

Inkberrow Parish Council strongly objects to Planning Application W/23/00270/FUL for the construction of a large solar farm, and recommends that Wychavon refuses to grant permission.

Strong local objection

Local concern has been growing for many months, and has been expressed very clearly at a range of meetings within the parish. In the latest instance, an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council (15th March) saw around 80 residents attend to raise objections, without a single person present expressing support for the application.

This application would represent the largest single development in the history of the ancient village of Inkberrow, covering over 287 acres and dwarfing previous housing developments. However, it's not just the scale of the application which concerns the residents and Inkberrow Parish Council (IPC) - the proposed location is in a pretty area of unspoilt rolling farmland, across which there are at present stunning views from the surrounding hills. All this amenity value will be lost if the development is allowed. The solar panels, high fencing, and battery storage equipment will all be out of character with the surrounding countryside, and will be very clearly visible from the higher ground and prominent viewpoints within Inkberrow and Morton Underhill. Where hedging is proposed to mitigate the visual impact, this will not only take 15 years to mature, but it will also only mask the fencing, not the 287 acres or reflective glare behind it.

The local objections also note that this application for a site of 49.9 MW is substantially larger than many others generating the same amount- some are 100 acres smaller. It would appear to be designed to allow it to be considered under less onerous planning rules and we assume this is because of the battery storage facilities, allowing the generation and input into the network to be managed. However, we urge Wychavon to consider that this means the residents of Inkberrow will have to endure a much larger development than other 49.9 MW sites, with a greater associated impact. It may be within the letter of planning law, but we question whether it is within the spirit of the planning rules as they were mostly likely intended to match the size of applications to the scale required to match the generating capacity. The rules were clearly intended to mean larger applications face more stringent tests than smaller ones. This is a large site.

Despite some arguments to the contrary, this is not about an abstract need for 'greener' energy, or solar electricity. Many residents understand the importance of green energy, indeed household solar panels are common in the parish. This is about an application which is too large, and too out of character with the surrounding area. The detrimental impact it would have on the area and residents is too great.

Further specific grounds for objection are:

This is not an appropriate location for a 287 acre solar site

The whole development, panels, fencing, batteries, and security are completely out of character with the area, and will have a detrimental impact on the amenity value of attractive countryside for residents and visitors. The site and high fencing will look too industrial in the proposed location.

It is far too large for the surrounding area, magnifying the detrimental visual impact. We would encourage planners and councillors to view the site from the banks above Morton Underhill, the top of 'Pinhills' or perhaps Chaston Hill in Inkberrow. As we have previously explained in response to the Scoping Option, the views from Morton Underhill are exceptional, and the impact on these is not adequately considered in the application. The landscape which helped inspire Tolkien is both

beautiful, and should be preserved. These views should also be considered in winter, not just from the perspective of how it will look with summer vegetation surrounding it.

This is a site substantially bordered by ancient woodland and countryside rich in wildlife because of the diverse combination of farming types and surrounding landscape. The panels, and especially the fencing will serve to break existing wildlife corridors and the height and scale of fencing which is presumably designed to try to secure this site, will prevent new ones from being created. Specifically, two thirds of the perimeter of the ancient Roundhill Wood will have the Solar Farm's high wire fence long it, preventing passage of wildlife in and out of the woodland.

This area, and country as a whole, needs productive farmland as food security becomes ever more important following the invasion of Ukraine. The proposed site is productive arable land, and even if it might arguably be Grade 3b, so is around 30% of this country's farmland, and the ability of this proposed site to grow very good arable crops is well proven. This country is not self-sufficient in wheat, and only around 50% self-sufficient in the oilseed rape which currently being grown in this location for harvest this summer.

Local economic loss

The local economy of the area will not benefit from this development. If allowed, the profits will go elsewhere, and the area will lose the direct, and indirect economic benefit of productive farmland. This 287 acres should produce a crop of grain (and sometimes straw) worth around £500,000 a year, employing local people directly, as well as those working in haulage, farm supplies, grain storage and processing. Refusing this application will ensure the benefit remains in the local economy and community of the parish and district.

Road safety, traffic, and increased vehicle movements

The proposed route onto the Earls Common Road from the A422 is unsuitable, requiring traffic lights to help vehicles to negotiate a 270 degree turn. This turn is also from a busy 'A' road, in close proximity to a junction with the B4096 which has a history of accidents.

The proposed route continues from this difficult junction along the Earls Common Road. The length of this road to the site is frequently narrow and winding, with eroding edges. It is a national speed limit road, along which lorries will find it hard, and in places impossible, to pass other large vehicles. These roads (there are no pavements) are used by walkers, horse riders, and cyclists, all of whom have been encouraged by the adjacent 'Quiet Lanes' the County Council created. The danger to all would be increased by the traffic associated with the development.

Inkberrow has not had a school crossing person for some months, leading to children and parents crossing the A422 unassisted at a point where the last speed loop data recorded a speed in excess of 35mph. This is already dangerous enough, and that danger will only increase with the traffic this development would generate.

Noise and impact on neighbours

This will have a detrimental impact on residents both during construction, and operation of the site. We do not accept that any of this is 'temporary' if the noise of thousands of posts being pile-driven into the ground has to be endured for many months, twelve hours a day. The noise and issues associated with the solar farm under construction in nearby Bishampton is well known, and feared by the residents of Inkberrow and the surrounding villages. The noise and hum of normal operation is also a concern, affecting residents 24 hours a day, for 40 years.

The proposed hours for the work of 7am to 7pm also have an unacceptable impact on residents nearby, many of whom will be at home during the day with little escape for months on end.

There are concerns about the fire safety of the site, especially the battery storage facility. Whilst plans to manage the risk may be put in place during the planning stage, the Parish Council is not convinced these will remain in place, or be updated, for as long as the site is operational.

Questionable public consultation

Residents have also expressed concern about the 'consultation' exercises undertaken by the applicants, with partial surveys, and social media links to comment on the planning application. **As parish councillors are all local residents**, we have also listened to the local community, and those most affected by the application. Inkberrow Parish Council is confident in representing the strength of their opposition to this proposal, especially from residents most at risk of being directly affected by it, to Wychavon District Council.

Summary

Inkberrow Parish Council believes that each of these reasons alone should provide grounds for refusing the application, and the cumulative impact of them in combination only confirms this.

The impact on the residents and parish will extend over 40 years, and potentially longer, because other solar sites have already had their original permissive lifespan extended. We do not believe this is temporary- it is more than half a lifetime, and we would question whether the site would ever be returned to its current use.

We strongly hope Wychavon District Council will send this application to full Planning Committee, and support the residents and Inkberrow Parish Council in refusing permission for this excessive and out of character development.