

S62A/22/0006 Berden Hall Farm Hearing

26 Mar 2023

Uttlesford Council Offices

Saffron Walden

Essex.

RE: BALANCE OF HARMS VS BENEFITS

My name is Georgina Hofer. I am a director of Protect the Pelhams.

I consider that the harms of the proposed development substantially outweigh the benefits.

The proposed development would not accord with Uttlesford's local plan and would also conflict with significant parts of national planning policy including those contained within the Framework.

The applicant refers to various decisions where a Planning Inspector has found that significant weight should be given to solar generation projects. However, the sites which are the subject of these decisions are very different to the current site. Even if weight should be given to the benefits of solar generation, as the Inspector commented in the 2023 Little Heath appeal "The policy and guidance related to renewable energy does not confer an automatic approval of such schemes".

I am told that you have a statutory duty to have "special regard" to the desirability of preserving the setting of heritage assets. The NPPF also states that "any harm" to the significance of a heritage asset should be given great weight. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Grade I and Grade II* listed buildings are assets of the highest significance

I also understand that the Court of Appeal has said that any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset results in a "strong presumption" against granting permission.

The Proposed Development would result in less than substantial harm to the settings of five heritage assets including a Grade One listed church, Grade 2 star Listed Berden Hall and the Scheduled Monument at the Crump.

The Crump is one of only 200 recorded examples of Norman ringworks.

The proposed development will result in the loss of 114 acres of BMV land. In the 2023 Lullington appeal the inspector concluded that the loss of only 75 acres of BMV land – mostly Grade 3a - was a significant negative aspect of the proposal which weighed heavily against the development.

Uttlesford's landscape character assessment states that the Berden and Farnham Chalk Upland as being an area of "moderate to high" sensitivity to change. The infilling effect of the solar farm would reduce the appearance of open fields and reduce the countryside gap between Stocking Pelham and Berden by up to 90%.

You have also heard [will also hear] evidence of the damage to local species -including to skylarks, which are red listed birds.

For obvious reasons, the current site is very similar to the site proposed for Pelham Spring Solar farm. Both sites can be seen when standing in front of the Crump.

Given the importance of consistency in planning decisions, the refusal by PINS to grant permission for Pelham Spring Solar Farm is a material consideration which must carry great weight. The conclusion of the inspector regarding Pelham Spring was that the benefits of the renewable energy scheme did not outweigh the harms to: character and appearance, landscape, the settings of designated heritage assets, archaeological remains, loss of BMV land, highway safety, biodiversity and noise.

I urge you to refuse permission for this development.
