

Dear Planning Inspectors,

I wish to strongly object to this proposed development and, in particular, to the fundamental unsuitability of placing such a large-scale industrial energy scheme in and around our small rural villages.

I fully understand the need for renewable energy and I am not opposed to sensible, appropriately located renewable energy schemes. However, I do not believe that protecting our environment should mean sacrificing irreplaceable countryside and the character, wellbeing and way of life of the small communities who live here.

The wrong development in the wrong place

Our villages and their surrounding roads and infrastructure were never designed to accommodate the scale and intensity of construction, transportation, maintenance and heavy machinery that this development would require.

These are small rural communities, with narrow country lanes and infrastructure that is simply not comparable to that of an industrial area. The disruption caused during construction would be significant, but my concern goes far beyond the construction period. We would be left permanently living alongside what is, in reality, a vast industrial installation.

The transformation of this beautiful, open and predominantly rural landscape into what could effectively become a solarised industrial landscape would be enormous and, in my view, irreversible.

Once this countryside has been industrialised, it cannot simply be returned to the way it was.

The cumulative effect of developments such as this is particularly concerning. What may be described individually as renewable energy infrastructure can, when placed across several adjoining rural communities, completely change the character of the area. Fields, hedgerows, views and the open countryside that have defined these villages for generations risk being replaced by rows of industrial equipment, access tracks, fencing, substations, cabling and associated infrastructure.

This is not simply a matter of putting solar panels in a field. It is a fundamental change to the character of the countryside.

What are we leaving for future generations?

I am also increasingly concerned about the long-term legacy of developments of this nature.

Technology is advancing extraordinarily quickly. What is considered an appropriate and efficient solution today may look very different in years to come. As newer, more efficient and potentially more sustainable technologies develop, I question whether schemes of this scale will continue to represent the best use of our countryside.

We must therefore ask ourselves what happens when these installations reach the end of their useful lives.

Will future generations be left with ageing infrastructure, substantial decommissioning costs and difficult questions surrounding the disposal and recycling of materials? We should not allow today's pursuit of renewable energy targets to create tomorrow's environmental and financial problem.

True sustainability must consider the whole life of a development—its construction, operation, maintenance, replacement, decommissioning and disposal—not simply the renewable electricity it produces during its operating life.

Renewable energy should not mean sacrificing rural communities

I fear that the understandable political drive towards renewable energy is allowing the word “green” to overshadow the question of whether individual developments are actually appropriate for the locations being proposed.

There is a profound difference between supporting renewable energy and believing that every proposed renewable energy development is therefore acceptable.

Our countryside is not an unlimited resource.

The people who live in these villages should not be expected to bear the permanent landscape, environmental, traffic and social consequences simply because our communities happen to be in an area that developers consider commercially suitable.

I am deeply concerned that commercial considerations are being given greater weight than the long-term interests of the local communities and the countryside in which we live.

The personal impact

I also want the Inspector to understand that this is not an abstract planning issue for me. Since this scheme was first raised as a commercial threat to our area, it has had a profound effect on my mental wellbeing.

The thought of the landscape around my home being transformed in this way has caused me considerable distress, and I genuinely fear how I will cope emotionally if the development is allowed to proceed.

The recently constructed Blys Grove solar development is a very painful example of what I fear happening here. Every time I have to drive past it, it breaks my heart to see what has happened to the countryside. On occasions, I deliberately take an alternative route simply to avoid seeing it.

That is the strength of feeling this issue has created for me.

I appreciate that personal feelings alone cannot determine a planning decision. However, I ask that the Inspector recognises that behind the plans, maps and technical reports are real people whose homes, communities and relationship with the countryside will be permanently affected.

Please protect our villages and countryside

I therefore respectfully ask the Planning Inspector to look beyond the headline objective of generating renewable energy and consider whether this is genuinely the right development, in the right place, at the right scale.

There are surely more appropriate locations for infrastructure of this industrial scale—locations with better transport links, stronger infrastructure and where the impact on settled rural communities and irreplaceable countryside would be substantially less.

Our villages should not become industrial energy estates simply because they are surrounded by open countryside.

Once this landscape has been changed on this scale, it cannot easily be undone. We have a responsibility to future generations to ensure that today's decisions do not leave them with an industrialised countryside, ageing infrastructure and a costly environmental legacy.

I therefore implore the Planning Inspector to recommend that this scheme is refused in its entirety and that our rural landscape, our villages and the communities who live here are protected from this irreversible industrialisation.

Yours faithfully,
Rachel Shreeve