



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 October 2025

by Jonathan Bore MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 31st October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/J4525/W/25/3365311

**Land at Usworth House Farm, Peareth Hall Road, Springwell,
Gateshead NE9 7NT**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Boom Power Ltd against the decision of Sunderland City Council.
 - The application Ref is 22/02803/FU4.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a renewable energy generating solar farm comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays together with substation, tower connection, transformer stations, switch room, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the contribution the scheme would make towards the generation of renewable energy; the effect of the proposal on the Green Belt and the landscape; and the loss of productive agricultural land.

Reasons

3. As regards the generation of renewable energy, the proposal would have a number of important benefits. The site provides a large potential area for solar power generation and benefits from an agreement to provide a grid connection. Sites with such locational advantages are not easily found. The development would generate a substantial amount of energy from a renewable source: on the appellant's figures it would enable a 12,500 tonne reduction to be achieved in carbon dioxide emissions per annum and would have enough generating capacity to supply the approximate energy needs of 11,000 homes a year.
4. In this regard the scheme would align with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and helping to support the transition to net zero by 2050, and it would also further the aims of strategic priority 9 of the Sunderland Core Strategy Development Plan, adopted in 2020, which seeks to adapt and minimise the impact of climate change by reducing carbon emissions and maximising the use of low carbon energy solutions.
5. However, the site lies within a narrow tract of Green Belt which is surrounded by major urban areas. This is readily apparent from the site; Sunderland, Washington, South Shields and parts of Tyneside can all be seen. To the north are Wrekenton and Leam Lane on the southern edge of Gateshead. To the east and south-east

are the A194M and the northern edges of Washington. Springwell itself lies within this narrow gap. This land plays an exceptionally important role in maintaining a coherent settlement structure within the Tyne and Wear area, providing a green breathing space and separating major areas of development. It strongly fulfils three of the five purposes of the Green Belt: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; and to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. It is not grey belt. The site may constitute only a small proportion of the overall Green Belt area but, being surrounded by major urban areas, the integrity of this part of the Green Belt is very vulnerable to incursion and encroachment by development, including the kind of scheme now proposed.

6. The proposed solar farm is inappropriate development in the Green Belt; it does not fall within the National Planning Policy Framework's list of exceptions. It would occupy a substantial and very visible part of the gap between the urban areas, replacing open, green agricultural land with extensive areas of manufactured structures for a period of 40 years. The fact that the development would be located in the central part of the gap and would not be contiguous with any of the built up areas does not make any difference; it would appear as development sprawl and encroachment into the Green Belt. It would cause significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt and undermine its integrity.
7. As regards landscape and visual impact, the fields on which the solar farm would be sited are part of an attractive arable landscape which generally slopes away eastwards from a low ridge and provides a wide panorama towards the north-east. The Sunderland Wind and Solar Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2015) advises that the sensitivity of this landscape for large solar farms is high, and the impact of solar development should be carefully considered with regard to the break between the settlements of Gateshead and Washington. This pleasant area of countryside, referred to as the Springwell Rise Landscape Character Area, is crossed by a network of public footpaths, most of which are very well used and provide excellent open views. It is a valuable open asset for the people who live in Springwell and the surrounding urban areas.
8. The solar installation would harm the character of this landscape and its value as open countryside. It would be particularly harmful when experienced from the footpath network on the site's north-western edge; from parts of the former Bowes Railway, a scheduled monument, now a cycle route; and from the footpath network in the west of the site. It would spoil the recreational value of the footpath network. In this regard it would be contrary to policies NE9 and NE11 of the Sunderland Core Strategy which seek to protect distinctive landscape characteristics and views. The scheme would be contrary to Policy WWE1 of the Sunderland Core Strategy (adopted 2020), which indicates that decentralised, renewable and low-carbon energy development should be located and designed to avoid unacceptable significant adverse impacts on landscape, wildlife, heritage assets and amenity.
9. The development would also cause the loss of productive agricultural land for 40 years. A minor proportion of this is classified Grade 3a. This would conflict with Policy NE12 of the Core Strategy and adds some limited weight to the negative aspects of the scheme.

10. In conclusion, it is acknowledged that the scheme would bring significant benefits in renewable energy production and would support the objective of reducing carbon emissions and moving towards net zero. However, it would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and it would cause significant harm to the openness and integrity of a particularly vulnerable part of the Green Belt, which in this location plays an important role in separating settlements and avoiding encroachment and sprawl. The scheme would also harm the character of the landscape and the enjoyment of the countryside and footpath network, and would cause the loss of productive agricultural land. The harm caused by the development would significantly outweigh the benefits and in consequence, the development would conflict with Sunderland Core Strategy Development Plan Policy NE6. Very special circumstances do not exist to allow this inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Other Matters

11. Discussion has taken place between the Appellant and the Council on the best means of mitigating the impact on birds and providing for and monitoring biodiversity net gain. I have taken note of the suggestions for conditions and the submitted unilateral obligations. However, given the above conclusions, these matters, including any potential biodiversity net gain, make no difference to the outcome of this appeal.
12. I have also considered the appeal decisions and judgments submitted by the Appellant, but each site and proposal is different, and each case must be considered on its merits.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Jonathan Bore

INSPECTOR