

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
3-8 Whitehall Place
London
SW1A 2AW
12th April 2024

Dear Sirs,

I am pleased to be asked to comment on the Secretary of States recent consultation document, regarding the Mallard Pass Solar application.

Essendine Village Hall is the community facility in our small village and is the only hub for community activities. Throughout the past 30 months or so, as Chairman of the village hall, I have not only worked closely with the Mallard Pass Action Group, but been heavily involved with compiling our objections to the application. The hall has been used throughout the consultation process, both for community meetings to inform and rally the residents, but also by the developers for events to display the documents and local politicians from the local councils and indeed Members of Parliament!

I was extremely dismayed and angry to read just a few days ago, that Network Rail have still not agreed or signed permissions for cabling to go over or under bridges and culverts, to carry the electricity generated, to the substations, situated to the south of the village. Surely the magnitude of the importance of routing the cabling, is a pivotal part of the application? This should have been in place at the outset of planning, back in 2019-2020, when they were in major, secretive discussions with local landowners!

My involvement in community life in Essendine, gives me a great deal of feedback from the residents and I have been swamped with angry and confused residents, stating their disbelief, that after 30 months, the cabling issue is still unresolved. It was bad enough that residents along both sides of the A6121, Bourne to Stamford Road, knew nothing of the developers plans to potentially put the cabling along the curtilages of their properties, even though there have been a number of events which the Applicants held, to inform people of the plans for the solar farm and had ample opportunities to do so!

Essendine Village Hall is affected by one of the potential cabling routes, as it has a long curtilage of some 50-60 metres, adjacent to the A6121. Additionally both the vehicular and pedestrian access to the hall would be severely impacted, should this cabling route be agreed.

More worryingly, the Applicant appears to be trying to retain options on two cabling routes, which causes yet more uncertainty for the Village Hall and residents! The shock of finding ourselves at the epicentre of enormous solar application, has been bad enough, with the potential loss of the very rural essence which most of us moved here to enjoy. Trenching the cabling along the sides of the A6121, is going to cause severe disruption to the use of the village hall. There is also a real possibility that there will be major issues with the utility services to the hall. In the research I undertook, I could find no evidence of any maps of pinpoint accuracy, indicating where utility cables are located. I am absolutely certain that there will be disruption to services, including electricity, water and fibre cables for our broadband connection. For the village hall, there would be a great deal of uncertainty to me and in turn the hirers, if these services could not be guaranteed at all times during the cabling works! The village hall relies heavily on the income generated from hirings, to run and maintain the facility. Disruption to the hall access and the utilities would have a very detrimental effect.

Many of the property curtilages, affected by proposed Compulsory Acquisition (CA) have wild flowers growing on them and there is no doubt that this flora and fauna will be destroyed with the digging of trenches. The Mallard Pass Applicants seem to have this idea that we can be easily bought or persuaded that all will be ok with the outcome. They are truly blinkered if they think Essendine residents can be bought, or convinced that this solar farm will benefit us, the village hall and Essendine residents in general!

In reading large parts of the documentation recently submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, I was astonished to read that the Applicant believes they can buy our goodwill through devising firstly a Customer Liaison Group (CLG) and secondly a Community Benefit Fund (CBF). No amount of dialogue with a liaison group, will placate residents to accept the benefits from a solar farm and reassure residents, or that large sums of money will buy favour and support for the scheme. Residents are going to be severely impacted by this proposed solar farm, with house prices particularly affected by the loss of the rural landscape. Such is the magnitude of the proposed project, that it would be impossible to put any sum of money on the table, that would compensate the devaluing of property prices, the potential difficulties with selling these properties and the mental well-being of residents, on which no monetary compensation could be ascertained!

This winter, this area has been very badly affected by large scale flooding. A number of storms through the winter, have meant that our village church has been badly damaged. One local farm, with a newly established vineyard and distillery, set up alongside a successful marquee business, has suffered huge damage and large financial losses. The nearby village of Greatford had large numbers of houses flood damaged, with many occupants unable to move back in until the summer. Half a million solar panels will cause irregular and unnatural runoff from the panels, which will exacerbate the flooding problems.

Throughout their long and exhausting consultation process, I along with many others have constantly complained about the lack of transparency that the Applicants have shown. They have not been entirely open and honest with us and at times, when we have raised issues and they have felt snared by us, they have hastily tried to placate us with empty promises, which they cannot practically deliver. With this poor track record of communication when interacting with residents, the parish and county councils; my feelings are anything they put forward to redress concerns from residents, should be considered fictional rather than realistic. Who, if this project were to be given approval would 'police' their activities during the construction and ensure they adhered to all the regulations and outline management plans put in place. My hunch is that the Applicants would be 'laws unto themselves', flouting them 'wherever possible'!

For these reasons as outlined above, as Secretary of State, making the decision as to whether or not the Mallard Pass plans should be approved, the lack of formalising of basic infrastructure, should a foremost reason why this application should be refused.

Yours faithfully
Adele Stainsby.

Chairman, Essendine Village Hall