

Knaith Parish Council – Further Representation 08.08.2023

These comments are in addition to Knaith Parish Councils already submitted representations.

The subject of large scale industrial solar farms is often debated at Westminster Hall with the most recent debate 19th July.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-07-19/debates/6E9797A0-6E4C-4FEC-822A-CA576FE91D2D/PlanningAndSolarFarms>

The main points from this debate that Knaith Parish Council would like to highlight are as follows:

1. It is estimated by the Government that we will need to need use 0.5% of land to meet the solar panel target, but it is also estimated that 600,000 acres of south-facing industrial roof space is currently unused, and I do not believe that the Government anticipated all the panels being in Lincolnshire, or would wish for such an outcome.
2. Local authorities are being 'circumnavigated using the nationally significant infrastructure project process to avoid local community engagement.
3. If successful, can contain an element of compulsory purchase orders, and from speaking to constituents, I am aware that some landowners feel intimidated by this fact. When they are being produced by a plethora of people prospecting and asking them to rent their land, they worry that if they do not comply, they will lose their land to compulsory purchase orders. The Government must address this'.
4. There are 12 NSIP applications currently in process in Lincolnshire for large solar farms but only one small-scale application to the local council.
5. Through NSIPs, local people have decision-making power taken away from them rather than given to them.
6. Where substations have been upgraded, we get a cluster of large solar farm applications near to them, as it is cheaper for the companies that want to build them. As a result, instead of a large number of small, low-impact solar farms, we get a small number of gigantic industrial farms, which utterly ruin the landscape, in some cases choking entire villages of potential future expansion and turning what has traditionally been a food-producing haven into a vast glimmering desert.
7. The impact will also extends to house prices. Many of my constituents fear that houses with unburdened views will sell for much more, leaving residents individually out of pocket as well.
8. Lincolnshire alone produces 30% of the UK's vegetables and 18% of its poultry, and is responsible for 12% of the country's total food production—all from a county covering less than 3% of the UK's land mass. Lincolnshire, without a doubt, has some of the UK's best and most versatile farmland, yet it seems to be particularly targeted by large solar farms.
9. 3a land is exempt from solar. The problem is slightly less good quality land, 3b in particular. In the old days the Government said solar was banned from 3b, but they have now changed their mind and are allowing 3b to be used.
10. In the UK, 600,000 acres of south-facing industrial roof space is currently unused. Prioritising industrial, residential and brownfield land for solar farms is a step in the right direction. The large Bentley factory in Crewe, its roofs coated in solar panels, is a brilliant example. It produces an average of 75% of Bentley's daytime electricity demands—equivalent to demand from more than 2,300 homes—a year, all without using as much as a square metre of productive and beautiful agricultural land.
11. The Liberal Democrats - some of the proposals for solar farms, as they are called, are too large; we need to distribute and disperse such renewable energy projects so that they do not take up vast tracts of land.

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12. Sir Edward Leigh - The point I want to make is that when it comes to a public inquiry—and there should be a public inquiry—the applications must be taken as one, because developers are trying to have their cake and eat it. On the one hand, they say that these solar farms are nationally significant infrastructure projects. They say that simply because they want to bypass local opinion—that is the only reason. They want to bypass the whole planning process. They say that they are nationally significant infrastructure projects and therefore must be considered by Whitehall rather than by the local authority. That is their point of view, although when Tony Blair brought in the new planning system, it was designed for nuclear power stations, not for one little company making numerous applications and subverting the local planning process.

This is ludicrous overdevelopment. To distribute, say, 1,000 acres —that is the offer—in a large rural district such as West Lindsey, covering perhaps up to 600 square miles, would be reasonable, but 10,000 acres ringing one town is just ridiculous overdevelopment.

One of my constituents noticed that some developers submit multiple applications, but under the same project management team. All three of the developers in our part of England use the same law firm. When the Department considers such applications, it must consolidate them into one and look at them as a whole. I do not think any fair public inquiry would allow development on 10,000 acres ringing one town, as long as the applications were consolidated into one. But they are trying to pick us off one by one.

13. Sir John Hayes - It is clear that this is not about the environment and renewable energy; it is about getting rich quick.

14. Dr Johnson - It has been a very interesting debate. I think there is broad consensus that solar panels are not a great idea and should not be on agricultural land.

In Lincolnshire, the land is good land. We have to travel a long way to find land that is not good land, so justifying something on the basis of what is available locally is not helpful. I would like him to look at that.

I think we all agree that the use of brownfield sites is better. I will support the proposed new clause tabled by my hon.

They cannot have all of them. In this case, the Minister cannot have his cake and eat it. In fact, without the best and most versatile agricultural land producing eggs, flour, sugar and other ingredients, he will not be able to have his cake at all.