

PLANNING REF : 200711
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Parish Office
: Swallowfield Street, Swallowfield, Reading
: RG7 1QX
SUBMITTED BY : Swallowfield Parish Council
DATE SUBMITTED : 23/04/2020

COMMENTS:

Swallowfield parish council wishes to object to Wessex's application for a solar farm in its current location. SPC is hugely supportive of green energy and see solar as an important contributor to UK's green energy strategy. We are also very supportive of the green diversification agenda being pursued by Farley Farms Estate whose land this application is on. However, this application proposes an industrial site on hugely visually important countryside to the residents of Farley Hill. This is the wrong location for such an application and we believe there are much more appropriate sites on the Farley Farms estate land close to the 33kW electricity network.

The landscape of the site is hugely valued by residents of Farley Hill. These fields are the gateway to the village and have huge visual amenity; they also provide the green gap between the villages of Farley Hill and Arborfield Cross. The proposed solar farm would be highly visible when driving down Castle Hill and when using the bridleway or the byway beside the site. The proposal includes 2.4m high security fencing that would be adjacent to all these and would be impossible to screen. The site would be hugely urbanising for this rural location.

The solar farm is an industrial site with substantial hardstanding roads and 11 buildings proposed to be built on agricultural land we can't afford to lose. By Wessex Solar's own selection criteria, the application site is on grade 3a & 3b agricultural. This is land of better quality than that recommended by the NPPF for solar farm installations which recommends brownfield or grade 4 ag land. Despite the references to sheep and landscaping, this would be an industrial site for a considerable period of time and with no guarantee that it would be returned to a rural landscape at the end of the 40 years referred to in the planning documents. Rural heritage is as important as the environmental arguments for renewable energy.

The site is important to local wildlife as it is adjacent to woodland, with a wide range of wildlife foraging on these fields. It is used by a wide range of animals for foraging including badgers, roe deer, bats and the occasional barn owl. The security fencing will stop most wildlife access into the site. The site itself will be actively strimmed to keep down vegetation to ensure the panels have the light removing the little wildlife that does make it through.

The site is prone to flooding and hence is unsuited to a large electrical installation

There are better, lower grade land options nearby which are not visible, not environmentally sensitive and are viable locations to connect to the electricity network. Please reject this application.

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