



21st January 2026

**Briefing note from Epping Forest Heritage Trust (EFHT) for EFDC Planning
Committee B**

Application: EPF/1216/25 – Proposed Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with ancillary infrastructure (access, landscape and ecology improvements).

While this site is not immediately adjacent to the Forest, EFHT is concerned about the wider, cumulative consequences of multiple large-scale solar/BESS schemes coming forward across the District and surrounding countryside, and how (in combination) they may erode the openness and rural character of the landscape around Epping Forest.

1) Key issue: cumulative landscape and countryside impacts

The Council's officer report acknowledges a "recent surge in solar farm proposals" within the District. In EFHT's view, this raises a planning issue: if schemes are assessed only in isolation, incremental approvals can lead to a progressive and unplanned "industrialisation" of open countryside, altering the character and setting of the rural landscape around the Forest.

What we ask Committee Members to consider:

- A clear cumulative assessment for solar/BESS proposals (approved, pending, and in pre-app where relevant), addressing:
- Cumulative landscape/visual effects (including on public rights of way), and
- Cumulative loss of openness and change in rural character across the northern/outer setting of Epping Forest.
- If a District-wide cumulative position statement is not available, Members may wish to ask whether it is appropriate to determine another large scheme before that strategic work is produced, given the scale and increasing frequency of such applications.

2) Green Belt: scrutiny of the "grey belt" conclusion (and precedent risk)

EFHT's original objection treated the proposal as inappropriate development in the Green Belt, introducing large-scale industrial character across a substantial area of open land. The officer report recommends approval and argues the site falls within the

"grey belt" concept and that very special circumstances exist. Given the potential precedent for further solar/BESS schemes, members may wish to scrutinise whether the approach taken here (if repeated) risks weakening Green Belt openness across the wider plan area. We should also highlight that precedence is being used already in officer's report referencing the solar farm within the District relating to the West Essex Golf Club (Ref EPF/2596/23 & APP/J1535/W/25/3364619) "where the Inspector considered the scheme under the Grey Belt exception and found acceptable".

3) Transport emissions and Epping Forest SAC pathway

Even if this proposal is non-residential, the officer report itself sets out the Council's Habitats Regulations duty and notes that even one additional vehicle using roads within 200m of the Epping Forest SAC can contribute to atmospheric pollution "in combination" with other plans and projects. The report's proposed controls include (among other things) a requirement that maintenance vehicles are fully electric and that construction traffic is routed to avoid roads going through or within 200m of the EFSAC.

We ask Members to check practical enforceability in this case.

- How will routing be secured and monitored in practice?
- Do the controls apply to all construction-related vehicles, not just the applicant's direct fleet?

Summary

- 1, Cumulative impacts: need for a clear cumulative assessment/position statement for solar/BESS roll-out in the District before further incremental approvals.
2. "Grey" belt: need for scrutiny of the justification and the risks this precedent creates
3. Transport: need for traffic-related controls are genuinely enforceable and monitored.