GROUNDS FOR OBJECTION

Harm to the significance of heritage assets
Industrialisation of this area within the setting of the heritage assets would cause harm to their significance. The Inspector was clear when rejecting the previous application, that the views to consider are not just from the heritage assets (there are 67 in the vicinity) but those experienced by anyone journeying around the assets and their setting.

Major adverse impact to landscape character
The previous scheme would introduce an industrial element that would harm landscape character, the magnitude of the change is high, and there would be a major adverse impact. The revised scheme has increased in area, height, scope and number of built elements, including a 5.7m mast, 18 battery storage units, cooling systems, 6 times the number of inverters and a switching station all of which would result in significantly increased harm to landscape character.

Overbearing effects
The site cannot be screened from view, even with increases in height and depth of planting it would be devoid of leaves during winter allowing clear views of the entire site for 6 months of the year. This would result in a dominating impact of the development on its surroundings. The Inspectorate was unequivocal, that any view of an industrial development, however limited, would cause harm to the setting of heritage assets and adversely affect the landscape character.

Adverse cumulative impact
This proposal would bring the number of large scale industrial solar farms within a 5km radius of the parish of Broughton Gifford to 10. There are vantage points where 2 or 3 can be seen simultaneously, others can be viewed in a matter of minutes. This development would result in a total of 765 acres of farmland given over to solar development, amounting to a capacity of 237MW. This concentrated proliferation in a tiny area equates to mass industrialisation.

Noise pollution and negative effect on amenity
The noise modelling for the battery storage and associated infrastructure shows a reading of 40dB which is 20dB above the prevailing background noise along a section of the public road. An increase of just 10dB above the background is considered to have a significant adverse impact. Passing walkers, cyclists and riders would experience industrial noise of twice the level considered a ‘significant adverse impact’. Other sections of the road are also subject to ‘adverse impact’ and the nearest residential receptors are at the boundary of the adverse/acceptable limit.

ADDITIONAL POINTS OF IMPORTANCE

The site is of ecological value
The land is very productive and successfully yields many different crops, the wheat grown is currently licensed for bread-making. It is not low quality as claimed by the developer. The land is classified as 3b which is moderate, 3b land makes up 60% of all UK’s farmland and is the backbone of British food production and is essential for food security.

Biodiversity net gains can be achieved without industrialisation
The biodiversity initiatives in the proposal are not dependent on the solar development, they can be implemented by the landowner/farmer as part of their ongoing land stewardship resulting in a greater biodiversity net gain and without any of the negative impacts of industrialisation or habitat fragmentation.

County-wide target vs small community burden
The Council’s 2030 carbon neutral target for solar renewables for Wiltshire is 590MW. The tiny area around Broughton Gifford, Atworth, South Wraxall and Holt is approximately 70km^2 and is just 2% of the total area of Wiltshire, but is potentially home to 237MW of solar capacity, nearly half the entire target for the whole county. This represents an unreasonable burden on a small community. As of November 2022 Wiltshire had 423MW of solar installed, 240MW in construction, 164MW in planning, making a potential total of 827MW which is more solar than any other county in England.

THINGS THE DEVELOPER HAS OMITTED

Further industrialisation once a precedent has been set

There has been a rash of developments locally. Given that once a solar farm is in place, an 'industrial' landscape is set, the proliferation of further development of this type would very likely result in the addition of further solar farms or a reserve power scheme (comprising; standby generator compound, two-storey steel acoustic lined containers, external fuel tanks, transformers and acoustic fencing) as at Roundponds.

Management of wildlife deemed as pests to solar farms

Pigeons, squirrels and rabbits are a major problem for solar farms as they damage the cables and cause fires. The necessary use of traps, deterrents and possibly even poison would fly in the face of any biodiversity claims.

Environmental responsibility

Nearly 80 million tonnes of solar waste will be in landfill by 2050. The panels contain heavy metals, such as lead and cadmium which can leach out of the cells and into ground water. The average lifespan of the batteries is 5 to 10 years so will need replacing regularly. There is a heavy environmental price to pay as lithium is a non-renewable material, it is classed as dangerous and toxic, and less than 5% of all lithium batteries for any application are recycled.

Food security

Farmland is already a renewable energy producer, making food from sunlight. Sacrificing that national asset to produce industrial solar energy will result in serious implications for British food security. Our solar farms should be wisely sited, making the most of disused, unproductive spaces and industrial roofs. There are alternatives for where solar can be sited, but not our farms.