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Dear Mr Penfold,

Request for call-in under Section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), West Dorset District Council Planning Application 1/D/12/001664, Rampisham Down, DORCHESTER DT2 0HS.

We respectfully request that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government issues a direction under Section 77 of The Town and Country Act 1990 (as amended) requiring West Dorset District Council (WDDC) to refer the above application to him for determination.

At a meeting of the Development Control Committee on 15 January 2015, members of the committee voted to give consent to the application, against the planning officers' recommendation and Natural England's advice to refuse consent.

Dorset CPRE is in principle fully supportive of renewable energy but were unable to support this unacceptably damaging proposal. We strongly recommended the planning application be refused in our response dated 11 August 2014.

We wish to draw your attention to two issues:

1. The decision to approve PA 1/D/12/001664 on 15 January 2015 is inconsistent with two earlier decisions to refuse solar parks: PA WD/D/14/001496 on 7 November 2014 and PA WD/D/001307 on 17 December 2014.

PA 1/D/12/001664, registered on 3 December 2012, proposed a 23.86 MW solar park, consisting of 118,280 panels on a 40.50 hectare development site at Rampisham Down, DORCHESTER DT2 0HS, all of which is designated AONB and SSSI. As stated above, the Development Control Committee granted planning permission on 15 January 2015, against the planning officers' recommendation and Natural England's advice to refuse.

PA WD/D/14/001496, registered on 12 June 2014, proposed a 20 MW solar park, consisting of 80,000 panels on a 59.0 hectare development site at Higher Kingston, Stinsford, DORCHESTER DT2 8QE, none of which is designated AONB or SSSI. Natural England did not object to this proposal but the planning officers' recommendation was to refuse. On this occasion, the Development Control Committee agreed with the officers' recommendation and refused planning permission on 7 November 2014.

PA WD/D/14/001307, registered on 17 July 2014, proposed an 8.75 MW solar park, consisting of 35,000 panels on a 17.0 hectare development site at Wardon Hill, DORCHESTER DT2 9PW. The whole of this site is AONB. Natural England objected and the officers' recommendation was to refuse planning permission. On this occasion also,

the Development Control Committee agreed with the officers' recommendation and refused permission on 17 December 2014.

It is accepted that these are only brief descriptions of the proposals. However, we would ask you to consider that they provide sufficient evidence to suggest that there is a case for investigation of the soundness of WDDC's Development Control Committee's decision to grant permission for PA 1/D/12/001664.

2. The decision to approve PA 1/D/12/001664 on 15 January 2015 did not take into account a less damaging alternative provided by PA WD/D/14/002974, registered on 19 November 2014 and currently awaiting a planning decision.

On 24 March 2014, Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service received a request from British Solar Renewables (developers for PA 1/D/12/001664) for advice on a solar photovoltaic installation proposed to be sited on the Rampisham Estate north of the A356.

The advice provided by Natural England was encouraging enough for British Solar Renewables to submit, on 29 July 2014, a request to WDDC for a screening opinion and subsequently, on 17 November 2014, a planning application, WD/D/14/002974.

PA WD/D/14/002974 proposes an 18.60* MW solar park, consisting of 71,544 panels on a 38.13 hectare development site on the Rampisham Estate, DORCHESTER DT2 0HS . Its location is on the north side of the A356 (Dorchester to Crewkerne Road) directly opposite the site of PA 1/D/12/001664 on the south side of the A356. The whole of this site is AONB but not SSSI. A significant difference between the two sites is that the one to the south is rare acid grassland and the one to the north is arable land.

The following is an extract from the Summary of Advice provided by Natural England:

“Natural England considers that while the Rampisham Estate site has some specific areas of landscape and visual sensitivity there is nevertheless more scope to accommodate a solar development on this site than on the neighbouring Rampisham Down. Furthermore, subject to the current advice and provided that the onsite and offsite landscape mitigation measures identified as essential in the current paper are secured in full, then we consider that the Rampisham Estate site would in terms of its landscape and nature conservation impacts provide an acceptable alternative site for a large scale solar farm in this locality.”

This extract suggests that PA WD/D/14/002974 could provide an acceptable alternative to PA 1/D/12/001664, consistent with NPPF paragraph 116, second bullet point.

Yours sincerely,

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* 18.60 MW is the installed capacity that would normally be reported in DECC's Renewable Energy Planning Database, that is, it is the product of the number of panels (71,544) and the panel rating (260 W). 15.5 MW, reported elsewhere, is the installed capacity if power losses incurred at the installation's electricity sub station are taken into account. The source of this information is Rory Casey, CAD Designer, British Solar Renewables, Higher Hill Farm, Butleigh Hill, Butleigh, GLASTONBURY BA6 8TW (Tel. 01458 224900).