

To the planning inspector for Gate Burton Energy Park

My thoughts on living with the proposed solar industrialisation of farmland.

Having lived for almost 24 years listening to the constant hum of traffic near a busy A road, despite being set well back off the road, and the quite surprising light pollution from Lincoln, we decided to purchase a property that would give us peace and quiet. We wanted a country setting where we could enjoy walking locally and appreciate the wonderful wildlife and birdlife in the area. Noise and light pollution have always affected me.

We were delighted to find just such a property. We decided to compromise on a few things, namely no shop, pub or bus stop in the area. We have a few neighbouring houses, which is good for security and it is lovely seeing people too.

We purchased the property just prior to lockdown. The one thing we always commented on was how lovely and quiet it was. Tranquil in fact. The birdsong is incredible. Something friends and family always comment on too. The huge skies at night with no light pollution is amazing. To see the stars unadulterated by artificial light is something we really value and appreciate.

Within the first year of us purchasing the house we received correspondence about a proposed solar 'farm'. We were horrified. How could anyone want to put glass panels onto fields where crops are successfully grown! Suddenly we had figures from field gradings! Some information we believe is incorrect. It would be advantageous to sequentially test the soil by somebody independently appointed by those of us who oppose this scheme. The farmers have supposedly had this done, but it is in their interest to have lower readings, even though they currently grow crops on those very fields.

We subsequently learnt of a total of four applications for solar panels in our area (plus a fifth small one, which is to be decided by West Lindsey District Council). There are at least nine applications now in Lincolnshire. Lincolnshire the arable county, the 'bread and vegetable basket' of the UK will become the solar capital of the UK!

I think what has shocked me the most is when I researched the size of the largest solar 'farm' in the world, Bhadla Solar Park in India came up as the largest recorded in 2023 with a total of 14,000 acres. These four adjoining sites near us are approximately 10,000 so not far short of the biggest one in the world! The site in India is built in a desert so does not affect too many people. Is Lincolnshire so worthless as a County that anyone wanting to make huge quantities of money can target us?

From what was to be an idyllic home in the countryside surrounded by wildlife (deer, fox, hares, swans, their signets, squirrels, many bird species), low on light pollution and noise, and very low in crime will now become claustrophobic with glass panels up to 4.5m in height for 40 to 60 years, noisy, light at night and not as safe. These timescales are whole lifetimes!

When our family stays with us, they always go for dogs walks or runs through the fields (on the designated public footpaths) and photograph or video the amazing views. Deer leaping through the crops, birds of prey calling and circling above and the distant views of the cliff edge and the beautiful Cathedral. They have said that if we are surrounded by glass panels it negates their desire to visit us in what should be the countryside and probably will have to rethink their weekends away, which will be sad for us. Who would want to have a vacation in an area of industrialization?

The noise not only from the construction process, but from the general running of these sites and battery noise will be unbearable. I really worry not only about my mental health, but everyone else's too with these applications. I would like my thoughts and this letter to be considered for each of the four applications. These applications should be seen as one application rather than cleverly separated into four. I am also disappointed, but not surprised, that a lot of the public meetings/consultations are during the holidays when many people are away or are held in venues which are not easily accessible for the local communities. Each application should be held in the area where it is proposed to be installed. The farmers who have willingly given up their land for 'easy farming' should attend these meetings too. I know a few of them do not live in the area.

I do realise that we need to become greener and more energy efficient, but when you see all the huge warehouses (along the A1, M1 etc.) that have been built over the last few years and are still being constructed, solar panels on the roof should have been a non-negotiable for planning approvals. There are brown field sites which should be used before healthy farmland is considered. Farmland is precious and should be protected.

I am very concerned about the crime levels that no doubt will be enormous due to criminals coming from other counties to plunder what is to be put into the fields. I worry about security fencing, security lighting, CCTV cameras etc. All of this is an intrusion into our lives. Then there is the wildlife! What will happen to them when they are barred out of their natural habitats? The insects and birds that use areas for nesting and/or migration routes will also be affected.

I feel this has been a short-sighted process where the Government wants to be seen as green, then companies see an opportunity and climb onto the 'green' bandwagon to make huge amounts of money at the expense of all the local communities. The best of it is some people still think that we as locals will benefit from this so-called energy capture, but sadly it is going to make millions for a few people, some of whom don't even live in this country. It is total greed at Lincolnshire's expense.