**Where is the access point going to be for the Solar Farm? On Cranfield Road or from A422?**

 Access to the site will be gained via the Newport Pagnell Road (A422) which links Milton Keynes with Bedford. The A422 is a c. 8m wide, two-way highway that frequently accommodates agricultural vehicles of a size similar to the HGVs that will access the site during construction.

 **Will the village receive any benefit directly from the solar farm (even though there isn’t a 106)? ie. a contribution towards the local community?**

 We are happy to discuss with the local community the benefits which can be delivered to the local community from the solar farm. If there are particular projects we can support we would be interested to receive that feedback and are happy to discuss this further during our video call.

 **Why is it named Cranfield Road (see point 1)?**

 The site runs adjacent to Cranfield Road

 **Will there be landscaping (trees/shrubs) around the site?**

 The proposals will include significant levels of hedgerow and tree planting in order to screen views of the site from key visual receptors and also to deliver biodiversity benefits. The planning application will be supported by a Landscape Plan, which will detail the measures that will be put in place – this will include the planting of new native-species hedgerow, infilling existing ‘gappy’ hedgerows and tree planting where suitable. These measures will be guided by a robust Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), and maintained in accordance with a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) which, together with the LVIA, will be submitted to the Council for approval.

 **Where will the labour force be housed during the installation of the farm? (Again with a view to impact on roads/traffic etc)**

 If the labour force are not local to the area and within easy commutable distance, they will stay in hotel accommodation.

 **How long will it take to install?**

 It is anticipated the construction period will last approximately three to six months

 **What is the duration of the solar farm before it is decommissioned?**

 This will be conditioned by the Council if planning permission is approved. The Applicant is seeking permission to operate for 40 years in order to deliver the most public benefit.

 **Who owns the land?**

 A private landowner whose identity is not for public information.

 **Consultation with Astwood**

 Astwood Parish Council have been sent a letter, leaflet and notice via recorded delivery and email on 27th July 2020. The parish clerk is Annmarie Duggan – the documents were sent to the provided email address on the Council’s website – duggan725@btinternet.com

**What considerations and protection is being put in place for contamination to the water from material degradation and leaching into the ground?**

 The components of a solar farm will either not degrade or are contained within protective bunding and/or casing which is designed to UK and international standards for such equipment. The proposed solar farm will not in any way contaminate ground water and will only provide environmental and biodiversity benefits. This is the key aim of the project.

**Why has an area close to Astwood been chosen for this development?**

 The Applicant has undertaken extensive preliminary work in order to identify the most appropriate area for this development. The site selection was guided by the development control considerations laid out through the general development control policies of the three sets of Development Plans covering thedevelopment site and the operational needs and requirements of the development proposal; these are guided by:

 A suitable location to benefit from sunlight intensity levels – the site should be relatively flat (or south facing) and free of any buildings or landscape features that could cause overshadowing;

A suitable location with access to the grid which has capacity;

A suitable location which is served / can be served by appropriate highway infrastructure;

Encouraging the effective use of land, where a proposal involves Greenfield land, the use of land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land;

A site with minimal environmental constraints. Bedfordshire benefits from a range of environmental and landscape qualities and this includes the Chilterns AONB and outer London Greenbelt. The focus is on avoiding these areas in the first instance.

A suitable site of the right size, shape and orientation that can accommodate a 45MWp solar scheme; and,

A suitable site which is available for the duration of the proposed scheme.

 **Why have the parish council not been contacted before going public?**

 Local parish councils have been contacted at the same time as the local community as part of an extended period of community consultation.

 **What are you intending to move the land use status to? At the moment it’s green belt. Will it remain as green belt? What does it need to be in order for a Solar Farm to be on it?**

 The site is not within the green belt. Please see below map extract.

 **Are you intending to graze stock around the proposed solar farm? And if so, why can your solution do it but others can’t and won’t?**

 Grazing livestock on the solar farm is beneficial to the upkeep and maintenance of the meadow beneath the panels; however, this can also be done manually. Livestock will be allowed to graze on the site periodically around the year at the right time. For example, avoiding grazing in either the spring or summer will favour early or late flowering species, respectively, allowing the development of nectar and seeds while benefiting invertebrates, ground nesting birds and small mammals.

 **If you do graze, how do you intend to reduce stress to animals from maintenance vehicles?**

 Maintenance vehicles will only visit the site a handful of times throughout the year. There will be no undue impact on the wildlife, and definitely no more than the existing agricultural vehicles

 **You also state, the land CAN return to its original use, but the question is WILL it? What assurances are provided?**

 All equipment will be removed and the land returned to its original use. This will be secured by way of condition of a planning permission. Once decommissioned, the land will once again be in agricultural use, albeit much more replenished with higher soil quality after an extended period of rejuvenation.

 **Solar farms cause substantial harm to the character of the countryside, and the overall effect on the “landscape character and visual appearance of the area”.**

 This is true -solar farms. If placed and designed poorly can have adverse impacts on the rurality and openness of landscapes. It is a key aim of the development proposals to avoid undue impact on the landscape. As mentioned above, the Applicant will be carrying out a robust LVIA which will inform future landscape mitigation plans. The key aim here is being able to site solar arrays on this site in order to deliver the green energy we need, without appearing incongruous in the landscape. The preliminary work undertaken until this point suggests that this is entirely possible. Renewable Connections only take sites through planning in which they believe are good sites that stand a very strong chance of community backing.

 The Solar Trade Association (STA) has produced a lot of reports in the past on solar farms and their benefits. These are independent reports and provide a good level of information on solar farms, their operation, maintenance and decommissioning.

https://www.solar-trade.org.uk/solar-farms/

 I have also attached a report titled, ‘The Effects of Solar farms on Local Biodiversity: A Comparative Study’ (2016). The principles outlined in this report are adopted by this proposed development.

I hope this email has been helpful and thank you again for getting in touch.

Kind regards

Tom Baguley