

Response from Staploe Parish Council regarding the solar farm at High Wood

From: clerk@staploe-pc.gov.uk

Sent: 04 June 2021 21:51

To: 'James Jamieson'

Cc: dsmith@staploe-pc.gov.uk; Emilio Meola (PC) (emeola@staploe-pc.gov.uk); Ged Meola (PC) (gmeola@staploe-pc.gov.uk); Jane Thomson; Jo Ibbett (PC) (jibbett@staploe-pc.gov.uk); rsquire@staploe-pc.gov.uk; Veronica Zwetsloot (PC) (vzwetsloot@staploe-pc.gov.uk)

Subject: Response from Staploe Parish Council regarding the solar farm at High Wood

Dear James,

Staploe Parish Council discussed your proposal to develop a 50mW solar farm at High Wood at their meeting on 20th May and would like to offer the following response.

- The Parish Council would like to thank Intelligent Alternatives for their openness regarding their plans.
 - We would ask that Intelligent Alternatives continue to keep us informed and that they send us a copy of the planning application before it is submitted.
 - We would like to invite Intelligent Alternatives to attend our next meeting on 15th July to update us on their plans
 - Although there is, as yet, no formal planning application the Parish Council wish to make the following comments on the draft proposal:
1. The Parish Council believe that this should not be considered as a separate entity to the existing solar farm at High Wood. As it is currently proposed it will be directly adjacent to and partially encircling the existing solar panels, the electrical substation will be adjacent to the existing one, they share an access track and the landowner and developer are the same. Therefore, the proposal should be submitted as a solar farm of >50mW and considered as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and subjected to the commensurate level of scrutiny required for a project of this size.
 2. We are concerned about the scale of the development. We understand the need for renewable energy but we estimate that the existing solar farm at Top Farm and High Wood would generate one fifth of the electricity required for properties in Bedford Borough Council and believe that it is reasonable to expect other areas in the Borough to provide some of the area for solar power and we believe that much of the area could be provided on the roofs of new homes to be built in the Borough or on existing warehouses. We would like to see a significant reduction in the area of the scheme and, in particular, we would like the fields in sight of homes and closest to popular walking routes not to be developed with panels and for the panels to be set well back from popular walking routes (Footpaths 29, 31 and the east west section of 26) and developed on only one side of them.
 3. We are concerned about the amount of high quality agricultural land to be used for the proposal. Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan 2030 states that large scale solar power projects should not be developed on high quality agricultural land. The land on which this site is proposed is all high quality Grade 2 land. Huntingdonshire District Council's Local Plan to 2036 similarly states that lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value should be used and any development should recognise the character and beauty of the countryside and not adversely impact the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

4. We are concerned that biodiversity should be protected and significantly increased by the project (>10% biodiversity gain) and that it is critical for the Ancient Woodland at High Wood and Huntingdon Wood to be protected. We would like to see features such as green corridors (particularly for wildlife access to the ancient woodland), wildflower meadows, hedges around the whole perimeter, ponds, and insect banks.
5. We are concerned about how the biodiversity features will be maintained. It appears to have taken a long time for the hedges to be planted at the existing High Wood site and many of the whips have fallen over / died. We would like to see the biodiversity features maintained to a high standard over the life of the project. We are conscious that wildflower meadows need careful maintenance over a long period of time to be successful and would like to know who will cut them and maintain them and see a protected budget for maintenance of all the biodiversity features.
6. We would like to see operational impacts minimised. Eg. silent piling / augering nearer residential areas and popular walking routes. We would like to see the noisy operations such as piling conducted Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and Saturday morning 9am to 12 midday.
7. We would like to be provided with a map showing the infrastructure constraints eg. underground pipelines / cables

Thank you.

Best wishes,

Lucy Crawford
Clerk to Staploe Parish Council
33, Staploe,
St. Neots,
Cambs. PE19 5JA
01480 471 526
clerk@staploe-pc.gov.uk

Our privacy policy is available on our website: <https://staploe-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Policies/Data-Protection-and-CCTV/General-Privacy-Notice.pdf>