**Parish Council Objection Summary – Solar Farm Proposal (2025/2767/MAF)**

**1.** **Transport and Highway Safety**

* Inadequate transport assessment.
* Unsafe highway arrangements.
* No evidence the road network can safely accommodate the development.

**2.** **Drainage and Flood Risk**

* Over-reliance on infiltration and unmaintained ditches despite clayey soils.
* Existing flooding issues in Eastfield Crescent, Hesketh Road, and Potterspury.
* No engineered drainage solution provided.

**3.** **Ecology and Wildlife**

* Habitat fragmentation due to fencing and infrastructure.
* Risk of bird collisions with solar panels.
* No binding mechanism to ensure biodiversity net gain.

**4.** **Lack of Community Benefit**

* Electricity will feed into the national grid, with no local energy benefit.

**5.** **Construction Compound Location**

* Compound placed within 90m of homes.
* Anticipated noise, light, and dust pollution for 12–18 months.

**6.** **Loss of Agricultural Land**

* 77 hectares of productive Grade 2 and 3b farmland removed from use.
* Contradicts national policy on preserving agricultural land.

**7.** **Rights of Way and Amenity**

* Footpaths (e.g., Grafton Way) heavily used and valued.
* Proposed fencing will degrade views and rural character.

**8.** **Landscape and Visual Impact**

* Industrial-scale development inappropriate near rural villages.
* Breaches Local Plan Policy SS 2.1(a) by threatening village identity and open land.

**9.** **Noise Impact**

* No clear data on noise from solar panel movement.
* Low ambient noise levels in nearby gardens could be disrupted.

**10.** **Glint and Glare**

* Visual disturbance likely due to panel tilt and elevated house positions.
* Vegetation screening will take years to mature.

**11.** **Landscaping**

* Insufficient detail to assess effectiveness of proposed landscaping.

**12.** **Battery Storage Safety**

* Lack of detail on design and safety of lithium-ion battery systems.
* Fire and environmental risks not addressed.

**13.** **Public Health and Community Impact**

* Loss of food production (22,400 tonnes over 40 years).
* Reduced oxygen output and increased carbon footprint.
* Greater flood risk and amenity loss for residents.
	1. **OBJECTION ON TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAY GROUNDS**

The applicants have provided an inadequate transport assessment, unsafe highway arrangements and fail to demonstrate that the development can be safely and acceptably accommodated within the surrounding road network.

1. Surrounding Road Network

The Transport Statement significantly misrepresents the condition and suitability of the local road network.

* Yardley Road, the primary access route, is stated as being 5.0m wide and suitable for two-way HGV operation. This is incorrect. Two HGVs require a minimum of 5.5m, and industrial estate traffic normally requires 6.75m. By comparison, the proposed internal access roads are 7.3m wide, highlighting the inadequacy of Yardley Road.
* Through Potterspury, Yardley Road narrows and passes through a residential area, wholly unsuitable for HGV traffic.
* Beech House Drive, also proposed as a site access, is only 3.0–3.5m wide, poorly surfaced, and incapable of accommodating significant two-way traffic.
* The Statement ignores operational issues at the A5 and A508 junctions, both of which already suffer congestion and delays.

2. Accident Statistics

Crashmap data confirms serious existing safety issues.

* Yardley Road / A508 junction: Six injury accidents recorded in five years. The Statement proposes only that a Construction Management Plan (CMP) will “manage traffic,” but provides no evidence of how this would address existing problems made worse by additional HGVs.
* Poundfield Road / A5 junction: Omitted from the Statement despite being a likely route. Crashmap confirms two injury accidents, including one fatal. This omission is unjustifiable.

Both ends of the Yardley Road corridor have a proven accident history, raising fundamental concerns over road safety.

3. Site Access

The proposed access strategy is inadequately designed and unjustified.

* One Yardley Road access lies almost opposite Beech House Drive, creating a quasi-crossroads contrary to modern standards, and no HGV tracking has been provided.
* A construction-only access from the A508 is shown but with no layout, design or safety detail. Given the A508’s high traffic flows and national speed limit, this omission is unacceptable.
* The construction compound access is unclear, with contradictory references in the supporting documents and no definitive layout plan.

4. Grid Connection Route

The 10 km grid connection route passes along the A5 trunk road and major Milton Keynes roads. The Statement dismisses the impact as minor, but any traffic management on these heavily trafficked corridors would cause severe disruption. No detail on timescale, phasing or mitigation is provided.

5. Construction Period

The Transport Statement quotes 12 months; the Design and Access Statement quotes 6–9 months. This inconsistency undermines confidence. In reality, a period longer than 12 months is more realistic.

6. Traffic Generation and Impact

The assessment of traffic generation is wholly inadequate.

* HGV trip rates are based solely on figures “provided by the applicant,” with no methodology or independent verification.
* Construction worker trips are not quantified at all.
* Departure times are stated to avoid peak hours yet overlap with the evening peak (1700–1800).
* No baseline traffic data is provided for Yardley Road, the A5, or the A508, all of which are already congested.

The conclusion that impacts will be “negligible” is therefore unfounded and misleading.

7. Construction Management Plan

The CMP is a high-level framework only. While such plans are useful, their effectiveness depends on enforcement. It is wholly unrealistic to suggest that a CMP could “solve” the accident problem at the A508 junction, which is already a high-risk location.

8. Overall Conclusions

The Transport Statement fails to demonstrate that the proposed development can be safely or acceptably accommodated.

* The road network is substandard, narrow and unsuitable for HGV use.
* Accident records at both Yardley Road junctions confirm existing safety issues, including a fatality.
* The access strategy is poorly designed and lacks necessary detail.
* The grid connection route would cause severe disruption but is treated with complacency.
* Traffic generation data is inadequate, unsubstantiated and fails to consider construction worker trips.
* Reliance on a vague Construction Management Plan is not credible.

On this basis, the application is not supported by a robust transport assessment. The impacts on road safety, congestion and residential amenity would be severe and unacceptable.

* 1. **DRAINAGE**

The Drainage Report is inadequate and fails to properly address existing and future flood risk.

* Reliance on infiltration and existing ditches: The Report assumes surface water can infiltrate or drain via unmaintained ditches, despite acknowledging the soils are clayey with impeded drainage.
* Evidence of existing flooding: Flood Map data and local experience confirm regular flooding of properties in Eastfield Crescent and Hesketh Road due to blocked or broken drains. In severe cases, floodwater flows into Marlborough Way and causes flooding at Nos. 15–23 Eastfield Crescent.
* Yardley Road ditch network: The ditch system along the northern edge of Yardley Road is heavily blocked and has not been assessed for viability since the A508 bypass was built in 1987. It is incapable of carrying additional flows without major remedial work.
* Western end runoff: Water already flows down Meeting Hill into Potterspury village, overwhelming highway drains and increasing flood risk to properties in Church End.

The assumption that “no formal drainage system is required” is therefore wholly untenable. Without a comprehensive engineered drainage solution, the proposal will significantly worsen existing flood risk to residents.

* 1. **ECOLOGY AND LOSS OF WILDLIFE HABITAT**

The site supports localwildlife including birds such as skylarks and birds of prey, foxes, badgers and deer that we regularly see in these fields. Installing impermeable fencing and intensive infrastructure risks fragmenting habitats and disrupting existing ecological networks. Security fencing around the site could become a barrier to the movement of wild mammals and amphibians and represent a collision risk for some bird species.

Large solar farms such as that being proposed have the potential to have a transformative effect on the land which could have consequences for local wildlife. Studies have suggested that birds can mistake the mirror like glare from solar panels for water, and collide into the panels when trying to land with deadly consequences.

Whilst biodiversity net gain may be claimed, no binding mechanism ensures these measures will compensate for habitat loss or maintain long-term ecological value.

* 1. **LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND**

Taking 77 hectares of productive farmland out of use for decades conflicts with Government guidance on safeguarding agricultural land and prioritising brownfield or less sensitive sites for renewable energy projects.

The site is productive arable farmland comprising a mix of Grade 2 and Grade 3b land which is Very Good (Best and Most Versatile land) and Moderate quality land. To permit the industrialisation of this farmland would contravene the South Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2 Policy SS 2.1 (h). The land has yielded quality crops of wheat, rape, beans etc every year. Claims about sheep grazing around the panels begs many practical questions about who would farm in this way and whether it is economically viable to do so. If the Council is minded to approve this application despite our objections, we would ask for stringent conditions regarding the future maintenance of the land beneath and around the solar panels.

The scheme has an expected operational life of 40 years. The construction of a solar farm the size of the proposed development will cost millions of pounds, and it is very unlikely that the site will ever be returned to its current agricultural use, therefore there is no weight to the claims that the development is temporary and can be reversed.

* 1. **RIGHTS OF WAY AND LOSS OF AMENITY**

We are fortunate to have a number of footpaths across the fields between Yardley Gobion and Potterspury and Furtho, including the Grafton Way. All are heavily used all year round and a huge asset to the villages and the quality of life of the residents. Whilst accepting that none are actually closed once construction is finished, the proposed two-metre-high deer fencing (Tech Drawing 6) is going to create an alien sense of enclosure and obscure key views out across the Tove Valley or to Wakefield Woods. If this application is approved, we would ask for a condition requiring the fencing to be set back as far as possible, especially around the medieval site of Cleley Well, and coloured green to blend in with vegetation as much as possible. We also ask that appropriate footpath diversions are put in place during construction.

* 1. **LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT**

The very large size of the proposed development is totally inappropriate for a site so close to residential properties in the rural villages of Yardley Gobion and Potterspury. The visual impact of such a huge industrial solar farm would fundamentally change the tranquil character of the area.

The development would infill the open space between the ancient villages of Potterspury and Yardley Gobion. The Local Plan Policy SS 2.1 (a) requires the maintenance of “the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts” and specifies that the proposal “does not result in physical coalescence that would harm this identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land...”. This scheme breaches the policy.

We consider solar farms should be appropriately located on already industrialised land, on roof tops or adjacent to motorways, not on productive agricultural land, or in an area which will cause significant visual impact to the residents

The solar panels and infrastructure including transformers, inverters and fencing will inevitably introduce a fundamental change to the character and appearance of the landscape. The expansive tranquil landscape of open fields would turn into a semi-industrial, utility-grade power complex, with fields of 3m high dark solar panels, shipping containers containing electrical equipment and security fencing.

The proposed site covers 77 hectares of open farmland and would introduce extensive rows of solar panels, internal access roads, underground cabling and 2m high deer fencing. This industrialisation of rural farmland would drastically alter the character of the area causing significant visual harm.

Policy ENV1 of the West Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2 requires protection of distinctive landscape character and this scale of development conflicts with the Policy.

Policy ENV2 seeks to avoid harm to valued non designated landscapes unless fully mitigated which has not been demonstrated here.

The National Planning Policy Framework (Para 170) highlights the need to recognise the intrinsic beauty of the countryside and consider the cumulative impact of renewable energy schemes on local landscapes.

Even taking the proposed planting scheme into consideration, it will take years to mature, and such a large tract of farmland cannot be adequately screened.

* 1. **LACK OF BENEFIT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY**

The proposed development will not benefit the local community. The power generated by the solar panels will go straight to the national grid – this will not be a source of cheap electricity for people living in the vicinity of the solar farm.

* 1. **LOCATION OF PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION COMPOUND**

The plans place the compound in the nearest field possible to residential properties. The proposed compound comes to within 90 metres of the closest house. For the entire length of the construction period (at least 12 -18 months) residents will be subjected to significant noise levels (including reversing ‘beeps’ of vehicles), light pollution (from security lighting) and dust pollution.

In the indicative plan of the proposed compound, the generating plant is located in the north-east corner of the site which is just over 90 metres from the closest house.

At the end of the construction period, it is presumed solar panels will be installed on this field (although page 10 of the Design and Access Statement says ‘restored to original condition). However, there will still also be various buildings and structures, including a large permanent substation only 400 metres away from the closest house. There seems to be no data concerning noise emission from the substation, so we are unable to assess its potential long-term impact

For these reasons, we ask that the location of the compound and the substation is moved much further away from Eastfield Crescent dwellings.

* 1. **NOISE IMPACT**

We are unable to find clear indices of noise levels associated with the solar panels as they tilt at different times of the day. The ambient noise levels in the rear gardens of the Eastfield Crescent houses is very low most of the time, as it backs onto open farmland at least a mile from the A5. This information should be required from the applicants and assessed professionally as to the potential impact on nearby dwellings.

* 1. **GLINT AND GLARE**

The technical document on this subject places nearby properties in dwelling receptor bracket 23-30 (actually number 30) and concludes that the new vegetation boundary to the west will suffice to obviate any adverse ‘glint and glare’. However, this boundary will be entirely new so it will be at least 10 years before it can take good effect. The panels are designed to tilt with the sun. Residents could experience serious visual disturbance for many years, especially as the houses have finished floor levels at least a metre above the original field level (for drainage purposes). Also, the 1960s style of the houses is typified by bigger than average windows.

* 1. **LANDSCAPING**

The landscaping proposals contain insufficient detail to assess the efficacy of the scheme.

* 1. **ON-SITE BATTERY STORAGE SAFETY**

The proposal includes large-scale battery storage facilities, yet the supporting documents provide no substantive detail on design, installation, or safety management. This raises serious concerns given the well-documented fire and environmental risks associated with lithium-ion battery systems.

Key issues include:

* **Proper Installation**: Systems must be installed to British Standards and located in shaded areas, away from external heat sources, to minimise overheating risk. No assurance of compliance is provided.
* **Fire Detection and Suppression**: Modern standards recommend automatic fire detection and suppression (e.g. water mist systems) to prevent or contain thermal runaway events. No such systems are referenced in the application.
* **Containment and Separation**: Fire-resistant construction materials and adequate physical separation between battery units are essential to limit fire spread. The application is silent on these requirements.
* **Monitoring Systems**: Real-time monitoring of temperature and system health can provide early warning of faults, but there is no evidence this has been specified.
* **Emergency Response Planning**: Given the scale of the installation, a detailed emergency response plan must be agreed with the Fire and Rescue Service, including safe access routes and site information for first responders. No such plan is included.
* **Community and Environmental Impact**: Thermal runaway events can release toxic gases and contaminated firewater. Consideration must therefore be given to prevailing wind directions, nearby communities, and the risk of water pollution. These impacts are not assessed.

**Conclusion**: The omission of a comprehensive fire safety, monitoring, and emergency response strategy for the battery storage compounds is a critical failure of the application. Without robust design and management measures, the development poses unacceptable risks to both public safety and the environment.

* 1. **PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**
* Loss of food production capacity (560 tonnes of wheat annually; 22,400 tonnes over 40 years).
* Reduction in oxygen production equivalent to supporting 700–800 people annually.
* Significant carbon footprint from construction and loss of soil carbon. Generate 30,000–45,000 tonnes CO2 in production/installation, undermining carbon neutrality claims.
* Increased amenity loss, and flood risk for nearby residents.
Renewable energy must not come at the cost of food security, biodiversity, and community health.

**OVERALL CONCLUSION**

This application is fundamentally flawed. It fails to demonstrate safe highway arrangements, increases flood risk, harms biodiversity, removes 77 hectares of valuable farmland, industrialises the rural landscape, damages residential amenity and poses unresolved safety risks.

**FOR THESE REASONS, YARDLEY GOBION PARISH COUNCIL OBJECTS IN THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE TERMS AND URGES WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL TO REFUSE APPLICATION 2025/2767/MAF.**