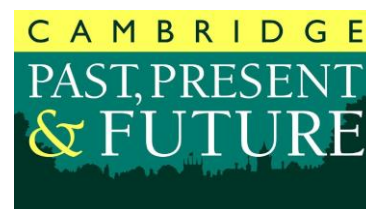


Greater Cambridge Share Planning Service



By email to:

By Online Planning Register
FOA Charlotte Spencer

Cambridge Past, Present & Future
Wandlebury Country Park
Cambridge CB22 3AE

Phone 01223 - 243830
www.cambridgeppf.org

22/02/2022

Dear Charlotte

Response to 22/00051/FUL: Installation of a 22,975 megawatt hours (MWh) per annum solar farm and associated infrastructure on land to the east of Lords Bridge, Barton for an operational lifespan of 40 years; Lords Bridge Barton Road Barton

Cambridge Past, Present & Future is Cambridge's largest civic society. We are a charity run by local people who are passionate about where they live. We operate in the greater Cambridge area and working with our members, supporters and volunteers we:

- Are dedicated to protecting and enhancing the green setting of Cambridge for people and nature.
- Care about Cambridge and are an independent voice for quality of life in the strategic planning of Greater Cambridge.
- Are working to protect, celebrate and improve the important built heritage of the Cambridge area.
- Own and care for green spaces and historic buildings in and around the city for people and nature, including Wandlebury Country Park, Coton Countryside Reserve, Cambridge Leper Chapel & Barnwell Meadows, Bourn Windmill and Hinxtton Watermill.

Cambridge Past, Present & Future **objects** to this application on the grounds of inappropriate development in the Green Belt contrary to Local Plan Policy S/4 (and National Policy) and loss of agricultural land contrary to Local Plan Policy NH/3.

The proposal will lead to development in the Green Belt and we do not agree that there are any exceptional circumstances to allow this inappropriate development. The development does not meet any of the exceptions listed in National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 149 or 150.

The essential characteristics of the Green Belt are their openness and their permanence. The development of this site with solar panels will introduce a built form which will restrict the openness of the countryside and Green Belt. This is recognised in the Planning Statement, but we do not agree with the view that as the panels are low lying and ground mounted the impact on the openness is minimal. The application recognises that the site will be visible from the ridgeline to the south. This is the direction the panels are facing and will therefore be intrusive development within the Green Belt.

The applicant argues that the development will not lead to the permanent loss of Green Belt as the proposal is for 40 years after which the structures will be removed. We do not consider that 40 years can be considered temporary given that it is half a lifetime (some permanent buildings do not last 40 years.) There is no certainty that the technology will be such that an alternative sustainable energy source will be available in 40 years' time which will allow for the removal of the panels.

We acknowledge and support the University's efforts to tackle climate change and increase its use of sustainable energy. There is, however, no justification to achieve this through development in the Green Belt, when the University could purchase land beyond the Green Belt for this purpose if it wishes.

We do not agree with the argument that supplying the electricity directly to the University is a special circumstance. In planning terms, it is irrelevant whether the electricity generated by the solar farm is supplying the University or the nation grid. Furthermore, it is equally sustainable for the University to supply solar energy to the grid and then use electricity from the grid. The argument that the solar farm is directly supplying the University could set a precedent with other large energy users in Cambridge, such as the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and the various science parks, who could argue for solar farms within the Green Belt to supply their operations.

The site is grade 3A agricultural land which is classified as the best and most versatile agricultural land. Adopted Local Plan Policy NH/3 prevents the irreversible loss of grade 3a agricultural land. The solar farm will take the land out of arable production. Brownfield sites and lower grade agricultural land should be looked at for development before the loss of higher-grade land is considered.

We note that there is considerable cycle and car parking on the West Cambridge Campus and car parking on the adjacent Park & Ride, all of which could be fitted with solar ports to generate energy. We are also aware of a scheme that was developed by the University 20 years ago to provide solar panel covered walkways on the West Cambridge Campus in order to generate electricity.

The application is lacking in detail regarding the infrastructure at the solar farm for the power interconnection and for the Data Centre – and what the implications of these might be.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Nicholas
Principal Planning Officer