

Oaklands Solar Farm

Consultation Feedback June 2022

Consultation Questions and the Walton on Trent Parish Council Response

Link to Feedback form: [Oaklands Farm Solar Feedback Form \(office.com\)](https://office.com)

Have you found this consultation exercise informative?

Yes

Please explain your answer:

As Oaklands Solar Farm is a large-scale development in a semi-rural area, it is vital that consultation with local residents and stakeholders is undertaken to understand and allow the expression of the views of the local population on what will be a significant change in the local environment (if approved). This is doubly so when the formal planning decision is being taken at a national level to ensure that there is democratic consent in the area most immediately affected.

Do you support the use of solar energy to generate electricity in the UK?

Yes

Please explain why you support/not support use of solar energy as part of the UK energy mix?

Walton on Trent Parish Council recognises that climate change is the most significant global challenge facing the world today. The UK (and other nations) need to move away from use of fossil fuels and increase the amount of energy generated from renewables. There needs to be a mix of energy sources, including onshore and offshore wind, tidal and wave electricity and solar [and nuclear]. The move towards renewable energy is also needed as part of providing the UK with energy security, alongside a focus on reducing demand such as via insulating the UK's housing stock. The determination of the appropriate energy mix needs to take into account the whole life environmental and economic costs of each energy source, not only construction and operation but also decommissioning and land remediation. The placement of energy generating plants needs to take into account the impact on the local environment, population needs/incentives and the requirement to improve the UK's food security.

Are you in favour of the proposals for Oaklands Farm Solar Park in principle?

No

Please explain why you support/do not support the proposals in principle

- Use of good farmland for energy not compatible with the need to boost UK food security – particularly when there are local brown field sites that could be utilised eg. Warehouse roofs;
- Few local employment opportunities in the long term compared to farming;
- Industrialisation of rural area of South Derbyshire – particularly when combined with other approved (Haunton) and proposed (Lullington) solar farms in addition to the existing solar farm and the waste energy plant at Drakelow;
- Loss of arable and pasture land which currently contributes to the rural and agricultural resource and heritage of the area;
- Construction traffic on roads not designed to cope with heavy infrastructure projects;
- Noise and visible pollution to the local area during the construction of the solar park;

- No direct benefit to the local community who will be affected by the direct loss of amenity, flora and fauna due to the solar park.
- When mature, 4m high hedges along the roads bordering the installation will significantly reduce the natural light and visibility on roads which already have a high level of accidents.

Question 1: Do you have any comments on the proposed siting or layout of the solar farm and energy storage facility taking into account any known constraints in the area?

Whilst it is understood that Oaklands solar farm has been sited in the area near to Walton on Trent and Rosliston due to the proximity with the connections to the national grid at Drakelow, Walton on Trent Parish Council consider that the scale of the proposed solar farm, combined with the other solar farm developments at Lullington and Haunton, represents a significant urbanisation/industrialisation in semi-rural area defined by a collection of small villages, linked by narrow country lanes. The local road infrastructure is not designed to cope with large scale construction projects of this nature with limited access to major trunk roads.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on our assessment of any landscape and visual impact considerations including our landscaping proposals as set out in the Landscape Strategy Plan?

The size of the development will fundamentally change the rural nature of the local area – correctly described in the Non-Technical Summary as a “lowland landscape of gently rolling topography supporting... mixed agriculture...bound by hedgerows” with “compact nucleated villages”. While the proposals to improve hedgerows, introduce wildflower meadows (which is already being undertaken by local landowners such as on the Catton Estate) and a proposed permissive footway are welcome mitigations, they will not offset the impact of a such a large semi-industrial installation on the local area. While the site will not be visible from the village there will be significant visual impact on views from the local road network and public rights of way.

Question 3: With regard to ecology, biodiversity and land use, do you have any views on the environmental considerations of the proposals and the mitigation measures required to address any impacts identified?

The use of lowland farm-land for non-food production does not align with the UK’s need for greater food security. While the non-technical summary notes that there may be improvements to soil quality due to the land no longer being subjected to intensive farming/use of herbicides and pesticides, these benefits could similarly be achieved via regenerative farming methods which would not involve good quality farmland being out of productive use for a generation.

Question 4: With regard to water resources and flood risk, glint and glare, air quality, noise, historic environment or cumulative impacts, do you have any views on the environmental considerations of the proposals and the mitigation measures required to address any impacts?

It is understood that there is low flood risk given the site location. Based on the non-technical summary there are no properties in Walton that should be affected by glint and glare – although the summary notes that there will be an adverse impact for up to 15 years for those properties (in Coton) and presumably potentially for road users as the panels will be visible from the road. The cumulative impacts of the site in combination with other solar park developments is considered to

be so significant that they would change the rural nature of the area as noted above. The open countryside upon which the solar park will be constructed, in our view, is not as suitable a location as brownfield sites such as the former power station at Willington for example.

Question 5; Do you have any comments on the connection route or whether you would prefer the use of overhead or underground cables?

The use of overhead lines appears to be concentrated in the area where there are residential buildings and local roads with underground cables being proposed under existing farmland. Visual impact is affected by these overhead lines, there would be less impact on the visual environment if underground cables were installed near residential properties.

Question 6: With regard to traffic, transport and construction, do you have any views on the proposals and the mitigation measures required to address any impacts identified?

Given that the solar farm is envisaged to be decommissioned after the period of operation at the outset the planning process should include an assessment of the mitigation measures for decommissioning as well as construction. A traffic management plan for construction and decommissioning needs to be in place as part of the planning conditions, with agreed timelines for communicating any inconvenience to the local communities and with local phone/online methods for any issues to be reported directly to the development company and short timelines for response from the development company. Given that planning permission if granted will be granted by a national body, delegated powers of enforcement should be granted to the local authority (either South Derbyshire District Council or Derbyshire County Council to enforce the traffic management plan to hold the developers to account).

Question 7: Do you feel that the proposed new right of way shown on the consultation materials is appropriate? Do you have any alternative suggestions for local access and routes through or around the site?

If planning permission is approved then any permissive proposed rights of way should become permanent public rights of way (PROW) to increase access to the countryside both during and after the operation of the solar park. This should be a condition of any solar park that there is improved public access to England's countryside as part of the granting of approval for such sites. Given such a large site, the provision of 1 additional access route seems a small gesture, the opportunity could and should be taken to improve non-vehicle linkages between the 4 most affected communities of Drakelow, Coton, Rosliston and Walton by providing PROWs through/around the edge of the site to link up with existing PROWs. We feel that the proposed height of the fences along the PROWs will create "alleyways" through the site which deny user groups views and vistas of the natural environment they are walking through.

Question 8: Do you have any thoughts on how this project could provide local community benefit?

Improved permanent rights of way as set out in relation to question 7. Presentations/site visits for local schools to learn about solar energy. Reduction in energy bills for local residents in the villages most affected by the solar park – Walton, Drakelow, Coton and Rosliston. Funding from the developer akin to S106 funds arising from housing developments for community organisations and

amenities, to be administrated by the Parish Councils local to the development. In compensation for the disruption and loss (as detailed above), that this development will cause Walton on Trent; Walton on Trent Parish Council in particular would welcome a significant contribution of financial support from the developer, to enable the completion of projects currently planned by the Parish Council to benefit the local community.

Question 9: Do you have any other comments on the proposals for Oaklands Farm Solar Park?

The community of Walton on Trent feel that the multiple large-scale development projects that have been granted permission in the local area, have significantly eroded our rural resource base for financial gain. This has come at a detriment to the local residents and environment. For example (but not limited to):

- Drakelow housing – 2000+ new build houses,
- Drakelow incinerator,
- Existing solar development at Drakelow,
- Proposed and approved solar developments at Haunton and Lullington,
- Significant quantities of new warehousing alongside Tucklesholme Nature Reserve.