

Carlton cum Willingham Parish Council comments in response to the Kingsway Solar pre-consultation

11 December 2024

These are the comments of parish councillors from Carlton cum Willingham Parish Council, which include feedback from our local residents shared with us during an Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting on 9th December 2024. The parish council is extremely alarmed about this proposal; **we** and **all** residents who we heard from are **opposed**.

We note that Site C falls within our parish boundaries.

Our concerns are as follows:

1. **The size and industrial scale of this proposed development, especially around housing in site C which runs to 2600 acres.** If a significant amount of site C were to be used for solar panels and battery storage, this would be disproportionate to the size of the local community and would adversely affect the rural landscape and character of the area.

2. **Loss of high-quality agricultural land and the impact on food security.** Site C is predominantly Grade 2 and is currently farmed and it is extremely concerning that so much productive land could be repurposed. Food security is as important as the development of renewable energy. There is also concern about the long-term effects on soil quality of solar panels and whether the land would be degraded such that it could not be returned to agricultural use after the 40 year lifetime of the proposed solar farm and battery storage. Given that there is not a development of this scale already in existence for this length of time, there is no precedent to support such a claim that this is possible and the long-term impact of a scheme of this scale is unknown.

3. **Ecological impact of such a large development on local wildlife and habitat.** There are numerous species, some of which are protected, living in the area, and some of which are endangered, including great crested newts, bats, stone curlew, red and yellow kites, fallow, roe and Muntjac deer, badgers, herons, white dove and adders. Lower Wood is a nature reserve managed by the Wildlife Trust and home to a variety of flora, fauna, birds and mammals. It is imperative this area is left untouched by development. Any development that would result in loss of established woodlands and hedges, impacting the rural landscape and removing wildlife habitat, is unacceptable.

4. **Natural environment and biodiversity**

The proposed scheme seems entirely at odds with the entirety of Section 15 of the NPPF. Including (but not limited to):

180. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

186. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as

ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists;

188. The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitat's site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), unless an appropriate assessment has concluded that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the habitat's site.

5. Traffic, construction and infrastructure

The Kingsway Solar Stage One Consultation Newsletter says that key factors driving the choice of site location included access to established transport links but Site C is mainly accessible via small single-track country lanes and B roads and some areas in site C are 6 miles from the nearest A road. Construction traffic would adversely impact already pot-holed roads and lanes, which are too narrow for large vehicles and the noise and visual impact of construction of such a large site over such an extended period of time, would hugely impact local residents and their enjoyment of the rural landscape, as well as local wildlife.

6. Flooding

The river Stour rises close to the west point of site C at Wratting Common and runs through to Horseshoe Lane and then along the north boundary of the isolated parcel of land to the east. In Carlton, we have two locations that flood regularly on Church Road and Brinkley Road and there is an area in Willingham Green on the corner to the east of the north section of site C on the B1052 which floods regularly and has caused damage to houses. Weston Green also floods annually and the ford on Horseshoe Lane which is the only approach to the lone parcel of land in site C regularly floods and can be completely impassable. Fields and roads adjacent to the Stour also flood regularly. We are concerned that the proposed development would interrupt overland flow routes, as well as increase the rate and volume of surface water run-off from panels in an area that is already prone to flooding regularly and has a high water table.

7. Archaeological sites of interest

Within site C are numerous sites of archaeological importance including The Icknield Way (one of the oldest roads in Britain, in use since pre-historic times possibly dating back to the Neolithic period), Moat House at Great Coven Wood in Weston Colville (a registered Scheduled Monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, designated a site of national importance), the River Stour (divided the Angles and Saxons, rising on the border of site C) and additionally there are a total of 76 Grade 2 listed buildings in Site C, five Grade 2* listed buildings and one Grade 1 listed building protected by Historic England.

8. Footpaths and bridleways

There are many heavily used footpaths and bridleways running through site C, which connect a lot of the neighbouring villages and there are a number of horses and studs in the area that also use these bridleways. It is vital that footpaths and bridleways are retained for the local community's enjoyment of the rural area that they have chosen to live in and for the continued activity of local studs.

9. Safety concerns about lithium ion batteries and noise disturbance from proposed battery storage

Residents are extremely concerned about the prospect of lithium batteries being sited near residential housing due to fears of fire risk and the impact of noise and light pollution, impacting nearby residents and wildlife.

10. Decrease in property values for residents closest to the sites

Residents are concerned that being positioned so close to a solar and battery storage site will make the local area less desirable and therefore impact property values.

11. Impact on the rural economy

Such a large development removing so much agricultural land would lead to job losses in the rural economy by those carrying out various roles. This would have a ripple effect on businesses in the area and over such a long time period, it is unlikely that any jobs created during the construction and then maintenance of the proposed development site would off-set these for local people.

Conclusion

Given all of these concerns raised, residents are bewildered by the choice of site C as part of this development proposal and we believe that there are more suitable sites closer to transport links like the A11 including brownfield sites in the wider South Cambridgeshire area.

We would like to draw attention to the fact that a 1.8 hectare solar farm was refused in September 2023 and an appeal dismissed on a site next to site C by South Cambridgeshire District Council (application Ref 20/01564/FUL). The Inspector dismissed the appeal for two main issues (a) the character and appearance of the area including the landscape and (b) the use of best and most versatile agricultural land, and whether the sustainability considerations and need for the development are sufficient to override the need to protect the agricultural value of the land. Their report states that 'the attractive, unspoiled qualities of the appeal site would be replaced by regimented rows of uniform solar panels mounted on metal frames together with ancillary buildings. The homogenous and typically geometric form of the proposal together with its industrial appearance and dark finish would erode the rural character of the appeal site and diminish its contribution to the key landscape characteristics of the West Wickham wooded Claylands area. Within this context, I find that the proposal would read as a highly obtrusive and discordant Form of development. As such, it would have a harmful effect on the land landscape'. The Inspector concluded that would cause 'significant harm to the character and appearance of the area, and I'm not persuaded for the reasons I've set out that these impacts will be capable of being made acceptable. In my view over the lifetime of the development, the harm to the character and appearance, including the landscape outweighs all the benefits of renewables'.

This rejected development proposal was on a considerably smaller scale than Kingsway Solar's and is only two fields away from site C with the same quality and type of agricultural land and rural landscape. Given this refusal was only a year ago, we would argue that the same reasons given also apply to Kingsway Solar's proposal.

It should not be the case that the need for renewable energy trumps all other factors and thus large scale solar schemes can all but disregard normal planning restrictions. Our country's countryside, agricultural land, environmental features, village heritage, ecosystems, historic architecture, archaeology, habitats etc. are all finite, irreplaceable resources. Any scheme, which severely impacts upon such environments should be interrogated to a higher (not lesser) degree to balance the harm it will cause (and what will be irretrievably lost) against the communal benefits it will bring. Kingsway Solar has not described a process of exploring the feasibility of other potentially more appropriate sites and indeed the site does not satisfy some of Kingsway's own site requirements, particularly in the case of site C, established transport links. Notwithstanding the impact of the solar fields themselves, the additional infrastructure required to connect such a rural location to the Burwell substation would be vast, costly, and harmful to large swathes of the natural environment. The harm caused by this proposal to the local community and rural landscape and wildlife seems vastly disproportionate to the benefit.