

LOCAL RESIDENT SUBMISSION SUPPORTING REFUSAL OF PLANNING PERMISSION FOR
A PROPOSED SOLAR FARM TO THE WEST OF BERRINGTON, SHREWBURY, SHROPSHIRE

DESCRIPTION

:

Erection of an up to 30 MW Solar PV Array, comprising ground mounted solar PV panels, vehicular access, internal access tracks, landscaping, and associated infrastructure, including security fencing, CCTV, client storage containers and grid connection infrastructure, including substation buildings and off-site cabling

Planning ref: 22/04355/FUL

Appellant: Econergy International Ltd

Ref: APP/L3245/W/23/3332543

23/03207/REF

DATE OF THIS SUBMISSION: 5th March 2024

PREPARED BY:

Mr Hugh Elliott

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My name is Hugh Elliott and I have been a resident of Cantlop since 2004.

I am lucky enough to have lived in this beautiful Shropshire landscape for twenty years, in a part of the county that the appellants have correctly described as having a 'gently undulating nature'.

I live to the south of the proposed site on the other side of the Cound Brook, and like many of my immediate neighbours, I will have a mainly unrestricted view of this development, should it go ahead, with all its potential glint and glare as the motorised panels track the sun's daily progress.

But this submission is not about my unrestricted view.

My concern is the devastation that a solar farm in the proposed location will have on the visual amenity that is the Cound Brook Valley and the further, more distant landscape in which it exists. This amenity belongs to, and affects, everyone, and protecting it from those who seek to destroy it is now at stake.

All of us are, or should be, custodians of the visual amenity that can have far reaching effects on the quality of our lives, our physical and mental health, and our general well-being, and it is incumbent on all of us to preserve and protect it.

The local planning authority has done its duty and democratically reached a decision based on evidence and common sense, but because this development is worth so much money to its beneficiaries, we now find ourselves in the appeal process.

The prize is too great. As a landowner why would you continue to rent out your high-quality food growing land for probably less than a quarter of what you would receive if it was a solar farm? For them it's a win-win result – they will be paid handsomely and get to call themselves environmentalists. What's not to like?

So, the value to the appellants is clear. But what value should we put on visual amenity given all the potential benefits it can provide for the greater good? A hard question to answer but that answer is 'probably priceless' - for everyone except the developers of this project.

Visual amenity is a bland planning term, so what does it mean to our daily lives and to how we experience the landscape?

To more fully understand this, it is important to consider some specific examples of how we might encounter the landscape that will be impacted by this proposed solar installation.

Not just residents, but also visitors, motorists, cyclists, horse riders, walkers, runners.

For example, if you were to visit the Grade 1 Elizabethan, Pitchford Hall, you may well decide to travel onwards towards Shrewsbury and take in Thomas Telford's historic Grade 1, Cantlop Bridge, but as you descend the road from Cantlop Cross you will be viewing most of the proposed site until you reach the bridge from where the solar panels will still be partially visible.

A cyclist, walker, horse rider or runner might then continue to Cliff Hollow and turn right up Sandy Bank and along the lane to the north of the site towards Berrington and, having stopped to recover at the top, could look south to the hamlet of Cantlop in the near background of the site and beyond to the Shropshire Hills, including the Lawley and Caer Caradoc. These distant views would be severely compromised by the panels and according to the appellant's own mitigation proposal, eventually completely obscured by the trees they intend planting to hide the solar panels, and of course the long view, which after time will be completely lost.

The largely unrestricted view of the site from Cantlop Cross, on the Shrewsbury road, is significant too. It is where children from the community wait for their school bus each weekday morning and it is disturbing to realise that many of those young people will be in their mid to late fifties before this inappropriately sited solar farm is finally able to be removed from the landscape.

The proposed site will also be highly visible from the public footpath that runs from the Shrewsbury road to Cantlop itself – a popular route for walkers and anyone using it now would realise that the scope for mitigation of visual harm is extremely minimal.

The physical and historical links between the two communities of Cantlop and Berrington must also be taken into consideration in terms of visual amenity. The lane that bisects the site leading to Cantlop Mill, itself an important historic asset, is a public right of way via an ancient footpath that crosses the Cound Brook and connects to Cantlop. As you ascend or descend the lane there are gaps in the hedgerows on either side which currently provide views to the distant landscape.

Once again, the proposed mitigation is to plant vegetation to cover up the panels and ultimately the view beyond demonstrating a complete lack of understanding, or possibly disregard, of the more subtle but essential components of visual amenity. Add in the historic assets and how they are impacted, and the result is an amenity that will be severely comprised for more than a generation.

Like so many of my neighbours, I fully support initiatives that will provide green energy generation provided they are sited in the right location. Already in this area there are two solar farms, Berrywood and Boreton, which are so much more sensitively inserted to their, flatter, topographical settings.

This south facing sloping site set in a 'gently undulating' landscape is simply the wrong place to build a solar farm for so many reasons.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the inquiry, and now we can only hope that over the course of the next few days common sense will, once again prevail.