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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:05:03 - 00:00:07:01

Uh, good evening everyone.

00:00:08:29 - 00:00:21:28

Good evening all. The time is now 5:30 p.m., and this open floor hearing for the West Burton solar project is now open. Thank you all for joining us today. Can I confirm that everyone can hear me?

00:00:24:00 - 00:00:29:18

Please get a member of the case team confirmed that live streaming and recording have started.

00:00:33:23 - 00:00:49:27

My name is Jonathan Medlin. I am a member of the Panel Examining of Examining Inspectors, appointed by the Secretary of State for the application made by West Burton Solar Project Limited for an order granting development consent for the West Burton Solar Project.

00:00:52:11 - 00:01:03:04

And good evening. My name is Andrea McGeehan. I am the lead member of the panel of Examining Inspectors, and you will hear us referred to as the Examining Authority.

00:01:05:12 - 00:01:39:11

Our role is to examine the application and, on conclusion of the examination, to write a report to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net-zero, with a recommendation on whether the Development Consent Order should be made. The case team works alongside us throughout the process. We have Louise Haraway and Rebecca Evans with us this evening. They should be your first point of contact. If you have any queries about the examination process or arrangements for hearings. I will now run through some housekeeping matters for those here in person.

00:01:40:02 - 00:02:21:24

Uh, first of all, can everyone please set all devices, phones, etc. to silent? Um, unless of course, you're using them to join the hearing virtually. There are toilets. They are out of the room to the left, to the end of the corridor. We noticed yesterday it might be better to use the set of doors to the left rather than the double doors, although that is propped open at the moment just because they're slightly noisy. There aren't any planned fire tests. But in the event that an alarm sounds, there is an exit to the left of me, which would be to your right, and also through the Primrose room on the other side of the corridor to avoid disruption.

00:02:22:04 - 00:02:40:26

During the hearing, please keep any other microphones muted until we invite you to speak. That will apply to people in the room, although as it's an open floor hearing, we will be inviting people to the microphones at the front of the meeting. But it does also apply to you if you are joining via Microsoft teams this evening.

00:02:42:15 - 00:03:21:03

For anybody who is joining via Microsoft teams or using teams to join, you're very welcome. The chat function on Microsoft Teams will not be enabled or in use, so please don't try to use it for comments. All questions if you are watching the live stream. Again, welcome that be. Please be aware that it will

be stopped during any adjournments. You will need, therefore to refresh your browser page to restart the hearing. A recording of today's meeting will be made available on the West Burton Solar Project section of the National Infrastructure Planning website, as soon as practicable after this meeting.

00:03:21:25 - 00:03:56:12

With this in mind, please ensure that any comments and speaking is made clearly into microphone stating your name and who you are representing before you speak again. As it's an open floor hearing that will generally be at the beginning of any comments or submissions made orally. If there is a break between between speaking, then may be advisable to restate that information. The recordings will form a public record and can contain personal information to which the General data Protection regulations apply.

00:03:56:14 - 00:04:32:21

The planning inspectors practice is to retain and publish recordings for a period of five years from the Secretary of State's decision on the Development Consent Order. If you participate in today's hearing, it's important you understand that you will be recorded and that you therefore consent to the retention and publication of the digital recording. We will only ever ask for information to be placed on the public record. That is important and relevant to the decision. It will only be in the rarest of circumstances that we might ask you to provide personal information of the type that most of us would prefer to keep private or confidential.

00:04:33:00 - 00:05:09:16

Please, therefore, try your best not to say or reveal anything that you would wish to be kept private or that is confidential. If you want to tell us about where you live as it is relevant to what you want to say, please try to just give a general location rather than specific address. A link to the planning Inspectorate's Privacy Notice has been previously provided in our rule six letter. Please do speak to a member of the case team if you have any questions about this. You probably will find it useful to have the agenda that was published on 16th of January 2020 for relevance.

00:05:09:18 - 00:05:43:21

Relevant parts of that may be displayed during this hearing, and that we will follow an order set out on that agenda in any event. The purpose of the open floor is for us to hear the views of those interested parties and other parties who requested this opportunity to speak to the examining authority. It's an opportunity for us to hear your thoughts about the application first hand. We'll give the applicant an opportunity to respond orally to all submissions after the hearing, and after hearing from those who have notified us that they wish to speak.

00:05:44:02 - 00:06:03:18

Alternatively, of course, the applicant may respond in writing and that would be set really for deadline for which is the next deadline. That's the 28th of February. It's the first question I have is who is the lead speaker for the applicant, or is the lead speaker for the applicant present? In the room.

00:06:06:07 - 00:06:06:22

So.

00:06:08:15 - 00:06:14:09

Uh, good evening. Uh, Gareth Phillips, uh, solicitor of Pinsent Masons here on behalf of the applicant.

00:06:15:21 - 00:06:16:20

Thank you, Mr. Phillips.

00:06:18:22 - 00:06:50:06

Do we have representatives of councils present who wish to introduce themselves? Um. Probably district or county. For the purposes of this question, it doesn't appear so, and that's absolutely fine. We don't anticipate asking local authorities to speak as this is an open floor hearing. And okay, I won't invite any other introductions at this stage. There will be an opportunity for you to introduce yourself later if you wish to speak.

00:06:50:29 - 00:07:00:11

As I've said before, each time you speak or when you speak, please give your name and organization that you represent. That can then be picked up for the formal record.

00:07:02:00 - 00:07:22:26

We're just about to complete agenda item one. But one final point. Really, um, subject to progress and how long this takes. We will take a short comfort break. If we're still going after 90 minutes or so. Are there any questions at this point about the agenda or arrangements for this hearing?

00:07:26:25 - 00:07:28:15

You okay? Thank you.

00:07:33:00 - 00:08:07:15

So we're now agenda item two, which relates to the purpose of the open floor hearing and confirmation of those who notified the Za of their wish to be heard. Um, so the purpose of the hearing is to give interested parties an opportunity to make oral representations about anything they consider to be important and relevant to the examination. Um, it's not about a particular location or topic. The topic is therefore up to yourselves. Just to note at this point that the hearing is subject to our powers of control over its conduct as established by the Planning Act 2008.

00:08:08:12 - 00:08:41:09

Uh section 95 sets out that disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Um, and to be clear, the purpose of the hearing is to assist us with our examination. So please don't, um, clap or cheer particular speakers that that doesn't really assist us with the examination. Um, and we want to make sure that we hear everything that's being said. Um, the hearing shouldn't be used as any as a political platform, and any attempts to do so won't be tolerated. Um, and your submissions must focus on matters that are important and relevant to the examination only.

00:08:42:12 - 00:09:06:18

So each interested party who's indicated a wish to speak will be invited to do so at the appropriate time. Uh, these Orioles oral submissions should be based on representations previously made by the speaker, but they shouldn't simply repeat matters previously covered in written submissions. Their purpose should be to provide further detail and explanation and and evidence that will help to inform us.

00:09:08:04 - 00:09:21:18

We've suggested that each speaker completes their submission in ten minutes, please. Um, and as a general point, we'd ask that you keep your oral submissions are succinct and to the point as possible. Um, simply repeating a point made by others doesn't add to its weight.

00:09:23:18 - 00:09:57:00

Um, so in making your submissions, it's not necessary to repeat the points that have been made by previous speakers. You can just indicate that you agree. Um, we may, if you do become repetitious, ask you to move on or to conclude your oral statement as as we do want to hear from everybody who's indicated their wish to speak to us this evening. Um, we will, as necessary, ask questions of the speaker. And this will usually be to clarify any particular points that have been made. And as has been said, the applicant will be provided with an opportunity to respond at the end.

00:09:59:11 - 00:10:11:05

Um, so we've we've had notification from a number of interested parties and, um, and to further speakers who wish to speak to us at this hearing.

00:10:12:28 - 00:10:46:14

Um. So in addition to those who previously notified us of their their wish to speak, we have had two further requests and Margaret O'Grady of filling and parish meeting and and Sue Bingham. So we'll start by confirming whether or not those parties that have indicated they wish to speak are here in the room or virtually. So we'll run through the list in front of us, um, which basically corresponds with the order in which we received those requests. And we'll also hear from people in that same order.

00:10:47:10 - 00:10:49:10

So, um.

00:10:51:00 - 00:11:26:21

When we, um. Ask you to speak. Please remember to unmute your microphone if you're joining by teams. I don't think anybody is joining us by teams, but if you are, um, please switch on your camera when we invite you to speak. If you're comfortable in doing so. And please switch microphones and cameras off again when we move on to the next speaker. Um, a roving microphone is available for anybody in the room that we invite to speak who doesn't have a microphone in front of them. Um, it's important that we capture all contributions, um, uh, for the formal record using the microphone.

00:11:28:06 - 00:11:54:23

Um, when you introduce yourselves, please indicate how you wish to be addressed, for example. Mr.. Mrs.. And so on. And whether you whether or not you represent a particular group or organization. So I'm going to start by checking who is who is here in the order that requests were received. Um, to the case team. So first of all, do we have Simon Skelton here? Q Mr. Skelton, um.

00:11:56:25 - 00:12:09:16

And then from seven thou a thousand acres, we've got a notification that either James Allen or Liz Garbett are here. Um, miss Mr. Allen. Thank you. Um.

00:12:11:04 - 00:12:14:17

And then we have Andy Johnson. Are you here, Mr. Johnson?

00:12:17:02 - 00:12:18:07

Okay. Thank you.

00:12:20:01 - 00:12:20:20

Um.

00:12:22:15 - 00:12:32:13

Stephen Spence, ore. And Christine Dunham. Thank you. And you, you both wish. So do we need to? We need to probably record this with the microphone, I think. Um.

00:12:35:28 - 00:12:36:22

I was thinking.

00:12:40:00 - 00:12:46:09

So just just to confirm. Um. It's council. Councillor Spence, is that right?

00:12:47:02 - 00:12:47:18

Hello.

00:12:47:20 - 00:12:50:15

Hello. Hello there. And it's Councillor Spence. Is it?

00:12:50:18 - 00:12:51:12

That's right. Thank you.

00:12:51:17 - 00:12:53:00

To speak to us this evening.

00:12:53:02 - 00:12:53:25

I do, please.

00:12:57:06 - 00:13:02:00

Uh, next we have, um. William rose, are you here this evening?

00:13:06:09 - 00:13:21:07

And, uh, finally. Oh, sorry. Not finally. Uh, Victoria White, are you here this evening? Okay. Thank you. And then, um, Margaret O'Grady, are you here? And then finally, um, Sue Bingham.

00:13:23:07 - 00:13:33:17

You here this evening. Okay, so we've had confirmation that, um, all of those who indicated they wish to speak are here. Um, anybody wishing to join us? Virtually.

00:13:39:06 - 00:13:46:24

Okay. Is there anybody else in the room who wishes to speak this evening? Who we haven't already? Third from. No. Okay.

00:13:48:00 - 00:13:50:21

Thank you. Okay. Thank you.

00:13:52:15 - 00:14:18:09

Okay. We will now hear oral submissions in the order that parties introduce themselves. Again, please remember to use the microphone when you speak. Um, switch it off again when you leave the table as we move on to the next speaker. We will be taking notes. So don't be put off if we're not necessarily looking at you, but we are listening first, then please, could we hear from Mr. Skelton?

00:14:19:24 - 00:14:20:09

Thank you.

00:14:34:10 - 00:14:37:15

Simon Skelton, local resident.

00:14:45:21 - 00:15:16:14

The use of a grid connection at the West Burton 400 kV substation is a negative and restrictive move in the quest for more power and to decarbonise the UK. The UK could require four times more power in the coming decades. When put into context, this solar scheme's electrical output is so small that it would be lost as a mere rounding up error. These enormous generation figures.

00:15:18:15 - 00:15:53:04

Within these enormous generation figures, and we'll do very little but selfishly displays many thousands of acres of much needed farmland. As stated, the West Burn Solar Project would inefficiently use one of the four green connections, utilizing only about 10% of its capacity. This would be a retrograde step that must not be understated. It is a waste of important national infrastructure at a time when generation levels need to increase at a rate never seen before.

00:15:54:11 - 00:16:42:20

These valuable high capacity grid connections need to be used effectively. Nuclear energy, for example, would reliably offer the large quantities of low carbon electricity we seek and would use brownfield sites or cover only a small footprint of land. I agree with the Atomic Energy Authority's comments regarding this matter. The 24GW of installed nuclear power expected would provide three times more electrical generation than the 70GW of installed solar power expected, and the 70GW of solar would cover an eye watering 300,000 acres of land.

00:16:43:20 - 00:17:13:28

Promoting solar on farmland and using up all spare grid connections is threatening the country's future ability to produce sustainable and reliable energy and food. All forecasts clearly state more power, not less. Solar power plants engulfing vast areas of farmland really are the Emperor's new clothes. But we see reality through all the solar lobbying.

00:17:16:09 - 00:17:52:01

If we continue on this reckless path of solar on farmland, because brownfields and rooftops are less financially attractive, then when we then we will totally bypass the government's requirement for a rooftop revolution. It makes perfect sense to put solar panels on your roof at home and not in your garden. So why are we displacing hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland for solar water, when we have enough rooftops to give this important secondary function to.

00:17:54:00 - 00:18:27:01

Using finite farmland for solar is robbing Peter to pay Paul. This is never a wise strategy, and the only people who think it is a good idea is the developers and those that do not know the facts. The scale and size of these behemoths being forced on our countryside is unjustified, unnecessary and there is certainly no urgency for a paltry 0.15% of electrical generation.

00:18:28:22 - 00:18:40:26

Solar is such a low yielding and poor performer. It simply cannot be given the green light to waste all this farmland and industrialise the British countryside.

00:18:44:27 - 00:19:03:12

An informed and bold decision needs to be made. Slow down this planning free for all, and give due consideration to the citizens of this country, and not to the tiny electrical and decarbonizing contribution of ground mounted solar in the UK.

00:19:05:07 - 00:19:21:03

The local shop. The local opposition group has a membership with over 300 years of power industry experience. Please listen to their experts who are without a financial agenda.

00:19:23:26 - 00:19:59:26

If at the end of this process the many harms remain unseen, then in the national interest, please consider the following five points. We do not create high impact solar industrialized zones in the UK countryside, such as the disproportional five in CEPs, covering over 13,000 acres proposed around Gainsborough, consisting of Westborough and Solar Project, Cottam Gate, Burton Tilly Bridge and Steeple Solar.

00:19:59:28 - 00:20:09:02

They all fall within a ten kilometre radius, with a sixth end falling just outside called One Earth Solar.

00:20:11:12 - 00:20:46:20

And we do not foolishly use up all the high power grid connections on solar, and we do not allow damage in 15 foot high solar panels into our landscape. We introduce fare exclusions out zones around all residential property and the battery energy storage systems, which are totally a separate entity, shall be located safely and sensibly on brownfield sites or adjacent to the grid connection.

00:20:47:15 - 00:20:52:10

From where it will always be charged from. Thank you.

00:20:54:27 - 00:20:55:27

Thank you, Mrs. Galton.

00:20:59:24 - 00:21:00:10

Thank you.

00:21:02:26 - 00:21:03:11

Um.

00:21:04:09 - 00:21:05:06

So.

00:21:07:05 - 00:21:08:10

The next.

00:21:11:03 - 00:21:16:00

Interested party is Mr. Allen from 7000 acres, please.

00:21:28:21 - 00:22:03:26

Hello. Good evening. I'm Jamie Allen from the 7000 acres group, and I'm making this statement on behalf of the 7000 acres group. There is a lot in the news about what the country must do to decarbonise, and the mounting pressure on National Grid to deliver the networks to enable offshore wind. You may have seen or heard of the Great Grid Upgrade campaign from the National Grid, explaining explaining the need to connect offshore wind to power the UK. Offshore wind will provide 70% of the UK's electricity by 2050.

00:22:04:11 - 00:22:39:08

It must therefore be connected to the cities across the country, and to do that we must layout high voltage overhead power lines or underground cables. National Grid is already consulting on routes for such overhead lines across Lincolnshire for any schemes which would undoubtedly have environmental impact, but would make a significant contribution to delivering the lion's share of the country's future energy. It's for another examination to consider whether these benefits outweigh the harms, but there is an absolute requirement to deliver offshore wind.

00:22:39:15 - 00:23:13:08

There is no alternative alternative to wind being the backbone of our energy system. Solar, however, is different. First of all, it will deliver a fraction of what offshore wind will deliver between 7 to 10% of the UK's electricity by 2050, even with the 70 to 90GW installed, and it doesn't need to be deployed in the way being proposed by the applicant. Deploying solar at scale miles from a substation creates unnecessary impact, as well as the need for additional transmission lines.

00:23:14:01 - 00:23:49:28

Despite the applicants protestations that their scheme is essential to deliver the UK government's 70 gigawatt ambition, this is not the case. Germany is a fantastic case study for what can be achieved. Germany has already delivered 80GW of solar without a single large scale ground mounted scheme of the size being proposed at West Burton. Their larger scheme is less than 200MW, and over 70% of their capacity is installed on domestic and commercial rooftops in 2023 alone.

00:23:50:00 - 00:24:27:02

Within the single year, Germany installed 14GW of solar and half of this came from domestic rooftops alone. Remember? And that's a country with 50% greater landmass than the UK. And despite having a higher solar gain in the UK, it chooses not to squander its land resources by deploying ground mounted solar at the scale being proposed by the applicant in the UK. By contrast, after 15 years, the UK has only installed 16GW of solar and every day we build more houses and commercial buildings without solar.

00:24:27:29 - 00:24:38:19

In the UK, the developers argue to the examining authorities that their large scale solutions are the only way to deliver the government's ambition. But this is clearly not the case.

00:24:40:14 - 00:25:16:06

Over the years, we understand more about how we decarbonise with clearer and louder calls for strategic coordination, coordination to deliver technologies effective, to use to aligned, and what our priorities must be. This is not a hollow cry from 7000 acres. Strategic coordination is called for and reports by the Electricity Commissioner, Chris Skidmore, by the National Audit Office, by the Beis Committee and by the UK Climate Change Committee. We need independent and objective consideration of how best to deliver decarbonisation.

00:25:17:13 - 00:25:57:23

Instead, we have a fractured landscape where developers see opportunities and act in pursuit of their financial interests and lobby accordingly. We've seen this through the last twists in the development of the national policy Statements, where the national critical national priority to deliver offshore wind has been watered down, to become a critical national priority to deliver any form of low carbon generation, regardless of what it can contribute. It renders any effective prioritisation meaningless, so its jockeying is unhelpful in a world which can ill afford to put a foot wrong in the path to decarbonisation.

00:25:58:18 - 00:26:30:28

Because of the shortages of skills, shortages of natural resources, shortages of supply chains, and shortages of time. So, of course, the applicant will reinforce their colorful urgency, given the government's ambition for 70GW of solar. But it's from a starting point of 16GW already installed. There is 20GW in a consenting process and 130GW in National Grid's development connection register. With none of this being rooftop solar.

00:26:31:00 - 00:27:00:06

There's a real risk that the opportunity to deliver the call for rooftop revolution will be redundant in the wake of this tide of ground mounted development. So it isn't any wonder that the developers are advocating for urgency. Their urgency is to get the scheme consented before the government wakes up to what it is presiding over. And the harm of having a load such uncontrolled, uncoordinated development which will ultimately impede decarbonization efforts.

00:27:02:00 - 00:27:45:18

So we agree that there is urgency, but not to act rashly or in a way that will cause major regret. We recognize that decarbonization is genuinely difficult, and it's too complex and too challenging to leave exposed, direct and entirely to global market forces, which is why the government is scrambling to

drive measures to support what really needs to be done, starting with unlocking the key of grid connections to deliver offshore wind. In the course of this examination, we have highlighted many examples where the applicant has provided a one sided view to support their case, their assertions on the inadequacy of rooftop solar, and the absolute need for such large ground scale mounted solar being clear examples.

00:27:46:12 - 00:28:18:06

A real fear is that the reams of partial and misinformation presented by the applicant, and the guise of evidence, cannot be sufficiently challenged within this process, and their words will be taken for the truth, for the region, for the country to deliver energy security and decarbonisation. This issue is too important to leave the applicant to be trusted to produce their own body of evidence. The country has a much clearer idea about what should be done to decarbonize. Major, sensible, objective reports have laid out the priorities as follows.

00:28:19:04 - 00:28:49:19

Coordination and planning of the energy system. Solving grid connectivity issues, especially to deliver offshore wind generation. Accelerating employment of wind and nuclear power generation and the need to manage energy flexibly and intermittency of renewable energy sources. There is absolutely no clamour for large scale ground mounted solar. The only voices you will hear pushing for these schemes are the developers themselves. That fact alone should sound an alarm.

00:28:50:28 - 00:29:04:15

Amongst all this noise, the examining authorities to pick a way through and then this moment of turbulence preside over a decision that will change the nature and character of the region for the rest of our lifetime and most of our children's lifetimes.

00:29:10:24 - 00:29:20:26

We must all have faith that the decision is right. Lastly, the premise of renewable energy is to protect the environment, not to destroy it in the process. Thank you.

00:29:22:24 - 00:29:23:27

Thank you, Mr. Allen.

00:29:25:18 - 00:29:44:26

Just a reminder really to all submissions there. There is an opportunity to summarize what you've submitted in writing by the next deadline. That would be very welcome. Thank you. Okay, our third submission we will hear from Mr. Johnson, please.

00:30:09:14 - 00:30:20:11

Good evening, Andy Johnson. I'm a local resident. Um, a lot of the items that I've thought about have already been touched upon. So there's one particular one which I'd like to focus heavily on, if I may.

00:30:23:02 - 00:31:07:01

In the past few weeks, we've experienced extensive, extensive flooding in the area designated for the installation of solar panels. My concerns are regarding the management of the land as the land sits inside the River Trent flood basin. I understand that the land management will be made the responsibility of the land owner and not the developer, including flood risk and other questions based upon this. The installation of the panels naturally will cover a large percentage of the ground, reducing the ability of the ground to act as a soak away, therefore leading to an early saturation of the surrounding lands, leading to a heightened flood risk.

00:31:08:24 - 00:31:29:08

Has the applicant provided a detailed document on how the landowner will provide land management in relation to the additional water displacement? What guarantees are being provided by the landowner or landowners to ensure land flood management and compliance over the planning permission period.

00:31:31:00 - 00:31:32:00

What will be.

00:31:32:02 - 00:31:46:01

Required to mitigate flooding risks prior to the panel installation, and there is their development plan of works stroke maintenance to cover this. Has this been accepted by the relevant authorities?

00:31:47:18 - 00:31:54:16

What are the relevant authorities thoughts on the additional flood risk management being via the land owner?

00:31:56:28 - 00:32:20:11

Fluid liability. Flooding has been viewed as a natural event with no one being directly accountable. However, we're changes to land away from nature based activities may now be accountable and liable for damage caused. What insurance cover will be provided to compensate any affected properties and land?

00:32:21:29 - 00:32:29:06

When I submit the document, I'll include the photographic documents to support where it's all been flooded. Thank you.

00:32:33:02 - 00:32:34:12

Thank you very much, Mr. Johnson.

00:32:44:24 - 00:32:53:15

Okay. Um, Mr. or Councilor Spence is next, please. Good evening, Councilor Spence.

00:33:02:27 - 00:33:35:01

Good evening, Stephen Spence. I represent the parishioners of Martin and Burton as chairman of the parish council. We have concerns over the large concentrations of solar panels proposed for this area. A large percentage of the arable land in both parishes will be covered in these devices. This will take good, productive agricultural land out of use and virtually visually blight most of the vicinity.

00:33:36:12 - 00:34:13:08

The narrow, narrow corridor of land between these solar developments will be excavated to bury the cables carrying the power to the court to the Cottam Power Station connecting point. All four of these proposed large solar parks have chosen virtually the same route to cotton, and they would all like to cross the River Trent at the same point. This is where there are already too high voltage overhead power lines, a large diameter gas pipeline, and a major drainage channel.

00:34:14:29 - 00:34:43:28

At this point there is a large flood defence embankment. The bank is not. Not situated here to protect Martin or Gate Burton, which have never flooded, at least since Roman times. These devices, these defenses prevent flood water running down the drainage ditches and ultimately ending up in the Brayford Pool in the center of Lincoln, which will cause major flood damage.

00:34:46:20 - 00:35:04:04

Laying these cables with the necessary heavy machinery required will ruin the productive land, decimate the wildlife and compromise the flood defences on the River Trent. The river authorities are also concerned about these proposals and have expressed their reservations.

00:35:06:15 - 00:35:18:10

The parish council is also alarmed at the idea of installing large battery storage systems in both parishes. The regulatory bodies do not seem to have any plan.

00:35:20:26 - 00:35:29:23

How to extinguish fires or control associated potential hazards. What risk assessments have been made.

00:35:31:10 - 00:35:48:13

We consider that the proposed developments are a waste of productive arable land. There are other derelict and brownfield sites available, along with millions of domestic and industrial roofs that could accommodate them. Thank you.

00:35:51:04 - 00:35:53:13

Thank you very much, Councillor Spence.

00:35:59:18 - 00:36:03:21

Could Mr. Rise, please come forward? Thank you.

00:36:17:04 - 00:36:20:08

Yeah. My name is William Rose. I'm a local resident.

00:36:21:25 - 00:36:39:15

I'm probably going to go over, uh, quite a lot. That's already been said, but. So just stop me if I do. I've found it filling in. For the past 56 years. I've lived there all my life, along with most other people. I can think of better places to be in front of this microphone.

00:36:41:03 - 00:37:16:03

But I felt I must stand up to these monstrous proposals. I will never be able to look my children or grandchildren in the eye if I haven't. If I haven't tried to do something to stop this, the applicants will say they're following government policy. They may well be, but it doesn't make it right. The whole strategy of looking for solar to generate 70GW of electricity by 2035 is flawed. The scale of output will need the sacrifice of at least 70,000 hectares of land.

00:37:16:29 - 00:37:50:09

This is a shocking figure, which I suppose the applicants from their ivory towers will pass off as a drop in the ocean. How can it be sensible policy to take this huge area of the finest farmland from this county? I have spent my whole life trying to follow the old dictum of leaving my land, and about a better state than when I took it over. I have planted woods, miles of hedgerows, created ponds, all to enhance the environment around me.

00:37:50:26 - 00:38:10:06

I am absolutely appalled by these proposals being put forward to you as adjudicators over these events. Must look at the bigger picture. We are not faced with this one prospect, a project, but many. Our rural landscape will be changed for generations to come.

00:38:11:22 - 00:38:50:24

You as adjudicator over these events, must look at the bigger picture. We are not faced with this one project, but many. Sorry solar on rooftops as part of a mix of renewable energy is not a problem. The

problem is the condemning of vast areas of farmland to become an industrial landscape. This is an ill thought out government policy, which doesn't care about the long term effects which it surely will have. The cumulative visual effect of such a large area of solar panels on our rural landscape is hard to comprehend.

00:38:50:26 - 00:38:58:12

This has never been done before. There can be no doubt that our outlook will be blighted as far as the eye can see.

00:39:00:25 - 00:39:13:18

By granting this, you will be destroying the landscape which generations of our forbearers have toiled to create, all for the sake of the profit for some faceless multinational company.

00:39:17:16 - 00:39:49:06

So I'll just finish on the end of it, really. The advent of many nuclear power stations will render schemes like these obsolete. In fact, by reserving grid connection for solar, it might hold up their development. If these schemes are allowed to go ahead, you can sign vast areas of rural England to an industrial, soulless wilderness. You will have changed our countryside forever. I would urge you to halt these proposals.

00:39:49:08 - 00:39:56:27

It will be your legacy to the people who live in this area. If you allow these proposals to go ahead.

00:39:58:22 - 00:39:59:07

Thank you.

00:40:01:17 - 00:40:02:18

Thank you, Mr. Rice.

00:40:12:20 - 00:40:15:04

Victoria White is the next.

00:40:17:01 - 00:40:17:22

Submission.

00:40:17:24 - 00:40:18:12

Thank you.

00:40:32:00 - 00:40:32:19

Can you hear me?

00:40:34:20 - 00:41:04:26

Um, I'm Victoria White and I'm a local resident. Um, and I've lived both in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, um, where these, uh, several applicants, um, will be, um, trying to impact on the areas of those counties. Um, what I would like to put forward in particular tonight, um, is the fact that nobody has given a cost benefit analysis that is easy for the public to understand.

00:41:05:13 - 00:41:22:25

There does not appear to be, um, a ready, readily available report with the advantages and disadvantages, both long term and short term, to UK citizens, and in particular, the local residents who will be surrounded by these solar farms.

00:41:24:28 - 00:41:59:06

My summary to date of all the applicants is it is only, um, a matter of displacement, not actually advantages, um, to the nation or the local people. It's displacing energy from farmland. It'll be displacing people, by the way they live in these areas and the wildlife. And the majority of this will be irreversible. This will cover large areas and it will be long term, if not, um, forever.

00:41:59:08 - 00:42:32:11

40 to 60 years has been, um, quoted as the lifetime of these panels. Also, what happens with these panels? Who is going to be maintaining them and what is the efficiency of them? For example, I've seen a report in countries such as California where the sun does shine a lot and these batteries have found it. Uh, they found it very difficult to actually absorb all that, all the, uh, the solar power, store it safely and then distribute it efficiently.

00:42:32:23 - 00:43:15:27

So not only do they have too much sun, they can actually distribute it evenly. So therefore there are still, uh, companies such as fossil fuels who are having to bridge the gap because they cannot manage the flow of the electric from these, uh, solar farms. We have the reverse in the UK. Obviously, we don't have as much, um, sun. So, um, perhaps the flow will be a little easier, but it will still not be efficient. Um, I think everybody else who has spoken earlier has covered all the other elements in particular, um, for the harm it will do to people in the environment, both short term and long term.

00:43:16:14 - 00:43:54:00

Um, but I would ask that can we please have an easy report for the public to be able to read these as applicants are coming at us quite thick and fast. It's been long term, and I think a lot of the common man at the public do not understand solar. Sounds like a very nice green thing to do, but actually when it's, um, investigated, solar panels on roofs may well be appropriate. Large scale solar panels covering vast areas of, um, land, farmland, or whatever in a concentrated area in our counties is unacceptable.

00:43:54:17 - 00:43:55:07

Thank you.

00:43:58:04 - 00:44:19:26

Thank you, Mrs. White. Thank you for your submission. And thank you also for bearing in mind what we said about not necessarily repeating what other speakers have already said. Um, as with other speakers, your written submission or summary will be welcoming to the examination.

00:44:22:14 - 00:44:29:01

The next speaker on my list is Margaret O'Grady from Bellingham Parish.

00:44:39:05 - 00:45:18:05

Good evening, Margaret O'Grady. Filling and parish meeting. Picture this. It's a fine day. Martin Clunes is smiling out at you and he's going to discover the truth behind solar farms. Get rid of those myths and misconceptions. He's going to show us that standing with a farmer in a beekeeper suit and in a small field with two meter tall solar panels, solar has benefits for the farmer, benefits for biodegradable biodiversity, and will not be invasive, imposed on communities, and will provide the electricity that the country needs.

00:45:18:29 - 00:46:02:16

Well, this is what Island Green would like to present because they have commissioned that video. Now picture this not just a few acres across different farms in different areas, benefiting a local farmer who is still farming alongside but concentrated over tens of thousands of acres in one district with 4.5m high panels here, there will no longer be agricultural farming. Alongside, there won't be any land left. Where will the biofuels be grown? Where will crops be grown for us to eat our animal feed? The benefits are limited to a few who may not even actually be farmers on the ground.

00:46:03:10 - 00:46:35:04

Now consider this the change to the National Policy Statements on Renewable Energy November of last year, which puts solar at as a critical national priority. Priority. Well, who were the lobbyists behind this? Well, strangely, they are not here now. They represent the companies behind the solar projects. They've put millions into persuading us and governments that ground solar industrialization is the way to give us energy. That's because they make money.

00:46:35:13 - 00:47:10:04

It's relatively easy to construct solar. Of course not here in the UK. They won't create any long term jobs in the region. They will change the landscape for 40 to 60 years. A lifetime. Or is that more than a lifetime? They will cause disruption in the building, won't provide the actual solar the companies imagine. And what actual guarantees are there at the end of its lifetime? But that's okay, because these companies, as we have heard, will have discussions between their topic leads.

00:47:10:06 - 00:47:42:06

They will use their professional judgments. Is that not like marking your own homework as a child? Is it not the same as lobbying to ensure that the government policy reflects your priority? Martin Clunes asks why isn't everyone doing it? Well, everybody's not doing solar because it's not the answer. Not what the country needs here is not the right place to put a concentrated area of large, ground mounted solar panels.

00:47:42:08 - 00:48:13:15

The place for solar is on roofs in small, small areas where the locals benefit are as part of a family of renewables. Did anybody tell Martin Clunes he had half the story? Like we are being presented with the part truth, the complicated arguments that just don't add up. Whilst these companies lobby and belittle us on social media, they are not actually doing this for green reasons. They aren't providing sustainable energy for the future.

00:48:13:17 - 00:48:46:29

They are over planting. They are tying up grid connections. They are racing to be the company that is allowed to put forward a proposal that is granted. They are here to take the contracts for difference. We are an island and land is precious. We need to consider carefully its use before we act. Land needs to do so much more than solar to rectify our damage that humans have done to the land and the climate. When these companies are long gone, but they will sell on and evolve.

00:48:47:02 - 00:49:19:12

Move on to the next big project and their legacy is debated in years to come, when solar should have been placed on rooftops as a policy before we were in crisis. When there is no one left accountable for their actions, what will our legacy be? How will we justify this to our grandchildren, our great grandchildren? I personally can say I tried to protect agriculture as a way of life, my community. I tried to protect the wildlife and the habitats.

00:49:19:28 - 00:49:30:26

I put solar on my roof years ago. But will that have been enough? Well I'm trying. Will others. Thank you.

00:49:34:20 - 00:49:36:19

Thank you, Mrs. O'Grady.

00:49:39:18 - 00:49:44:11

On my list. Next we have, uh, Mrs. Bingham.

00:49:45:09 - 00:49:46:05
Sue Bingham.

00:49:47:28 - 00:49:48:13
He.

00:50:06:04 - 00:50:07:04
Good evening.

00:50:09:25 - 00:50:24:16
I can't say I'm particularly prepared for this evening. We all have busy lives. I don't think there's quite as many people here this evening, but 5:00 5:30 start isn't ideal for working people either.

00:50:26:29 - 00:50:40:02
I just find this whole process absolutely appalling. The fact that there are four applications. In a very small area.

00:50:41:25 - 00:51:02:21
And we, the communities are expected to deal with that. I looked at one of the Cottesmore Gate, Bourton. I can't remember because I can't honestly keep up with it all, and I'm sure I've addressed West Burton Inspectorate at DoubleTree in Lincoln in November. Is that right?

00:51:04:24 - 00:51:25:05
Um. On the on the Cottesmore Gate. Burton, who knows 79 pages of a report, each with different appendices. How on earth are we expected to keep up with that? This is truly a David and Goliath. Attack on our communities.

00:51:27:18 - 00:51:57:27
And our lives. I cannot understand how any sane and sensible person can see that this is a good idea to plaster our rural communities with 15 foot high, 4.5m, whatever that is, solar panels on over 10,000 acres. And this is not confined to Lincolnshire either. This is across the country.

00:51:57:29 - 00:52:00:21
Little bits more here, there and everywhere.

00:52:02:14 - 00:52:14:04
I am angry, very angry that this process. Is shutting us out, and we are going to be the ones that have to live with it.

00:52:16:23 - 00:52:20:01
I've already given numerous statements.

00:52:22:10 - 00:52:24:03
I think we're all getting sick of it.

00:52:26:17 - 00:52:41:19
Mr. Phillips, the solicitor for several of the applicants, I understand, said at the Lincolnshire Showground meeting that we should all hang our heads in shame for purchasing Chinese stuff.

00:52:43:05 - 00:52:55:28
Because we all have it. I don't think there's much choice because our manufacturing base was exported. Our government is exporting the carbon problem.

00:52:57:15 - 00:53:08:15

Not solving it. Dealing with an ever belligerent China is totally ridiculous in my eyes.

00:53:12:19 - 00:53:28:07

Mr. Phillips also said that Lincolnshire is historically been a power producing area. No, it has not. That is Nottinghamshire. Across the River Trent. Not Lincolnshire. Lincolnshire is a food producing area.

00:53:30:22 - 00:53:59:16

And of course we have lots of golf courses, and that is only 0.1% of the total land mass, and solar will only be 0.1% or up to 0.3%. Not very much at all except in our local area. That is a huge concentration of massive solar panels. Not only the solar panels, but the cabling that goes with it, which is often down footpaths, bridleways.

00:54:01:11 - 00:54:25:24

And the disruption to our lives and our lifestyles. Our fauna, our flora, our food producing capabilities would be absolutely devastating. For what benefit? The only benefit I can see to this.

00:54:27:26 - 00:54:35:15

Is the huge profits that the applicants are going to make. That is what it boils down to.

00:54:37:25 - 00:54:42:23

I could say a lot more. But I am so angry.

00:54:44:20 - 00:54:49:27

About this process, the way it's been dealt with, the onslaught.

00:54:53:22 - 00:54:55:11

Of the applications.

00:54:58:06 - 00:55:01:24

I beg of you to turn them all down.

00:55:03:19 - 00:55:08:05

I did suggest site visits. I don't know if those site visits have been.

00:55:10:05 - 00:55:15:10

Done. Or if you're intending to visit our village.

00:55:16:27 - 00:55:17:21

Because.

00:55:19:14 - 00:55:50:12

And I am a fourth generation family farmer that I think I've previously said our lives will be totally destroyed. There will be nowhere safe to ride, to cycle for children, for dog walkers. The cabling is scheduled to come through our village. And battery storage area, which. The fire risk is enormous.

00:55:56:05 - 00:56:12:08

There is a lot of passion. From a lot of people. And a lot of people who think they are not being listened to. And I beg of you to turn down these profiteering applications.

00:56:13:24 - 00:56:14:17

Thank you.

00:56:20:01 - 00:56:20:24

Thank you.

00:56:26:12 - 00:56:49:28

Thank you, Mrs. Bingham. Just to confirm, the examining authority has undertaken a number of site inspections and taken on board all of the comments and helpful suggestions of points of interest and places to visit. Um, the most recent inspections were undertaken today. Thank you again for your submission.

00:56:52:16 - 00:56:57:15

That concludes the list of those who have indicated their wish to speak.

00:56:59:04 - 00:57:19:27

Before inviting the applicant to respond. I just will invite any. Anyone else in the room who may wish to raise anything within the scope of the open floor hearing. If there is anybody. Please make yourself known and I'll invite you up to the table.

00:57:23:18 - 00:57:46:21

I'll just check that we haven't had any attendees virtually. It doesn't appear so. In which case we will proceed to agenda item four. This is the applicant's response to representations with the applicant. Like to respond. Thank you, Mr. Phillips. If you could make your way to the microphone. Thank you.

00:57:59:20 - 00:58:00:05

Uh.

00:58:00:09 - 00:58:33:02

Uh, good evening, Gareth Phillips. I'm a solicitor and partner at the firm Pinsent Masons. Uh, and I'm speaking on behalf of the applicant, uh, for this DCO application. Uh, first, some reassurance on on process and seeing the wider picture. Uh, those that have spoken this evening from the local community, um, have invested a great deal of time speaking at all the other open floor hearings that have gone before this one in respect of the other applications that have been mentioned.

00:58:33:14 - 00:59:23:26

Uh, they have committed time to that. They've expressed similar points, as we've heard this evening, and those are on record with the examining authorities for those applications. It's worth also noting that in terms of that wider picture, there is an interrelationships report, uh, that was requested, uh, I believe, on the gate. Burton applicant, uh, examining authority first, which describes all of these projects, how they the relationship between them and particularly the point at which the cable corridors have been designed to essentially come together so as to limit, uh, land taken impact on, on the environment in that location so everyone can rest assured that there is there is no single focus on one project.

00:59:23:28 - 01:00:03:24

Each of the examining authorities in question have the evidence before them of the other projects coming forward. And of course, the environmental impact assessment, uh, includes a cumulative assessment, which by law means that the decision has to be taken in respect of this project, having regard to all the others. So there is that wider picture being seen. It's also, I think, worth saying as reassurance that it is not only down to the local residents of the communities affected to, um, provide the alternative argument to those that are put forward by the applicant.

01:00:04:00 - 01:00:42:09

Everything that has been put into this application and put before this examining authority is not only scrutinised by this examining authority, but also the local planning authorities affected and the statutory nature conservation bodies, Natural England and others. They are all professionals. They are all used to looking at applications of this scale and smaller ones, and they will be able to provide the scrutiny that has been asked for by local residents. It is not just down to them, uh, but their views and opinions do count and should be, should should have regard to uh when determining the application.

01:00:43:13 - 01:01:15:09

We've heard a few things, uh, this evening and other hearings that this is all just developer led that essentially, I think we heard this evening that it's only developers and those that don't know the facts that support solar. And we've heard that it's only the developers that consider these projects nationally significant. I'm afraid that's simply not the truth. In the United Kingdom, we have a plan led system. Earlier this month, the national policy statements were designated.

01:01:15:11 - 01:01:50:17

That means adopted. Those are the very latest expressions of the government's policy for energy in the UK. Those have not been brought about through rash judgement or expedition or anything else like that. Quite the contrary. Uh, if the so-called solar lobbyists had had that their way, um, it would have happened faster. But it hasn't that those policy statements have gone through two rounds of wide ranging consultation, three iterations, and were brought about by judicial review in the first place.

01:01:50:19 - 01:02:22:12

That was saying to government, come on now, it's about time you updated your your plans that were at were last designated in 2011. Those plans are on the back of other policy documents that we've seen in the last two years British Energy Security Strategy, the Energy White paper back in, in, in, in around Christmas time 2020. And we've seen powering up Britain as well. It's not all come about all of a sudden because of some profiteering developers seeing an opportunity to make cash.

01:02:22:14 - 01:03:03:04

This is actually the process, the planning process that has identified the need for solar and not just solar and not just ground mounted solar, all those within the energy industry, except that all of the technologies are needed if we're going to decarbonise. There is a place for nuclear. There is a place for offshore wind. And those two two power generations are important. There's no doubt about that. But they sit alongside other technologies, which include solar, which include battery storage, which is a mix of technologies will help us meet the decarbonisation objectives that are set out in policy.

01:03:04:07 - 01:03:34:08

In terms of land use, the analogies with golf courses and things like that. It's about putting it in context as the amount of land that will be put to solar use if all 70GW were to come forward. Um, in terms of loss of agricultural land, there is a common theme running through these hearings that just because land has been used for agriculture, every square foot of it is going to be put to that use all the time.

01:03:34:10 - 01:04:06:00

And that's simply not the case. Leaving all energy proposals to one side. There is current government policy, as there has been for many decades now, that that encourages farmers to set land aside. There are three policies at the moment three different schemes where where farmers can earn money by taking land out of agricultural use. They can do that by filling in a form, submitting it online, and then they get paid some money for doing it. But there's no reference to that by those that are objecting to solar.

01:04:06:04 - 01:04:37:29

The reference to China was simply to point out that the concern about Chinese supply is only raised in relation to solar. There isn't anything said about Chinese manufacturers contributing to nuclear. The

last two nuclear proposals in the UK were by Chinese companies. There's no reference to it in terms of offshore wind and where the where the Chinese actually contribute to that. Yet we've heard both of those technologies are preferable to solar.

01:04:38:08 - 01:05:07:01

Presumably, if they're not supplied by China, though, the reference to other Chinese goods is just to explain that if we if we are to take a stand on Chinese supply, then let's not just say, well, it's it's only to do with solar. We need to take a step back and say, is this an appropriate supply chain for those goods that we consume in the UK? So it's not just about solar and I think. So to wrap up on some of these points.

01:05:08:18 - 01:05:51:21

So much of what is raised is actually about policy and actually about process. The process was a legal process that was brought forward in 2008. It has been going since that time. The policy has evolved through various stages to get to where it is now. It is not the developer that has decided that large scale solar is the solution and only the solution. It is government that's decided policy. It is developer that is following government's lead, and the developer in this case firmly accepts that solar, both ground mounted and rooftop, sits within a suite of technologies that are required to meet decarbonisation.

01:05:51:23 - 01:06:22:27

This developer and many others like it, do not say it is the only solution, but it is one of the solutions that are needed to make the targets that have been set out by government with with evidence that has been provided by independent bodies like the Committee on Climate Change, like the National Infrastructure Commission and many others that operate across Europe, and all point to ground mounted and rooftop solar, forming part of the technology mix. So it's not about profiteering.

01:06:23:12 - 01:07:01:29

Um, unfortunately, since the privatizations in the 80s, just about everything is driven by private sector. Nuclear, offshore, wind, solar, tidal. You name it. It's all delivered by private companies that are following the policies set out by government. And it's very similar to other aspects of our life, whether it's the train operating companies or any other that you might think of. It is a private sector driven economy these days. Yes, there will be a profit motive in it, but then you can choose a number of places to invest and whether I'm whether I'm believed or not.

01:07:02:01 - 01:07:21:16

I can tell you that this applicant does have a concern about environmental change, does have a concern about climate change, does want to make a significant difference to that, and does want its legacy to be a contribution to decarbonisation and removing carbon from our planet. That's what I'd like to say. Thank you very much.

01:07:23:18 - 01:07:25:07

Thank you, Mr. Phillips.

01:07:33:29 - 01:08:21:20

Okay. Thank you. We won. We're now moving on to item five of the agenda, which is where we draw the hearing to a close. This this point, I'm just going to as an aside, I'm going to take a moment to clarify our position on the change request that was received earlier this month. This was referred to and introduced verbally by the applicant at our issue specific hearing yesterday. Um, so in terms of the at the change request, we've had time to, um, to review the documentation documentation received on the basis of whether we've got we've got sufficient information to examine the changes proposed and also whether they would constitute a material change to the project overall.

01:08:21:27 - 01:08:59:06

We have concluded that on the basis of the information submitted, there is sufficient, um, information available for the examination to proceed. And also in terms of the materiality of the changes, um, they're relatively small scale. They would not result in a materially different project, noting that there would be no changes to the principal elements of the scheme that we're examining. Um, we're also satisfied that the consultation required, um, can proceed on the basis of the compulsory acquisition regulations, and that further consultation on the environmental information presented isn't required.

01:08:59:12 - 01:09:26:19

We've therefore made the procedural decision to accept the applicant's change request, and we'll be confirming this in a relate three letter as soon as possible, which will set out a slightly revised timetable to enable the appropriate consultation to be accommodated. Um, and so in the meantime, before that letter has been issued, we ask that the applicant proceed with advertising the start of the consultation period as soon as as is practicable.

01:09:28:13 - 01:09:52:12

So we just wanted to note that that, um, that procedural decision at this, this point in the examination. Um, so just back on to, um, where we are, which is, um, bringing the the hearing to a close. We'd like to thank everybody, um, for taking the time to speak to us today. Um, yes, miss Bingham, you've got your hand raised.

01:09:57:00 - 01:10:00:11

So we can't. If you if you come forward. Um.

01:10:28:15 - 01:11:01:11

In terms of the process that we go through. It's it's, um. It isn't really within the, um, the, the parameters of of the meeting that we have. We normally hear from interested parties and the applicant has a right of reply. If we heard from you again, we'd have to give the applicant a further right of reply. And would it would it would be a could end up as a continuous process. So what I'd suggest is that if you put any additional points in the, um, your written submission, uh, which we, we will accept following, following this meeting, you understand, we have to try and manage the process as, as fairly as we possibly can.

01:11:01:18 - 01:11:11:14

Um, so you will have the right to reply in writing. But. But not verbally. As I say, we could end up with a back end to which we don't want to know to have. In terms of this forum, I.

01:11:11:16 - 01:11:21:05

Quite understand that. But he has, um, erroneously stated, um, about farming and environmental schemes that I think definitely needs correcting.

01:11:21:09 - 01:11:28:17

As I say, if you if you would do so in written comments, that would be that will be. We'll receive that in due course. Thank you, Miss Bingham. Thank you.

01:11:35:04 - 01:12:06:24

So, as I say, um, we'd like to thank everybody for taking the time to, to come out this evening and to speak to us. We've heard everything that everyone has said. And, um, we'd be grateful if you could confirm what you've said in writing. So we've got a written record of that as well. Um, and if you could do so by the 28th of February, which is deadline for of the examination, that that would be very helpful indeed. Thank you. Um, so as is the usual case, the recording of the hearing will be published on the project webpage as soon as it's practicable.

01:12:07:03 - 01:12:27:03

Um, and if you have any concerns about the project web page and where to find this information, please speak to the The Case team who are, um, with us today. So just to confirm, we have covered all of the items on the agenda. Um, the time is now, um, 1842. And this open floor hearing is now closed. Thank you.