

Statement by Philip Watson presented at planning inspectorate meeting on 23.07.2024

1. Arable land grading.

Solar PV Generation should not be constructed at the detriment of good, high yield active farmland. Byers Gill solar farm results in the loss of highly productive farmland and is detrimental to UK food supply security.

The grade of farmland in JBM/RWE reports is grossly underestimated and is not an accurate representative soil quality for the area. Most of the land being taken by Byers Gill solar farm is high yield agricultural land.

It is the responsibility of the planning inspectorate as part of its robust assessment to have independent samples taken from all areas A, B, C, D, E and F. The samples taken by JMB / RWE are not accurate or representative of the entire area on which Byers Gill solar farm development is proposed.

How does the planning inspectorate validate the data being presented by RWE and its subcontractors without independent analysis?

The planning inspectorate must be clearly seen to have validated the soil sample data independently otherwise it has no mechanism on which to check the data they are being presented is accurate.

Local farmers are of the opinion that the land is of a higher grade than is being presented by RWE / JBM.

2. Bishopton Conservation area.

The proposed Solar PV panels are far too close to Bishopton Conservation area.

Bishopton is a designated conservation area and this development, specifically AREA E and AREA F will have a detrimental impact on this Conservation area. As a minimum to protect the Bishopton Conservation area the solar panel areas E and F should be removed completely from this Solar Farm Development.

How can a development like this not consider its location to a designated Conservation area?

The planning inspectorate must give recognition to the Bishopton Conservation area as part of its assessment and demonstrate that it has been considered when reaching its decision.

3. Protected Species

The area around Bishopton, specifically Area F of the development is known to be used by migrating Geese and Curlews. This wildlife habitat will be lost due to the placement of solar panels. Photographic and video evidence of this is held personally and by many villagers due to the genuine concerns for loss of local habitat. It is considered that a sufficiently robust bird survey has not been carried out by JBM/RWE. A more robust and independent bird and wildlife survey is required.

Images of protected species of birds in Area F can be provided to the planning inspectorate and should be requested via Bishopton Parish Council.

Deer, foxes, bats and owls are also in the immediate and surrounding land of Area F.

I request that the planning inspectorate carefully assess that all wildlife surveys have been carried out with due diligence and that on detailed on-site surveys have been

undertaken over sufficient duration to ensure no species have been inadvertently missed and subsequently not captured within the wildlife surveys. Additional work here is necessary before a planning decision can be reached.

4. Amenity area – Mill Lane

The Area of Mill Lane which runs adjacent to Area F of the development is the **ONLY** area of accessible amenity available to Bishopton residents who use this for:

- Dog walking.
- Walking, including elderly residents.
- Running.
- Cycling.
- Horse riding.
- Other equestrian activities.

This is the only safe road to walk on from the village and the only area available for immediate access on foot. It is the Hub of village amenity!

The solar panel AREA F will have a detrimental impact on this area of amenity and will therefore have a detrimental impact on the majority of Bishopton villagers.

a. Primary School and Play area.

Adjacent to Mill Lane is the village Primary school and children's Playground. AREA F of the development is too close to the school and playground and as such will have a detrimental impact on both school playground and children.

b. Equestrian Centres

Bishopton Village has multiple equestrian centres that all use Mill Lane for equestrian use. The impact of AREA F and the presence of solar panels adjacent to the lane will place all equestrian user at risk and will render these businesses unviable as Mill Lane will no longer be usable due to construction activities and the glint and glare from panels impacting the horses.

Impacted businesses include:

- Bishopton Equestrian Centre – Livery yard and competition centre, Mill Lane Bishopton.
- West House Equestrian Centre – Mill Lane Bishopton.
- Yorkshire racehorse retraining and rehoming, 9 the green Bishopton.

These businesses are renowned both locally and nationally and receive visitors from the entire region and from throughout the UK.

Each of these businesses use Mill Lane for riding. Hedgerow planting will not be sufficient to hide the 3 to 4m high solar panels.

I strongly object to area F due to all of the above points and request that area F is removed from the development.

Should area F not be removed and be granted approval then the Secretary of State must ensure that all construction and operational traffic is banned from using MILL Lane for the entire construction period and the 40 year lifetime of the development and that this is written into the planning conditions. Any breach of this condition must halt construction

until suitable corrective action to prevent further occurrences is put in place. Subsequent infringement should result in the removal or Area F construction from the scheme.

Bishopton Parish Council must be consulted in the definition and wording of all planning consent conditions should this project be granted planning consent. Reason, to protect the Bishopton community.

5. Local Road network.

The Local Road network around Bishopton does not meet highways standards and has not been inspected and maintained over recent years in accordance with National Highways Standard CS 126. Darlington Borough Council are aware of this as Bishopton Parish Council have submitted a detailed road survey report (ref PC/1/24/001) to Darlington Borough Council on this matter.

There have been multiple accidents on the road from Bishopton to Redmarshall alone, which is also the route proposed for the cable route for the Grid connection of Byers Gill solar farm. Five serious road traffic incidents have occurred on this road since 31.10.2023 and are documented. Information on this should be requested from Bishopton Parish Council as part of the assessment of this development by the planning inspectorate. A copy of the above report (ref PC/1/24/001) can be supplied.

The local road network will not support the level of construction traffic needed to construct Byers Gill Solar Farm without risk of road traffic collisions due to the poorly maintained and dangerous roads. The local road network around Bishopton is deemed in a CRITICAL state of repair in reference to CS 126 Inspection and assessment of road markings. There is a genuine risk of a fatal road traffic incident occurring on these roads should this development proceed with the road network in its current 'CRITICAL' state.

6. Bishopton Scheduled Ancient Monument

Historic England Research Records confirm the site of a Motte and Bailey castle built approx. from 1143 within Bishopton Conservation Area. This will be impacted by the cable route works and the detrimental impact should be considered. A detailed full archaeological survey should be carried out before these works commence to ensure no loss of antiquity occurs should this development go ahead.

This is a Scheduled Ancient Monument within the Bishopton Conservation Area boundary (Monument No.20970, grid ref: NZ 255 173. Motte and bailey 400m SE of Bishopton).

Current protection is offered by the DCMS document Planning Policy Guidance document 16 (PPG16), "Archaeology and Planning". The scheduling of a monument means that permission - 'Scheduled Monument Consent' (SMC) - is required for works affecting that monument. This must be considered as part of the review by the planning inspectorate when reviewing this planning application and the negative impact his development will have in the Bishopton Conservation area.