

Proposed Solar Farm To The West Of Berrington, Shrewsbury, Shropshire.

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My name is Dr Simon Briercliffe, I'm a historian and museum researcher. My wife and I moved to Cantlop from near Dudley in November last year, principally because of the panoramic view of the valley from our bedroom window. We quickly took to sitting in bed with our coffee each morning taking it in, and we walk our dog all over the area to enjoy the views and watch the wildlife. The proposed solar farm would fundamentally change the area we fell in love with. I strongly support a complete transition to renewable energy, but there are better ways to do this without the negative impacts on historic, natural and community environments that this scheme has.

One of my key concerns about the proposal is its impact on the historic environment. While researching our new home I found an advert from 1915 advertising stays in "farmhouse apartments" at William Allwood's farm in Cantlop, which he described as the "prettiest part of Shropshire", which certainly rings true to me. The beautiful landscape, the rural economy and the deep history of the place are all connected in a way you simply can't replicate in an urban area like that from which we moved. I want to outline here why the whole valley is of historic importance, why that's important for considering what constitutes the "setting" for heritage assets, and how that impacts on things like public rights of way and tourism.

Heritage, agriculture and the rural landscape

Shropshire Council's archaeological report suggests that there's a strong chance of Roman or prehistoric remains on the proposal site, and there's documentary evidence of agricultural use since Domesday. This makes sense: it's a fertile south-facing valley, which is why it's still high-grade agricultural land. It was mostly common land, so it wasn't limited to just rich farmers - it was for the whole community. The heritage assets in the area reflect that: there are fine farmhouses and the community mill, but also excellent examples of ordinary farm-workers' cottages. A century ago Shropshire Council created a number of smallholdings here to enable new farmers to start up and to maintain the area as an agricultural community. William Allwood was one of those, as was Charles Ashley, whose family still farm the fields either side of the Brook. As such it has avoided some of the industrial methods of farming that have caused widespread biodiversity loss elsewhere, and the reason we can watch deer and red kites in the fields, listen to skylarks from our garden, or try and spot otters and ospreys by the Brook, is because of this history. The proposed solar farm would feel like a significant break in this ancient link between the local community and the land.

Heritage and setting: Cantlop Bridge

Given how visible the proposal site is from multiple rights of way, I think it's important that the broadest possible definition of "setting" be applied to heritage assets in the vicinity. The area's most protected monument is Cantlop Bridge, built by Thomas Telford in 1813. Previously this crossing was just a ford - the bridge was actually at Cantlop Mill, and was known as Church Bridge because it enabled parishioners from Cantlop to follow the lane through the proposal site to attend church. Telford's bridge was funded by public subscription, so it was a community asset even then. It's now the best

example of Telford's cast-iron bridge engineering remaining in Shropshire, it's Grade II* listed and is maintained by English Heritage. It forms part of a signposted tourist route, and there's a picnic bench there to stop and enjoy the setting. I was surprised by the dismissal of impacts on the setting of the bridge in the appellant's statement and by the lack of consultation with Historic England, which is usually statutory for Grade II* listings like this. The proposal site is about 200 metres from the Bridge, and would be visible for at least half the year, which I think constitutes a very clear negative impact on its setting.

Public rights of way

As new residents of Cantlop, we've been exploring local footpaths and rights of way. We walk up to Cantlop Cross or down to the mill every day, and we use the paths around Berrington which overlook the proposal site. We really value the space, the greenery, the benefits to our mental and physical wellbeing, and the connection they give us to the land and its history. There are beautiful views over the valley and towards the Shropshire Hills which more than justify that assertion that it's the "prettiest part of Shropshire." The appellant's statement of the impact on viewpoints falls far short of reality. In fact, the solar farm would be unavoidable from the paths and roads around Cantlop and Berrington. Even the additional planting would in practice reduce the beautiful views from these paths and create a more enclosed and less spacious feel.

Heritage tourism

Shropshire was recently nominated as the first-ever "tourist destination to watch" in Britain by ABTA, because it contains "some of the country's most beautiful landscapes, towns and villages." The old turnpike road via Cantlop Bridge now forms part of a

brown-signposted route from Shrewsbury to Acton Burnell Castle, where the first parliament to fully represent the Commons was held in 1283. It also takes in Pitchford's amazing Tudor hall and the oldest treehouse in the world, and you can continue on to Condover Hall, the English Heritage chapel at Langley, or the oldest pub in Shropshire in Cardington. We're a stone's throw from other heritage attractions of national importance like Attingham Park, Wroxeter, the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site and Shrewsbury itself, and there are walking and cycle routes including those promoted by the Council nearby. It *is* possible to build solar sites without detracting from the feel of a coherent historic landscape that would impress visitors, as at Boreton and Berriewood. But *this* site would have a strong negative impact on visitors' impressions of the area. Domestic tourism is hugely important for Shropshire, and any risk to it should be carefully considered.

This development affects the setting of important heritage assets in the immediate and wider area. It would make the rights of way in the area much less pleasant for residents; it would negatively impact the economic benefits of rural heritage tourism in Shropshire; and it would completely change the historic character of the Cound Brook valley for a generation (I will be in my 80s by the time this solar farm would be dismantled, which doesn't feel very temporary to me). Heritage is more than just historic buildings and short-term impacts though. These assets act as a vantage point from which to learn about our shared history, and visitors can learn to enjoy, protect and improve their own communities and environments in the present. I hope that our valley can be understood in this way, and that alternatives to this development can be found to protect it for future generations.