

## **Fillingham Parish Meeting, Statement at West Burton Solar Project, Open Floor Hearing, 08/11/23**

Fillingham Parish Meeting, would like to make two observations.

The first observation is that among all the technical topics of environmental concerns, what seems to be missing is any genuine consideration of the people of the area.

In terms of benefits to the community, there is barely anything, and certainly nothing to 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 West Burton scheme or any of the other large scale solar projects in this region – and overwhelming opposition from every Parish that has expressed a view – representing 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 165 pages and many appendices.

The Consultation Report describes in detail how people were made aware, what events were held, who was told and when.

The Executive Summary concludes that the Applicant has considered and complied with all guidance and legislation.

The Applicant also concludes they have actively sought and taken due regard to feedback and yet...

Faced with the question: “How informative did you find our consultation materials?”

At 49%, the most frequent response was “not informative”

Having taken due regard, what did the Applicant do to follow up on this?

Faced with the question:

“How supportive are you of our emerging solar project proposals, which would generate clean, affordable, and reliable renewable energy for the national grid, with energy storage for when it is needed most?”

Faced with such a spectacularly loaded question, even then, 79% strongly opposed

Having taken due regard, what did the Applicant do about this?

Faced with the feedback: “A common issue has been a request for solar panels to be installed on rooftops”

The Applicant answered, apparently seriously that:

“An assessment of commercial rooftops in the host authorities of West Lindsey and Bassetlaw Districts identified no rooftops or combined premises of an adequate area to facilitate a large-scale solar project”

As if finding a 10km<sup>2</sup> cluster of rooftops in a rural area was ever likely to be a credible proposition.

In their conclusions, the reported that their activities resulted in “a high level of engagement” and yet, only a few hundred people visited the information events – by my estimate, less than 2% of people in the region – and even today, I still meet people who know nothing about the scale of solar development in our area.

The Applicant also asserts that they have “reduced the risk of potential confusion” – and yet they are culpable for having contributed massively to the public confusion by having made two separate applications, one for Cottam and one for West Burton, covering similar areas, sometimes with joint processes and often with parallel processes, all of which serves to confuse the community and fatigue any opposition.

It is evident that the purpose of the Applicant’s Consultation has purely been to tick the box of Consultation, not to engage with the community at any meaningful level to ensure that the project is not an imposition on the community.

The second observation is in relation to our experiences of the process so far:

Thousands of pages are produced by the Applicant. We study them, and make, what we feel, are valid concerns, which include:

- This scheme, along with others in this region, is too large and would radically alter the character of the area.
- The panels are far too high and could never be effectively screened.
- The fragmented parcels of the Cottam and West Burton schemes each dwarf the communities they surround.
- Development at this scale will last for years and be massively disruptive to the people of the region – as well as its wildlife.

Despite raising these concerns, nothing changes.

The Applicant produces many more thousands of pages, most of which simply restate their original position, and the process rolls on.

And at every stage, the development submitted by the Applicant has shown absolutely no sensitivity to the region or its people.

The villages in this region are not affluent. They have few amenities.

The one thing they do have is a tranquil, rural setting, with open views that has been shaped by agriculture for generations.

It's where we walk, and run, and cycle, and ride horses.

It's where many of us work.

It's where we live.

The setting our villages have will be decimated by this development and others of a similar scale within a closely concentrated area.

And it doesn't have to be this way.

We know the country needs solar, but every day, more rooftops are built on houses and commercial buildings without any solar panels.

How can there be a climate emergency that ignores the obvious place to install solar panels, and instead results in the ruination of our environment?

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It makes no sense.

And it makes people in our community weep with frustration, that this relentless process is even allowed to march on.

As we are somehow, seriously discussing throwing away productive farmland and a landscape the size of a city, for power when the sun shines...

Throwing it all away for no power at all when the country shivers on a winter's evening.

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Finally, there is a moral dimension here... if humanity wants to feed itself and provide power and decarbonise, then we cannot simply tear up our farmland and expect other countries to feed us.

In the parched deserts of Africa and India, where they can grow no food, they will look at us in disgust at our wastefulness. And rightly so.