

Mallard Pass Solar Farm Proposal

CPRE Final Submission to the Planning Inspectorate

As the countryside charity CPRE is normally in a position to be a strong advocate in support of a planning application intended to assist the move toward more sustainable sources of renewable and 'climate challenge' compatible energy generation. It is untypical therefore that, on this occasion, the charity must make it clear that it **does not support** the Mallard Pass proposal.

CPRE is of the view that well executed solar energy projects of **appropriate scale and location** utilising the latest in panel design and construct have a significant role to play in the nation's future energy provision. Local community support for any project and the use of rooftops and brownfield sites (rather than agricultural land) will be key components of community acceptance of the technology.

Long established countryside communities are set to be devastated by the Mallard Pass Solar Farm project which will severely impact Lincolnshire and Rutland. It is regrettable that current planning policy and practice is endangering swathes of valuable agricultural land at a time when severe economic hardship and a war in Europe highlight the value of home grown food.

CPRE believes that solar should be on roofs and brown field sites. It is in both the Inspectorate and government's hands to ensure this. As indicated in the charity's earlier submission, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) alone has many brown field sites lying unused which would lend themselves to energy production. It is expected that the Inspectorate will not support the loss of farms and green space at such a critical time for the food supply chain. Such a decision would defy logic.

The Inspectorate's report and decision on the Mallard Pass proposal is the opportunity to set an example and recommend stopping the loss of productive land and highlight the need to relocate such a large scale project to a brown field site. Such sites include a significant number of former airbases dotted around the region and the country.

As the Inspectorate must be aware, most of the current applications for large solar farms appear to be driven by financial opportunity rather than being part of an integrated strategy of energy supply. Foreign investment seems to be a significant force in the market with little evidence of long term commitment to the UK. The community benefit offered to supporting communities touted by some of these investors does not stand up to scrutiny and is frequently not transparent. There is, therefore, considerable and understandable public opposition to such a massive proposal.

The voices of the impacted communities must be heard. The Mallard Pass Action Group (MPAG) have eloquently led a well researched investigation into the viability and desirability of this proposal. Their findings are clear. There is no significant groundswell of support for the project. In fact, much the opposite. If the proposed solar farm was smaller and intended to establish a 'community owned' renewable energy source, it may be that the research findings of MPAG and CPRE would be very different and probably more positive. Instead, most of those consulted have taken the view that this is not a potentially valuable contribution to the country's future energy needs but in fact a 'get rich quick' project for foreign investors.

Once again CPRE wishes to respectfully remind the Inspectorate of the following facts.

1. Alternatives are available The success of **offshore wind** to date supported by the current growth rate in **rooftop solar** means that the UK is projected to be self-sufficient and actually

able to export energy by the year 2030. This alone challenges the need to cover farmland and greenfield sites with huge solar installations

2. Rutland currently has solar farm applications under consideration which will cover over 2% of its countryside. This compares with the national position of 0.1%. This is clearly unjust and disproportionate from a Rutland perspective
3. The new draft Rutland Local Plan and its supporting database, published this week by Rutland County Council, offers the opportunity to meet the county's energy needs almost entirely by smaller scale solar and wind proposals with minimal footprint on green space
4. A mini nuclear reactor such as that developed by Rolls Royce located on say a disused military site would be more than enough to meet the region's future energy requirement. CPRE Rutland is to host a public debate on this option in January 2024
5. Understanding Rutland as a tourist destination is paramount in any planning deliberation with significant countryside impact. The relevant facts are well evidenced in the Future Rutland Conversation published by Rutland County Council and the recent successful levelling up bid undertaken jointly by Melton Borough and Rutland councils. Tourism lies at the heart of Rutland's economy. This project will not enhance its sustainability. It will detract from it.
6. The wild life of north Rutland and nearby Rutland Water has an international profile attracting visitors from all over the world. The change of character and impact upon on bio diversity necessitated by the Mallard Pass project brings little cheer to its future prospects and again a negative contribution to sustainability.
7. The desire to industrialise a large piece of countryside for financial gain when there are clearly better energy alternatives is difficult to comprehend and invokes scepticism on the project's statement of purpose. Given the reported performance of UK offshore wind, and the potential of onshore wind, in line with current strategic planning policy, there is no sound or science based planning reason for this project to be approved.

As confirmed in the public hearings by CPRE Rutland Chair Ron Simpson BEM and submitted online to this enquiry's library of evidence, rather than just stating all that is wrong with this planning application, the CPRE funded Rutland Renewable Energy Study, published at www.cprerutland.uk provides clear community based evidence of what would be right for Rutland with regard to renewables, and demonstrates the benefits to Rutland of a low carbon future. Throughout the community engagement discussions that helped create the energy study, it was clear that Rutland residents wanted to be careful not to sacrifice the beauty of the local landscape for the sake of generating a commodity (electricity). However, there was also a recognition that having appropriate scale and well sited renewable energy in the area could bring valuable benefits to the county. Similarly, there was a clear desire for solar and wind to bring investment in genuine biodiversity improvements such as local hedge and verge planting to support pollinators, provide wildlife corridors and prevent soil erosion. In related CPRE workshops it was suggested that the creation and management of new networks of hedgerows to shield 'brown field' solar developments could provide an important source of land based employment and training in rural skills for young people in the county. The charity can see little such community benefit from the Mallard Pass proposal.

Too often the shift to low carbon energy across England becomes divisive and confrontational when rural communities are presented with a proposed scheme that they know will severely damage their local environment. Mallard Pass will certainly do that.

In CPRE and MPAG studies, residents have shown that they are in favour of renewable energy and appropriate installations on rooftops and in their countryside, as long as these developments are sited sensitively to protect or enhance the local landscape. There is an especially clear appetite for renewable energy schemes with a limited footprint that contribute to the restoration and enhancement of the habitats, nature and wildlife that local residents evidentially value so much.

CPRE's view is clear. Mallard Pass does not offer a sustainable future. It is oversized, incompatible with its surroundings and of little local community benefit. The Inspectorate is urged to reject this application.

Thank you for this final opportunity to submit opinion and evidence. CPRE is appreciative of the manner in which this enquiry has been conducted.

Ron Simpson

Ron Simpson BEM
Chair
CPRE Rutland
16.11.2023

Notes:

These observations draw upon:-

- 1. the countryside charity's recent submission to the government's Environmental Audit Committee which considered evidence on the future contribution of solar energy to the UK's transition to Net Zero.*
- 2. The findings of a 2023 CPRE Rutland Renewable Energy Study which researched the future energy requirements of the Rutland community with particular regard for the potential contribution of solar and onshore wind.*
- 3. The MPAG and CPRE jointly funded 'Landscape and Visual Review' prepared by Carly Tinkler*

Please address any correspondence to:-
Ron Simpson BEM Chair - CPRE Rutland

Tel: [REDACTED] Mobile: [REDACTED] E-mail: chair@cprerutland.uk