

# Working to Protect the New Forest



## PLANNING COMMITTEE

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Reply to: -

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Sent as attachment to Email only

4 January 2015

Deborah Slade  
New Forest National Park Authority  
Lymington Town Hall  
Avenue Road  
Lymington SO41 9ZG

Dear Deborah,

**Application 14/01004 LAND OFF LEPE ROAD, EXBURY, SO45 1AJ**  
**Construction of a 9ha Solar farm to include solar panels (sic) to generate electricity; associated plant buildings; perimeter fencing; landscaping and associated works; internal access track**

1. New Forest Association (NFA) objects to this application and will support the NFNPA in any appeal against refusal.
2. There is a belief in some quarters that the benefit of more of these arrays to the Nation and its people outweighs the harm done to the countryside, but increasingly this is not the view of Government.

National policy is well covered in the Authority's assessment of 00470 and 00817. The special emphasis of the National Planning Policy Framework on protected landscapes at section 11, para 115 is noted as is the publication of the recent National Planning Practice Guidance which introduces new conditions for schemes such as 01004. It encourages the use of brown field sites and introduces the need for a sequential approach to sites. An appeal inspector subsequently ruled that the search area need not be restricted to a particular local authority area.

The applicant is a company (09199977) with a registered address in London W6. The company has not declared the nature of its business and therefore has provided no evidence that its activities are in anyway restricted geographically. This London-based company uses an agent based in Bristol. The inevitable conclusion is that in this case, the search area required for the sequential approach is the whole of the area where the generation of electricity from solar panels is viable - say the area south of a line between the Bristol Channel and the Wash. There is no justification for it being less. That area contains tens of thousands of acres more suitable than that proposed. Even within the Hampshire basin there are hundreds of acres of brownfield sites, large scale green houses etc, and all those green fields not in a protected landscape. Even within the immediate locality of the application there are brown field sites (eg closed power station), gravel pits, greenhouses, unused reclaimed land of low ecological and agricultural value, and all those green fields not within a protected landscape.

The comments of the Environment Secretary Liz Truss as reported in the Daily Telegraph on 27th December 2014 emphasise the antipathy felt by HMG and the Conservative Party in particular towards solar farms. Miss Truss is quoted as saying; -  
*English farmland is some of the best in the world and I want to see it dedicated to growing quality food and crops. I do not want to see its productive potential wasted and its appearance blighted by solar farms. Farming is what our farms are for and it is what keeps our landscape beautiful. I am committed to food production in this country and it makes my heart sink to see row upon row of solar panels where once there was a field of wheat or grassland for livestock to graze. That is why I am scrapping farming subsidies for solar fields. Solar panels are best placed on the 250,000 hectares of south-facing commercial rooftops where they will not compromise the success of our agricultural industry.*

# Working to Protect the New Forest

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3. There is also a misunderstanding in some quarters about the economic benefits of the solar farms. Electricity produced by them is purchased at **twice** the commercial rate and that cost is passed onto consumers, rich and poor alike, and adds an average of around £100 per annum to the household bill.

If the New Forest National Park needs to justify its existence in financial terms (and there is no statutory requirement for it to do so), it is that its special qualities act as a magnet to investment into the economies of the of the South Hants built up area (the country's sixth biggest) and the Bournemouth/Poole built up area (the country's sixteenth biggest). Unquantifiable but potentially significant loss of employment in those areas through erosion of the Forest's special qualities needs to be balanced against the claimed value (contested at 1,2,3 above) of any local development.

4. There is negative benefit to the local economy. Land used to sustain rural occupations is rendered sterile for a generation. There is no annual planting, no carbon-absorbing growth, no harvest of oil seed rape or maize to offer cover for wildlife and raw material for processing.

5. On the question of the Core strategy definition of *small scale*, I attended discussions on this matter during the writing and examination of the plan. It is my view that in the minds of all parties was a naïve vision of solar panels generating enough electricity for remote milking sheds thus negating the need for power cables runs. In the terms of the New Forest National Park, typified by small paddocks and ever changing vistas, solar farms such as that proposed in this application are **huge**.

6. With regard to matters of landscape, I would remind you of the report of the Authority's own landscape officer for 96148 which re-stated the universal truth regarding visibility in a protected landscape: - *Landscape Officer: Recommends refusal. Intrinsic landscape value of sites will be harmed even if not visible from public vantage points.* This truth was repeated in the landscape officer's comments on 00817 as follows: - *Intrinsic value to the landscape, whether it can be seen from a vantage point or not. Landscapes seen and unseen from public vantage points are of equal value.* It is the view of the NFA that within a protected landscape, this consideration alone warrants refusal.

7. NFA leaves it to local concerns to discuss any deterioration of the view of the National Park's landscape from any public vantage point.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Baker  
NFA Planning & Transport Committee