

The following is my final statement. However, it isn't exactly what was said when delivered, as I omitted any repetitions (especially concerning the 'black backs' of the solar panels).

New material added in blue.

To whom it may concern

Witness Statement by John and Annie Owen re: Grove Farm Solar Park

We are John and Annie Owen, who live at the above address, directly north of the eastern section of the proposed Grove Farm Solar Park. **We also own Crossing Cottage and 1 Pond Hall Cottages, both buildings of local significance, and three woods. Two of these, Newcome Wood - an ancient replanted woodland - and Hall Heath - ancient and semi-natural woodland - fall completely within the Conservation Area. The third, Old Hall Wood - an ancient replanted woodland - sits partially (approximately 50%) within the Conservation Area. We mention our good fortune in owning these elements to show that our hearts are thoroughly invested in the care and preservation of the area.**

We strongly object to this development for the following reasons:

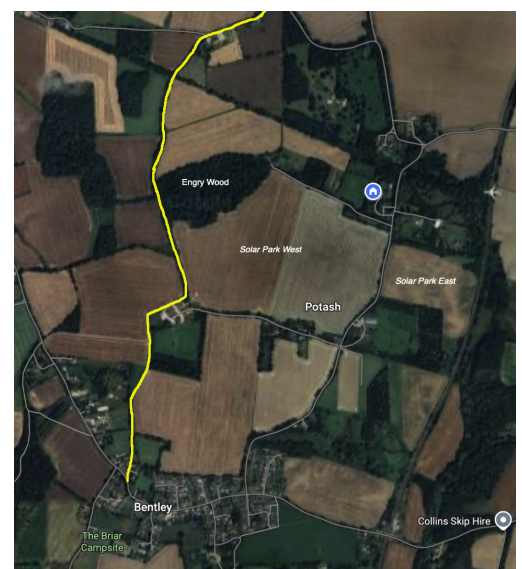
1. The negative impact this development will have on walkers in general and ourselves, as walkers, in particular.
2. The negative impact this development will have on residents' views from their homes in general and ourselves, as residents.
3. The site itself
4. The lack of mitigation for ourselves
5. Biodiversity and Wildlife

1. The negative impact this development will have on walkers in general and on ourselves in particular.

We have lived at Uplands for over 25 years and, during that time, have enjoyed the many walks which radiate from the Church of St. Mary's.

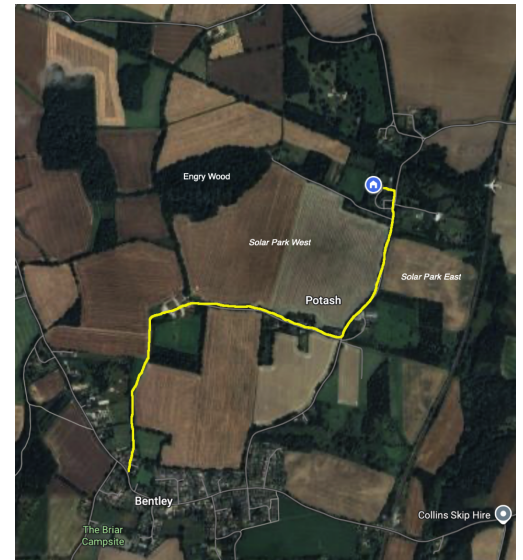
We can attest to the popularity, amongst Bentley residents and a much wider circle, of the following walks from the village:

1. to Old Hall Wood, passing alongside the proposed

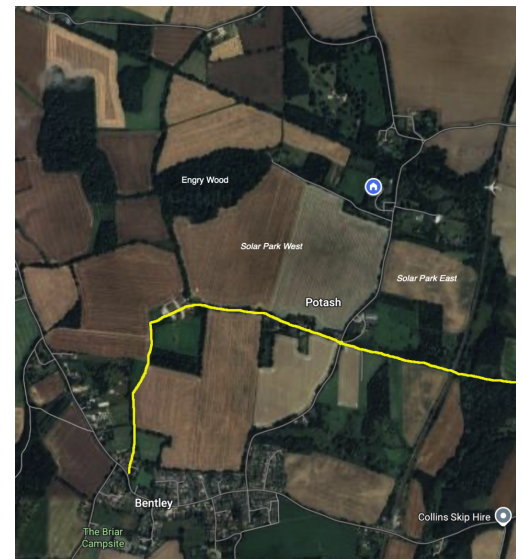


development ('the site') to the west and thence passing Engry Wood.

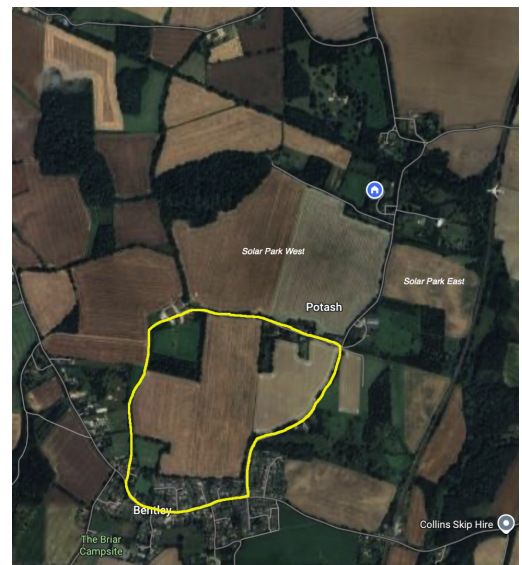
2. to the Church, which passes alongside the site to the south (Potash Lane) and through the middle of the site (Church Road);



3. to Tattingstone, which passes alongside the site to the south (Potash Lane) and thence through land south of Falstaff Manor.



There are also two circular walks from the village which are heavily used. One uses Potash Lane,



the other the section of Church Road which sits in the middle of the site. The eastern section of this walk - as far as the junction north of the church - is also heavily used by cyclists and horse riders.

Every single person who enjoys these walks and bike rides will have full views across the site (and therefore of a sea of either reflective panels or their shadowed, and therefore black, backs).



I would like to describe in detail one of our favourite walks, which has elements from both the above. From Uplands, we take the road north, passing the church, Bentley Hall and then turning onto the footpath across land belonging to Bentley Park (with views of the house). From here, we pick up the disused railway line, cross a field diagonally and pick up Pond Hall Lane going south. We pass Engry Wood, pass through the farmyard at Grove Farm and then along - what always seems to us the 'higglety-pigglety' and infinitely interesting - Potash Lane. Along Potash Lane, there are several field entrances which afford us views across the large fields to the north and south. These are of value to us for themselves, that is we enjoy looking at the seasonal changes and the crops, as we value living within an agrarian environment.

Finally turning north onto Church Road, we again enjoy views across large fields on both sides of the road until we reach home.

I think of all these elements as jewels on a necklace; a circle of fascination. I hope all present agree that a jewelled necklace looks better on the neck of a pretty woman than on a pig.

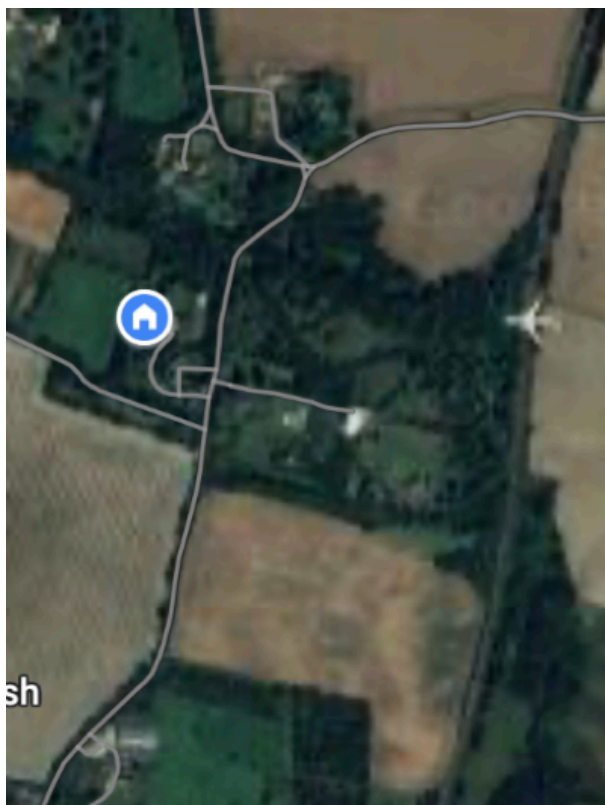
I have been listening to the Appellant today (Thursday, 22 January, 2026) make a case that the west field of the site is 'just an ordinary field' with items of heritage and landscape value around it, i.e. that the field itself has no heritage or landscape value. I would like to draw a parallel with the Standing Stones at Avebury, or the Ness of Brodgar on Orkney: two circles of historic interest, with wild grass in the centre. What value does the grass have? If none, then could we put solar panels inside these ancient circles? Obviously, that would be ludicrous, as it would also be ludicrous to put a solar park on these two Bentley fields. The fields provide the structure or frame, in a manner befitting those heritage elements.

I also must add that, although the residents of Bentley are on average quite elderly, we are both able to turn our heads while walking and also remember within the time taken to walk from Potash Lane to the church what we have seen along the way. We do have memories longer than that of a goldfish.

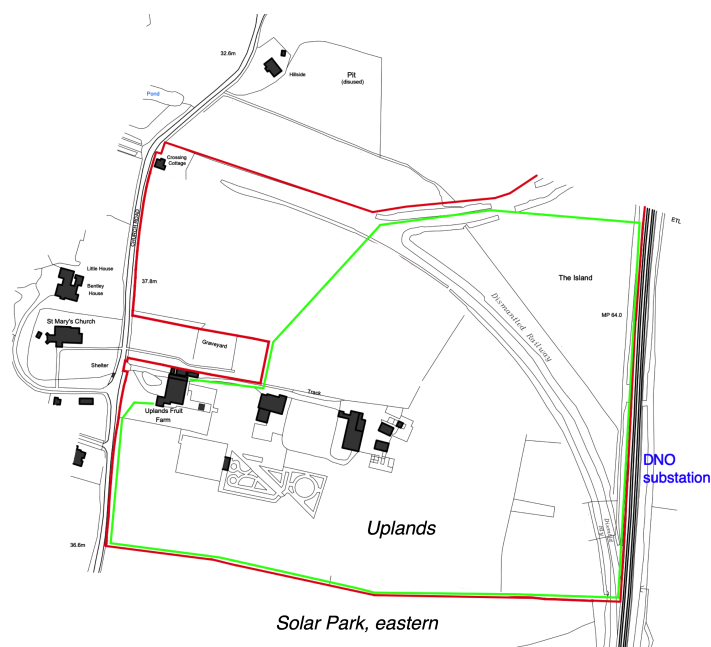
On behalf of all walkers, we also must point out that the planned hedge extensions will take years to grow and will not provide a shield in the winter. We have visited two solar parks close to us - Foxearth and Parham - and can attest that the former is highly visible from the road, despite being well set back, and the latter is highly visible from the footpath which touches it.

As well as the above impact, we personally face the prospect of our walks around our own property being blighted by the presence of a large field full of high black rectangles, surrounded by a fence which comes very close to the track on our southern border. This fence would have CCTV cameras mounted on 3m posts along its length. By contrast, what we now enjoy is an open field where hares run freely. The following diagrams should illustrate our prospect.

A satellite image showing the eastern section of the site, with our land immediately to its north:



A sketch of our land, in red, and our most used circular walk, which includes the southern and eastern borders, in green:



Two views from our southern border, towards the site of the Solar Park east, taken from either end of the track. These show the slope of the land upwards to the south.



The backs of the solar panels will be in permanent shadow and will therefore present us with a wall of blackness, stretching upwards to the horizon, as these pictures attest:

A stock photo of the back of a set of panels:

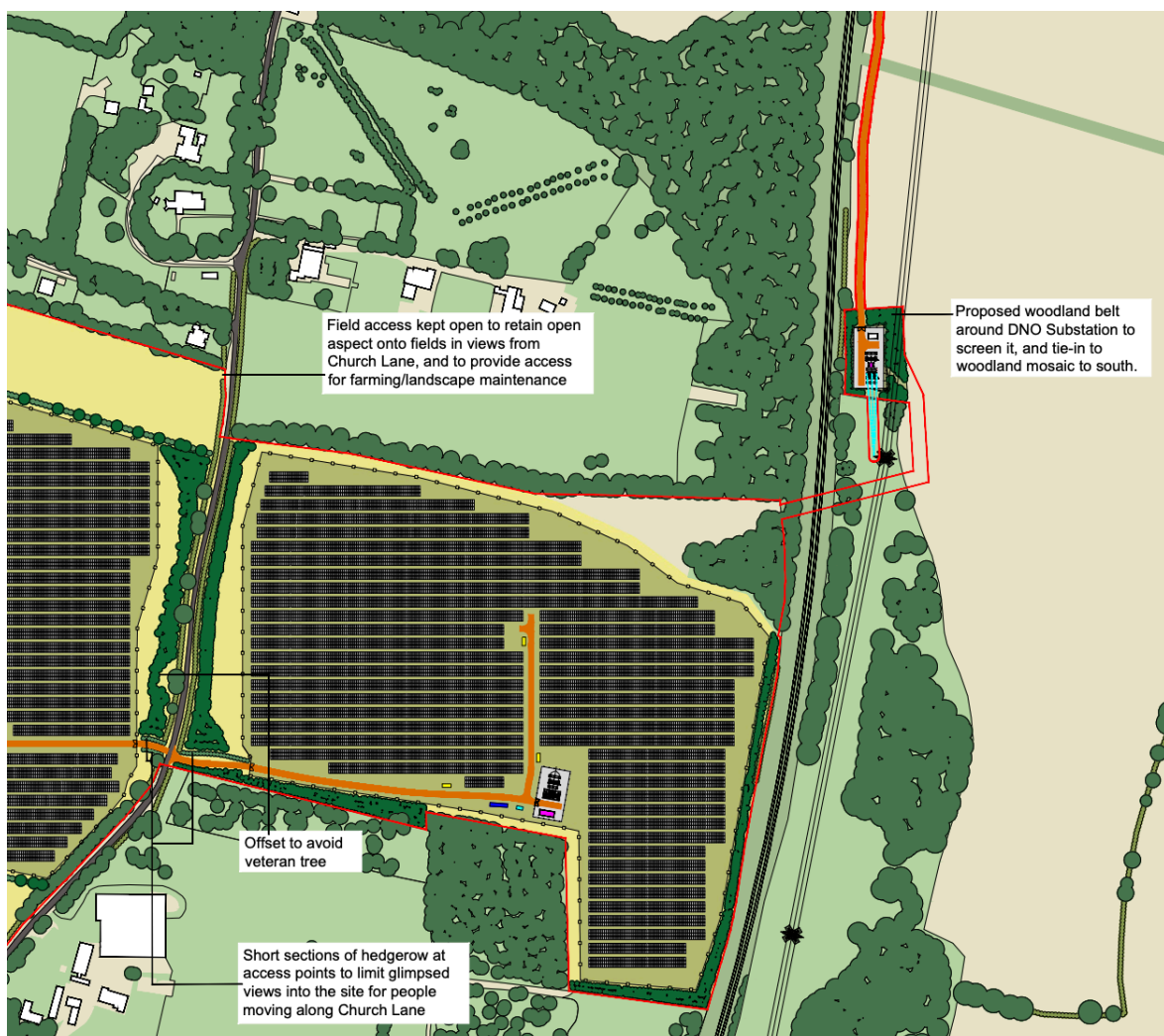


The Solar Park at Parham:



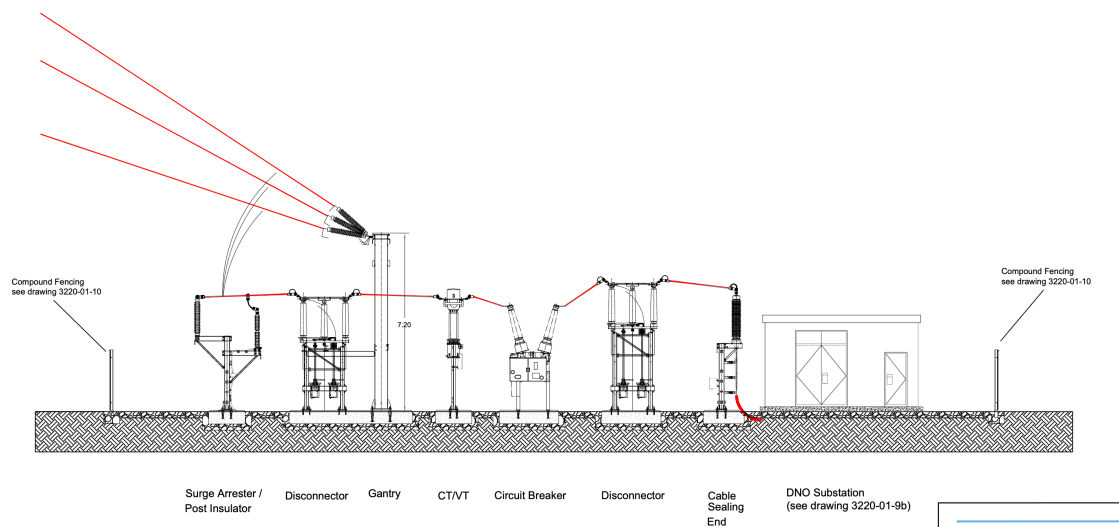
In the amended application, the western section of the site has been redrawn with a buffer zone to offer a small amount of protection for the residents of Potash Lane and the dwellings along Church Lane, but - and despite our requesting it - we have been offered nothing.

The diagram in the amended application (shown below) is misleading, as it appears to show a band of vegetation between ourselves and the site. However, these are actually native trees which



we have planted **within our land**, are north of our track and therefore not protective of our track, and anyway offer no protection in the winter months. Behind them (and to the north of them) are a line of slender poplar trees, which offer little screening in the summer and none at all during the leafless months.

Finally, our walks also take in the track alongside the railway to the east of our land. The original plans for the Solar Park had no impact here, but we are now faced with a large, noisy DNO substation opposite us. The scale of this can be seen on the previous diagram on page 6, where the DNO substation is in the top right and directly opposite our main walk, and its ugliness can be seen below.



2. The negative impact this development will have on residents' views from their homes in general and on ourselves in particular.

The residents who live on Potash Lane and Church Lane face a view from their homes of a very large field of reflective panels or of large black rectangles, whereas at present they have the enjoyment of seeing the rotation of crops throughout the year. In other words, in an instant they will be moved from a rural landscape to an industrial estate.

Our prospect is also dire. From our garden and from the upstairs of our home, we have a direct and full view of the field to our south. Our land slopes down towards the boundary and then the field slopes upwards away from us. This increases the intrusiveness of the development, the potential site producing a black wall stretching to the horizon.

On the following pages are views from the upstairs of our house, looking south towards the Solar Park Site, eastern section and from our garden. Please note how little cover the trees provide.

The outlook from upstairs:



The Solar Park site highlighted:



Two aspects from our garden, with the same aspects showing the field view highlighted.





The site itself

From the very start, this has seemed an odd application. To place a large solar park in the middle of a village, disturbing the lives of many, seems unnecessary. There are plenty of large, unused parts of Suffolk (for example old airfields) which could be put to use without such disruption. The two sites we have visited are much less intrusive. The Parham site is placed equidistant between three villages, on a disused airfield and in very open land. Only one footpath is in the vicinity, this touching briefly the far corner of the site. The Foxearth site is northwest of the village, with no adjacent dwellings. There are no footpaths near it and no roads run through it. The Grove Farm Solar Park, by contrast, would have about 30 dwellings directly next to it, would have a public road running through the middle of it and would separate the church from its attendant village. Since the original application, and its refusal by Babergh District Council, the area has been granted Conservation status. It is inexplicable to us that the developers would go to appeal when the conditions for their approval are worse now than they were when they were originally turned down.

4. The lack of mitigation for ourselves

As previously mentioned, there has been no attempt to mitigate the effect of the Solar Park on ourselves by placing a buffer zone between us and the eastern section of the site. What makes this more galling is that, in their resubmission, the developers have increased the mitigation for others by including some extra hedge planting, yet - again - nothing for us.

We have wondered about this and can find only two reasons for such treatment:

- 1. the mitigation elements along Potash Lane and Church Lane have only been included because of the existence of dwellings of heritage interest (and not for any consideration of the effect on residents and visitors).**
- 2. the appellants have realised that, as the land slopes upwards away from us to the south, mitigation would have little or no effect. In other words, there is nothing they can do to alleviate the dreadfulness of the experience of the backs of hundreds of black panels except to drop the plan of having a solar park in that field all together!**

We note with some irony that Falstaff Manor (where the owner of the land lives) is to be protected by extra planting. We are also puzzled by the planting of a hedge to protect the view from passing trains. People on the London Liverpool Street to Norwich line pass through the industrial sites of east London and Ipswich without harm and therefore we assume that seeing a solar park would not injure them. The thinking must be that, once they are travelling through rural parts of the country, they may be dismayed at the sight of a solar park. In other words, the site is shameful and needs to be hidden! Meanwhile, we - who have chosen a rural life - will have to live with this sight all day every day, with no protection at all. We therefore believe that the proposed development will cause substantial interference with the use and enjoyment of our land.

A summer view from our track of the eastern solar park site:



Finally, we note that the document 'Appellant Statement of Case' contains **not one** reference to Uplands, our land or ourselves, despite the fact that we have a border along the whole of the northern boundary of the eastern section.

5. Biodiversity and Wildlife

We are very lucky to live surrounded by a rich tapestry of nature. When we moved here in the year 2000, the land was a old orchard of dying dwarf apple trees (dwarfs are only productive for around 20 years, and these had already lived much longer). As they inevitably died, we replaced them with both native and exotic specimen trees and have now a large collection.

Between the trees, we maintain tall grassland, cutting sections of it in alternate years. Where areas are cut, we find a wide variety of wildflowers, including, occasionally, whole fields of bee orchids. The grassland itself provides shelter for hares and escaped game birds, the most delightful of which must be the pairs of partridges who raise chicks here every spring.

There is a long-established badger set on our land, whose inhabitants criss-cross the orchard to reach the field which may be destined to become the Solar Park, eastern section. The badgers also access the Solar Park, western section via our southern track.

We have a well-documented population of dormice living in the island and along the old railway lines, **plus stag beetles along almost all our hedges, and particularly underneath the line of poplar trees to the immediate north of the proposed eastern site. Both these species are protected by law.**

The bird life is also very rich, mainly because of the island (see the sketch on page 4). This is land between the mainline railway and an abandoned railway line from Bentley to Hadleigh. This was abandoned land, which we now maintain with wildlife as a focus.

To give a picture of the biodiversity, I am listing below, in decreasing size, a selection of the creatures with whom we share Uplands, with varying frequency: (I would ask Ms. Hill to stop me when she has heard enough!)

Fallow deer, roe deer, muntjac, badgers, foxes, herons, grass snakes, hares, red kites, pheasants, mallards, buzzards, mandarin ducks, magpies, rooks, wood pigeon, tawny owls, stoats, kestrels, barn owls, jay, jackdaw, cuckoo, collared doves, green woodpecker, partridge, sparrowhawks, squirrels, fieldfares, blackbirds, great spotted woodpecker, slow worms, song thrush, little owls, pipistrelles, redwings, swallows, pied wagtail, grey wagtail, yellow wagtail, swifts, yellowhammer, nightingale, chaffinch, duncock, greenfinch, blackcap, robin, great tit, nuthatch, long-tailed tit, house martins, treecreeper, moles, goldfinch, siskin, blue tit, coal tit, chiffchaff, lizards, wren, toads, goldcrest, newts, dormice, frogs, harvest mice, shrews, southern hawker dragonflies, slugs, pigmy shrews, stag beetles, snails, cockchafer, butterflies, moths, hornets, damselflies, millipedes, bumblebees, grasshoppers, wasps, lacewings, water boatmen, glow worms, woodlice, shield bugs, honey bees, St. Mark's flies, pond skaters, spiders, ladybirds, houseflies, froghoppers, ...

We have written this extensive list to show that our land, and the surrounding lands, are already very rich in biodiversity. Replacing large fields with strips of set-aside and narrow hedging will not add any more. **An increase in biodiversity means an increase in the number of species, not the number of specimens. The Appellant's proposals will attract the species we already have, not new species. There is a slim possibility that sowing wildflowers which are not native to our area could attract something new, but all who live in the countryside know that wildflowers won't grow where they are not meant to. They are very soil- and site-specific. Only wildflowers native to this area will survive and they will only attract the species we already have. The Paul Burrell rebuttal references a new study by Cambridge University showing some increase in biodiversity in solar parks in fenland, but this has no relevance to our area. Fenland is biodiversity poor, very short on woodland and very intensively farmed, whereas we sit in a mixed agrarian situation, with extensive surrounding woodland and other rich environments. That same rebuttal article itself references studies in more diverse situations which show little or no biodiversity gain.**

We ask everyone who reads our witness statement to ask themselves, 'Who owns the land?' Humans have parcelled land up, fought over it, and indeed died for it ever since agriculture began, but we very rarely think about the other creatures for whom this is home. Do we have more right to our land than the badgers and hares with whom we share Uplands? Or the deer herds who pass through? Humans see the other animals of our planet, if they cause any inconvenience to them, as vermin to be persecuted. All the wildlife with whom we share the countryside are marginalised at best, under severe threat at worst. Now we are to throw into their lives a huge industrial complex, the effect of which can only be guessed at. Their foraging sites will be severely disrupted during the building phase, and access will be more difficult afterwards. Do animals have any sense of the aesthetic? Who knows, but we dare to guess that they would prefer an open field with crops to 'steal', or soft ploughed land to dig in search of worms, to a sea of plastic and metal, with gates they must squeeze through for access.

In conclusion, we hold this site to be totally unsuitable for the location of a solar park. It sits in the middle of a village, in a Conservation Area and in a very biodiverse environment. It is surrounded by public footpaths, is bisected by a public road and is skirted by many dwellings. We can think of few places more unsuitable.