

I have been chairman of Essendine Village Hall come over 30 years. During that time we have built a wonderful community facility which benefits all those that live in the village and in surrounding areas. Never was it a more important building than during the Covid pandemic of 2020- 22. Mental health issues were of great concern in the village, and it was very important with many people struggling. Although we live in the most beautiful countryside, this could soon be denied to us through the siting of a 2000+ acre solar farm, which will completely engulf the village of Essendine and other nearby settlements.

During Covid lockdowns we were able to take long walks along the bridleways and paths of this lovely area; where we were able to see all the wonderful wildlife that this part of the country has to offer. It is a proven fact that mentally, people are better for going out and exercising and obviously walking cycling or horseriding, were the safest ways of doing this. Through lockdown, we were able to offer the village hall facilities for forms of exercise and mental well-being, I fear again, we will have to offer the facilities to run sessions to help people deal with the mental strain that they are going through, whilst trying to grapple with the enormity of this proposed solar farm. Should permission be granted, our roads will be gridlocked for much of the day with heavy vehicles, which are too big and too wide to be on the small roads; beautiful areas of the roadside verges will be ruined by vehicles that have to mount them to pass this or to access turning corners at different locations. We have been so lucky with the carpets of Cowslips which you can see around the verges with some of the verges being designated as SSSI sites in the past. There have been glowworms up along the Pickworth Drift, the road running alongside the railway line, and this is one area where solar panels are planning to be installed, so that the narrow road currently outlined for access to this site would be ruined and the verges churned up.

Compulsory Acquisition is a major concern to the myself and the Management Committee at the village hall. Should this permission be granted, contractors would have the right to deny us the full access to this facility and the adjoining open spaces, including the children's playground. If the plan were to be approved, access to all properties would be severely compromised during the laying of cables through the village, to connect solar panels with the substation. enabling the developer to run 33KV cabling through the streets of Essendine from the edge of the site near Mallard Point vineyard all the way back to the new substation location opposite Ryhall 400KV substation. The depth of trenches required for this rating of cable is 850 mm, so the laying of cables after trenches have been dug, will not be a swift operation and will cause long term traffic disruption, to an already busy main road from Stamford to Bourne. This is also the designated route for high load vehicles, to avoid low bridges on the Stamford A1 bypass and these wide and heavy loads would find the route along the A6121 between Mallard Point at the bottom of the village and the turning to Uffington impassable during the works. The law requires all cabling to be marked once laid and these way markers would be an unsightly addition to the roadside verges fronting properties. Though the solar farm has asked for 30-40 years to be granted and during this time, they will have automatic access to properties like the village hall, to be able to dig up cabling to repair or replace it. Disruption therefore on this scale may be a long term prospect and will affect the property prices of these houses.

Services to the properties would likely to be affected and possibly cut for periods of time and of course that doesn't factor in further disruption for the accidental damage caused to utilities, when pipes and cables are damaged during trenching! Many of the residents, rely on their fibre broadband cables, to be able to work from home. The Village Hall itself would be directly affected by CA too, as it fronts the main road and needs access via Plover Road, to our main vehicular entrance. It is quite likely that our booking and activities at the hall, would be severely affected for all the same reasons as residential properties. Noise too of trenching machinery and the general increase of construction traffic would also be distracting for our quiet groups, such as Yoga sessions and Art Workshops.

Many of our bookings at the village hall are childrens parties and I have no doubt that parents would not want to use a facility that is noisy, difficult to access and with higher levels of pollution from trench digging machinery. Other groups use our hall to run trading sessions such as First Aid courses and rely heavily on good internet connection for their workshops; this could not be guaranteed and thus groups would not hire the facilities.

Essendine Village Hall has always been used by the emergency services for a command centre and rest area, so 24 hour access and good utilities connection is essential at all times.

There is no benefit to a solar farm being built around Essendine, to preserve the inhabitants mental well being and their choosing to live in a rural area should be their right. I hope that the Planning Inspectorate will see fit to recommend refusal of this application.