

Working to Protect the New Forest



PLANNING COMMITTEE

Reply to: -

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Sent as attachment to Email only

4 November 2014

Mr Rob Ainslie
New Forest National Park Authority
Lymington Town Hall
Avenue Road
Lymington SO41 9ZG

Dear Rob,

**Application 00817 LAND AT LIMOLANDS FARM, VAGGS LANE, HORDLE, SO41 0FP
Construction of a 14 hectare solar farm, to include solar panels to generate electricity, associated plant buildings; perimeter fencing; cctv cameras; landscaping and associated works**

1. New Forest Association (NFA) objects to this application. It is noted the previous application 00470 was withdrawn and no decision report exists.

2. I make no excuses for reproducing an extract from a recent HMG press release in order to alert the landowner of the change in subsidy arrangement, to make entirely clear the view of HMG to solar farms on agricultural land and to remind the Authority of the amended planning rules. From DEFRA press release dated 19 October 2014 *Farmers will lose their right to claim subsidies for fields filled with solar panels under new plans to ensure more agricultural land is dedicated to growing crops and food. The move will help rural communities who do not want their countryside blighted by solar farms. Britain has some of the best farmland in the world and ministers want to see it dedicated to agriculture to help boost our food and farming industry that is worth £97 billion to the economy. The change, which will come into effect from January 2015, will mean that farmers who choose to use fields for solar panels will not be eligible for any farm subsidy payments available through the Common Agricultural Policy for that land. Environment Secretary, Elizabeth Truss said: 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. The subsidy change will also save up to £2 million of taxpayers' money each year that won't be available for these subsidies. The reform follows other government measures designed to end support for solar farms in agricultural fields. The Department for Energy and Climate Change recently announced that renewable energy subsidies for new large-scale solar farms will end next April. This year, the Department for Communities and Local Government amended planning rules to ensure that whenever possible solar installations are not put in fields that could be used for farming.*

3. The NPA officer's report on 00470 is contained at <http://wam.newforestnpa.gov.uk/WAM/doc/Committee%20Report-378796.pdf?extension=.pdf&id=378796&location=VOLUME3&contentType=application/pdf&pageCount=1&appid=1001>
NFA commends the author on his comprehension and thoroughness. NFA agrees the content and conclusion of this report and believes, despite some titivation that has been undertaken by the applicant, the same report would suffice for 00817.

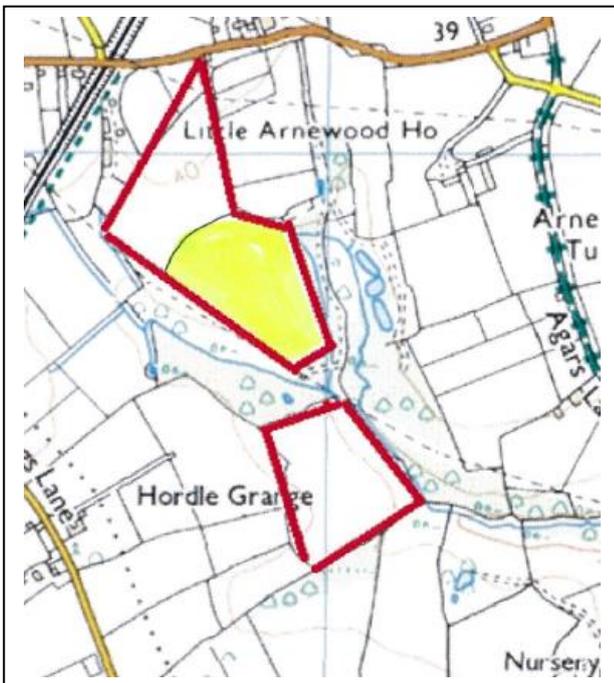
On the question of the Core strategy definition of *small scale*, I attended discussions on this matter during the writing and examination of the plan. It is my view that in the minds of all parties was a naïve vision of solar panels generating enough electricity for remote milking sheds thus negating the need for power cables runs. In the

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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**.

On the key question of the sequential approach, NFA believes that many examples of other more suitable locations exist in the area; for example extensive glasshouses.



4. NFA notes this application is not for a tiny proportion of a large farm on land previously used for agriculture of low ecological value, but what NFA understands to be a large proportion of a small typical New Forest pastoral farm enjoying rights of common of pasture. The Verderers' office has supplied the map left. The area shaded yellow does NOT enjoy the right of common of pasture. The remainder does - this is back up land.

5. 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. The visual impact of the panels, fencing, substation would be unacceptable within the rural landscape. being semi industrial in nature and out of character in the rural and tranquil settings.*

Yours sincerely,

Graham Baker, NFA Planning Committee