



Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

Restoring 70 miles of canal and towpath for the benefit of local communities, wildlife and leisure.

Patron: Her Majesty the Queen

Wiltshire Planning Department
County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
BA14 8JN

27th May 2026

FAO Mr Oliver Phippen

Dear Sirs,

Consultation on PL/2026/02160 - Solar Farm at Studley Grange Landfill Site

The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust regrets that this submission is late because the applicant failed to notify the trust despite it being a neighbour.

The Trust **objects** to the application on the ground that it gives inadequate consideration to the safeguarding of the canal and its benefits to users.

The canal is shown on the application drawings and is referred to in several documents, but not always correctly. The canal is shown correctly on the Site Plan within the southern boundary of the land owned by the applicant but is not labelled. The Trust has a long lease on the canal corridor from the landowner Biffa Group and is responsible for its restoration, operation and maintenance.

In fact, the canal was restored by the Trust in the period 2014 to 2018 and is maintained with a permissive public access to the towpath pending restoration of adjacent lengths when it will become a fully operational waterway and blue/green corridor. The towpath has been restored with environmental improvements and interpretation boards.

The towpath is popular with walkers for its peaceful environmental qualities. It is possible to walk on the towpath from Marlborough Road in Royal Wootton Bassett to the east end of the Studley Grange length. Pending more restoration, a temporary footpath links the end of the restored canal across the landfill site to join path LTRE59 and thus it is possible to continue into Swindon. This length is a part of the Trust's strategic programme to restore fully the route between Royal Wootton Bassett and Swindon. The creation of a towpath suitable for walking and cycling is top priority and will provide an active travel route between the towns which does not exist now.

The boundary of the proposed solar panel field is approximately parallel to the canal for 600 m and about 30 to 40m away. It is likely to be visible on the skyline above the canal for about 800 m of the walk.

The Heritage Statement references the Wiltshire Local Plan Core Policy 58 Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment which includes in its scope non-listed heritage. However, the Heritage Statement only deals with listed properties in the area and does not recognise the heritage value of the canal. Wiltshire policy is to safeguard and support development of the canals in the county, recognising their heritage, environmental and other benefits (Core Policy 54 Wiltshire's Canals).

The Landscape and Visual Assessment report rates the view from the towpath as medium magnitude and medium sensitivity resulting in a moderate adverse effect (Para. 5.3.15 and Table 2) and hence requiring no mitigation. People enjoying the towpath walk will be there to look around at their surroundings and scenery and not focused on other matters, which is the guidance for medium sensitivity. Therefore, applying the LVIA Guidance in Appendix 1 the sensitivity should be rated as high. The impact on walkers will be substantial. This evaluation should be upgraded and mitigation proposed.

The Policy Statement says in Para. 7.3.10 of the chapter on Ecology and Diversity : *“Overall, the development is not expected to result in significant impacts on bats provided the recommended mitigation and enhancement measures are implemented”*. The recommended measures include (Par.7.4.2): *“A minimum 20m buffer between the development and canal enhanced with scrub planting and management”*. The Proposed Illustrative Landscaping Plan does not show any landscaping other than the restored grassland within the immediate area of the solar panels and therefore the environmental recommendation has not been adopted.

The Transport Statement and the Construction Management Plan both indicate the only access to the site for heavy vehicles is via the lane connecting the landfill site to Wharf Road / Hay Lane but do not comment on the use of this lane by walkers from the canal towpath and other routes. The lane is designated as a public right of way LTRE59. There is no separation of vehicles and pedestrians which presents a hazard to pedestrians. This needs further consideration.

The Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Report concludes that the solar installation will not have a significant impact on the rate of run-off from the landfill site which is managed by a drainage system installed as a part of the landfill site restoration. However, the Preliminary Ecology Report says in Para. 4.13 that the steep south-facing slope above the canal shows plant growth more typical of wet pasture. The Trust is concerned that this indicates a lack drainage on the slope above the canal which could be a contributory cause to the failure of the gabion wall alongside the fence line. The Trust therefore seeks confirmation that the site drainage scheme has been completed according to the approved drawings.

The proposed development is detrimental to the Wilts & Berks Canal and to its enjoyment by its users. The Trust is most concerned at the visual impact of the development on the enjoyment of the canal and its towpath by members of the public walking along it. The view of the solar panels on the skyline over a distance of 800m will significantly degrade the experience. It is therefore proposed that a visual screen be provided by way of a substantial hedgerow that will screen the view of the panels from the towpath but not be high enough to interfere with the solar horizon from the panels. This screen should be

located at the bottom of the southern slope and inside the fence above the canal. This feature will also assist meeting the recommendations on planting to enhance the environment for bats. The landscaping plan should be amended to include this feature or a condition applied to the consent if granted. The applicant should also give further consideration to the other concerns expressed above.

The Trust will withdraw its objection if the applicant provides satisfactory evidence and commitment to improvements to the scheme.

Yours Faithfully
Rod Hacker



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