

Date: 4th March 2024

Proposed Solar Farm To The West Of, Berrington, Shrewsbury, Shropshire.

Mary Elliott, [REDACTED]

STATEMENT

My name is Mary Elliott and I have lived in Cantlop with my husband for 20 years, moving here in 2004, to live in the countryside, with local walks and cycle rides, and views across the valley. It's not a 'chocolate-box pretty' kind of place, but it has character and it's natural charm reveals itself the longer you live here.

We are advocates of alternative energy and indeed we have been using air source heat pumps at home for a few of years, with the addition of solar panels and battery storage more recently. We believe in solar farms where they are appropriately sited and do not harm the environment.

I work from home as a gallerist with occasional visits from artists and customers who enjoy the journey to Cantlop, and our location with views across the fields to Berrington and east towards the Wrekin. The setting is conducive to the business. I am also an artist and spend many hours in the lanes and fields recording the seasons and the landscape in between Cantlop and Berrington, and along the Cound Brook Valley.

This part of the valley is a wildlife corridor with birds moving from the River Severn following the Cound Brook to Venus Pools, Berrington Pools and westwards towards the meres of Shropshire and the rivers of Wales. We watch the migration of geese and swans in the winter, whilst swallows and house martins visit and nest in and around Cantlop in the summer, skimming the fields for insects. The singing of skylarks on a sunny morning is one of the most uplifting sounds you can hear.

My objection to the solar site is primarily for the protection of the skylarks, which is one of the three reasons for the planning refusal. It is obvious that there has been little consideration for this species in the original planning application and consequently what appears to be a hurried and inadequate proposal to relocate the skylarks from the solar site to another field, in an attempt at mitigation.

Once we had notification that the appellant was going to Appeal the planning refusal, I contacted Shropshire Ornithological Society to see if there were any experts who could assist. We were really lucky to find Leo Smith who has been working with the solicitor Mark Turner and the ecologist Diane Corfe. Leo has submitted his evidence which I hope you will read. It is knowledgeable and authoritative.

In brief both the ecologist Diane Corfe and Leo Smith agree that the appellant's surveys have been insufficient, lacked detail about the methodology, and the accuracy of the reported results.

The appellant has since made some last minute proposals vis-a-vis their mitigation site for the skylarks, but the thinking appears to be muddled and indecisive.

In Diane Corfe's rebuttal she states: '...there is a high level of uncertainty associated with the mitigation land as two scenarios have been proposed..... screening by Natural England is requiredand has only recently been requested The fact that this screening was not undertaken in advance of planning submission is a significant omission in the Skylark Mitigation and Management Plan.' **(Rebuttal Proof of Diane Corfe 2 Ecology Rebuttal 2.40)**

Leo Smith concludes: 'The proposed development will destroy 11 Skylark breeding territories, and provide little or no realistic alternatives.' **(Proof of Evidence from Leo Smith, Ornithologist. 8.Conclusion 8.2)**

The appellant is now trying to use legal conditions to try to get planning permission on the promise that they will create a good habitat for the skylarks. It feels disingenuous, it's messy and inconclusive.

My second concern is the impact on the landscape and it's heritage. Berrington and Cantlop have been linked for centuries, socially, industrially and physically. A public right of way across the Cound Brook at Cantlop Mill and up Mill Lane to Berrington is an ancient route, and is a good walk, with views of the Shropshire Hills and beyond, through gaps in the hedgerows and field entrances. There will be no views like this with the solar site and 25% of the walk will be through and round the edge of the development, with the attendant sound, not of skylarks but of motorised panels and the intrusion of security fencing and cameras.

Back in Cantlop, and from our end of the settlement, the whole solar site will be in full view all year round. It will be impossible to screen because the site is on a steep slope and the glare will be constant.

There is no question that green energy is an urgent global need. But this has now become a business opportunity for solar companies from all over the world who have spotted a gap in the market. With councils under pressure to have acres of solar sites in their counties, but with little in the way of resources, skills and experience, they are dominated by the solar companies who swoop in with their proposals and the finances to go to Appeal and all of the attendant costs. Landowners being offered a £1,000 an acre rather than £280 from a farmer, are suddenly keen environmentalists, and you could say who could blame them.

Surely we all think, how can this imbalance of the value of land be right?

And therein lies the problem. It is why we have we got to this position, with tens of thousands of pounds being spent on planning and an appeal, and with everyday people giving up hours of unpaid time and raiding their savings, to protect their environment. It is not fair and it is not democratic.

The appellant and the landowner have not considered the skylarks, the intrinsic value of the land and history of the Cound Brook Valley, or the people of Berrington and Cantlop, as essential elements of the environment. They have unfortunately treated these two communities with disdain. This lack of understanding of the wider

meaning of environment, demonstrates that their sole interest is in solar energy as a business and not the environment they purport to care about.

The big headline of 'Renewable Energy to save the Environment' is the realisation that the true headline is 'Renewable Energy is the new Business Opportunity'. This has been the overriding driver of this application.

If this Planning Application for a solar farm was in the appropriate location and truly about the environment, there would be no objections, there would be no appeal and we could all be doing something more productive and positive with our time.

I hope you will find that the Council's original decision to refuse this application was correct and that you will uphold that decision. That you will find that this solar site is inappropriate and out of balance with the environment.

Thank you for listening to my concerns

