

We are writing to express concerns regarding the proposed Oaklands farm solar energy project in south Derbyshire and its potential impact on the surrounding areas of Walton on Trent, Rosliston, Coton in the Elms and Overseal. While we recognise the importance of transitioning to renewable energy sources, this specific project raises a number of significant issues that we believe warrant urgent consideration.

The Oaklands farm solar project is of an unprecedented scale, covering 400 acres of farmland, the local road infrastructure is simply not equipped to handle the increased traffic that construction will bring. The proposal estimates 14 HGV movements and 67 light vehicle trips per day during the two-year construction period. The narrow country lanes surrounding this site and connecting the villages in between are already in urgent need of repair, and the additional strain caused by heavy construction vehicles will severely disrupt local travel, posing a danger to residents and visitors alike. Whilst the building of the proposed new bridge at Walton on Trent remains uncertain, this only further exacerbates the problem.

Furthermore, this project will result in the loss of valuable agricultural land. The government has previously recognised the importance of retaining good quality farmland for food production, and this land is classified as "best and most versatile." It is deeply concerning that this land is being repurposed for industrial use. Rooftop solar on industrial or brownfield sites would be a far more appropriate solution, as it would allow us to meet renewable energy goals without sacrificing our food security.

The project also proposes the installation of a battery energy storage system (BESS), which would involve the storage of lithium-ion batteries in 78 shipping containers across two acres of the site. This development introduces serious environmental and safety risks. The increased hard-standing areas will cause more rainwater runoff, exacerbating existing flood risks in the area, which has seen a worsening of flood conditions in recent years. The possibility of fires in lithium-ion battery storage facilities poses an even greater threat. In the event of a fire, the release of toxic fumes and pollutants could contaminate local watercourses, including those that feed into the river Trent, further endangering both human health and wildlife. Since the original submission of the Oaklands farm solar limited proposal, a large number of additional 3rd party BESS facilities have also submitted planning applications in the vicinity, further exacerbating the problems here.

Access for emergency services is another concern. The site is in a remote area with limited access, and local roads, which are prone to flooding in winter, would make it difficult for fire services to reach the battery storage facility in the event of an emergency. It is unclear what plans are in place to ensure fire prevention, detection, and suppression, or how nearby residents would be informed and protected should a fire occur.

Moreover, this project cannot be considered in isolation. It is part of a growing trend of BESS and solar farm applications on greenfield land across south Derbyshire. The cumulative impact of these projects amounts to a significant change in land use from agricultural to industrial by stealth. Our rural landscapes are being transformed, and tenant farmers are facing eviction, all in the name of renewable energy development. This shift is unsustainable and poses a long-term threat to both local economies and national food security.

Finally, we must re-stress the inadequacy of the local transport network. The proposed construction projects will require thousands of large vehicles, including container lorries and concrete mixers, to access the sites. Local roads are already under strain, and the additional heavy goods vehicle traffic will severely exacerbate congestion and safety issues. While we fully support the need to expand renewable energy, it should not be done at the cost of our natural habitats, valuable farmland, and local communities. We urge you to act to reject this application and instead pursue renewable energy projects that utilise brownfield sites or rooftop installations in industrial areas, where the environmental and social impact would be far less severe.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these points. We hope you will take them into account when making a decision regarding the viability of the Oaklands farm solar limited project and the associated multitude of proposed BESS storage facilities currently submitting planning applications in the vicinity.