

From: Daniel B [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, July 2, 2024 10:07 AM
To: Section 62A Applications <section62a@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>
Subject: S62A/2024/0045 Land at Wickham Hall Estate, Bishops Stortford, Uttlesford, CM23 1JG

I am writing in support of the application S62A/2024/0045 as a local resident.

I believe the installation of onshore solar energy is crucial to developing the right energy mix for electricity production that is sustainable and meets legally binding Paris Accord objectives to limit global warming to 1.5°C by ensuring that greenhouse gas emissions peak by 2025 and decline 43% by 2030. The UK is still falling short of its objectives and the installation of solar energy is part of the national effort to achieve lower greenhouse gas emissions. In July 2019, Uttlesford district council almost unanimously backed a cross-party motion declaring a climate emergency with the ambition to achieve net zero by 2030: <https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=4865> The resolution stated that the council would "commit to achieving net-zero carbon status by 2030 and protecting and enhancing bio-diversity by [...] working collaboratively across the Council and engaging with individuals, community groups, businesses and other partners in the district, including young people who should have a voice to help shape our future [...] producing a bold plan of action that is realistic, measurable and deliverable [and] ensuring significant progress has been made to deliver the action plan by April 2023."

A strategy was produced in 2021 that makes a number of relevant points: <https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s22640/CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20STRATEGY.pdf>

- "Since 2005, domestic and commercial carbon emissions have reduced in the district due to changes to vehicle fuel efficiency, domestic insulation, heating and lighting, energy efficiency improvements to industrial processes and the introduction of renewable energy"
- "To support our district to conserve energy, a sustained engagement programme will be needed with households, landlords and businesses promoting practical ways to reduce energy used and find carbon neutral or reduced carbon alternatives for energy that is consumed. The green energy sector needs to be supported through engagement with renewable energy installers, energy efficient material suppliers and electrical heating businesses to promote the district as an attractive market for product development and trade."
- "As an organisation committed to addressing climate change and providing a leadership role we need to reduce our carbon emissions and the energy that we use, prioritise renewable energy sources and manage our services in a sustainable way"

This should be regarded as an overarching commitment by the authority to meet the objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by all means possible, including in its planning function. While UDC is not determining this particular application, PINS should consider this as a local planning objective, in lieu of an extant local plan.

Solar farms assist with boosting biodiversity by taking land out of intensive industrial agriculture and enabling rewilding. The impact on food production is vastly overstated and for Uttlesford's households to be entirely solar-powered, less than 2% of the district's current cropping area would need to be utilised for solar production.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. NPPF paragraph 124 states: Planning policies and decisions should:

- (a) encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside;
- (b) recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production;

In an area that is virtually absent of meadows and woodlands, the retirement of land from industrial agriculture will enable new habitat creation and benefit wildlife.

A survey published earlier this year, conducted by ecological consultancies Clarkson & Woods and Wychwood Biodiversity and entitled the 'Solar Habitat 2024: Ecological trends on solar farms in the UK' found that solar farms can become "safe havens for biodiversity" and play an "important role" in nature restoration. The study analysed a total of 87 solar sites in 2023 and found that vulnerable and red-listed species, such as skylarks, are among the most common wildlife present on UK solar farms. Yellowhammers, linnets and starlings – all red-listed bird species – were also present at the observed solar sites. On the ground, brown hares, a species under conservation concern, made up 40% of mammal observations across the 87 observed sites. Downing Renewable Developments and Endurance Energy have cited offerings of 176% and 62% biodiversity net gains, respectively, within the planning applications for their 50MW solar sites.

UDC previously refused an application for a solar farm on the site with some councillors believing that the solar farm would lead to coalescence with Bishop's Stortford and therefore undermined the Metropolitan Green Belt. Given that a solar farm is not an urban structure, it is not permanent and it actually enhances biodiversity, the claims were ill-founded. Councillors also expressed concern about the impact on the landscape and residents' enjoyment of it. As a regular walker in the Stort Valley area, I do not believe that the site next to the busy A120 but largely secluded from it will have any significant impact on the landscape and the footpaths around it are among the least used in the area.

For the sake of fighting climate change and boosting biodiversity in an otherwise intensively cropped landscape, I urge PINS to approve this application and overrule some of the spurious objections within UDC that contradict its own stated policies on climate change as well as legally-binding international commitments.

Daniel Brett

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