



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

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For the attention of:  
Mark Andrews - Head of Planning  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council  
The Council House, Manor Square  
SOLIHULL B91 3QB

23 July 2025

Dear Mr Andrews, Mark

**Ref: PL/2025/01145/PPFL**

Land off Benton Green Lane Berkswell Solihull  
Installation and operation of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with associated ancillary infrastructure, access, landscaping and boundary treatment.

This letter constitutes formal advice and recommendations from the Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.

A Senior Development Manager and a Project Developer attended our meeting held in Shire Hall Warwick on Thursday 17 July 2025. They gave a presentation and took part in a Q&A session.

We were not impressed and came away with more unanswered questions than acceptable given the huge negative impact the proposal will have on a productive agricultural green belt site in UK food production. They were either unable or unwilling to provide answers on issues which gave us concerns; each question was met with a 'nothing can go wrong' scenario which was unsatisfactory.

## **Highway Issues:**

Inadequate reports and supporting documents fail to recognise dangerous highway issues.

The **entire** length of Benton Green Lane is narrow and tortuous. However, the manipulated supporting photographs taken using a wide-angle lens makes the lane look like an 'A' road. The access route shown from Tanners Lane fails to take into account the hamlet of residential properties on a very narrow part of Benton Green Lane and on tight bends where parked cars often make the lane virtually impassable. Access to construction traffic and oversized equipment will be virtually impossible.

The design of the proposed access, including splays, is questionable with removal of vegetation and hedgerows and the associated loss of habitats and biodiversity required to provide the proposed large tarmac and concrete access apron. The wide access is a visually alien feature which introduces toxic materials into the sensitive rural

environment. It is out of character in the rural landscape as is the length and negative impact of the long internal access road. Neither do we believe the access and internal roads proposed meet the Fire Chief Council Guidelines which are being upgraded and will be published by the end of 2025.

The present guidance:

- suitable facilities for safely accessing and egressing the site should be provided
- at least 2 separate access points to the site to account for opposite wind conditions/direction.
- roads capable of accommodating fire service vehicles in all weather conditions.
- A perimeter road or roads with passing places suitable for fire service vehicles
- road networks on site must enable unobstructed access to ALL areas of the facility.

If there is an emergency, access using Benton Green Lane is the first serious issue. Safe access for Fire Service vehicles, especially HGV Fire Tenders is seriously compromised by the physical features and topography of the lane.

There is scant technical information on the capacity (power output) from the BESS. There is a 132kW substation on site with 28 storage containers (coloured green) on the legend but we cannot confirm what the similar sized 'units' (coloured black) on the legend are. We assume they are transformers. Neither can we establish from the inadequate layout plan where the 'power station' will be situated?

We recognise the significance of 132kW as a higher-voltage system in connection terms. There remain questions on how connection to the grid will be achieved.

### **Drainage and Contamination:**

The various ponds and the area marked 'reservoir' on the Indicative Master Plan are of concern in an emergency situation. If the identified 'reservoir' is for use by the farm to compensate for loss of mains water, pollution of the essential supply would be of major concern in the event of a polluting emergency.

Toxic pollution of a productive agricultural green belt site, a working farm, from explosive discharge of toxic gas and chemicals in the event of thermal runaway would be disastrous as would huge amounts of polluted fire fighting water including the chemicals required to quench battery fires.

Grenergy were unable to allay fears or give details on proposals in place to contain and store toxic and chemically polluted water runoff and how it would be managed and removed from the site. ***At one point they said 'water' would be 'discharged' into a minor watercourse which is clearly unacceptable.*** No realistic answers to questions on toxicity and other pollutants leaching into the surrounding land and watercourses or what proposals were in place for cleaning-up dangerous pollutants was forthcoming.

## **Security:**

The proposed fencing is not secure from vandals and thieves accessing the site from the various boundaries. CCTV and lighting is an essential deterrent, but is not compatible with a sensitive green belt site where it will disturb local wildlife and protected species including bats. The irreplaceable ecology and biodiversity of a sensitive area including connectivity to local woodland, is under threat. The distinctive and valued rural landscape of the site will be lost to unwanted light pollution and visual urbanisation with the negative impact extending into the wider environment, the PRow (Coventry and Millenium Ways) and the adjacent Massey Furguson playing field/sports ground.

The historic **Scout Camp off Rough Close** is a **High Risk Receptor** during emergency events including thermal runaway explosive toxic gas discharges and fire. Grenergy continued the favoured 'nothing can go wrong' approach to this and were unable to provide information on risk management plans.

## **Connection to the National Grid:**

Information on the proposals for connection to the National Grid and if licences were required or in place was non-existent. Grenergy are proposing to connect to the Berkswell Substation in Hodgetts Lane which is a considerable distance away. Digging trenches across productive Green Belt agricultural land between the proposed site and the connection point appears to be the first tier approach with trenching alongside local roads the second choice. No information on definitive plans was forthcoming.

Definitive information is necessary for the accuracy of the decision making process. The proposals, at this stage of due process, remain an ill-considered concept with omissions and anomalies unable to be satisfied by application of Conditions.

## **Local Residents and Communities:**

The hamlet of residential properties on Benton Green Lane close to the proposed access route are shown on one of Grenergy's site layout plans but nevertheless appear to remain a mystery to the Grenergy representatives, as does the narrow and tortuous nature of the lane.

Residents living on Benton Green Lane and in the wider local community are at considerable risk should thermal runaway occur especially from airborne toxic gas discharges. The safety, health and wellbeing of local residents has not been recognised or given appropriate consideration. Similarly residents and others living and working on Tanners Lane are equally at risk given the close proximity to the proposed site.

The scout camp and users of local Public Rights of Way are similarly in danger. No consideration has been given to the safety of these groups. We understand the proposed BESS off Tanners Lane has been approved with a connection into the Tanners Lane Substation.

The cumulative impacts of two BESS facilities in such close proximity is unacceptable and puts undue pressure on the local roads and lanes in the area.

The dangers of exponential increases in heavy commercial and other traffic during construction and after completion is unsustainable. Transport and Highway reports inevitably minimise and discount safety as an issue, however, every additional vehicle puts unwelcome pressure on already overcrowded and pressurised local road and lane infrastructure. It has to stop somewhere.

Local residents, your taxpayers, are the losers with their daily lives and amenities under threat from projects and dangers not fully understood. The long running disruption to local lanes, roads and highways during construction and the noise from cooling fans and 'hum' from transformers during operation will be intrusive. Living in an atmosphere of danger will affect the daily lives of residents and the wider community.

The potential to lose the peaceful enjoyment of their homes and possessions are not, have not, been appropriately considered or given the weighty material planning consideration they deserve.

### **Battery Storage Proposals for BES facility off Benton Green Lane:**

Greenergy could not tell us where batteries were being sourced or if they used 'second-life' life batteries, which are often the ones that have cell damage and can cause overheating, where redundant batteries would be recycled or where the lithium, cobalt and other dangerous substances were sourced. They discounted noise from the industrial sized banks of fans required to cool the batteries and disperse heat from constant charging and discharging of electricity during operation, as an issue. The 'hum' from the transformers will exacerbate the issue. Batteries will charge during periods of light demand and discharge during peak use. The 'circular' movement of electricity as an operational process is very inefficient.

***We sourced a 'Research Briefing' from the House of Commons Library entitled 'Battery Energy Storage Systems', published for the information and to support the work of MPs and another entitled 'Delivery of electricity grid updates'.***

They contains many Government related concerns about lack of manufacturing capacity, delays to upgrading the National Grid, the questionable published timescale for upgrade completion, lack of grid connections, the role of critical minerals and resilience of supply (the UK is almost complete dependence on imports), lack of recycling facilities for spent batteries, battery fire prevention, lack of investment and research into alternative and more sustainable power production etc. etc. etc. They are an educational and surprisingly forthcoming read.

The Fire Chiefs Council are in the process of producing an updated Guidance for 'Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage System Planning' which should be published by the end of the year.

We know climate change has reached a tipping point and that sustainability in many aspects of our lives is vital. The production of sustainable energy is an essential component of mitigating the now obvious impacts of the climate change emergency. However, losing productive agricultural green belt land in UK food production (BMV) for a concept project is not the answer. Preserving the character and ecology of our rural landscape environment together with the benefits it provides for recreation important for

mental and general health far outweigh living alongside a project which contains huge risk to health and wellbeing. This BESS project fails to provide definitive information in supporting documents which are wholly based on a conceptual 'nothing can go wrong' scenario.

The Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Local Access Forum recognise and champion sustainability but until every new build home and commercial building installs solar panels as a mandatory requirement for planning approval and Government retrospectively fund, or partially fund, retrofitting of solar panels we will continue to fight for conservation and preservation of our productive agricultural green belt agricultural land and for the net zero and carbon sequestration benefits producing food in the UK brings. Maintaining the Green Belt's rich and irreplaceable ecology, ecosystems and biodiversity is a win for us and a win for future generations.

The Government recognises the unwelcome approach favoured by developers in submitting financially speculative applications for renewable energy projects which have no realistic or altruistic component. The government recognises 'zombie projects' which clog up the planning process at huge cost to the public purse. The policy to end 'first come, first served' and cut waiting times for electricity grid connections was brought in by Ofgem in November 2024. We question its success as the numbers of BESS projects proposed primarily on Green Belt land, appear to be increasing at pace. The use of brownfield sites and recycling derelict and other urban land has spectacularly failed with developers choosing the easiest and most profitable way - open irreplaceable green belt.

We paraphrase from your recently published Draft Solihull Rural Settlement Hierarchy Assessment Report, page 1 - 1.3, 1.4 and 1.7 which refers to the purposes Green Belt land serves:

*This application cannot be argued as 'grey belt' designation; IN any event NPPF footnote 7 precludes it due to the huge negative impact the development will have on local highways and lanes and the wider highway networks all of which are totally unsuitable to take construction traffic and other traffic associated with major projects. Other associated issues caused by this proposed development confirm it to be the 'wrong site in the wrong place'. The site is adjacent to the boundary between Solihull and Coventry on Tanners Lane, the Bannerbrook estate and Banner Lane at **the narrowest point in the Meriden Gap within the Arden Landscape.***

*Purpose (a) is to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas*

*Purpose (b) is to prevent neighbouring towns merging*

*Purpose (d) is to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns*

**1.7 states:**

*This is particularly relevant in Solihull where the gaps between settlements in the Green Belt are considered important, including the vital strategic gap between Birmingham/Solihull and Coventry, known as the Meriden Gap. One of the key challenges in the current Local Plan and the recently withdrawn LP is to maintain the gap between key settlements to ensure the integrity of the Green Belt in Solihull and to ensure it contributes to the purpose of the Green Belt.*

153 NPPF:

*When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness and permanence. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*

**We do not believe Exceptional or Very Special Circumstances have been demonstrated which outweigh the inappropriateness of the development to be constructed within the Green belt on productive agricultural land in UK food production (BMV).**

The Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum ask Solihull Borough Council and its Planning Committee to **REFUSE** application **PL/2025/01145** for all of the weighty material considerations described above.

We request a confirmation of receipt and details of how many objections to the project have been received. We believe this major proposal should be determined on the public platform of a planning committee meeting.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Sheila Cooper'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending from the bottom of the name.

**Sheila Cooper**

Acting Chair the Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum

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