

Good evening Councillors.

This project represents an important opportunity for our local farm business, to further diversify and support the business through ongoing turbulent times and help to support it long term. Alongside making a positive contribution to tackling climate change, the land will remain in agricultural use and it is poorer quality land, as demonstrated by the land grade assessment which accompanies the application. When we were approached by the applicant, we discussed the most appropriate location in terms of our ongoing farming activity and agreed that the proposed location is lowest impact, being furthest from villages and dwellings.

We are keen to continue to work to support local jobs and commerce, alongside hosting a solar farm which will power thousands of local homes.

Alongside these benefits, the solar farm includes substantial biodiversity enhancements, which will complement our nature improvement and stewardship efforts to date. We will be providing the 30 Skylark plots on our farm land around the solar farm to improve the habitat for this popular farmland bird.

We are pleased that the applicant has engaged with the local community, and has answered questions and queries raised by individuals and by the Parish Councils. There is a community benefit fund offered, and there will be potential opportunities for local businesses during construction and operation including accommodation, security, landscaping maintenance and haulage.

We are also pleased to see that the application has been robustly assessed by Braintree Council and their externally appointed landscape architect. The applicant has worked hard to make sure that the impacts have been minimised as much as possible, based on the Council's advice and local comments. In this case, by avoiding the north facing slope of the Stour Valley, by incorporating extensive new hedge and tree planting and by moving the panels back from Pentlow Hill.

I hope these benefits, and the efforts the applicant has gone to in terms of minimising impacts as much as possible, will be taken into account when determining the application.

Many thanks

Peter Brand
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