

APPLICATION NO: 20/01107/FUL

DESCRIPTION: Solar farm and associated development

LOCATION: Land East Of Pentlow Hill Pentlow Essex

In several discussions with my neighbours, we all agree that solar farms are essential for our country, and that there are suitably inconspicuous local sites for solar farms. Then they pause and add in puzzlement 'But why there, on the edge of the valley?'

Why indeed. The Upper Stour is one of the most important landscapes in East Anglia. This is a unique landscape of preserved woodland, listed buildings, and stunning 'chocolate box' villages such as Cavendish and Foxearth which are both conservation areas, as is Glemsford's Egremont Street, within sight on the opposite side of the valley. The patchwork of fields and villages of listed timber buildings, together within the valley, has been enjoyed by many visitors for generations, and abound with natural life.

Pentlow has thirty-seven listed sites and Foxearth has thirty-four as well as a conservation area. Not only that, but the valley itself with its astonishing cropmarks of prehistoric and Roman dwellings and tracks.

The applicant has spent great effort in trying to argue that this prominent site for a solar farm will have no real effect. The big question is lost within a mass of detail. Will it be detrimental to the landscape as a whole, made up as it is from a mass of vernacular historic monuments, unspoiled farms, woodland and water meadows? Even if it does, would it matter?

We who live near the site know that it would matter. Even if it were not so painfully visible from the valley and the road, it contributes to an overall effect that is appreciated by visitors. They don't come to see an isolated historic monument, but to cherish a timeless landscape that supports a rich natural environment. To argue that it is only a few fields is like arguing that it doesn't matter if you paint a moustache on the Mona Lisa. Using this site amounts to substantial harm to an area of historical significance and the unspoilt open qualities of the valley edge. It would detract from the rural landscape setting and erode the quality of a view, which is an important part of this heritage asset.

The true effect on the landscape can only be best appreciated from viewing the site in person.