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| A black and white photo of a tower  Description automatically generated with low confidence | **WESTONING PARISH COUNCIL** | 07 July 2021 |

FAO Planning Department

**Application CB/21/02583/FULL**

Westoning Parish Council has considered the above application carefully and has engaged in a consultation exercise with our residents, the results of which are shown in Appendix 1. The council wishes to record its opposition to the application for the development of a 162 acre solar farm on arable farmland off Sampshill Road in Westoning for the following reasons:

* 1. The scale of the development is excessive at 162 acres which, in addition to the existing 60 acre solar farm on adjacent land, would become one of the largest, if not the largest in the country.
  2. The proposed development is located on land contained within the South Bedfordshire Green Belt and would be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt.
  3. There are several public footpaths, bridle ways and byways open to all traffic accessed from Sampshill Road and the area is very popular with walkers, cyclists and wildlife watchers.
  4. Parts of the proposed development would be visible from the Sharpenhoe Clappers, an area of outstanding natural beauty. A recent application for the creation of a solar farm at Faldo Farm Barton was refused and the visibility of the proposed development from the Sharpenhoe Clappers was cited as one of the reasons for refusal.
  5. The Council is concerned that the proposed development would have an adverse impact on wildlife habitat over such a large tract of arable agricultural land.
  6. The proposed development, mostly on rising land, will be visible from many parts of the village of Westoning, especially from the several public footpaths and bridle ways to the east of the village and would spoil the natural countryside vistas currently enjoyed by our residents.
  7. The new landscaping proposed in the application is insufficient to adequately shield the proposed solar panels from view.
  8. The Council deeply regrets that the application does not propose any community benefit to compensate for the significant harm that would be caused by such a large development. Clearly there is a national need for renewable energy and therefore a need for solar farms to built.  However these will inevitably cause environmental damage to local communities. This is recognised in the Government’s Community Energy Strategy which remains in place from 2015. What the Council finds most scandalous about Anesco’s current application is the lack of any substantial proposed community benefit to compensate Westoning for the considerable environmental damage this large solar farm will cause. Anesco paid a community benefit of £750 per MW per year for the existing solar farm at Clayhill – why are they proposing no benefit in the current application ?   The Council appreciates that community benefits have fallen over the years to as little as half the previous level but we would expect a community benefit between £400 and £500 per MW a year to be negotiated if the scheme went ahead. As an exemplifier of what other companies are offering a link to a similar solar farm development at Kemble in Gloucestershire is attached where the developer is offering £350 per MW or £17,500 pa to the community for the next forty years. This is broadly the level Westoning/Central Beds should be achieving to compensate for the inevitable environmental damage caused by the development and requests that, in the unlikely event that the application is approved, an annual payment of at least £400 per MW per year for 40 years is required for the benefit of the residents of Westoning through a Section 106 obligation. <https://www.aurapower.co.uk/kemble-solar-farm/|>
  9. In the event that this application is approved, a condition should be attached requiring the land covered by the application is returned to agricultural use and not designated as ‘previously developed land’ or ‘brown field’.

If the application is brought before the DMC for determination, WPC will wish to make use of the public participation facility to oppose the application.

Yours sincerely

**Karen Barker**

**Clerk to the Council**

**WESTONING PARISH COUNCIL**

**Appendix 1**

**Application CB/21/02583/FULL**

Results of Westoning residents response to planning application CB/21/02583/FULL conducted by Questionnaire during the week 26/06/2021 to 04/07/2021

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| **No** | **Question** | **Yes** | **No** |
| 1 | Are you in favour of increasing Britain’s use of renewable energy? | 92.6 % | 7.4% |
| 2 | Would you like the application (CB/21/02583/FULL) for the Sampshill Solar Farm to be approved? | 21.4% | 78.6% |
| 3 | Do you feel that the area to be covered by the proposed 162 acre Sampshill Solar Farm is too large? | 88.9% | 11.1 |
| 4 | Are you concerned that wildlife and its habitat will be adversely affected by the Solar Farm development? | 75% | 25% |
| 5 | Do you think that the proposed Solar Farm is an appropriate form of development on land designated as Green Belt? | 29.2% | 70.8% |
| 6 | If the application, as submitted, is approved, is the proposed landscaping sufficient to protect the openness of the Green Belt and the visual character of the area? | 16.7% | 83.3% |

**WESTONING PARISH COUNCIL**

**Appendix 2**

**Application CB/21/02583/FULL**

**Project information taken from the Aura website on the Kemble Solar Farm in the Cotswolds.**

**Aura Power are working with the Bathurst Estate on a solar farm proposal on land southwest of Kemble and northeast of Chelworth. The solar farm could generate enough electricity to power the equivalent of up to 14,441 homes, thereby saving up to 25,787 tonnes of CO2 from entering the atmosphere each year. These figures are based on the expected capacity of up to 49.9MW.**

Kemble Solar Farm will be built without subsidy, and will therefore compete with fossil fuel generation on a level playing field. By increasing the supply of clean power, our solar farm will help to reduce national power prices, whilst securing regional investment and green jobs. As a local business, our solar farm will also be contributing nearly £100,000 in business rates to Cotswold and Wiltshire Councils every year.

Furthermore, Aura is proposing a Community Benefit Fund of £350 per MW per year (index-linked), for the lifetime of the solar farm. This could amount to £17,500 a year for 40 years or nearly £700,000 in total. £2,000 a year would be set aside for educational sessions with local schools and site visits to the solar farm. The remainder will typically be administered by the local parish councils and used for social and environmental community projects.