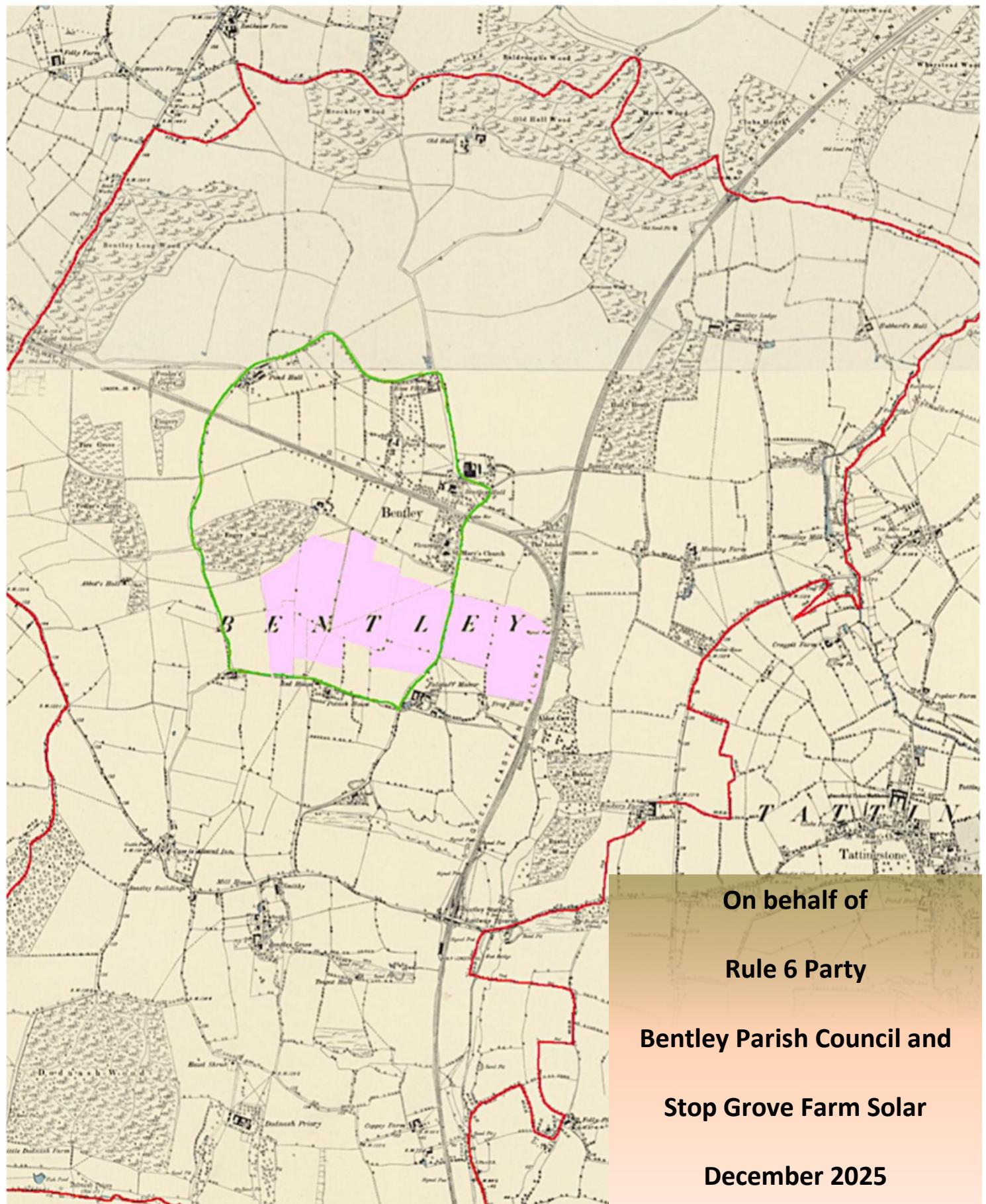


**STATEMENT OF MARK AND LUCY HENSON, CHURCH FARM**

**Grove Solar Farm, Bentley, Suffolk**



**Mark and Lucy Henson, Church Farm, Bentley IP9 2DA**

**SOLAR APPEAL STATEMENT**

**December 2025**

We have tried to be as reasonable as possible throughout this 3+ year planning application process, and to approach the proposed 116 acre solar development on our doorstep with open minds. But the plain truth is that there are so many reasons to object to the permanent damage that it will cause to the place in which we live, that it is has been impossible not to object to it in the strongest possible terms.

1. Nothing about it is acceptable in this location. Around 30 households, including ourselves, live in very close proximity to the proposed development site and will directly overlook all, or part, of it. We will bear the brunt of the many negative impacts, while experiencing no gain at all. The site is in a designated Conservation Area and Valued Landscape with Quiet Lane status. The site is not a piece of land that sits on its own, or is mostly hidden from view. The proposed site, along with its two substations, would sit right in the middle of a rural community, right in between the village, school, pub and shop and the church and the majority of the village's heritage buildings. If this development goes ahead, it will be entirely visible to us all when we are in our homes and our gardens as well as *every single time* we leave them to walk, drive or cycle anywhere, to the village or further afield. This development would entirely change the nature of where we live.
  
2. We have lived at Church Farm, Bentley for nearly 20 years. We moved here because of the very lovely, unspoilt rural location, the many long views over agricultural fields to ancient woodlands and heritage buildings, the tranquillity, the little lanes, the intact historic patterns of farmland and settlement and the overwhelmingly RURAL nature of the place. This is what brought us here, and it is what brings lots of individual walkers, walking groups, families, school field trips, cyclists and riders here too. We see many of these people every single day here. As it is the only access to or from home, we walk, cycle or drive up and down Church Farm Lane – which runs for approx. 500m right alongside the proposed site – to Church Road, which runs right through the middle of the site, and along Church Road several times every day. Mostly we turn right to the village and would progress through a sea of solar panels on either side of the lane, or we turn left past the church on our normal circuit and experience solar panels and inverters as soon as we reach the gateway south of Engry Wood. Even on a trip along Church Road to the A137 the second substation and new access roads and fencing would come into view. There will literally be no escape from this industrial development. We walk our dog, we walk to our friends and neighbours (as they do to us), we walk to the post box, and to church and we walk just for the joy of the place. We almost never do this without meeting other walkers or neighbours, people who have come here specifically to enjoy the peace and scenery of the lanes and numerous footpaths or people who live here and

appreciate it as an absolutely integral part of their everyday lives. Multiple public rights of way, 8 footpaths and one bridleway surround the two site fields.

When you stop and talk to the people who come here but don't live here, they always remark on how lovely it is and how lucky we are to live here. And they are right.

3. What strikes you – quite powerfully – is that the walk along Church Farm Lane would have looked, sounded and felt almost exactly the same throughout history, and back to the 16<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century. There are no power lines and no tarmac. Nothing industrial whatsoever. Just the trees, which in many parts of the lane form a canopy of their veteran branches, the view to the Church and over agricultural fields, long views to ancient woodland, appearances by undisturbed often notoriously shy wildlife (such as barn owls, nightingales, brown hares, golden plovers, stag beetles) and sky. Its pretty magical. At dusk you get just a small show of light from the windows of the homes on Potash Lane, which borders the opposite side of the main site field. If you lived here, you could not bear the thought of this landscape and way of life being permanently destroyed and industrialised either.
4. One of our adult children suffers from mental health difficulties, he lives at home and this place is a true sanctuary for him. Often, when things are their most difficult, he will take himself off and just sit in the grass at the hedgerow beside the field (which would become covered in solar panels, fencing and buildings), watching nature and the views to Engry Wood and Church Road and feeling its constancy, peace and calm reassure and ground him. We don't think that there can be any argument against the fact that we all need more, not less, of this.

For the last 3 years, since this application was first submitted, we have walked this beautiful lane every day with a great deal of sadness, knowing the threat that this place could be industrialised and lost, and that our lives and the lives of so many others could be so disrupted and changed for the worse. Our elderly and frail neighbours at Little Bush have said that they could not continue to live here if this goes ahead. This development would actually drive them from their home of many years.

5. We have visited other solar parks of a similar size and we would lose our long, rural views and instead look out over and walk amongst miles of chain-link fencing, danger of death signs, CCTV on tall poles, a sea of 100,000 blue or black vast, high, glinting solar panels on metal legs in every direction, transformer stations, TWO monumental substation compounds, also with CCTV covering all angles, new access roads and additional openings in hedgerows that will increase the view of the development. Along with this will be the hum of inverters, fans and converters which can become disturbingly loud on sunny days. This will not just be when we are in our homes and gardens, but also every single time we walk, drive or cycle anywhere from our homes. It will dominate our entire community, and for us it will be visible from every window on the south and east sides of our house, including our bedroom window. **The development is set to come to only 70m from our house. This is extremely close for a solar park to be to residential property. Studies recommend the**

**minimum distance be between 300m and 1000m because of the negative visual impact, the impact of glint and glare and of noise. It has really alarmed us that the applicant has repeatedly claimed neutral, low and medium effects on the households like our's that are so close to the site – and our own home, astonishingly, was not even considered.**

What is rural would become unequivocally industrial – whatever way it is wrapped up and delivered to us by the developer and landowner. This is fact. Having gardened here for 20 years, we know any proposed hedge planting will take at least 15 years for any meaningful screening and that once it is grown it will simply further block anything that remains of our current cherished views over open countryside.

6. We have a 20 year experience of watching the seasons change and the crops grow abundantly on the BMV farmland that would become the 116 acre solar site up to harvest. Up until this development application was submitted we were often told by the landowner and his family that the main site field was their prize field. Their family used to proudly turn out to watch the harvest being kicked off there. All manner of crops appear to grow on these fields extremely well, we never see bare or patchy areas. New BMV farmland can't be created to replace what is lost to development.
7. Flooding on Church Farm Lane and Church Road is a further concern to us . The developer says: '*A low or no risk of flooding from rivers or surface water has been identified across the site*'. As long-time residents we strongly disagree. Church Farm lane – our only access to our house – is unadopted, unsurfaced and sunken below the level of the main site field. It already takes the runoff from the field, and both this lane and Church Road regularly flood, even after only moderate periods of rain and all year round. The runoff from 100,000 massive solar panels, the laying of new roads and tracks, ground compacted from machinery and piling cannot possibly do anything but exacerbate flooding on our lane. Because it is unsurfaced, it gets churned up very easily when wet and it seems very possible that our access road could become almost impassable.
8. We are deeply concerned about the massive disturbance of the estimated 32 week/8 month build – which the developer told us at the public consultation is in fact likely to be closer to 18 months. We note from the planning application that work will take place Monday – Saturday 7.30-6pm with deliveries and movements of abnormal loads on Sundays.

Suddenly living within a few metres of a monumental building site of lit and fenced car parks and construction compounds with refuelling facilities and storage for chemicals and oils plus 24-hour security, HGVs and heavy machinery working and moving constantly, excavations for new roads and buildings, trenching, fencing, cabling, construction workers and then the endless metallic hammer and vibration of piling 100,000 panels will be abysmal. Much of the wildlife will not stay and if they

come back and ever manage to find and use the small holes in the 4km+ of chain link fencing it will be a miracle. We often see barn owls crossing the main site field towards Church Farm, where they land in our garden and perch on our fences and roofs. Barn owls are notoriously threatened and disturbed by humans and need open fields within 1km of their nesting site to hunt. We also often see and hear other varieties of owl. Brown hares, also notoriously shy, cross the site fields and inhabit Engry Wood and the hedgerows around Church Farm. We often see them 'keeping sentry' in the middle of the main site field, which would become covered in industrial detritus and buildings if this goes ahead. The hares will be gone. Engry Wood is a protected habitat for the endangered Hazel dormouse, we can't imagine all of this disturbance will help them greatly. There are also deer, muntjac, incredible birds of prey, hedgehogs, badgers - all living here undisturbed and able move, hunt and breed freely now.

9. The principal mission of the Bentley Neighbourhood Plan (passed by referendum in Dec 2022 with the approval of 90% of voters) is '*to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment*' to '*enhance our rural nature and agricultural surroundings ...for generations to come*' and '*to maintain and enhance a strong rural identity and sense of place (with) sensitive small scale development*' stressing the '*attractive landscape and distinctive views*'.

The industrialisation of 116 acres of the most attractive rural and agricultural land in the village, within a Conservation Area and a Valued Landscape, very close to the most significant heritage buildings in the village, directly adjacent to the largest density of ancient woodland in Suffolk and multiple households is entirely contrary to this Neighbourhood Plan. Living within a few metres of this solar park will change our lives irrevocably and this **development would also change the nature and character of our historic, rural countryside forever. This would be a terrible loss to us and to the generations of Bentley residents and visitors to come.**

10. But the single most important point is really this: solar parks can be built in more suitable locations but historic countryside worthy of being in a Conservation Area with lanes, listed heritage buildings and ancient woodlands – most of them untouched for hundreds of years - cannot be replaced or created.