



The countryside charity
Somerset

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President Mariella Frostrup
Chair Hugh Williams
Planner Fletcher Robinson

27 August, 2025

To: Somerset Council, Area East Planning Planning Team

For: the attention of Trudy Gallagher, Case Officer

Dear Planning Team East,

Re: 2025/1289/FUL- Solar Farm, Nythe Road, Ashcott

CPRE Somerset wish to OBJECT to this proposal.

Introduction

The Butleigh Moor landscape, overlooked by a crescent of high ground being the Polden Hills, Walton Hill, Dundon Hill and High Ham is one of the most intrinsically beautiful and distinctive landscapes in Somerset. The LPA has already accepted that this is a valued landscape for NPPF purposes.

This landscape would be blighted and industrialised by the thousands of monotonous toned panels proposed, the inverter buildings and the proposed control room, the kilometres of security fencing containing CCTV cameras set on high poles, the whole covering the equivalent of 83 premier league football pitches. It will create substantial harm to the unique character of this landscape. In our view it is entirely unacceptable at this location.

The previous planning application for the site was refused for 10 reasons under delegated powers (2023/1892/FUL). The development remains unchanged in all material respects. There are two minor changes in the Application, which are insignificant in the overall context: a) panels have been removed from the small field at the northern edge, which is now labelled Biodiversity Net Gain; and b) more planting is proposed to conceal the panels.

We objected to the previous application in our detailed letter posted 25 April 2024 and submitted a separate landscape objection prepared by Philip Hanson CMLI, commissioned jointly by Save our Somerset Levels and by CPRE Somerset, which set out detailed arguments why this is a valued landscape and entirely unsuitable for such development. An updated letter has been submitted for this planning application by Philip Hanson CMLI confirming his objection.

The New Planning Application

We do not intend to repeat points made previously but would make the following points in light of new information provided:

1. We note the highly detailed Landscape Review submitted by Carly Tinkler BA CMLI FRSA* in relation to this planning application which comprehensively explains why the applicant's LVIA is not safe to rely on for decision-making purposes, and why the LVIA contains numerous errors and flawed assumptions which has led to levels of adverse landscape and visual effects having been underestimated. We respectfully ask the LPA to consider the additional reasons Ms Tinkler has given in her report as to why this landscape is a valued one in TGN 02/21 terms.*Footnote- Ms Tinkler served on the Landscape Institute's working party which advised on the Technical Guidance Note TGN 02/21 'Assigning Landscape Value outside National Designations, which was prompted by a need to interpret the NPPF term 'Valued Landscape'. This important guidance on landscape value is frequently relied upon in appeal decisions and case law.
2. We wish to highlight Ms Tinkler's points that 'the screen planting will cause the total loss of valued views across the characteristically open, hedge-less landscape of the Levels which are of high quality and have high levels of positive aesthetic and perceptual qualities'; and that 'the screen planting is uncharacteristic and would itself result in adverse effects' .
3. These evidenced landscape reports confirm that the proposed screening would be: a) ineffective as the panels would be highly visible from both the elevated and flat land; b) alien to the open landscape character of the moor, where boundaries are defined by rhynes, not hedging [contrary to the claim in LVIA Part 1 para 3.5]; and c) would block views from the Samaritan's Way towards High Ham.
4. We also note the letter submitted by Tim Taylor of Khift Ltd, planning lawyers, which explains the legal reasons why reasons for refusal of the previous application remain fully applicable to the determination of this new planning application. Also we share his concern for the need for consistency: ' The need for consistency is a key tenet of planning decision-making. The Court has explained on numerous occasions that a lack of consistency will undermine public confidence in the operation of the development control systems, as well as being unhelpful for both developers and development control authorities'.
5. We are concerned that the ecological impacts appear to have been inadequately assessed, including those on commuting SPA/Ramsar site birds, highlighted in the objection by Natural England (NE). NE cites surveys data undertaken in 2020/2021 and in 2025 which indicates that 'the site is of high importance to sustaining the favourable conservation status of the SPA population', and concludes that: 'It must be assumed that the installation of solar panels will result in the functional loss of this habitat for the SPA/Ramsar species'. NE reports that the site is mapped as containing Coastal and Floodplain Grazing, which is a priority habitat. Priority habitats are of particular importance for nature conservation. NE also states that the site is situated on deep peat and that it does not support the principle of disturbing and development on restorable peat. In our view it is clear that the proposal is inappropriate on this highly important site.

6. We disagree with the Applicant's claim that the development 'would not be out of character' because it borders an existing 40 acre solar farm [Planning Statement, para 8.24]. The LVIA totally fails to acknowledge the substantial adverse cumulative impacts to the valued landscape that would result from the proposals (the cumulative impacts were a reason for the previous refusal). There is no principle in English planning law that harmful development justifies more of the same, and on a scale over four times as large.
7. We disagree with the Applicant's incorrect claim that 'no neighbourhood plans exist in the area to take account of' (see LVIA Part 1, para 2.33). In fact the Ashcott NP 2015-2027 is relevant to this planning application.

In conclusion, we wish to strongly endorse Mr Hanson's and Ms Tinkler's arguments that due to its scale, nature and use, the proposed development would be entirely inappropriate in this location and would result in adverse landscape, visual and other effects detailed in their reports. We have also taken due note of Mr. Taylor's legal opinion, which we consider to be helpful to the LPA, and the objection from Natural England.

Yours sincerely,

Hugh Williams
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