

Andrew Martin
Planning Department
West Dorset District Council
Charles Street
DORCHESTER
DT1 1EE

15 February 2013

Dear Mr Martin,

DORSET CPRE RESPONSE TO PA 1/D/12/001664 - RAMPISHAM 40 MW SOLAR PARK

1. Although Dorset CPRE is in principle fully supportive of renewable energy, we are unable to support this unacceptably damaging proposal. We strongly recommend the planning application be refused.

2. It is in nonconformity with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 115, which is clear that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and that conservation of wildlife is an important consideration in such an area.

3. NPPF paragraph 116 is also clear that permission should be refused for a major development in an AONB except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated it is in the public interest. We believe there is insufficient evidence to show that these conditions are met:

3.1 There is no need for this development in West Dorset. Currently, 97 per cent of the renewable energy being generated in West Dorset is from solar photovoltaic (PV) panels¹. West Dorset's 2020 renewable energy target is 188.56 gigawatt hours. This can be reached by utilising five technologies: biomass, heat pumps, solar voltaic, solar thermal and hydro power². To generate 188.56 GWh, each technology would be required to contribute a 'fair share' of 77.9 per cent of its assessed resource³. For solar PV this translates to a contribution of 17.39 GWh or 9.2 per cent of the target. To generate this amount of energy annually would require just 19.85 MW of installed capacity - not the 40 MW proposed for this application. Assuming a notional 250 W panel⁴ with dimensions 861 mm x 1,061 mm, the number of panels required is 79,400. These would cover an area of 11.0 hectares - less than half the 22.2 hectares required for the 163,000 panels specified for this application.

3.2. The scope for solar PV deployment in West Dorset outside the Dorset AONB is extensive. The area of rural countryside potentially available is 30,311 hectares. However, much of this as elsewhere across Dorset, consists of small-scale high value landscape more suited to small-scale solar farms. It can be noted here that the largest solar PV farm currently operational in Great Britain has a capacity of 5 MW. The panels cover an area of approximately 2.8 hectares.

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This illustrates the truly industrial size of the deployment proposed in this application. However, it is not inconceivable that there are eight 2.8 hectare sites within an area of 30,311 hectares that could accommodate a total installed capacity of 40 MW without causing unacceptable damage to the countryside.

3.3 The magnitude of the detrimental effects on the environment and the landscape of the Dorset AONB have been authoritatively identified by Natural England, the Dorset AONB Partnership, the District Council's Landscape Architect and the Dorset Wildlife Trust. We support their findings and support the recommendations for refusal of this application.

4. The evidence submitted by the District Council's Senior Economic Regeneration Officer is not adequate to support his contention that the Planning Application should be allowed because of the value of the development to the economy of West Dorset. We recommend that it be given insignificant weight.

REFERENCES:

1. Ofgem FIT Installations Statistical Report (www.renewablesandchp.ofgem.gov.uk).
2. Wind is not included because it has been established that West Dorset's target can be achieved without the deployment of a single industrial-size wind turbine, widely acknowledged as being unacceptably damaging to the high value small-scale landscape prevalent throughout Dorset's rural areas.
3. The Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole Renewable Energy Strategy to 2020, 27 March 2012.
4. The notional panel chosen for illustrative purposes is the Panasonic Model VBHH250AE01, previously marketed as the Sanyo HIT-H250E01.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Nicholls
Chairman
Dorset CPRE

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The Campaign to protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.