

Lime Down Solar Project (EN010168)

Closing statement of South Cotswolds Liberal Democrats

To: The Examining Authority, Lime Down Solar Project (EN010168)

From: South Cotswolds Liberal Democrats

Interested Party reference [REDACTED]

South Cotswolds Liberal Democrats want more solar power, built quickly. We oppose Lime Down because of its scale, its location and the questions still unanswered at the end of this examination. This statement builds on our relevant representation and uses only evidence already on the record. We ask the Examining Authority to accept it at its discretion, and we support the closing statement of [REDACTED]

Right idea, wrong place

Lime Down would put 748 hectares of panels across five parcels of land within a 46 square kilometre area, joined by a 22-kilometre cable corridor. It would sit beside the Cotswolds National Landscape, one of the most valued landscapes in England.

The central dispute is how far that landscape's setting reaches. The applicant places it only 300 to 600 metres from the boundary, according to what can be seen from one to the other. Wiltshire Council and the Cotswolds National Landscape Board both say it reaches further, taking in the Fosse Way corridor and the land to its north-west. The Board points to a July 2026 appeal decision (APP/D3505/W/25/3370515) in which the Inspector found that setting is about more than intervisibility, and that harm to views on the approach to a National Landscape is harm to its setting. The Secretary of State must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the National Landscape (section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, as amended in 2023), and NPS EN-1 gives designated landscapes and their settings strong protection.

The effects are significant even on the applicant's own assessment. It accepts significant effects on recreational use of the Fosse Way and on footpaths HULL1 and NORT10 for the life of the scheme, and on bridleway SHER16 even after seeing to remove all panels from Field A1. Wiltshire Council goes further. It considers the scheme does not comply with Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, and that the applicant has understated the effects on routes through Sites A, B and D, including the Wiltshire Cycleway.

The mitigation does not answer this. The Council warns that hedgerows grown to four or five metres would look out of place and shut off the open views that define the area. The wildflower meadows offered as enhancement are temporary, and the Board advises that temporary measures deserve less weight. The Council also warns of a creeping

baseline, in which this part of North Wiltshire is changed scheme by scheme into a solar landscape.

Who pays

The cost of this scheme falls on the people nearest it, and the benefits largely do not.

Construction traffic. The applicant's transport chapter (ES Chapter 13, Revision 5, October 2026) forecasts rises of more than 270% in daily HGV movements on Alderton Road and the Fosse Way across a 24-month build, yet concludes there would be no significant transport effect. It rates the Fosse Way as of low sensitivity, although the applicant's own survey recorded 93 cyclists on a Saturday during proposed delivery hours. The figures also kept moving during the examination. The panel count rose from 588,988 to 842,500, and estimated HGV movements to the solar sites rose from 26,086 to 35,054, with a further 20,160 for the cable route. At Deadline 7 Wiltshire Council said key assumptions behind the lower figures were unproven.

As **highway authority**, the Council considers it unacceptable that no road improvements are proposed between The Street junction and Bradfield Cottages, and that passing places on the Fosse Way are 300 and 380 metres apart. Hullavington Parish Council has shown that a well-used walking route with no footway and a narrow railway bridge was never specifically assessed, and that school buses use Norton Road at the times construction traffic would. Grittleton Parish Council has shown that HGVs would use The Street, in the Conservation Area, to reach a compound next to the village hall, recreation ground and playground.

The **local economy**. In its Local Impact Report (REP1-137), Wiltshire Council judged the effect on tourism negative and contrary to the economic policies of its Core Strategy. The applicant's worst case is the loss of about 50 tourism jobs during construction and 11 for the life of the scheme, which it treats as not significant by averaging them across a 5 kilometre study area. That hides the concentrated harm to businesses closest to the sites. The Council has warned that eleven stud farms are at serious economic risk and that insurers may treat the construction period as a material change in risk. The applicant's own noise figures show a rise of around 11 decibels at West Park Farm, measured against thresholds designed for people and not horses. Grittleton House, a Grade II listed wedding and events venue, was not assessed as a tourism business, and The Angel in Sherston, which relies on walkers and cyclists, expects to become unviable.

About **878 hectares of productive farmland**, much of it best and most versatile land, would leave food production. The Council notes that the ongoing economic gain would mainly benefit the landowners receiving payments, and considers the applicant's estimate of local construction jobs optimistic given low local unemployment. The scheme offers no clear or guaranteed benefit, such as reduced energy costs or

community investment, to the villages that would live beside it. We support the Council's view that a business compensation fund is increasingly necessary, but we do not believe a fund would make the scheme acceptable.

Gaps that remain

Our representation raised three further concerns:

Ecology. Wiltshire Council identified substantial gaps in survey data, especially along the cable route, where surveys for bats, birds and protected species were limited or absent. Without that information it cannot be concluded that the impacts on biodiversity and designated ecological sites can be adequately mitigated.

Carbon. The Council's assessment shows substantial construction-phase emissions, with carbon break-even arriving only decades into the scheme's life. Climate benefits that arrive that slowly cannot justify immediate and lasting harm to landscape, communities and the local economy.

Battery storage. The battery energy storage systems raise safety and public protection issues given the nearby transport corridors and sensitive water environments. An incident may be unlikely, but its consequences could be severe, so the mitigation must be clear, secured and enforceable. We do not consider that standard has been met.

Confidence in the process

Compulsory acquisition powers may only be granted where there is a compelling case in the public interest (section 122 of the Planning Act 2008). With the harm set out above, and less damaging ways of generating the same power available, we do not think that case has been made.

The process has also strained local confidence. In August, Wiltshire Council, as landowner and highway authority, told the Examining Authority it could not tell what rights were being sought over its land or whether they were necessary and proportionate. A local landowner told the June hearing that surveyors had entered his farm uninvited twice, and the applicant apologised. When Grittleton Parish Council surveyed its residents in October 2025, Lime Down was the most cited concern alongside road safety. If a council cannot establish what is being asked of it, residents and private landowners have even less reason for confidence.

Wiltshire Council has formally concluded it does not support the scheme as submitted, and that position is shared by parish councils, local residents and our Member of Parliament [REDACTED]. The infrastructure regime allows this decision to be made nationally, but the planning balance must still give proper weight to local impacts and local democratic voice.

Conclusion

We ask the Examining Authority to recommend that development consent be refused.

Wiltshire's planning policies ask that large renewable schemes compare well with less intrusive options such as building-mounted solar, bring lasting benefit to local communities, and strongly support community ownership. The applicant has not shown that Lime Down meets those tests. Rooftop, brownfield and community-owned solar can bring this area with the transition and give it a stake in its success. A scheme imposed at this scale, on this landscape, with benefits that largely leave the area, risks turning local support for solar into opposition to it.

With kind regards,

South Cotswolds Liberal Democrats