

Statement at Gate Burton OFH from Fillingham Parish

On behalf of Fillingham Parish Meeting, I would like to make an observation, that among all the technical topics of environmental concerns, energy, agriculture etc. as well as the details of the content of the DCO, what seems to be missing is any consideration of the people of the area.

In terms of benefits to the community, there appears to be the possibility of a limited fund, but this does not address having deprived people in the area of livelihoods and landscape.

It is therefore not surprising that, as far as I understand, there is scant support for the Gate Burton scheme or any of the other large scale solar projects – and overwhelming opposition from every Parish that has expressed a view – representing 18 or 19 villages.

Government Strategy Papers and National Policy Statements all refer to the need to consider community impacts and the Skidmore review recommends that projects are not imposed on local communities, but the NSIP process feels like a machine that the community has no real say in.

The Applicant has been through its consultation process, covered in the detailed Consultation Report, which runs to 338 pages. The Executive Summary alone is 8 pages, and describes the approach taken to comply with statutory duties. The Executive Summary concludes that the Applicant has considered and applied all relevant advice and guidance. Nowhere are the results of that consultation mentioned in easily digestible terms, such as how many respondents are supportive or in opposition to the proposed development.

The Consultation Report describes in forensic detail how people were made aware, what events were held, who was told and when. It sets out that the Applicant has established a thorough process, and then have done what they said they would.

There are details on the numbers of people attending, the number of website clicks and engagements.

There is line-by-line detail of the issues and concerns raised and, in general, where the Applicant believes such issues are addressed in their extensive material. There is an age breakdown of who provided feedback from 142 responses received – which is a tiny fraction of people in the area.

Despite all this work, and all these pages, nowhere is there an answer to simple questions such as... “What has been the effective reach of consultation?”, “How well is the proposed development understood in the area?” and “What public support is there for the scheme?”

It appears that the purpose of the Consultation process has purely been to tick the box of Consultation, rather than engage with the community at any meaningful level to ensure that the project is not imposed on the community.

Could I therefore ask the Applicant directly what local support they feel the scheme has?

And may I ask of the Examining Authority to what extent local engagement, understanding, support or opposition to the proposed development have a bearing on the Examination process?