

My name is Phil Coathup.

I studied Geography under Professor Sir Peter Hall at the University of Reading and have a Masters in Transportation Planning from the Institute of Transport Studies at Leeds University.

I am chair of the Roundhill Wood Solar Farm Opposition – fighting a 287-acre solar plant planning application in rural Worcestershire.

I am also a member of the UK Solar Alliance – an alliance of groups opposing over 120 solar planning applications across the United Kingdom. From our database of schemes, applications, documents, planning and appeal decisions, we have a unique perspective on what is going on in the industry.

I'd like to talk through some of the common mistakes made by the many applicants who are trying to game the planning system to drive through these flawed schemes.

Overall, the planning applications and appeals provide several important lessons for local potential developers, authorities and – dare I say – planning inspectors:

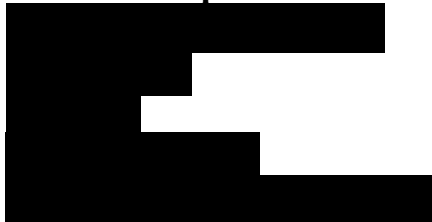
1. **Climate benefits are not necessarily a trump card.** The applicants rely almost entirely on the claimed clean energy benefits of the proposed development. This leads them to choose inappropriate locations for developments that could potentially succeed elsewhere. Climate change is now a significant material consideration in appeals such as this, but it is not the only one. Development designed to respond to climate change must, at both application and appeal stage (and, indeed, at the conceptual stage), properly grapple with traditional planning issues.
2. **Location matters.** Many proposed developments would arguably have been acceptable in other locations. Often the balance is tipped against applications largely by the “linking” effect of the proposed developments and the distinctly inappropriate topography. This leaves the applicants’ landscape and planning witnesses with a mountain to climb in attempting to reduce the weight placed on the negative landscape, visual and environmental impacts. Their evidence is often therefore rightly rejected.

3. **Cumulative effects.** The cumulative effect of multiple proposals will result in a detrimental change to the quality of the strategic landscape, and a failure to conserve and enhance the character of the landscape. This would result in significant harm to the character of the area and thus negatively impact the enjoyment of the area by receptors using the local public rights of way. The proposed mitigation is often insufficient to overcome these harms.
  
4. **40 years is not “temporary”.** Developers in many appeals, have succeeded in mitigating their negative impacts by claiming that they are “temporary”. Increasingly – and rightly - planning inspectors are giving this argument short shrift. For instance, at the recent hearing for a proposal in Little Heath Lane, Hertfordshire, the inspector stated:

*“Although the proposal is for a limited period, the length of that period is very substantial..... it cannot be right that the fact that approval is sought for a 40-year period is accorded more than very limited weight in favour of the scheme in relation to the loss of openness. To do so would go against the concept of permanence.”*

Protecting the environment requires a more nuanced approach than writing a blank cheque for renewables.

**Phil Coathup**



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