

Subject: ASWAR objection to APP/E3715/W/17/3171976

Ref: APP/E3715/W/17/3171976

I write to you as a resident of Churchover and as coordinator of 'Against Subsidised Windfarms Around Rugby' (ASWAR) that was set-up by villagers seven years ago when the community was first threatened by renewable energy (RE) subsidy speculators wanting to build wind turbines around the village.

The community's fight against two applications (plus one that was found to be illegal) to build wind turbines and now 60 acres of solar panels has been led by both ASWAR and the Parish Council, who have worked closely together while being separate and focusing 1) on the small 'p' political aspects of organising rallies and meetings etc and 2) the more technical local and national planning regulation aspects, respectively.

We ask you to understand the historical context of the seven year siege that the community has been under before considering the specific planning reasons for why this appeal should be rejected.

You will see from our website www.aswar.org.uk on the homepage the trail of the full story of the fight over the last seven years as well as a number of photos of rallies both outside the community centre, the church and on the steps of Rugby town hall prior to when the local planning committee was taking place. The first thing to recognise is the remarkable determination of the community to keep turning out to show support for ASWAR when they have many better things to do. There are some 100 dwellings in total in the village when outlying houses are added and the numbers involved in the ASWAR rallies are impressive. The defence of our village against industrialisation has become what one might call a 'Cause Celebre'.

As Churchill said: "If you are going through hell, keep going".

ASWAR has always had as its priority, while objecting to these subsidised RE schemes, the importance of being able to show it has a strong mandate from an informed community. It therefore organised a village meeting to discuss and vote on the proposed solar park. In order that the facts from both sides of the argument were put the three following people addressed the meeting of 60 people, along with others like the local and county councillors.

- The local MP Mark Pawsey.
- Roger Helmer MEP, the energy spokesman for UKIP, who lives locally and is MEP for the East Midlands that starts on the north side of the solar park site.
- Reza Shybani, the chairman of a national solar park trade body and who lives in the village.

The vote was 85% against and 15% in favour.

One should note that the village has consistently voted by over 90% against the various wind turbine proposals and though the solar park would be less prominent in the landscape than turbines, the village still voted as much as 85% against. Perhaps people have become wary of being bombarded by alarmist, biased, global warming propaganda for so many years from the likes of the BBC etc. and though some people may feel guilty to publicly disagree that RE will save the planet, nevertheless when the arguments are debated in an open and non-hostile manner, the scam of RE subsidies has the chance of being exposed. Again it is worth noting that the Wind Turbine Appeal Inspector held a meeting in the village and was much impressed with how the villagers who packed the village hall, showed utmost respect for the one villager who spoke up in favour of the turbines. Churchover is a community that should not be idealised, but there is a balance between wealth and poor, and diversity in most aspects and we all mix and respect each other, which in many ways representing the heart of an attractive place in which to live. The Secretary of State Greg Clarke (SoS) said, its views should not be ignored but be taken into account. If democratic government is to work it is crucial that communities like Churchover be respected.

Why has the community and every democratically elected representative objected to the solar park?

There are basically two reasons. Firstly, the effect on the connected landscape and heritage assets and secondly the loss of good agricultural ground.

The SoS when rejecting the called-in wind turbine appeal, following a five-day Public Inquiry, confirmed that he understood “how important and highly valued, the setting of the heritage assets of the conservation area and the grade 2* listed church and dominant spire within the open fields, were to the local community as they gave a tranquillity around Churchover itself, combined with an unusual sense of isolation within its remote rural character”, even when it is so close, within about one mile, of major roads M6 and A5. (Please see paragraphs IR 256 and 258 and SoS 11 and 15 of the Appeal decision document as mentioned in ASWAR's initial Solar Pk objection document.)

The setting of the village heritage assets among the open fields is reflective of the historical connection with the surrounding land. There used to be four working farms within tiny Churchover which also housed the church used by Coton House, both of which go back to and are noted within the Domesday Book.

People live in the present and enjoy coming home after work to this extraordinarily beautiful village setting with the church spire dominating from 360 degrees and enjoy its open rural nature which they do not want spoilt by rows of industrial glass panels.

The Parish Council objection will give you full details of the recent Kedleston High Court case and so we will only highlight two paragraphs that are directly relevant to the relationship and connection between Churchover's heritage assets and the solar park land as explained above.

Mrs Justice Lang took the view published on 22nd of June 2017 (my underlining):

Para 39: The application site remains in its historic agricultural use, with hedges and mature trees characterising the field boundaries. There are views across the site towards the registered [Park and Garden] and conservation area and vice versa. The site contributes to the setting of both assets in terms of aesthetic value – a pleasant and open agricultural landscape. In terms of the historic relationship between the Hall and its surrounding landscape, the site forms part of the Estate which would have been managed historically as an economic and social entity. Thus the preservation of this site in its historic form as agricultural land associated with the Kedleston estate contributes materially to the significance which these highly graded designated heritage assets derive from their setting.

Para 65: The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but are not visible from each other may have a historic or aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of each.

The clarity with which the High Court emphasises the effect on heritage assets should not be considered purely as a visibility issue but within our understanding of the historic relationship between places, is directly relevant at Churchover with the open fields helping create the importance of the type of setting of the heritage assets. Increased height of extra hedges and trees as an attempt to screen the industrial rows of glass panels and associated lights, fences and cameras may reduce partly the direct visibility of the applicant site but will at the same time undermine the historic and aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of the heritage assets. For most of the year the farmers keep the hedges trimmed down so the beauty of the open fields and the dominance of the church spire across them can be enjoyed by both car drivers and walkers.

The second reason for the need to reject this appeal is the importance of maintaining the solar park ground as agricultural land and not restricted to a minimal amount of sheep grazing between the rows of panels.

The absentee land owner's father was a major farmer in this area up to when he died about twenty years ago.

The RE subsidy speculator has retained an 'expert' to report on the classified quality of the ground. They summarise as saying 35% is either grade 2 or 3a. In other words they admit that at least a third of the ground they consider as BMV land which the government specifically wishes to protect from industrialisation.

The further 'expert' comment that Rugby Council retained asks questions about the developers survey.

There are in addition to this information, three farmers who have intimate knowledge of the land over a period stretching back some forty years and have each objected to the solar park proposal.

The absentee land owner's father employed a farm manager who has subsequently died but his wife has given evidence in her objection that her husband always said that the land was considered some of the finest quality in the area.

The absentee land owner after being bequeathed the land, hired it out to her nephew to farm from his farm across the A5. This Nephew farmer has again given evidence in his objection that this is good quality land.

Thirdly, the extremely well organised and efficient farmer who with his brothers farms a considerable amount of land across the southern East Midlands which includes 'Top Barns' most of whose land is classified grade 2, farms the land right next door to the full eastern boundary of the proposed solar park land. He says in his objection that this land next door is his finest piece of land and better than his other Top Barns land to the south of the Leicester road which is officially classified as grade 2.

Although there are now no longer any working farms based within the village, you can see from the objections of these three farmers there continues to be that historical link between the community of the village and the land within which it is set, not just conceptually but through real people who work the land and feel a responsibility to help defend the community.

This island of tranquillity between the urban sprawl of the ever encroaching two towns of Rugby and Lutterworth must be protected.

We urge you to listen to this community and all democratically elected representatives, Historic England, the High Court and Rugby Council and lift the seige on Churchover by these RE subsidy speculators and refuse this appeal.

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