

From: Sir Edward Leigh MP

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The cumulative effect of these proposals needs to be considered wholistically, as the combined impact on local communities, the country, and the world is significant.

These proposals should not be considered individually but must be taken as one. The proposals include:

- West Burton Energy Park
- Cottam Solar Project
- Tillbridge Solar Project
- Beacon Fen Energy Park
- One Earth Solar Project
- Heckington Fen Solar Project
- Mallard Pass Solar Project
- Springwell Solar Farm
- Temple Oaks Renewable Energy Park
- Fosse Green Energy

Together these will cover 26,000 acres of land. Compared to the value of the food produced over much of this land, the amount of energy these solar farms would provide would be miniscule. Sizewell C Nuclear Power Station will be able to generate 7 per cent of the UK's electricity need on a site covering just a couple of hundred acres.

The timeframe for construction is more than seven years over four of these schemes. That's a long time for interference in our country roads which we in rural areas are more reliant on.

Local people have not had sufficient time to respond to this onslaught of proposals, nor are they properly resourced. My fear is that the deck is weighted in favour of these energy companies, and what's at stake is a huge amount of rural Lincolnshire. If these proposals it would result in a massive loss of farmland – as much as 15% of the area. Lincolnshire has traditionally been the breadbasket of England – we're very proud of that here. It's not just our history but our present-day and we very much want it to be our future too.

We have nothing against solar energy itself. Indeed, it's to be encouraged, along with all other feasible forms of renewable energy. The more solar power we generate, the better use we're making of our natural resources.

No one opposes this, but the way you do it is important. We should be encouraging solar installations on rooftops, not on farmland. Projects should focus on industrial, manufacturing, and logistics sites with large flat rooftops. We should also look at how to integrate further solar power into existing housing or housing under development.

The Council for the Protection of Rural England have been arguing persuasively for a national rooftop strategy to do precisely this. They have highlighted the grave threat to farmland that projects like Gate Burton present.

CPRE estimates that, without a rooftop based approach, current solar power targets could result in the loss of 280,000 acres of farmland. There are many unforeseen circumstances.

For example, we have a fair amount of general aviation in England. For smaller aircraft, farmland is often essential in ways people might not understand. If you're piloting a single-engine plane and your engine cuts out, open fields are often the only safe option for an emergency landing. What assessment have the proposers made of the impact that thousands of several-meters-tall solar arrays in these fields would have on aircraft safety?

Opposition to Gate Burton and the other proposals here in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire is both broad and deep. As a Member of Parliament whose constituents will be affected by this proposal I am here to convey to the Inspectorate the opposition of residents of the Gainsborough constituency. I have spoken to county, district, and parish councillors and there is near unanimity of opposition.

This proposal is unwise. It is un-environmental and unsustainable. It threatens our food security. It undermines our rural culture. It would result in monstrous overdevelopment. And it is opposed by local residents and stakeholders. It must be turned down.