

REPRESENTATIONS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

MONDAY 22 November 2021

1. WD/D/19/003181, Land at Higher Stockbridge Farm, Higher Stockbridge Farm, Stockbridge

OBJECTIONS

OBJECTION FROM Mr Michael Gates

The proposed development covers a considerable area of small fields in one of the few unspoilt Dorset clay vales. This valley runs south from the small village of Lillington in a landscape of considerable beauty that is virtually unchanged since Thomas Hardy's time providing a marvellous setting for a number of heritage assets including the Grade 1 church in Lillington.

My family have lived at [REDACTED], set just south of the development, for nearly thirty years. We have loved exploring the footpaths and bridleways in the vicinity with their stunning views over the vale, west towards Winyards Gap and south to the Batcombe ridge in the Dorset AONB. We watch other walkers and equestrians on nearby bridleway and footpaths also taking enjoyment from the landscape. The development would cover a significant area of the valley floor and would be visible from the many rights of way around and across the proposed site including the Macmillan Way.

The proposed tree planting to screen the development is quite inadequate to shield it from users of the bridleway next to our house and it will also be visible a very short distance away from our home and a number of our rooms.

We are concerned that the proposed development will blight this attractive landscape for future generations. How confident can we be that Voltalia and any future owners will be willing or even able to reinstate the land to its present condition.

The benefits of the proposal are outweighed by the adverse impact this would on the landscape, heritage assets and amenity value of the area. We believe the proposal should be rejected as it fails to meet a number of Dorset Planning Policies.

Objection from Mr Pinney – Knights PLC

This is the wrong time to approve this application when technology and policy are changing rapidly.

- With 5 amendments to the application since 2019 and despite public rebuttals and corrections, the application still contains contradictions and errors on size, value, visibility, tourism and management practices. The Applicant's capability to plan and deliver such a large project effectively and sympathetically is in doubt.
- Voltalia is untrustworthy: its responses to public concerns are disingenuous, it:
 - o denies risks of contamination on decommissioning
 - o defies OFWAT on predicted rainfall figures and potential for flooding
 - o claims to restore the area to farmland

There is no contingency or risk planning and it has no experience of site restoration.

There are no pledges, covenants or guarantees to prevent Voltalia causing downstream floods and leaving a contaminated brownfield site to DCC.

• Voltalia's application is based upon obsolete policy; the Country's current emphasis is more on the preservation of land as carbon sinks in their natural environment, than generating solar power.

o At point 9 of The Government's 10 point plan published 19/10/2021, The PM states: "We will safeguard our cherished landscapes... protect our natural environment safeguarding these areas for future generations.... protecting and improving 30% of UK land by 2030".

o Energy and Climate Minister Greg Hands said, "a £500m package of support at COP26 will help protect millions of hectares of land, boosting rural communities".

o Chris Loder, our MP has declared his hope this application is rejected to prevent the desecration of a part of the cultural and historic fabric of Dorset.

o Support for solar has reduced since 2016 when the Government cut subsidies for renewable UK energy projects until 2025.

• Considered in isolation the merits of this application are unconvincing. Taken in conjunction with the damaging to our local cultural heritage.

o No effort has been made in some other 9 sites in the locality, this application is the largest, most visible and most areas of greatest consumption: no solar panels appear on any new roofs in the 400 acre development at Poundbury, or Thornford, Yetminster and Sherborne.

o Solar energy is seasonal, contributing only 4% of UK's total (less than wind and biomass).

The committee must reconcile the perceived gains against the risks, detriments and lost cultural heritage.

Given the lack of confidence in Voltalia delivering a beneficial long term gain; the changes in policy and priority, and the imbalance of benefits between rural Dorset being the provider of ethical power for urban consumers, the Committee should refuse the application. Not to do so would be condemning 147 acres to environmental uncertainty in the hands of outsiders with little or no accountability to those in, local to or visiting Wessex.

Objection from Mark Ashley Miller

This industrial solar park will have a significant detrimental impact on land designated as "ancient farmland with specifical historic character".

The harmful effects of building the park are enhanced due to its size and valley location. They will far outweigh the benefits of producing solar power.

There are many more sites of industrial or post industrial land within a few miles of Higher Stockbridge Farm which are more fitting for renewable energy developments.

If approved, the Dorset Council would be responsible for "trashing" the beautiful local environment and this is not what the people who you represent wish for.

Please oppose this application.

Objection from Kevin Waterfall

"The overall concern with this project proposal is that it is contrary to the objectives of the majority of stakeholders impacted. If renewable energy by Solar PV is to form part of our future developments then it needs to enhance society and not degrade the natural and social environment or people's enjoyment of it.

People want to boost production and usage of renewable energy in appropriate locations and this installation in this location fails to do this in relation to its impact on wildlife and the local ecology.

2021 UK government plans now emphasise the role of natural carbon sinks, protection and enhancement of rural land use instead of large scale solar farms.

This project would be in contravention of local Dorset and national planning legislation. It would be contrary to Policies ENV 1, ENV 4, ENV 10 of the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan (2015) and paragraphs 174 & 199-203 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) thus the principle of development of the scheme is also contrary to Local Plan policy COM 11.

If the land was to be enhanced for wildlife and environmental measures then there would be linkage of existing areas of woodland and natural wetland development would involve the watercourses through it.

Voltalia fails to recognise the value of the site, playing down environmental and wildlife benefits. It plays down the quality of the land, trees, and agricultural practices plus failing to record the full variety of birds and mammals on the site.

By their own admission Voltalia build, but have minimal operating experience of solar farms.

Therefore in order to protect our wildlife, prevent further loss and enhance our natural environment this project must be rejected."

The Sherborne and District Society (CPRE) strongly objects to this planning application on the grounds that it poses unacceptable harm to the landscape, the setting of heritage assets and the amenity value of this important part of the Blackmore Vale.

CPRE Sherborne welcomes the excellent and thorough Case Officer's report and trusts that the Strategic Planning Committee concurs with the recommendation that the application should be refused.

Mr R Hartley

On behalf of the Sherborne and District Society (CPRE)

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SUPPORT REPRESENTATIONS

Support from Peter Roberts

I passionately support this application. As the recent COP26 highlighted we are in an international battle to safeguard the world we live in for future generations. This development will play a part in this journey and it is crucial that we support it. The application is detailed and has been ongoing for a significant period of time and no doubt cost to the developer. The statement of community involvement clearly shows how they have listened and adapted based on constructive input from the community.

I am expecting to become a father for the first time in early 2022. I would be proud to show my child how we as a local community are engaging in the climate crisis positively and dealing with the inconveniences this causes.

Support from Poppy Maltby, Head of Cities and Regions, Regens

Regen carried out a Dorset Low Carbon Energy Map and Evidence Base review for Dorset LEP in May 2021. Please see: <https://www.dorsetlep.co.uk/news-article/opportunities-to-unlock-dorset-s-net-zero-potential>. We wanted to take this opportunity to ensure the planning committee is aware of the evidence from that work and the relevance to consideration of applications for solar PV developments.

The work indicated that a net zero compatible strategy would see installed solar PV capacity in Dorset tripling from the current 480 MW to c.1.5 GW by 2050. This would entail an additional 200 MW within the next 8 years. Since then the UK government has, in line with the focus at COP26 on keeping the rise in global temperatures below 1.5%, committed to achieving a net zero power system by 2035. This will require an even faster rate of growth of renewable power generation than was envisaged at the time of this work being completed. Action in this decade is crucial.

In the context of the very significant increase required in renewable energy capacity to address the climate emergency and meet the UK legally binding commitment to net zero it is clearly important that the benefits of proposed solar PV project in reducing the carbon emissions are given very significant weight in the planning process.

As Dorset Council have themselves acknowledged in their Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy “Every degree matters” and “Time is short”.

It also states that “Every opportunity to utilise renewable energy to meet current demand needs to be taken and large-scale deployment projects need to be developed.” And acknowledges that “Dorset County’s [renewable energy] capacity needs to increase by a factor of eight.” See: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/renewable-energy-technical-paper>

In addition there needs to be an appreciation within the planning committee of the availability of land to meet these net zero goals in Dorset. I’ve copied below a map which summarises the areas technically available for large scale solar PV within Dorset which are already very constrained by the ANOBs. The available areas of low agricultural land grade, availability of electricity infrastructure and are outside ANOB areas are highlighted in yellow. These present an extremely important solar PV resource for Dorset and include the land around High Stockbridge Farm.

Finally, I would also stress that considerable opportunity for inward investment and job creation in Dorset through the solar PV industry. The report highlights that as well as diversifying farm income and improving biodiversity, an additional 200 MW of installed solar PV would create £200m of investment and the potential for c. 200 jobs.

Support Gareth Roberts – Pegasus Group

I represent the applicant, Voltalia UK Ltd, on planning matters. Having reviewed the Committee Report, I make the following points over the scheme's planning merits and balance.

The proposal is for a 35MW ground mounted solar, equating to the annual energy consumption of c. 10,605 households and an annual CO₂ displacement of c. 20,000 tonnes.

This should carry significant weight as required by national policy.

The proposal is wholly consistent with the Government's policies in meeting the challenge of climate change and energy security. As with Voltalia's scheme at Spetisbury, local businesses will be contracted for labour, materials etc.

Landscape

The local landscape's capacity to accommodate a large solar park is established through Decision Notice WD/D/15/001841, which expired in 2019. The unimplemented permission

was located 1km south of Higher Stockbridge.

The site is located within an undesignated countryside and doesn't form the setting to the

AONB, it falls on the lowest tier in the hierarchy introduced by NPPF para 175. The local landscape is not covered by any non-statutory landscape designation. The scheme was reduced in its physical footprint as part of the iterative design process, omitting parts of the site that were judged to be more visible. Any landscape character or visual effects would be localised and largely limited to the immediate environs. Some community respondents withdrew their objection following re-consultation.

Heritage

A review has been made by a second heritage consultant at Pegasus Group, informed by site visits to the Listed Lower Stockbridge Barn and Farmhouse, St Anthony's Convent and

associated elements in the Italian Gardens. The proposals would not be visible from these

assets, nor co-visible in views where their significance can be appreciated. Any views from

the Water Tower (which has solar panels within its grounds) will be distant and partially screened by vegetation. The positioning of the scheme in the wider surrounds of these heritage assets will not harm their heritage significance through changes in setting. The scheme accords with all heritage law, policy and guidance.

Other Matters

It is enough for the proposal to accord with the development plan as a whole. It does not have to accord with each policy therein. Officer's Report confirms development is acceptable for biodiversity, highway safety, PRoW, drainage, archaeology and residential amenity. It also occupies poor quality agricultural land.

The connection point to the electricity grid is within the application site, thus no grid connection disruption to the local community. There are no brownfield sites available for the development. Development provides significant biodiversity net gain. It will add to the organic matter in the soil and assist in alleviating climate change and flooding.

Any further delay in delivering renewables would only mean more radical intervention in the future.

Yours sincerely

Kelly Clutterbuck
UK Development Manager, Voltalia

The solar development at Higher Stockbridge supports the transition to a low carbon future as part of an international effort to combat climate change and will provide a decentralised, clean, renewable and sustainable form of electricity generation. The benefits brought by the anticipated CO₂ displacement of the project plus biodiversity enhancements and regional economic benefits are significant.

Voltalia UK is committed to working with and supporting the local community. Following two delegated approvals in Dorset (South Farm and Clifton Farm) Voltalia has proven this commitment by funding and completing improvements at Spetisbury Primary School, provided funding for Parish Council initiatives and is continuing to engage with the community at the South Farm site.

The Committee Report states that 'detailed landscape and conservation advice was not sought'.

This statement is incorrect. The pre-application advice was issued following a site visit undertaken by the Council's Case Officer and the Council's former Specialist Service Team Leader, a qualified landscape architect. To summarise, the Council considered that the layout of the proposed site, the surrounding landform and topography **would** make it a favourable location for solar.

The submitted Design and Access Statement identifies how the initial scheme was reduced prior to submission to reflect pre-application and community consultation advice. The pre-application advice was based on a larger scheme in comparison to the layout that is being presented to the Strategy Committee and the development footprint has further reduced by 20% during this determination period.

A key requirement with renewable energy development is identifying an electrical network with sufficient capacity to accommodate the exported power and it is for this reason that developers are driven to specific geographical areas. Voltalia has reduced the scheme as far as practicable.

Given the recent announcements at COP26 and current climate change emergency, the need for new renewable energy is even more pressing. The Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy published by Dorset Council in July 2020 identifies how Dorset needs to play its part by generating 100% of its own energy demand and projects that Dorset will need around 4GW of solar generation.

The target represents a significant local challenge and emphasises the significant weight that should be placed **in favour** of this development. It is notable that Dorset did not achieve its own 2020 target of providing 7.5% of total energy from renewables. There was a shortfall of around 292GWh.

This project is strategically important for Dorset.

2. Application for a definitive map and statement modification order to add a footpath from Sunnyside Road to Ryland's Lane, Wyke Regis, Weymouth

Dear Mr Matthew Piles & The Strategic Planning Committee

I am requesting these words be listened and considered very carefully for this application. I have read through the summary. A lot of questions were asked, and yet I was not contacted for clarification on any of my points.

My evidence comes from being a resident at [REDACTED] for most of my life. I am [REDACTED] years and [REDACTED] months. The footpath through the school was never contested, until the few years before the

application (which arose from the gates being locked). I refer to point 6.1: ..."...the School had no intention of dedicating a right of way. However there is no evidence that this was communicated to the public". The school literally locked the gates one day. The public were trying to use the route as usual, which was now suddenly locked.

Living next to the footpath, the gates were not locked from 1986 through to 2011, (only attempted to be locked from 2005 onwards). I spent many weekend days (the school not open as weekend) learning to ride my bike, rollerskating, walking to the Fairview park to meet friends. Heading to the shops on Portland Road. This all spans over 20 years, and I was never challenged when using the route (I refer to point 6.3, where the school claim challenges were made in 2011). The access was not blocked either, I had straight access through open gates.

The confusion of my evidence: I am not planning officer. I am a member of the public who is amongst the witnesses who provided you their information. I beg that it be considered that a lot of the people who submitted their evidence, a few are of the much older generation, and an abrupt phone call is not sufficient to take evidence from when asking further questions. I had complaint of such a phone call. Had I been asked to do so, I would have happily gathered any missing signatures from the people who happened to forget to sign their signature.

Here are my points:

Point 7.11: I would have appreciated consultation and not presumption on this document. To make allegations that I had doctored the document is not basis for making a definitive decision. Consultation with myself would have given information for further investigation of the official documents.

Point 7.14: As above, discussion with myself on any questions to relevance would have revealed the desired evidence of my direction with this document. A very distinct memory in fact, that when crossing the grass area, there was a raised manhole/drain, which has now since been removed (possibly when the new hall was built?). This might not seem relevant, but it backs up my use of having used the route (I in fact fell over this in the 80s, so it is a very prominent memory).

7.22 & 7.23: There is confusion over this, as the pathway was always used. No means ever stopped use. Users were never told use was to stop using it. No communication ever happened to tell the public to stop using. Sign I have memory of, were brief signage that had decayed over years from lack of maintenance, Forgive me being confused by suddenly being confronted by a gate that suddenly appeared locked. It was a pathway always used, with never any doubt over use, until now.

8.2 Analysis of the evidence under Section 31, Highways Act 1980:

Use of the path was never brought into question.

I used the path, as well as others, interruption for 20 years.

Use was never of secrecy and without permission

Use must be by public at large...please look at the Portland Road Tesco's. It is too close because of takings being down. I am positive that the closure of the footpath has contributed to this (alternative routes not as safe as this one, so this side of Wyke could not access it to shop freely).

Please can thes police reports be requested. There has never been evidence of the public being those responsible for the alledged drugs, I can, however, confirm that school pupils like to smoke weed the pther side of my garden fence at break times (it can be smelt).

7.31 Other submissions concerned matters of convenience, desirability and security and did not contain any evidence which can be taken into consideration.

Safeguarding. Students can be regularly seen climbing the locked gate at Rylands Lane. There is no safety being considered. Students have never had to climb the gates to get home, until recent years while this case is ongoing. I can vouch for being a student allowed home at lunchtimes during my attendance, when the gates were never locked. The current situation leaves the school open to injury claims. Student safety is definitely not being considered.

5.17 Officer comment:

If use were with permission, the duration of use is of no relevance. The

dates when gates on the route were locked seem to be unclear.

A sign reading "Not a right of way but you are welcome to walk through" would be sufficient to prevent acquisition of public rights, but the fact that the sign was only seen by one person during the time this route was laid out makes its presence open to question".

The sign appears in point B1, as photographed in 2005. What is there to question