

Statement from Nick Angel, Bentley Hall

Appeal reference: APP/D3505/w/25/3370515

Re Grove, Solar Farm, Land at Grove Farm & Land East of the Railway Line, Bentley Suffolk

21 January 2026

I live at Bentley Hall, one of the Heritage Assets affected by this proposal. I have lived there with my family for over 20 years.

Aside from having the pleasure and commitment of maintaining one of the key Heritage Assets relevant to this enquiry, I am a regular walker on the footpaths around the proposed site and use Church Road all the time.

I object to the application.

I understand that, in simple terms, the enquiry needs to determine whether the proposal (i) causes harm to the landscape and/or heritage assets and, if it does, (ii) whether that harm is outweighed by the public benefit.

I will frame my objections in the context of these questions. I appreciate that the Enquiry will have some three weeks of expert evidence and technical legal argument to enjoy to aid a decision, but I will ground my objections in, at least what I see as, common sense. You would hope the two approaches lead to the same conclusion.

Would the proposed development cause harm to the landscape or heritage assets?

Of course it will. The proposal involves the insertion of a 116-acre power production facility right into the middle of the northern and southern parts of Bentley village. That's over a hundred thousand, 3m high solar panels, the generation and transmission infrastructure, 3m high CCTV poles and 4km of fencing, replacing agricultural fields. Add to that 32 weeks to 18 months of construction traffic and infrastructure. This is in a spot replete with history, close to nationally significant heritage assets, in the middle of a Conservation Area, across a much-used Designated Quiet Lane, visible from heavily used footpaths, bridleways and country lanes and extraordinarily close to a number of houses.

Those who are unlucky enough to live on the periphery will find their rural views swapped for this entirely incongruous and ugly scene. Those many people who use Church Road to walk between the village and the church, or between the houses at the north and south ends of the village, or ride or drive on their day-to-day business or use the footpaths will have their experience and views irreparably damaged.

The approach to one of the "best preserved and historically significant Tudor manor complexes in the whole of Britain"¹ along Church Road will change from a passage through a country lane, to a passage through the middle of an industrial area.

¹ A description applied by Leigh Alston to the Bentley Hall and Bentley Hall Barn collection of buildings.

The proposal of mitigation in the form of screening is an acknowledgement that the development is so out of place and unattractive compared to what was there before that it needs hiding. It is also wholly unrealistic. It doesn't do anything for those who live on the periphery. Hedging takes time to grow. It won't screen the site for years, maybe half the project's lifetime. And its effect is severely limited in the winter.

On top of that, some 63% of the land involved is "Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land". The country currently faces geopolitical risks of a significance that we have not seen in our lifetimes. I am confident that you can find many places in the UK to generate green electricity, but good quality farmland is limited and, in my view, now, more than ever, is not a time to gamble with our food security and sacrifice our best, productive land.

How can this not be harmful.

Is the harm outweighed by public benefit?

Let's assume the facility gets built and it manages to secure a connection to the grid, then the public benefit appears to be the addition of green energy to our supplies. But that is a benefit that does not rely on this site. I do not doubt that there are many other places, where the investment and effort could be applied that are nowhere nearly so sensitive or contentious.

So back to the question

- Not if you ask those living on the perimeter of the site,
- Not if you ask 175 of the 189 people who responded to Babergh's planning consultation process (that's a 93% objection rate)
- Not if you ask the village residents, walkers and riders who objected during the enquiry
- Not if you ask Bentley Parish Council
- Not if you ask Capel St Mary Parish Council,
- Not if you ask Tattingstone Parish Council
- Not if you ask Historic England
- Not if you ask National Landscape
- Not if you ask Suffolk Preservation Society
- Not if you ask Ipswich Ramblers
- Not if you ask Babergh District Council; and
- Not if you ask me.

The point I am making here is this: I am with those many others who have looked at this application and been unable to find a benefit that merits its support. More than that, all I can see are material disbenefits for so many people who actually live in and use Bentley.
