**.

The Examining Authority requested further commentary by Deadline 7 and recognised that a reduction in income to Grittleton House was a realistic possibility.

We strongly welcome consideration of this issue.

Grittleton House is a privately owned Grade II* listed building and estate which requires substantial and continuous expenditure to maintain.

The wedding and events business is fundamental to the continued viable use and maintenance of the House.

We therefore do not believe that the impact upon Grittleton House can be considered simply by asking whether the construction works physically harm the fabric of the listed building or whether the House can technically remain open during construction.

Our product is the **House and its setting**.

A couple who visits Grittleton House and sees a large construction compound within an important view, or experiences construction traffic or noise, may decide to book another venue.

That is a lost wedding which cannot subsequently be recovered when the compound is removed.

Similarly, the effect of a poor guest experience, photographs or negative reviews during construction could continue to affect the reputation and future bookings of the venue after construction activity has finished.

There is therefore a clear relationship between:

*construction impact → reduced attractiveness as a wedding venue → potential reduction in bookings and income → reduced income available for the maintenance and stewardship of the Grade II listed House.**

This concern is not hypothetical in the examination evidence.

Wiltshire Council has already identified the potential for the construction compound and cabling route east of Grittleton House to affect its setting and has specifically raised the potential impact upon the viability of the business and consequential impact upon the building's future.

We therefore strongly question whether a conclusion of “no harm” adequately addresses the particular issue raised by the Examining Authority.

We understand the Applicant's position to be that construction effects would be temporary and localised and would not result in permanent harm to the significance or setting of Grittleton House.

However, **temporary construction does not necessarily mean temporary economic consequences.**

The loss of a wedding booking is permanent. Damage to reputation may extend beyond the construction period. Reduced income during construction may affect the resources available to maintain the listed building.

We therefore respectfully ask that the assessment distinguishes between:

- physical harm to the fabric of the listed building;
- harm to its setting during construction;
- economic harm to the established business which provides its viable use; and
- the consequential implications for the continued maintenance and stewardship of the Grade II* listed building.

In our view, the question raised by the Examining Authority concerning the **ultimate viable use of the heritage asset** is fundamental and requires proper consideration.

Local economic benefits

It was also mentioned that the project would seek, where possible, to use local small businesses for work associated with the Scheme.

We recognise that this could provide an economic benefit to some local businesses.

However, this does not mitigate the specific economic risk faced by Grittleton House.

Occasional opportunities for local businesses to undertake work associated with the Scheme cannot compensate Grittleton House for lost wedding bookings, reputational damage or a reduction in the attractiveness of the House and its setting as a wedding venue.

Our position following the hearing

We appreciated the opportunity to speak at the hearing and welcomed the discussion which took place.

However, we left the hearing without concrete answers or agreed mitigation to the concerns we raised.

A number of possibilities were discussed:

- reducing the size of the compound;
- stopping or restricting works on wedding days;
- avoiding reversing movements and associated alarms;
- undertaking works during January and February; and
- maintaining communication between the Applicant and Grittleton House.

However, none of these discussions currently provides the certainty required by a business which is accepting wedding bookings several years in advance.

There is also currently no specific additional screening proposal for the compound which has been presented to us.

We therefore respectfully ask the Examining Authority to ensure that the Applicant's response at Deadline 7 clearly addresses:

1. **The size of the compound** – if a reduced compound is proposed as mitigation, its reduced footprint should be defined and secured.
2. **Visual mitigation** – appropriate screening of the compound from Grittleton House should be properly considered rather than reliance being placed upon our existing tennis court hedge and a small number of individual deciduous trees.
3. **Wedding-day working restrictions** – if works are to cease or be restricted during weddings, the activities affected, duration, notification arrangements and means of securing those restrictions should be clearly defined.
4. **Vehicle movements and noise** – if avoiding reversing movements and alarms is proposed, it should be demonstrated that this is operationally practical and the measure should be secured.
5. **January and February working** – if seasonal programming is relied upon as mitigation, it should be supported by a realistic programme which takes account of weather and ground conditions and competing requests from other affected parties.
6. **Communication** – a clear and reliable communication protocol should be established identifying appropriate contacts, notice periods, responsibilities and how agreed restrictions would be implemented.
7. **Economic and heritage impact** – the potential effect upon wedding bookings, income and the continuing viable use and stewardship of Grittleton House should be properly assessed in response to the matter specifically raised by the Examining Authority.

Most importantly, **any mitigation relied upon in concluding that the impact upon Grittleton House is acceptable should be clearly defined and secured before consent is granted.**

Without that, the area currently identified for the compound remains available for use and the possible measures discussed at the hearing provide Grittleton House with no certainty that they will actually be implemented.

Grittleton House has operated as a family business for many years. The income generated by the wedding and events business supports the continued use, maintenance and stewardship of an important Grade II* listed building.

We are not asking for informal assurances.

We are asking that, where mitigation is necessary to make the impact upon Grittleton House acceptable, **that mitigation is agreed, clearly defined and secured.**