From: Rt. Hon. Stuart Andrew MP <stuart.andrew.mp@parliament.uk>
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2026 10:55
To: Green Hill Solar <greenhill@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>
Subject: EN010170 - Green Hill Solar Farm (Case Ref: ST00204)

Dear Planning Inspectors,

Further to my in-person representation at Open Floor Hearing 3, I also wish to provide my comments in writing, to ensure the issues highlighted are considered in full when the Examining Authority writes its recommendation report.

Please see below:

Loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

A major concern is the proposed development's use of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land, defined as land within Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification system.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that where significant development of agricultural land is necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of higher quality. Similarly, the National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) advises developers to consider the quality of agricultural land when selecting sites for solar development.

Available information indicates that a substantial proportion of the Green Hill site area lies within BMV classifications. The proposed development, therefore, risks the long-term loss of productive farmland across a large rural area.

This raises wider concerns in relation to:

- national food security, particularly given increasing pressures on agricultural productivity caused by climate change and global supply instability;
- the irreversible change to soil quality and structure resulting from construction, cable installation, and any decommissioning.
- the potential loss of land capable of supporting diverse agricultural production.

Although solar development is sometimes described as a temporary land use, the proposed 60-year operational period represents multiple agricultural generations, during which time the land would effectively be removed from full productive use.
Given these factors, the proposal doesn't align with national policy objectives aimed at safeguarding high-quality agricultural land for future food production.

Inappropriate Scale and Location

The development covers approximately 1,200 hectares, making it one of the largest solar projects proposed in the UK. The scale of the development is comparable to the footprint of Heathrow Airport, highlighting the magnitude of the proposed scheme.

The dispersed nature of the scheme, spread across multiple solar sites surrounding numerous villages, risks creating the perception that communities are encircled by industrial-

scale energy infrastructure.

The proposal, therefore, raises significant concerns regarding compliance with the design principles contained in the National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1), which requires infrastructure projects to minimise environmental impacts through appropriate site selection, layout and scale.

In particular:

- the scale of the development appears disproportionate to the rural landscape in which it sits;
- the distribution of sites risks creating coalescence between settlements, reducing the visual and spatial separation between villages;
- The landscape character of the Northamptonshire countryside, defined by open farmland and historic settlement patterns, would be fundamentally altered.

There is also concern that the location has been driven primarily by proximity to the grid connection at Grendon Substation, rather than by a comprehensive assessment of environmental constraints and landscape capacity.

While national policy recognises the importance of renewable energy infrastructure, it also requires that developments be sensitively located and proportionate to their surroundings, which this proposal does not appear to achieve.

Preference for Alternative Sites

Many residents support the expansion of renewable energy but believe that alternative locations should be prioritised before developing productive agricultural land.

National planning policy encourages the efficient use of previously developed land and existing built infrastructure. There is strong public support for expanding solar deployment on:

- warehouse and industrial rooftops
- supermarket car parks
- brownfield land
- motorway verges and transport corridors
- new housing and commercial developments

While it is recognised that not all buildings have suitable orientation, structural capacity, or grid connectivity, the rapid growth of large logistics and warehouse developments across Northamptonshire presents significant opportunities for rooftop solar generation.

The application documents appear to provide limited evidence of a detailed sequential site assessment, demonstrating that brownfield sites, rooftop installations, or lower-grade agricultural land were thoroughly evaluated before selecting large areas of BMV farmland.

Without a transparent comparison of these alternatives, it is difficult to conclude that the current proposal represents the most sustainable or policy-compliant location for solar development.

Visual, Environmental, and Heritage Impacts

The proposed development raises concerns regarding landscape character, heritage assets, biodiversity, and environmental risk.

From elevated viewpoints, particularly around Walgrave and nearby ridge lines, solar clusters at Sites A and A2 may be highly visible, creating a substantial change to the visual character of the countryside.

The project also lies within a historic landscape containing:

- listed buildings
- conservation areas
- historic field patterns
- archaeological remains

The National Planning Policy Framework requires decision-makers to conserve and enhance the historic environment, ensuring that developments do not cause unacceptable harm to heritage assets or their settings.

Specific concerns have also been raised regarding:

- a World War II aircraft crash site near Mears Ashby, which may fall under the protections of the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986;
- the possibility that the site may contain ordnance or human remains, warranting careful archaeological investigation and preservation.

Environmental impacts are also associated with:

- hedgerow removal and vegetation clearance during construction
- potential disturbance to wildlife habitats
- long-term fragmentation of ecological corridors.

In addition, the proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) near Grendon is located in an area identified as a Flood Zone, which raises questions about environmental risk and emergency response planning.

Taken together, these issues suggest the proposal could lead to significant environmental and heritage impacts that have not yet been fully resolved.

Project Lifespan and Decommissioning

The proposal states an operational lifespan of approximately 60 years, which is significantly longer than the lifespan typically associated with solar panel technology.

Solar panels commonly have an effective lifespan of 25–35 years, meaning that significant replacement or refurbishment could be required during the project's lifetime.

This raises questions regarding:

- the long-term environmental impact of panel replacement and disposal
- the potential increase in waste materials and resource consumption

- whether the project's overall lifecycle emissions remain consistent with its stated environmental objectives.

There is also concern that if the project were to become economically unviable in the future, it could be abandoned without full restoration of the land.

For this reason, many residents believe that a financial decommissioning bond should be required from the developer, currently owned by Macquarie Group, to ensure that funds are available to restore the land to agricultural use once the project ends.

Without such safeguards, there is concern that the land could become permanently degraded, eventually being reclassified as brownfield land and potentially redeveloped for housing.

Construction Traffic and Infrastructure Strain

The construction phase of the project is expected to involve large volumes of heavy goods vehicle (HGV) traffic, transporting solar panels, mounting structures, cables, and other equipment to multiple dispersed sites.

Many of the surrounding roads are narrow rural lanes designed primarily for agricultural vehicles, rather than sustained HGV traffic.
Potential impacts include:

- increased road safety risks for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders
- noise pollution affecting nearby residents
- damage to local road infrastructure not designed for heavy construction traffic
- disruption to daily life in nearby villages.

With construction anticipated to take years, rather than months, the cumulative impact of construction traffic across multiple sites may therefore place significant strain on the local highway network and rural communities.

Disruption to Local Access and Recreation

The countryside surrounding the proposed development is widely used for walking, cycling, and horse riding, forming an important part of the area's recreational and cultural identity. Several well-used routes are located within or adjacent to the proposed sites.

Construction activities, increased traffic, and the presence of extensive solar infrastructure risk:

- reducing the amenity value of these routes
- disrupting established recreational patterns
- altering the rural experience that residents and visitors currently enjoy

Although permissive paths are sometimes offered as mitigation, these do not carry the same legal protections as formal rights of way and can be withdrawn in the future.

Many residents, therefore, feel that the social and community value of these landscapes has not been adequately considered.

Concluding Comments

While there is broad recognition of the importance of renewable energy and the role solar power can play in supporting the UK's transition to a low-carbon energy system, the location, scale, and land use implications of this particular proposal raise significant concerns for many local communities.

In particular, the loss of Best and Most Versatile farmland and the industrial scale of the development across a rural landscape suggest that the project, as currently proposed, may not represent the most appropriate or sustainable approach to delivering renewable energy infrastructure.

Thank you.

With best wishes,

Stuart

The Rt. Hon. Stuart Andrew MP
Member of Parliament for the Daventry Constituency