

### **Briefing note for EFDC Planning Committee B Meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

ITEM 7 - EPF/2596/23 - Proposed solar farm on Land at West Essex Golf Club and Netherhouse Farm, Bury Road, Chingford.

Epping Forest is an ancient Forest, loved by local residents, and protected by the Epping Forest Act 1878 which requires the 'natural aspect' of the Forest to be preserved.

Epping Forest Heritage Trust objects to this proposal on the following grounds:

1. **These sites are inappropriate for solar farms, and would impact the natural aspect of the Forest.**

While the Trust supports measures to provide low carbon and renewable energy we believe the siting of industrial structures (solar panels and associated infrastructure) close to the Forest, particularly at the West Essex Golf Club site, and in the Green Belt, is not appropriate. The officer's report clearly states that the proposals "*would cause a moderate degree of harm to the openness of the Green Belt.*" and "*moderate... degree of harm to the landscape character and visual amenity of the area.*" contrary to Local Plan policies.

2. **These sites are close to the Epping Forest SAC/SSSI which should be protected in accordance with Habitat regulations and Local Plan Policy DM2.**

The planning officer's report is not correct in stating that "*The proposed development is not sited within or close to any of these [nature conservation] assets or areas...*". The West Essex Golf Club site is some 250m away from the Forest SAC/SSSI, which EFDC has a duty to protect as the "competent authority" under the Habitat Regulations and under Local Plan Policy DM2. The close proximity of the Forest SAC/SSSI to the sites has not been fully reflected in the landscape and ecological assessments. In addition the two sites, Netherhouse Farm and the Golf Club, are not adjacent, and their impacts should be considered separately.

3. **We do not accept that the sites in question are "grey belt".**

We believe that the Green Belt in this area contributes strongly to preventing the spread of urban development from Chingford and Waltham Abbey and to the areas merging as per paragraph 143 of the NPPF on Green Belt purposes.

4. **Approval would create a negative precedent.**

Approval would create a precedent allowing the construction of solar farms on other sites close to the Forest which would have a cumulative detrimental effect on its natural aspect, visual amenity and landscape character. Just imagine the Forest fully surrounded by solar panels....

If approved, which we hope it is not, unambiguous conditions should be imposed requiring the return of the sites to farmland, grassland or other green space in due course. Also, the BNG Management Plan required as condition of approval should incorporate all more recent research on BNG, including that by Cambridge University/RSPB ([link here](#)).