

26<sup>th</sup> June 2019

## Written Statement

Whilst I don't believe that the Graveney Marshes is the right place for a solar power station for many reasons, I will leave others to expand on those. I disagree fundamentally with the chosen location and scale of the development in combination. I am particularly concerned about section 14 of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report – Non-Technical Summary headed 'Access and Traffic'.

I would like to set out my thoughts and vision for a cycling and walking infrastructure throughout the solar power station and surrounding area's which will encourage visitors to the area and open up the space for local families and for those from further afield where they can cycle with their families safely and enjoy the outdoors and keeping fit and active.

The issues I raise are two-fold:

1. Firstly there is a great opportunity to open up the 1,000 acre site to give access to cyclists, walkers and horse riders. There is currently nothing in the plans from the developer which gives back to the communities which are going to have to live with this huge industrial plant on their doorstep.

My biggest fear is that it will go ahead on the current proposed terms which do not include anything which is beneficial to the local communities who will have to live with it.

What I wish to speak about is my vision for the land to be opened up to give access to walkers and cyclists. It seems to be a golden opportunity for Government to set the bar in terms of expectations on developers of such large scale schemes (of which there will likely be many more!) to provide something amazing for communities.

There is already a national cycle network which goes through Graveney, although it currently uses the main road through the village to Seasalter. This is an opportunity to divert that cycle path using existing farm tracks so that an off road route can be created from Faversham to Seasalter. A network of paths and tracks could provide an asset to the local area and encourage families from both Faversham and Seasalter as well as from further afield to visit the area, in line with local policy to support tourism.

Opening up the land to such uses will be invaluable and will encourage wildlife exploration, fitness, tourism and wellbeing. It is an opportunity that should not be missed.

And with one of the big issues locally being the effect on the local roads of the through traffic during construction and potentially ongoing, this is an opportunity to keep our cyclists safe without them needing to use that main road which is currently part of the national cycle infrastructure.

The only thing that the developer is offering currently is one permissive byway which means, as I understand it, that it can be closed at the landowners discretion for up to 364 days per year. This is not acceptable and it should be a proper public right of way in perpetuity. In addition the developers are actually proposing to close off a current access route which has been used for many, many years by locals, walkers and cyclists. This is the northern part of the farm access track which heads west at the junction with the footpath as you cross the marshes. I have raised this with the developers during consultation and this has been ignored. My proposal would be to upgrade the existing farm access track including this section.

There are already farm tracks and paths throughout the site and the layout of the solar panels lends itself to have trackways throughout as there are batches of panels with spaces in between. As I understand it solar panels will not be erected underneath any overhead cables and therefore this also provides an opportunity to put in a pathway that would link up to the developers proposed permissive footpath – this is the part which runs closest to the southern boundary of the solar power station proposal. This gives a variety of different circular routes for people of all abilities.

Swale Borough Council is currently undertaking a review into cycle access throughout the borough and this could be a way of vastly improving the cycle network and making it safer, at zero cost to the council and ultimately the taxpayer.

It is also important to make sure that it is accessible to all including the disabled and therefore the gates need to be suitable for this group as well as cyclists and walkers.

I have worked up a draft plan for this network of paths and cycleways which I would like to share and strongly believe that the developer should be made to fund this infrastructure.

2. Secondly there is a need to create a walkway along Head Hill Road and Seasalter Road between the village of Goodnestone and through Graveney. This is for safety reasons as the traffic during the construction will make it impossible to walk along this already dangerous stretch of road. This will mean families can't walk to school, local residents can't get to church or to the pub or village hall safely without using their cars (if they have one). Current footpaths ZR490 and ZR492 which go through a number of fields and over a railway line are not suitable for the elderly, those with pushchairs or during the winter months when it is very muddy. There is a need for a footway which runs alongside the road.

The developers are in denial that the increase in traffic will be detrimental but given that there will be a lorry, truck or van passing through approximately every 2 minutes between 9am and 5pm (according to their access and traffic information provided - 75 HGV's and 48 LGV's could be required to access the site per day, making approximately 250 movements in and out of the site) - this is an extraordinary amount of additional traffic for a small village lane with no walkway.

A related concern for me is the noise, vibration and pollution created by the additional traffic in the centre of the villages, particularly with the village school being right on the side

of the road and the school playing fields being opposite on the other side of the road. The safety of our children is imperative and there needs to be mitigation of the significant risks to them posed by this development. There is nothing in the proposal which even acknowledges these things and the developers have not been in contact with the school as a stakeholder during the entire process so far.

The villages of Goodnestone and Graveney are linked together in name but not linked together physically and this is an ideal opportunity for this to be rectified to support the residents as well as for safety reasons.

The developer has shown no regard to the local community in their plans, particularly in comparison to London Array, which was proposing a much smaller scale development. They had a more thoughtful approach to the local community when the substation was built, providing a number of interventions which benefited the local community and helped ensure that safety was the number one priority – such as providing the school car park and a crossing patrol outside the school as well as a village fund set up to benefit the community.

The developers in this case have stated from the start that there is not enough money to give anything back to the community, but this is not good enough. They have an obligation to support locals when they are obliterating a local area in such a manner as this project proposes. Even safety does not appear to be taken seriously and I challenge them to turn this around and consider being pioneers in offering something positive for the community.