

## QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

### TO THE PLANNING COMMITTEE ON 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023

#### Item 6 - 23/00532/FUL – Land South of Southlands Cottages, Runwell Road, Runwell, Wickford, Essex

##### Question from Mrs F

With ref to your email regarding application number 25/00582/FUL I am writing as I am unable to attend the committee meeting regarding the proposed solar farm as I will be having my operation the morning of the meeting.

In 2020 we moved to our forever home in XXXX a plot with a beautiful view across the fields. We have worked hard in the house and felt that this was our home.

The view was the reason for the decision to buy the property.

Since moving here we have seen nesting Jays, Kingfishers long tail tits and many more common birds, Ramblers enjoying their walk thru the fields to battlesbridge, Horse riders enjoying the fields rather than being on the roads.

A solar farm would alter this and turn life into a different experience with high fences and sheets of panels to look at from every angle from the rear of the garden.

Please don't spoil this lovely piece of land, there isn't many this close to the town with walks with beautiful animals and the views especially with sunrise and sunset they are amazing from my garden, I'm fully aware we didn't purchase the view but it was the main factor in our purchase.

Thanks

##### Question from Mrs D

As a family, we would like to make our strong objections known.

We moved in to our property in June 2022. Prior to this we lived in Wickford by the memorial park, and regularly used the fields in this proposal to walk to Battlesbridge almost every weekend with our children and dogs. The fact that our new property was right on the doorstep to the fields was the main reason that we chose to buy our family home. We regularly walk our dogs, on an almost daily basis, and love the large, safe open space and diverse wildlife. Now that I predominantly work from home, I cannot express how much the fact that I am able to access such a space, and the feeling of peacefulness and nature, has impacted so positively on my own mental health. We regularly meet other walkers on the route, and the possibility that this could be taken from us is extremely hard to bear. To a point where, if the proposal had shown up on and searches prior to buying our property, we would not have gone ahead with the house purchase! This has also led me to believe that our house prices in future will be significantly decreased.

The effect of this proposal on the view to the countryside will be dramatic. We will no longer feel safe walking in our own area, particularly in the darker evenings. As Essex police have already stated, the likelihood for crime will increase significantly.

Our property is metres away from the field, and drawing on my own research, we will be negatively impacted by noise and/or vibrations.

Whilst I appreciate the need for renewable energy, the evidence concerning long term effects on the land, wildlife, and indeed HUMAN HEALTH, have not been fully investigated due to the fact that such schemes have simply not been around long enough for data to be gathered over extended periods of time. I do not want to be a guinea pig used in this

experiment. Some studies in the short-term have highlighted health concerns such as headaches and nausea to even CANCER. This is not acceptable.

Solar farms are NOT environmentally friendly and are proven to not generate the energy needed when weighed against the harm caused.

### **Question from Mr G**

Hi

I am hereby submitting the following statement in relation to the above item, and will also put it in person at the meeting.

My name is XXXX and I come before you not just as a concerned resident but as someone deeply connected to this land.

Our home is adjacent to the proposed solar farm development. And consists of 13 acres, which is used solely for the purposes of conserving rare breed native UK ponies.

For decades, my family has upheld a legacy of conservation, dedicating ourselves to the protection of endangered breeds like the Dales and Fell ponies that find sanctuary in our fields, with Dales ponies having moved to "critical" status with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, meaning there is a population of fewer than 300 mares.

The proposal for a solar farm, while promising sustainability, casts a shadow over our efforts. The shimmering glare of panels could unsettle our beloved horses, creatures sensitive to sudden movements and sounds. Their safety and well-being - and that of my wife and 8 year old son in tending, caring and exercising these ponies - intricately linked to this land, are at stake.

During the consultation period, our attempts to engage were met with silence, unlike that of other residents. Our concerns, born from a deep understanding of this ecosystem, were overlooked. This overlook is not just a dismissal of our property; it's a dismissal of our commitment to conserving these rare breeds, woven into the fabric of this landscape.

Moreover, the encroachment on the green belt goes beyond visual intrusion. It challenges the essence of preservation and contradicts the very purpose of protecting these sanctuaries. High fences and intrusive infrastructure disrupt the harmony of this belt, undermining its significance in conserving the natural heritage we hold dear.

I implore you to see beyond the blueprints and statistics. This is about safeguarding a passion cultivated over a lifetime, ensuring that these rare breeds, with their historical significance, remain an integral part of this landscape. It's about upholding the sanctity of the green belt, preserving not just views but the essence of conservation.

Please consider not just the project's sustainability but also the intricate tapestry of life, history, and dedication that this proposal threatens. Thank you for your attention and understanding.

I am in total support of the officers recommendation to refuse this planning application and trust you the members will also support this recommendation.

### **Question from Mr B**

Firstly I would like thank the planning dept for the recommendation or refusal showing it their lengthy report the strong reasons for this being the wrong location for a solar farm and ask committee members to support that ,and the concerns of local residents with refusal of this application.

I have lived in this rural part of Runwell for 36 years. In that time I have done my best to support our local community, I was active in the campaign against the Prison in 2010 , and gave my full support to the development of St Lukes as I believe we need progress and in my opinion it was the right development for Runwell I was born and grew up on a farm and the open countryside has and will always will be a big part of my life. The footpath running from Runwell to Battlesbridge is the best experience of open rolling countryside locally, during covid and since it is used by many more as a form of connection to our open countryside. If this was to become a commercially fenced corridor through the proposed development I would not feel safe to continue using it. Also I understand we do not own our view, but the visual impact of a Solar farm and the loss of valuable farmland would have a devastating effect to our local community.

Whilst I agree we need to find an alternative energy source, solar or otherwise, this is in my opinion is purely the wrong location for this massive expanse of solar panels and associated structure. With over 20 neighboring properties directly affected, and no evidence that solar farms are safe, and have no long-term effects Healthwise, as this method has not yet had the test of time, myself and my family are not prepared to be human Guinea pigs for this and again ask the committee members to refuse this application.

### **Question from Mr B**

Good evening.

Chair and Members of the committee, I would like to thank you for taking the time to listen to the concerns of local residents tonight.

My name is XXX and my home is adjacent to the proposed installation and will impact my family greatly.

Currently I look out of my kitchen window onto what I would describe as rolling farmland.

This proposal will dramatically alter the open landscape, not just for my family but also the local residents of Runwell and Wickford. The proposal is highly visible from Wickford Memorial park and the surrounding areas.

At 160 acres, the scale and mass of the proposed development, which is predominantly made up of metal structures and photovoltaics, at a distance these will merge into each other and appear heavy and industrial, not dissimilar visually to a distribution centre in terms of its scales and proportions, which located adjacent to these residential areas I feel is out of keeping.

My other concern is the perceived obstruction to the public right of way and associated safety risks and concerns.

One of the main benefits of the green belt and why its protection in this specific location is important, is the provision it provides local residents to access open space and the countryside for health and wellbeing and social recreation.

The only way to safely cross the A130 for residents to access these amenities and the wider public footpath network, is via the footpath which crosses through the proposed installation.

Whilst the public footpath is retained in the plans, it outlines the installation of 2 metre high fences either side of the path, and installation of other security equipment such CCTV and lighting. Whilst planting is proposed this will take many years to mature.

This creates an enclosed tunnel effect which runs for 1,228 metres.

This tunnel effect creates an intimidating environment set against the densely set rows of solar panels and fences, which for many will feel like you're not supposed to be there, otherwise why would you need such security measures if no risks are present?

This would create a perceived barrier and remove the unobstructed right of use to the public footpath.

Safety concerns also arise due to the length of the enclosed footpath, which removes the options to avoid such instances like a fire, or if a person was confronted by an individual or larger group of people.

Again I believe this would obstruct the use and accessibility of wider amenities for local residents beyond the proposed installation, like easy access to Battles Bridge, a popular short walk away for families, especially during the summer months.

I welcome the Planning Officers report, it is wide ranging and robust. I greatly support its recommendation of refusal and trust the committee upholds this recommendation.

Thank you for your time.

### **Question from Mr M (Applicant)**

- Good evening Councillors. I'm Richard and I'm one of the planners at Enso Energy, a company seeking to increase the amount of renewable energy generated in the UK to tackle climate change and provide energy security.
- It is obvious that this country needs more renewable energy. We are facing an energy crisis, driven by the international geo-politics of fossil fuels. The British Energy Security Strategy emphasizes the need for more UK based renewable energy – a power supply that's made in Britain, for Britain, that is immune to the whims of the price-fixing oil cartel OPEC, and not influenced by conflicts abroad.
- Your Officers are recommending you refuse permission tonight, based on:
  - o Harms to the Green Belt and to the landscape. These harms disappear when the solar farm is decommissioned.
  - o On the other hand we have:
    - o Benefits associated with renewable energy; benefits of energy storage and flexibility; benefits to biodiversity; significant investment into Chelmsford; and the diversification and economic support offered to a local farming business.
- The benefits alone outnumber and outweigh the temporary harms identified. All forms of development may have some local negative impacts, but that is no reason to discount or reduce the importance of the benefits it delivers.
- The Planning Inspectors allowing renewable projects at Sandon Brook near West Hanningfield, Crays Hall near Billericay, and Parsonage Road near Stanstead all concluded the significant benefits of renewables outweighed all the temporary harms.

This project will deliver:

- o 6,000 homes worth of electricity every year on just 0.2% of the Green Belt within Chelmsford District;
- o Displace over five thousand tonnes of CO2 entering the atmosphere every year, for 40 years; and

- o Provide a substantial 138% biodiversity net gain for habitats and 85% gain in hedgerow, a gain far beyond any required by legislation or policy.
- Your Council has declared a Climate Emergency, and the fact your officers are recommending you refuse this project sits very uncomfortably against not only that declaration, but your Climate Change Action Plan, and all the local and national policies that support and encourage renewable energy development.
- It is against this background that I sincerely request you approve this application.  
Thank you

### **Question from Mrs B**

Hello I'm XXX, thank you Chairman for the opportunity to speak this evening.

I've lived on Runwell Road for 4 years, we had the option to move to Berkshire or stay in Essex when we moved in together. We made the decision to stay here because of the vast green landscape and our neighbours. My home is uncomfortably close to this vast solar farm proposal.

I work full time, work for me is home based, I'm often at a laptop or on calls for long periods of time. Most days I walk the public footpath through the fields - a 3 mile loop. I love walking and find it supports my mental well-being. I head out on my own and just listen to the sounds around me, enjoying the landscape, watching things change each and every day. I still notice new things and this makes me happy, uplifts my mood, and makes me a better person for the rest of the day.

The proposal suggests a huge security fence to the left and right of me for 1/3 of my walk. I'll be honest, I'm a middle aged confident woman but this makes me feel intimidated for my safety. Today I can see far into the distance and can spot if someone is approaching me. This gives me the conscious choice to walk towards them on the dedicated footpath or I have options to take a different route. Being effectively caged in from Runwell to Battlesbridge isn't going to make me happy enjoying the views, the sounds around me (when it's likely going to be a dull hum of the solar farm) but most importantly isn't going to make me feel safe. This will mean I have no choice but to walk a different route on busy roads and just stay home.

We have a lot of males in the room tonight, all I ask is that you consider if I was your mother, wife, sister, daughter or female friend - as a female we always have to consider safety when we walk alone, and rarely choose to walk during dark / night time.

I am in total support of the officer's recommendation to refuse this application and trust that the committee upholds this recommendation.

## **Item 7 - 23/01193/REM- 1 Brassie Wood, Chelmsford Garden Community, Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 3FP**

### **Question from Mrs P (Applicant)**

Submission of Statement from Seymour House / L3 Property

Statement Outline:

We appreciate the opportunity to address the committee and provide insights into the development, operation, and community impact of our proposed facility.

#### 1. Introduction:

o Seymour House was founded in Chelmsford and has been operating for 35 years with a proven track record of delivering high-quality early years education, operating multiple nurseries in Essex, all of which are judged as Outstanding by Ofsted.

#### 2. Land Acquisition and Development:

o The proposed site forms part of a S106 and is designated for early years use. We've engaged fully through a pre-application submission with planning officers. Planning permission would allow us to acquire the site and a programme of construction is planned from September 2024, which would be expected to take 12 months, and be tightly controlled by an award-winning contractor we are in negotiation with.

#### 3. Architectural Design:

o The proposal is for a high-quality building, the architectural style reflects and complements the local surroundings and adheres to all relevant design guidelines. Differing materials are proposed on each of the three sections to ensure a seamless integration with the surrounding buildings and open space.

o Safeguarding children is our top priority and has been at the forefront of all design decisions.

#### 4. Operational Details:

o Our nursery will adhere to specific operational timings, boast a dedicated and qualified team with training opportunities, and accommodate a carefully calculated number of children. Noise concerns have been addressed through measures to minimise disruptions to the surrounding environment. Confidence can be given that this is tightly managed and not a problem at other sites.

#### 5. Parking Considerations:

o We understand concerns regarding parking and traffic. Our plans include effective strategies to manage these issues, and we have engaged in productive discussions with the council to strike a balance that meets both our operational needs and the community's expectations. The staggered timings of parent drop offs and pick up has a big impact on limiting congestion, and parking numbers are sufficient for our use with the TRO limiting the waiting times in the visitor bays already constructed as part of the wider masterplan.

#### 6. Community Use and Engagement:

o While the facility may not be suitable for community use due to a range of factors (primarily safeguarding), our nursery is committed to being a positive addition to the neighbourhood. Our engagement with the local council has been successful in addressing local concerns

and we are dedicated to community collaboration. – Staff and contact numbers will be set up once the nursery is built to allow direct engagement with neighbours.

In summary, we hope you see we are committed to providing a high-quality building that will be an asset to the local community, providing outstanding care and education that allows parents to return to work with confidence and provide training and employment opportunities in the area.

Following many of the principles of the development already being established, we hope you can support the Reserved Matters Application and believe our nursery will significantly contribute to the community by providing quality and necessary education and support to local families.

We are open to addressing any further questions or concerns the committee may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

## **Item 8 - 23/01281/FUL – Hen Cottage, North Hill, Little Baddow, Chelmsford, Essex**

### **Question from Mrs S**

Objection to be read out at Planning Committee meeting 5 December 2023 regarding 23/01281/FUL Full Application for Proposed replacement dwelling for Hen Cottage North Hill Little Baddow Chelmsford Essex

Access road “Gravy Lane”

The track is completely unsuitable for construction traffic and is used regularly by walkers. In wet weather it can get extremely boggy. The conditions imposed to keep construction vehicles and materials off the main highways will only increase congestion on Gravy Lane and make it impossible to guarantee safe and calm access for walkers and their dogs. The Highways Authority specified that “the track must remain freely accessible and retain its rural, dirt track nature at all times” The current proposal and conditions will necessarily encumber the track with vehicles and materials and destroy its “dirt track” nature.

Height of the building

The additional 1.8m height of the proposed building, its “articulated” roofline and the windowless “blind” walls will be clearly visible from Walters Cottage & other houses on North Hill which sit on higher ground thereby damaging the rural vista from these and other vantage points. This is at odds with the wishes of the village as expressed in the Neighbourhood Plan for this non-designated heritage asset.

In the application, Hen Cottage should be subservient to both Cock Farm and Pilgrims which the latest proposal is clearly not and overrides the original planning consent restricting Hen Cottage to protect the sensitive historical vistas which are still considered important to the community and should override any desires of an individual owner.

### **Question from Mr W**

The site of what is now Hen Cottage was originally the Hen. The Hen was a small single storey building, contemporary with the half dozen or so listed cottages that surround it.

Had the Hen survived, it would in all likelihood have been listed - preserving this tiny part of the history of Little Baddow, unchanged in 2 centuries.

The Hen did not survive, that chance of preservation was lost.

However, when approving the current dwelling many years ago, while allowing a significant expansion in size, it was restricted to a single storey - thus retaining the unique harmony of this historic part of the village.

My question to the committee is what really has changed?

Hen Cottage is the only property built in this tiny section of the village in over 200 years.

Why is consideration being given to the construction of a self styled Manor House, over 3 floors, in such a sensitive site?

I ask the committee

To respect the objections of the neighbouring property owners, resident in the village for some 20, 30,50 and over 60 years.

To accept the views expressed by the whole of the village in the Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plan - the desire this area of the village apply to be a conservation area.

And to honour the judgment of your predecessors - in restricting the site of Hen Cottage to a single storey property.

I have no objection to anyone wanting to improve their home but I ask the committee to consider the wider implications.

A development of such scale and overbearing nature, once built, destroys a historic scene that when lost can never be authentically recreated.

### **Question from Mr G**

We would like to voice our objections to the proposed development replacing Hen Cottage. We live behind Hen Cottage, next to Cock Farm, so are also well within visual range.

Our main objection is the height of the proposed house (as opposed to the current bungalow) which in the report, the increased height is referred to as "only" and "slightly" and "minor", when in fact the height increase is a substantial 1.8 metres, which is taller than the average UK male today.

The elevated ridge will spoil the historical local skyline which has remained the same for hundreds of years.

Please do not choose to ignore the 25 local residents objections (in vast majority compared to only 2 in favour), plus the parish councillors majority vote also objecting to this plan.

These objections are mostly from people who have to actually live with the proposed development.

## Question from Mr L

References by others today note the disproportionate (“manor house”) scale of the proposal in an historic setting. This area may soon be listed as an “area of natural beauty” (AONB) which the Planning Officer could not have known.

This statement will inform the Committee further on two points – the requirement (section 6.3.iii of the application) that approval “does not result in any other harm” - and considerations about the ancient (“Gravy Lane”) - the only access to the site.

### “No Harm”

The Planning Officer’s report suggests no evidence for our “Pilgrims Barn Bed & Breakfast” (B&B) statement that guests choose us because the site is secluded and not overlooked. The applicant has removed the tree and bush screening and the “manor house” will be close to our guests’ outdoor area and much taller than Hen Cottage. We have yet to review these facts with the Planning Officer.

### “Gravy Lane”

This ancient, hedged, narrow and “designated right-of-way” is a fundamental element of the area’s history. Essex Highways is protective of its status and insists that it “must be unobstructed at all times”. Condition 13 of the proposed approval requires “no unbound materials” to be applied. Gravy Lane is the conduit for significant surface water. The subsoil is notorious for instability – Hen Cottage, Pilgrims and our B&B all have had heavyweight underpinning.

It is inconceivable that the proposal can satisfy the consequential environmental and conservation considerations. It will result in permanent damage or change. We believe these points have not been reviewed with Essex Highways.

### Conclusion

Please pause to consider these factors. A delay - or separate scrutiny - avoids the risk of “getting it wrong” for this especially sensitive and historically important site.