

Comments on Planning Appeal for Land North of Butterfly Lane, Land Surrounding Hilfield Farm and Land West of Hilfield Lane, Aldenham, Planning appeal Reference: APP/N1920/W/22/3295268

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As I do not live in the immediate vicinity of Aldenham, I was not consulted as part of the original consultation. I only found about the public inquiry by a notice that was posted on public footpaths in the Aldenham Area on 02/11/2022.

My interest in this proposed solar farm development is as a member of the public who walks on public footpaths in this area with a walking group that I organise. The group is called South Herts Hikers and it is based in Potters Bar. It has 1589 members on the social media web site Meetup, <https://www.meetup.com/southhertshikers/> The South Herts Hikers group is affiliated to The Ramblers, Affiliated Club HFC 100. Much of our walking takes place in Hertsmere including the area around Aldenham.

I am also a registered volunteer with Hertfordshire County Council Countryside and Rights of Way Service and I am therefore aware of the Hertfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The views expressed in this submission are my personal views as a member of the public and should not be taken as representing the views of the Ramblers nor of Hertfordshire County Council Countryside and Rights of Way Service.

In objection - Negative effect on existing public footpaths and insufficient new footpaths to enable active travel

The project site is crossed by a network of public footpaths which currently go across open fields or beside hedgerows on Green Belt land. This pleasant rural character of this network of footpaths will be completely changed and their amenity value will be greatly reduced as most will be enclosed by high fences on both sides. The network of public footpaths that cross the project site cannot be considered in isolation. Footpaths link roads together and they must be viewed in the context of all walking routes in the area, whether on footpaths or roads and whether used for leisure walking or for active travel to and from schools or places of work such as Bio Products Laboratory in Dagger Lane. This network of walking routes and active travel routes has suffered severe loss since the 1960s for the following reasons:

- The construction of Hilfield Park Reservoir severed a number of footpaths including Andenham Footpath 8 which ends at an observation platform to the northeast of Hillfield Park Reservoir. Fig 1 shows an extract from Hertfordshire County Council First Definitive Map, Sheet 38, Aldenham, circa 1960, showing the footpath network around Aldenham that existed before Hilfield Park Reservoir was constructed
- The remaining section of Aldenham Footpath 8 across Elstree Aerodrome exists on the HCC Rights of Way map but it is currently impassable due to accesses issues on the 100 metre section north of Hogg Lane.

- Hillfield Lane, Dagger Lane, Butterfly Lane and a 700 metre section of Aldenham Road North of the junction of Dagger Lane have no footway and no safe or feasible walking route along the verge. Due to past road widening and increasing volume and speed of traffic, these roads are not safe or feasible walking routes for leisure walking or active travel and some public footpaths such as Aldenham FP 34, 42 and 43 are effectively dead ends. These issues and others are addressed by the Hertfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2017/18 – 2027/28, July 2017 edition, Ref. [2]
- A public bus service that formerly served Aldenham Country Park, Letchmore Heath and other locations has not run since 2009 but the inactive bus stops are still shown the transport infrastructure map of the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan, see Ref [3] and Fig 3.

The proposed solar farm plan does very little to address this poor connectivity of walking routes and lack of opportunities for active travel. The permissive footpaths are welcome as one implements suggestion Ref 6/63 on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) as follows:

6/63 Aldenham Parish, Aldenham 32, Little Kendal Wood through to Aldenham 31, needs link, Score 2, Add RoW

Other suggestions in the RoWIP are not addressed including suggestion Ref. 6/61, i.e.

6/61, Aldenham, Decent link from south Radlett to Haberdashers Aske's School. Avoiding busy roads, Score 2, Add RoW

This should be addressed by means of a new footpath through the proposed solar farm. Another issue that needs to be addressed is the lack of a safe walking route along Butterfly Lane. RoWIP suggestion 6/59 refers:

6/59 Aldenham Lane. Off road link needed. Wood at side or right path could go in. Important east, west link from Oxhey to Borehamwood and up to Hatfield via Tykeswater, Score 1, Add RoW

Neither does it address the lack of a safe walking route along a 700 m section of Aldenham Road. RoWIP suggestion 6/159 refers:

6/159 Aldenham & Elstree & Borehamwood, Greenway verge improvement, Score 3, Add RoW

Neither does it address the lack of a safe walking route along Hillfield Lane. RoWIP suggestion 6/144 refers:

6/144, Bushey, Greenway verge improvement, Score 3, Add RoW

To conclude, opportunities for active travel in the area of the proposed development has suffered badly with closure of footpaths due to construction of Hilfield Park Reservoir, widening of roads and narrowing of verges, non-maintenance of highway verges, increased speed and volume of traffic. To address these issues, any plan for a solar farm should be conditional on the developer working Hertfordshire County Council Countryside and Rights of Way to implement all the suggestions in the RoWIP that are within the proposed development sites, i.e. providing safe walking routes by means of new footpaths parallel to and close to Hillfield Lane, Aldenham Road and Butterfly Lane plus RoWIP suggestion 6/61. This would complete a walking route from South Radlett to Haberdashers Aske's School. These new footpaths should be dedicated as public rights of way in perpetuity not merely as permissive paths which can be closed in future.

References:

[1] Hertfordshire County Council First Definitive Map, Sheet 38, Aldenham, 1st DM - DM3-38 (Aldenham).pdf provided by the Definitive Map Officer, Countryside & Rights of Way, Environment & Transport, Hertfordshire County Council

[2] Hertfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2017/18 – 2027/28, July 2017 edition

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/countryside-access-and-management/rights-of-way/improvement-plans/rights-of-way-improvement-plan-201718-202728.pdf>

Accessed 03/11/2022

[3] South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan <https://www.swhertsplan.com/> page 56

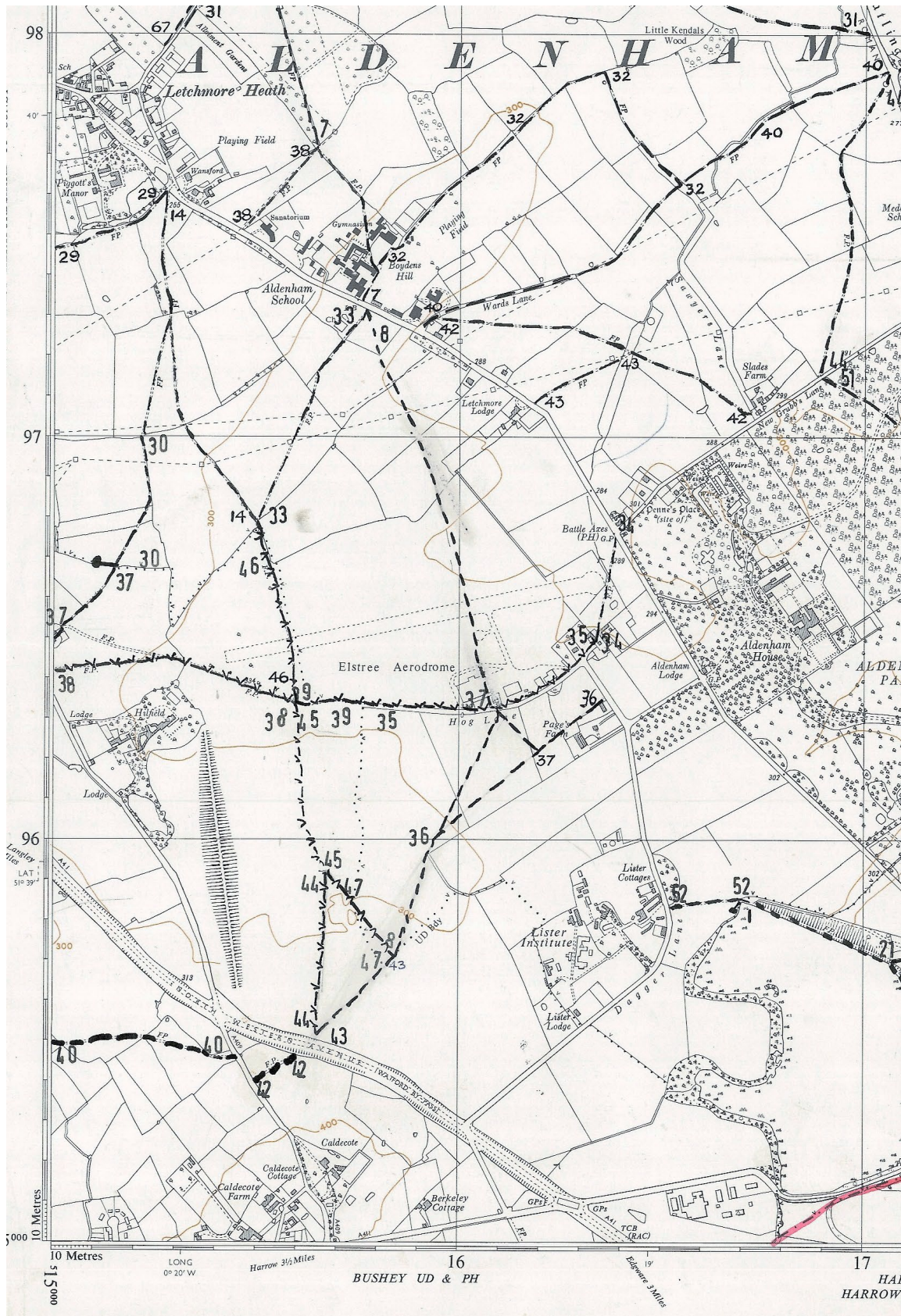


Fig 1. Extract from Hertfordshire County Council First Definitive Map, Sheet 38, Aldenham, circa 1960, showing the footpath network around Aldenham before Hilfield Park Reservoir was constructed

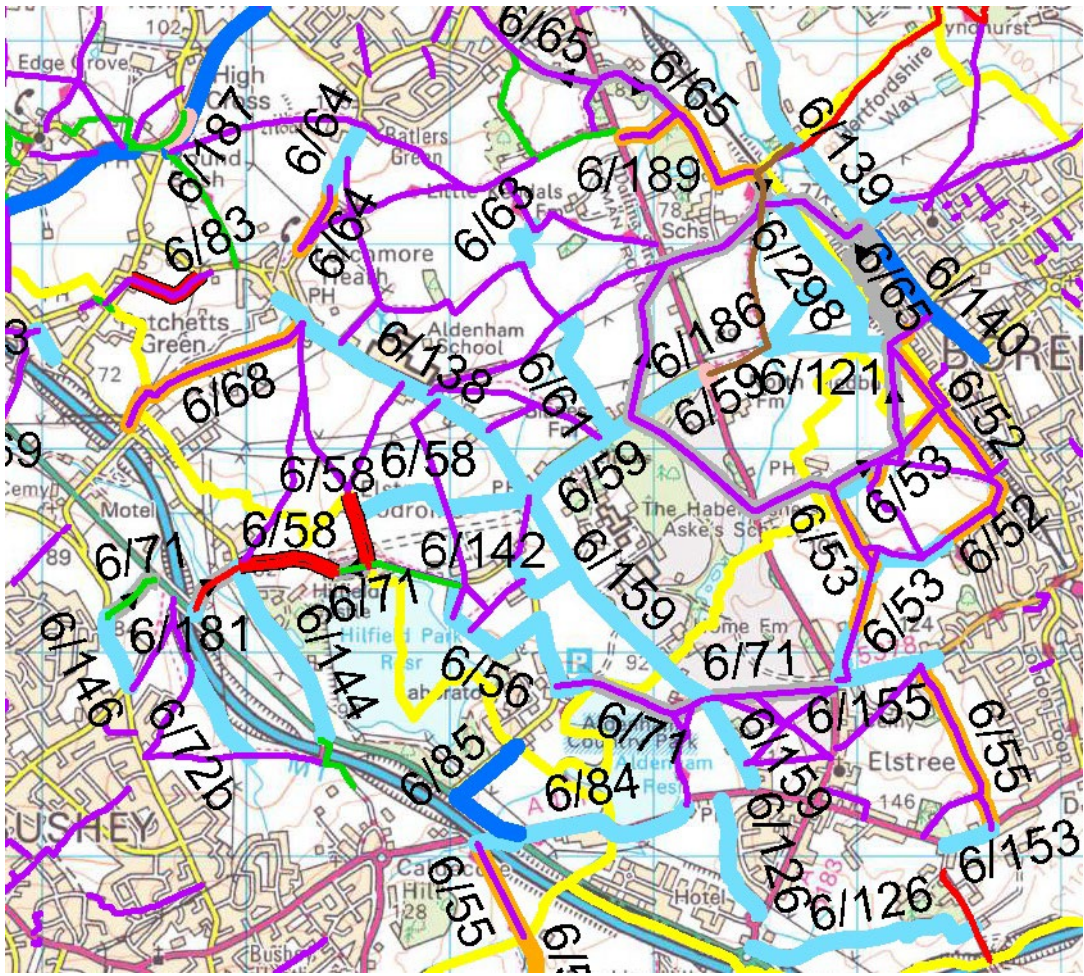


Fig 2. Extract from Hertfordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan Hertsmere Area Suggestions (2017)

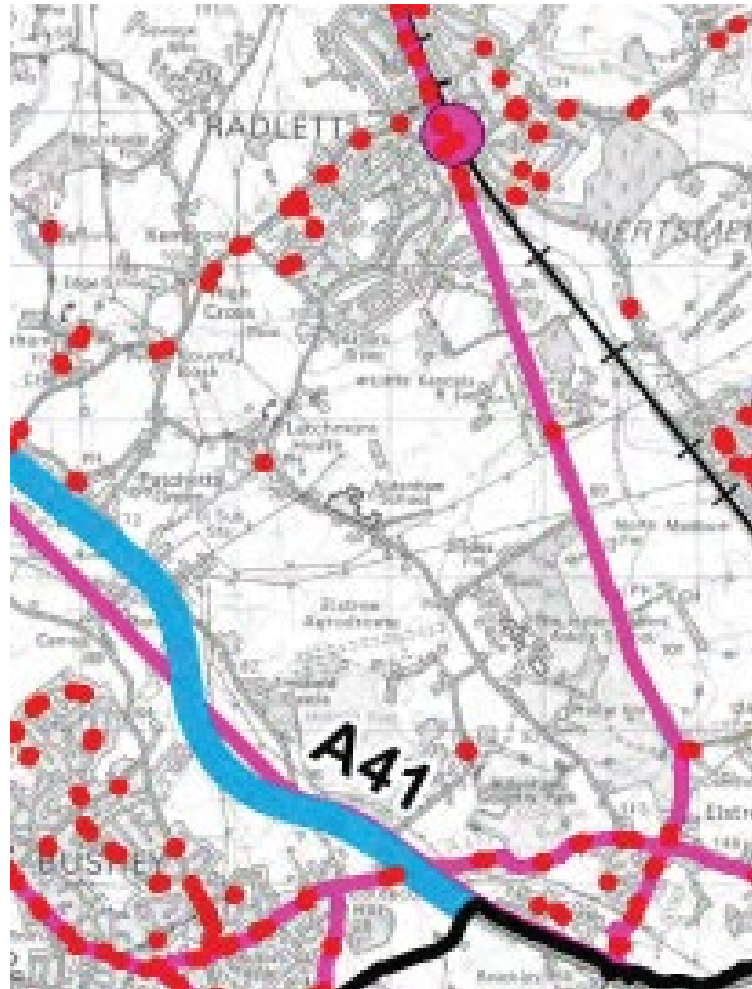


Fig 3. Extract from SW Herts Joint Strategic Plan Scoping Report Page 56. Red dots show bus stops including some that are no longer active.