

I am writing to object to the planning application SCC/0045/23SE on the following grounds:

I live on Silver Street in a Grade II listed heritage property. The oldest parts of the house formed the original Silver Street farmhouse and is said to date back some 600 years.

Sparrow Hall Cottage is on the western edge of Withersfield, a village with conservation area status, which borders Haverhill. We enjoy the benefits of living in a rural environment and have believed that the West Suffolk Local Plan (previously the St Edmundsbury Local Plan) provides us with some safeguards against inappropriate urban or industrial intrusive developments. The site of the proposed industrial development is on land which is designated as agricultural within the countryside and we believe should therefore be protected from such developments.

The Withersfield Parish is a mix of conservation village, isolated historic farms and heritage buildings and an area of modern family housing bordering a light industrial/research park. No part of the Parish has been considered appropriate to be zoned for development of industrial, waste management or power generation plants.

Our house sits amongst agricultural land and ancient woodlands which have been much the same for hundreds of years. From the rear of our home, to the south and west are currently uninterrupted views of fields, woodland and the hills across Essex and South Cambridgeshire. Only to the east is there any sign of modern development, and the Epicentre is visible above the tree line.

The proposal for the biodigester will mean that 5 fermentation tanks, each higher than the Epicentre will blight the current historic views. The site at Spring Grove Farm is significantly closer to Sparrow Hall Cottage than the Epicentre and is at a more elevated level. The applicant claims that the plant will have minimal impact on our property and that any impact does not result in harm. This is not the case. The plant will be visible and only partially screened by deciduous trees and a hedgerow. It will be even more intrusive during autumn and winter months when trees lose their leaves. The proposed gas flare-off stack will be even higher than the massive tanks and will form a permanent blight and when in use will impact significantly on the enjoyment of our home.

The Environmental Impact Assessment wrongly claims neither impact nor harm but with no evidence to support this assertion. Indeed, even the evidence presented is flawed. A photograph (plate 16) on page 44 of the Desktop Heritage Assessment document purports to show a view from Silver Street farmhouse (our home) towards the Spring Grove Farm from our home. It does not. The photo is taken from Horseheath Road about 100 metres to the north east of our home and looking towards Howe Wood to the east. This is disingenuous and must call into question the overall validity of the assessment of impact on our home.

We breed rare breed sheep, continuing an historic tradition for Withersfield ("wethers field" – a place where wethers- castrated male lambs are grazed) and are hugely enthusiastic and supportive of the agricultural heritage and current practices of our parish. We are also supportive of the need for diversification on farms, and of the benefits of making modern farming "greener". However, we believe that this proposal does not represent a positive diversification nor a contribution to making farming greener. This facility will remove valuable grade 2 agricultural land from productive use and also mean that more land currently used for production of food and feedstuffs will instead be turned over to silage and "break-crops" grown specifically to feed the biodigester. In addition, it is clear that to justify a plant of this scale will require huge quantities of silage material being trucked in from distant farms. Some 20,000 tons of poultry waste too is planned to be trucked in. None of this is consistent with contributing to making agriculture greener. All of this will generate additional greenhouse damaging emissions from the vast quantity of HGV movements to and from the plant

Biodigestors have a history of leaks and explosions. I refer to a report of the Environment Agency into accidents, incidents, leakages and explosions in biodigestors produced in 2019. They also produce toxic and odorous emissions and generate noise from the various processes on site. The applicant of this development indicates that they may operate it 24 hours a day. Such facilities should be located in a remote location where they will not impact on areas of housing or on sensitive environmental areas. In the proposed location we believe that it will pose a real risk to the quiet enjoyment of our home and to the Withersfield community.

The application indicates that there will be a significant increase in vehicle movements on existing farm tracks with upgraded entrances on Silver Street. It is not specific where these upgraded entrances will be, but we fear that this will make current traffic issues on Silver Street worse. Silver Street is a country lane or approximately 4 metres width. It is currently inappropriately used by large HGVs en route to and from warehouses at West Wratting. There are frequent blockages and damage to verges. There is also poor drainage and some flooding caused by run off from fields to the north of Silver Street. We fear that such a massive increase in farm traffic will adversely impact on the road, its condition and pose significant risks to other road users, as well as pedestrians and dog walkers. Silver Street is misused by traffic avoiding heavy traffic on the A1307 and there is a risk that the HGV traffic accessing Spring Grove farm will overspill on to Silver Street and other village lanes.

In summary, I believe that this application must convincingly demonstrate that the benefits far outweigh the harm caused. This is patently not the case and I urge all members of the committee to reject the application.

Terry Rich
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