
PLANNING APPLICATION RESPONSE TO NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE: 25/01947/FP

PLANNING APPLICATION DESCRIPTION: Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), ground mounted solar farm, associated infrastructure, access and landscaping.

NHDC CONTACT: Nigel Mason

RESPONSE DATE: 2nd October 2025

RUSHDEN AND WALLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Further to a parish council meeting held on 18th September in Rushden Village Hall, a number of points were raised by both members of the public (residents of Rushden) and Parish council members giving rise to the objection to the planning application detailed above. The objection is on the grounds of direct effect on the local community through noise, safety concerns, reduction of wildlife and biodiversity and Conflict with planning policy and is specific to the location of this application.

Policy Conflict and Conclusion

NPPF and National Guidance: While the NPPF (Section 14) and Government support renewable energy in principle, they also emphasize that adverse impacts must be satisfactorily addressed and that the transition to low-carbon energy should be plan-led and *appropriate*. Paragraph 155 (formerly 160) of NPPF requires that plans “maximize renewable energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts) are addressed satisfactorily”. In this case, the adverse impacts on landscape, community and safety are far from addressed NPPF paragraph 180 (c) (previously 174) requires planning decisions to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and protect it. Approving this scheme would do the opposite. Additionally, the unresolved safety risks mean it fails the NPPF’s stipulation that planning should prevent development that cannot be operated safely.

North Herts Local Plan (2011–2031): Policy SP5 (Countryside) seeks to protect the intrinsic value of the countryside, with section 46 stating *‘for rural proposals, the need is to protect the countryside for its own sake, with aspects such as nature conservation, archaeology, landscape and agricultural land in mind’*. This development seeks to industrialise rural land.

‘Policy NE1/NE4 (natural environment, landscape and biodiversity) requires conserving and enhancing landscape character and biodiversity – the scheme harms both.

Policy NE12 (Renewable Energy) explicitly says proposals for solar farms on best and most versatile farmland will be determined in line with national policy; as argued, national policy (NPPF footnote 65) discourages using such land except where justified, and here it is not justified.

Balancing Benefit and Harm: There is little doubt that renewable energy is a public good and that action on climate change is essential. There is support for renewable energy in principle. However, the planning system requires a balance. In this case, the harms are specific and acute: a huge amount of natural rolling landscape will be lost, biodiversity disturbed, residents subjected to noise and risk.

1. Loss of peace and Tranquillity / Noise Pollution

The inclusion of a large **Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)** compound and numerous inverters/transformers means this development will generate significant noise. BESS facilities emit high noise levels primarily from cooling systems. needed to prevent battery overheating. It is noted that water cooled BESS units are mentioned in the Statement of Community Involvement (section 6.6). This process produces noise and as the exact equipment for this development has not been selected, serious questions over the accuracy of the Noise Impact Assessment must be asked. The Metrica report (section 7) is misleading at best and is unclear as to which information data relates to the background “natural” noise and which includes the industrial cooling machinery. It is unreasonable to expect any increase in background noise to the rural community and with some 868 BESS units the noise pollution will be significant, industry data shows 70-92db(A) at 1 meter from typical BSS cooling equipment, as this is most likely in summer months where the equipment can operate 24hrs per day this disruption to current quite rural soundscape is completely unacceptable. A clear maximum noise limit should be clarified and adhered to.

Nearby residential properties within the Parish of Rushden at Cumberlow Green and the wider village of Rushden will be affected, especially during quiet nights the continuous hum and fan drone from the BESS, transformers, inverters and associated equipment will degrade local serenity. Even if it meets minimum regulatory limits, it will destroy the tranquility of the countryside that residents currently enjoy. The NPPF clearly states that ‘decisions should mitigate and reduce potential adverse impacts of noise on health and quality of life’.

In addition to operational noise, during the construction phase heavy machinery and increased HGV traffic on local roads (including the A507 and smaller lanes) will significantly increase for many months bringing noise, dust and general disturbance for the community. Given the scale of the proposed development, there will be hundreds of HGV movements bringing equipment and materials to site.

2. Safety concerns

The Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) presents a serious health and safety concern for the local area. Lithium-ion battery installations, especially of this scale, carry a known risk of thermal runaway leading to fires or explosions. Such fires are difficult to control and can burn intensely, releasing toxic fumes – local residents are very concerned about this risk. Should a battery fire start how would it be extinguished or contained? Standard practice would be the use of water to suppress. If this we the case there would be a high risk of contaminated fire-water runoff contaminating the River Beane and the underground chalk aquifers that are the source of this areas water and large local conurbations. This has been identified by the Environment Agency (EA) in their consultation response dated 15 September 2025. The proposal fails to demonstrate safe operation. This runs contrary to NPPF para 188 (which states planning decisions should assume other regimes will operate, but planning should prevent development where an unacceptable risk remains)..

3. Local Community and Amenity impact

Local residents choose to live in this rural part of North Hertfordshire for its peace, open views, and access to nature. The proposed development would severely diminish those qualities – replacing green fields with metal and machinery. Public rights of way across or adjacent to the site would be transformed from pleasant footpaths

through open countryside to paths flanked by security fences and endless rows of panels, making them an uncomfortable and scary places to walk. The enjoyment of our local area for recreation, dog walking, and scenic appreciation would be greatly reduced.

As outlined earlier, the community will suffer noise pollution and construction disruption. The character of Rushden Parish would be altered irrevocably with the introduction of an industrial facility eroding the rural amenity that residents currently have and hope to maintain with the protections of countryside planning policies. This application is not happening in isolation. There is already widespread community opposition to the solar farm proposals in this area. Over 1,000 objections were lodged against the adjacent Beane Valley scheme in East Herts showing how strongly the community feels. If both East Herts and North Herts applications were approved, this community would find itself virtually surrounded by solar farms, a prospect the community finds unacceptable. The proposal would significantly diminish residents' quality of life, contrary to the planning objective of supporting healthy, safe and pleasant places to live.

4. Harm to Visual Amenity / Countryside Landscape

The proposed 187.3 hectare (463 acres) solar farm with extensive rows of panels, security fencing, over 850 battery storage units and enormous power transformers would industrialise the open countryside, forever changing its rural character. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), chapter 15 requires planners to recognise "the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside". Furthermore, the North Hertfordshire Local Plan policy NE2 states, *'Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that: a) Respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape character area and have regard to the guidelines identified for built development and landscape management; b) Do not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the landscape character area in which the site is located, taking account of any suitable mitigation measures necessary to achieve this; c) Are designed and located to ensure the health and future retention of important landscape features; and d) Have considered the long-term management and maintenance of any existing and proposed landscaping'*.

This area is currently an open farming landscape valued for its scenic beauty and tranquility, qualities which national policy seeks to protect.

When combined with the when combined with the adjacent "Beane Valley" proposal in East Herts and other speculative adjacent developments, transforming nearly 1,000 acres of farmland into a solar power estate would fundamentally degrade the visual amenity of the area. It should be highlighted that the proximity of the two proposed sites will have a cumulative effect on the landscape, something that the NPPF and the North Herts Local Plan section NE12 both address by requiring *consideration of the combined impacts of multiple energy-generating stations on landscape*,

Responses to the East Herts application (*RES Beane Valley Solar Farm*) should be considered with this application too notably from the landscape officer and environment agency stating considerable harm would arise due to the rolling countryside and the inability to screen the development resulting in significant change to the landscape character and visual amenity of the site.

5. Loss of Agricultural Land / Food Security

Best and Most Versatile Land: The development would lay fallow productive agricultural fields, including 38% (according to the developers survey) best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land in grades 2 and 3a will be completely developed. Government policy is clear that if significant development of farmland is necessary, *"areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality"* (NPPF section 15, footnote 65). At 200 ha this large development must demonstrate a necessity. Clearly crops have been successfully grown on the subject site and even CPRE Hertfordshire emphasise *"Districts with high-*

grade farmland and beautiful countryside (such as East and North Herts) “are not suited to industrial scale solar plants on greenfield” sites.

It is obvious that by developing land away from agricultural use for 40 years will undermine local and national food security. Opponents of the adjoining Beane Valley scheme have noted that taking such land out of food production “is not a sustainable solution”, and that solar panels ought to be sited on brownfield land or rooftops instead wherever possible. The same principle applies here. At a time when both food security and renewable energy. The application therefore fails to comply with Policy NE12 of the North Herts Local Plan, which requires solar farm proposals on BMV land to be considered in line with national policy (i.e. only if absolutely necessary).

6. Biodiversity / Habitat Impacts

The proposed site, a large area of open countryside that currently supports extensive wildlife, a landscape including hedgerows, field margins, and fallow areas that provide rich natural habitat including wild deer, bats, badgers, skylarks, yellow wagtails, and red kites. The development and boundary fences of the solar farm will significantly disrupt these habitats.

No detailed Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan is included in the Biodiversity Gain Plan. RSPB guidance recommends *annual rotation, no mechanical weeding during breeding season, and monitoring in years 2, 5, and 10*. The current proposal lacks these commitments, raising concerns about long-term effectiveness. The Ecological Impact Assessment acknowledges the loss of nesting habitat due to fencing and solar panel installation. Without robust mitigation, this could result in a net loss of Skylark breeding territories, contrary to Biodiversity Net Gain principles.

In addition no plan for loss of irreplaceable habitats is stated. The plan is submitted is stated “*for information only*” and not yet approved. Therefore an independent review of ecological, arboricultural, and noise mitigation strategies to ensure that they are robust.

some species cannot be mitigated for on-site: for example, lighting and noise from the BESS compound will disturb nocturnal wildlife (bats, owls), and fencing will exclude larger mammals such as Badger and deer. There is also a massive cumulative impact to consider: two huge solar projects back-to-back will amplify habitat loss and pressure on wildlife corridors across a broad area.

Signed on behalf of Rushden and Wallington Parish Council



Clerk for Rushden and Wallington Parish Council