

CLOSING SUBMISSIONS OF SHERSTON PARISH COUNCIL

Sherston Parish Council wishes to submit the following closing statement for consideration by the examining authority. Sherston PC has read the submissions and responses made by the applicant over this examination process and also observed the open hearings. The council wishes to state in the strongest possible terms that, as stated in our first submission, we remain convinced that this vast industrial project is totally inappropriate to this area, and in fact would be severely detrimental to both the landscape and the wellbeing of its residents.

We would refer the examining authority to our previous representations: Rep1 -148, Rep 6- 069 and AS- 023.

Sherston PC will not repeat these submissions here but would point out that we do not believe the applicant has at any point adequately responded with specific plans to reduce the negative impact on this community.

In particular we remain particularly concerned about the increase in HGV and other traffic, and the impact on landscape and habitat, food production, employment, footpaths and mental health. The impact of all these issues is magnified by the length of the project.

Increase in Traffic

The applicant admitted in the hearings that their figures were (at least) 34% understated for HGVs. The recent freight action plan for Wiltshire made clear, as per our submission AS- 023, that the roads around Sherston are entirely unsuitable for high levels of HGV traffic.

The applicant has not given adequate reassurance that they would have strong workable procedures to ensure that drivers of vehicles during construction, operation and decommission would stick to the defined routes nor how they would manage the HGVs on what are, in places, single track roads.

The applicant themselves has recognised that the Fosse and routes connecting through it are heavily used by cyclists.

The increase in traffic, and particularly HGVs, will make the narrow lanes around Sherston impassable and dangerous for local users whether in car, on bicycle or on foot.

Landscape and Habitat

The proposed project is to be situated in the beautiful, rural countryside around Sherston. The beauty of the Sherston setting is recognised by its position within the Cotswold National Landscape. The Parish Council notes that, although the scale of the development has been slightly scaled back along the Fosse Way and edge of the National Landscape, the setting of Sherston as a rural village, and the roads used by residents and visitors, will be materially affected by the overwhelming majority of the project where the panels and infrastructure are maintained. Using a few fields of agricultural land for ecological mitigation of the industrial project does not seem beneficial to us or to counter the damage the scheme would cause to the landscape.

At present there is a huge variety of vegetation and wildlife within these fields and particularly within the richly biodiverse edges and hedgerows. Ripping out natural habitats such as hedges and verges will destroy that habitat. The wildlife impact is absolute; we will lose it.

Furthermore, the fields along the Fosse are still going to be used for cabling whilst almost one and a half acres at the Grittleton junction end will be destroyed and used as an extra-long vehicle turning point. The applicant states that mitigation measures will reduce the visual effect over time. We would ask how long this is anticipated to take; trees and hedgerows are unlikely to cover 4.5m panels in anything under 15 years.

The applicant has also to explain how the new plants are to be watered. They reference a potential water source in A1, but this does not have easy access and it has not been properly explained how the water would be channeled to the new planting. The applicant proposes vehicle transport in its outline Water Resources Strategy but has not reflected this additional traffic in its vehicle statistics. Furthermore there does not seem to have been any consideration for the management of watering in conditions of drought. Sherston Parish Council is concerned that, because the source of water is a mains connection, its use in drought conditions could affect the supply to local residents.

Employment

We do not believe that the applicant has given any comfort to our concerns that a reduction in visitors and tourism will lead to a subsequent closure of businesses and a related loss of local employment. This is also the case for other affected local businesses such as a local stud farm which, as was noted in the owners' representations, would most likely be forced to shut down and cause associated loss of employment both directly and indirectly to vets, farriers and feed merchants. The applicant has itself stated that the project will lead to very few employment opportunities to residents.

Food Production

Current global events have made food security even more important. The majority of the land with the project is 3b and above; historic and current farming on these lands proves that 3b produces very good yields when properly tended.

Footpaths

We remain very concerned about the impact on the local network of footpaths which are well used by locals and rambling groups. Sherston 16, 18 and 35 will be surrounded by panels and resemble industrial tunnels. Sherston 37 will also be dramatically changed and devalued by the vehicle turning area both in the construction and post construction phase. The footpaths 11,13,14 and 15 which all start within the National Landscape of Sherston will be far less appealing as walkways once they lead into the industrial development of Lime Down.

Mental Health

We remain unconvinced by the applicant's dismissal of our concerns about an increase in mental health problems were the project to go ahead. Easy access to nature and beautiful countryside is accepted by the medical profession as beneficial for mental, and indeed physical, health. Turning the countryside into an industrialised area will remove this easy access, and many in the community remain extremely worried about the impact of the project on their mental health.

Length of Project

The applicant persists in its description of the proposed project as "temporary". This is disingenuous at best. As was highlighted by some moving testimonies from young people at the hearings, the project will be in place for a lifetime. Moreover, the period of construction and decommissioning (which may be in different phases) will take years, causing extreme conditions and cost to all persons who live and transit the area.

We take no comfort from the applicant's aim to return the land to its original use and condition "as far as practicable".

There remain limited safeguards in the proposal to ensure even this relatively low aspiration.

Conclusion

We again urge the Planning Inspectorate to recommend refusal of consent for this proposal for the reasons we and others have set out throughout the examination.