



**Application by Mallard Pass Solar Farm Limited for an Order Granting Development Consent
for the Mallard Pass Solar Project – project ref. EN010127**

Submission by Mallard Pass Action Group (MPAG) – unique ID ref. 20036230

Deadline 5: Any further information requested by the ExA

Examples of Local Health Implications

1.1 The ExA has invited MPAG to look at the implications on mental and physical health and well-being of the proposed development on residents. MPAG believe strongly that the process of this NSIP application, and if the proposed development were to be consented, is and will amount to real harm being experienced by many people within the local community.

1.2 It is an accepted fact that poor mental health and well-being can lead to poor physical health costing the NHS and employers billions a year. The Centre for Mental Health estimates that ill health has an economic and social cost of £119 billion a year in England. Of course it is extremely hard to definitively prove and attribute the exact cost of the harms from this Proposed Development to people's mental and physical health. It is only each individual that intrinsically knows the harms they are experiencing, for some though that knowledge may come too late to change the final outcome on their physical health. It is not for the Applicant to determine it themselves but accept and listen to what people are saying and fully acknowledge those impacts. If this development becomes the catalyst/trigger for poor mental health and well-being and also leads to physical health issues, those likely costs/harms should be factored into the examination assessment and considered very carefully in the planning balance.

1.3 Why are people being affected?

Changing the status quo for the community without them having any meaningful say and buy-in to the changes is extremely harmful. Residents have chosen to live in a rural area and there is an important link between the setting and the enjoyment of their home and community, whether it is for work or pleasure - ref NPPF para 175 Many have lived in the local area for years and treasure the rural way of life, the tranquillity, the landscape character, visual amenity, quality of recreational amenity, the connection to arable farming, the biodiversity on their doorstep. All of this will change and not for the better as far as they are concerned.

1.4 Why are they concerned?

- Harm to business – how will it affect the running and operation of their business?
- Harm to property – how does it affect the saleability of their home; how does it affect the value of their property?
- Harm to community – how does it affect each community and the inter-connectivity between communities? Do individuals or individual communities become more isolated?
- Harm to residential amenity – how does it affect everyday life to, from and at the home?
- Harm to recreational activity – how does it change the quality and level of their recreational experiences?
- Harm to the environment – how does it affect and change biodiversity in the broadest sense of the word, not just the items BNG 3.1 happens to assess, and not just in terms of creation but in terms of outcome? How does that make people feel who are passionate about their environment?
- Harm to landscape character – how does the industrialisation of the landscape make people feel?
- Harm to visual amenity – how do the changes affect your senses, your mood, your sense of well-being when confronted with over 1000 acres of black solar panels, fencing and CCTV?
- Harm to value set/principles – how does it conflict with your desire to protect agricultural land, to protect food security, to protect the environment?
- Harm to security – how does it affect how secure residents feel in their own home and in and around the vicinity of their community? What is the impact on people of the prospect of solar crime arriving on their doorstep?

1.5 How do the above concerns manifest themselves in respect of how people feel?

- Angry
- Anxious
- Concerned
- Fearful
- Frustrated
- Incredulous
- Insulted
- Loss of trust
- Powerless
- Sad
- Sense of Loss
- Shocked
- Sick to the core
- Stressed
- Trapped
- Undermined
- Upset
- Worried

Ultimately any one of the above or combination takes a toll on people's mental health – to a greater or lesser degree.

1.6 Policy context

The NPPF outlines in many areas of its guidance the importance of both protecting and enhancing mental and physical health and well-being, whether directly stating it, or as an outcome from its guidance, as outlined in the paras below:

1.6.1 Para 92: *Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:*

a) promote social interaction...

b) are safe and accessible ...

c) enable and support healthy lifestyles...

1.6.2 Para 93: *To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should: b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;*

1.6.3 Para 98: *Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities,*

1.6.4 Para 100: *Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access...*

1.6.5 Aside from policies directed specifically at health, policies that ensure good design are equally important as outlined in para 130 of NPPF.

1.6.6 Para 174: *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside

1.6.7 Para 185: Requires decisions to *'avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life [and] identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason'*. Noise issues are recognised to be a major contributor to negative impacts on mental health.

1.6.8 It is clear as outlined in all the above examples there are many aspects of policy and guidance that focus on health and well-being and as such it should be carefully considered in the planning balance mix..

1.7 Landscape & Visual Assessment

Carly Tinkler, MPAG's landscape and Visual expert highlighted in her post hearing submission (REP4-056) P15 paras 60-66, confirms her review covered such aspects as health and well-being, quality of life, social amenity and economics and that they are integral both to landscape and visual effects and need to be reviewed accordingly.

1.7.1 GLVIA3 Figure 1 shows examples of LVIA 'discussion areas', which under the heading 'human beings', includes social impacts.

1.7.2 The importance of the above issues is made abundantly clear in the Landscape Institute (LI)'s policy on public health, and associated position statement Public Health and Landscape: creating healthy places. The policy states, *'We want public health professionals, planners and landscape architects to promote and act upon the idea that high quality landscape increases wellbeing'*.

1.7.3 Both the policy and the position statement are derived from the European Landscape Convention (ELC), which states: *"Signatories acknowledge that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas' and that 'the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being."*

"The landscape also bears within it a system of social values, which sometimes have to be highlighted through awareness-raising activities. The landscape's social values are tied to its importance for quality of life, health, and to its contribution to the creation of local cultures. Landscape identification, characterisation and assessment underlie landscape quality objectives. This is why such assessment should be done with the interested parties and population concerned, and not just with specialists in landscape appraisal and operations."

1.8 Likely outcomes.

1.8.1 When locals from the community wrote their consultation and written submissions they were very conscious about not coming across as a NIMBYs but more about being seen as a CAMBY (Care About My Back Yard). Consequently they have not shared in writing the direct impacts and harms this proposed development is and will have on their mental health. Since initial consultation though the MPAG team has spoken with hundreds of people who have expressed many of the adjectives I have used above, about how it has left them feeling, how it is affecting them on a day-to-day basis.

1.8.2 As Chair of MPAG I feel I have some experience of understanding mental health impacts. I have worked as a volunteer for the NHS Mental Health team for a number of years now. I have seen firsthand how changes in circumstances to individuals can be the trigger to developing a mental health condition. A consequent outcome of that is it usually takes its toll on the individual's physical health too. That then involves deploying both physical and mental health services to try and address both issues; the underlying cause unfortunately may still be present.

The same can be said of a homeless charity I have supported for the last 10 years. Society at large tends to stereotype the kind of person that might become homeless but the reality is far more complex and nuanced. It is very often to do with the mental health side effects of a situation arising. It may be the breakdown of a relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, the loss of a home as you once knew it. The point is that the impacts of certain situations are just too much for an individual to bear and there will be harm to mental health, physical health, or usually both. Therefore it is important the Applicant does not just dispel peoples' views and brush them off as unimportant or not significant, as there can be unintended consequences.

1.8.3 Here are 2 quotes from local residents giving some insight into how the solar farm application is and will affect them.

Local resident A:

“The location of our home means we will have views of the proposed solar scheme from all lower and upper floor rooms and all of the journeys we make regularly from the property whether on foot or vehicle will be dominated by views of panels. Gone will be the open rural landscape and the feeling of space and freedom it creates, the reason we choose to live here.

It is hard to put into words the emotions I feel, angry, devastated & trapped spring to mind. Since the proposal was first announced we have been living with uncertainty, like many we have a property that is blighted, with potential impact on its value, we face massive disruption from the consequences of the compulsory acquisition rights if granted and noise of piling, and other construction works in such close proximity is causing significant anxiety. Other than making representations against the proposal, I feel powerless to do anything to change our situation and feel like a prisoner in my own home - it feels like there is no escape.

I have already had to seek medical advice regarding a stress related illness which I believe can be attributed to anxiety relating to this proposal.”

Local resident B

“X and Y chose the house we live in over 30 years ago as a wonderful location to raise our family. We were aware when we bought the property that we would have to put up with some noise from trains on the East Coast line and to a lesser degree, the road noise from the A6121. But these background noises were more than compensated by the wonderful views, the softly undulating countryside, rich with so many forms of wildlife and so many places to walk and for the children lots of woodland and streams to explore and play in. Raising three children is quite stressful at various times of their lives and I found a little bit of escapism in being able to go down the garden and spend time looking at the views and watching the abundance of wildlife.

Due to personal trauma the countryside surrounding my house became a very precious space in which to cycle and walk. Also during lockdown for many in the villages around this area the countryside provided the opportunity for long country walks in voluminous amounts of open space. There is nothing more calming than walking or cycling the labyrinth of paths and side roads with the only sounds being the birds singing and I would always return home feeling refreshed and relaxed.

The announcement that a solar farm was potentially being built, which was the size of Heathrow airport and completely engulfing all the wonderful countryside around me, immediately meant my mental health was severely affected. I felt depressed looking around the beautiful countryside, thinking I could soon be looking at glinting glass panels, walking along corridors of land constrained by high fencing, and reminders of CCTV scrutinising every move.

For the past 20 months I have been part of the Mallard Pass Action Group, raising awareness of this solar farm, researching information, delivering leaflets and attending numerous events and hearings. This has taken a huge toll on my mental health, particularly during the winter months when I suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder Syndrome (SADS). Very poor sleep patterns are just another way in which I am suffering. Whenever I feel angry

or upset I find a good walk in the open countryside helps to calm me, soon this could be denied to me if all the area surrounding where I live becomes a colourless black industrial landscape. “

1.8.4 These are not one-off pieces of feedback, it is quite typical in many ways. As the community go through the different phases of the application it is like riding a rollercoaster, except not a pleasant one, one that leaves you feeling sick, anxious and fearful of what could be around the corner. If the impacts and harms as the community perceive it were not so real or significant in depth, then the rollercoaster might be just like a bumpy train ride, unpleasant but maybe bearable. That unfortunately is not the case.

1.9 The Applicant says in Q1.0.9 Applicant's Response to Mallard Pass Action Group Deadline 3 Submissions (REP4-025) *“based on the conclusions of the technical assessments in the Environmental Statement, it is considered highly unlikely that the Proposed Development would result in a significant effect on wellbeing or mental health outcomes at receptor populations including Rutland and South Kesteven residents. The Applicant recognised that this does not mean that no individuals would experience adverse impacts on their health outcomes on the basis of the experience of their walks being affected, but considers that this is not necessarily automatically the case. However at a reasonable population health/study area level, **no significant effects on human health would occur.**”* MPAG is alluding to the impacts being experienced by the local communities immediately adjacent to the Order Limits or within close proximity, not to the populations of Rutland and South Kesteven per se. In that respect MPAG do not concur there would be no significant effects on human health.

2.0 It is evident that the Applicant does not seem to understand the nature of the impacts which do not relate to *loss of use* or *loss of access* (other than at some points during construction), but to the ***decimation of the landscape character ; the complete loss of being able to see any view in the distance; the loss of pleasurable experience of walking on a PRow; the impact on the living environment; the real concern about future food security /their future livelihood/the prospect of solar crime*** etc.

2.1 Taking one example of landscape character and visual amenity, it became very apparent on the recent accompanied site visit (see photos below) the impact the 3.3m high placard had both on the walkers that day and on social media later on. People were aghast at how the panels would just obliterate the landscape in the background. Everyone knows the panels are 3.3m high, but having a practical example on site brought alive the impact and harm it would have. For many of the community who are passionate about their environment, this physical demonstration made them both angry and upset. That is without adding the impact of fences, associated KEEP OUT signage and CCTV at regular intervals.



2.2 The community has tried hard to make their voice heard – 3 major submissions (2 pre-application through consultation responses and 1 post application with a Relevant Representation). In each instance the number of people responding increased, finally resulting in 95.7% of the 1206 citing their objection to the Proposed Development. There is no question there are and will continue to be mental and physical health side effects to some members of the local community, and some may be significant. As time goes by the impacts could compound and deepen, what the proportion of the above are and will be affected is unknown. What MPAG can say is that anyone who cares and is passionate about the issues would find it hard to brush off the impacts and subsequent harms it has on them, and therefore we believe the mental and physical health and overall well-being justifies as much consideration as all the other topics which are being scrutinised during this application process.

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