

Issue Specific Hearing 1 regarding the draft Development Consent Order for Cottam Solar Project

10:00am Wednesday 6 September 2023

Summary of Oral Submission, from Margaret O'Grady, Fillingham Parish Meeting

During the ISH on DCO, the Applicant described the Urgent Need to decarbonise.

It is worth highlighting that the Climate Change Act came into force in 2008, placing a legal responsibility on the Government to stick to binding CO2 reductions – reflecting the urgent need to decarbonise.

Decarbonisation has been an urgent issue for at least 15 years now.

Over this time, even without retro-fitting any rooftops, new build domestic rooftops alone could have delivered 6000MW of solar, or around 12 similar sized NSIP schemes to Cottom (based on 100,000 houses / year, with 4kW installations).

Since 2008, we know much more about how to decarbonise.

There is a need to plant 30,000-70,000 hectares of trees per year.

There is an urgent need to decarbonise all sectors of our society, including energy and food production – which must be truly sustainable.

And yes, there is a need to provide solar power to decarbonise, but it was only last year, in 2022, the UK Government identified an ambition for 70GW of solar – the first time any figure has been stated.

The Skidmore review calls for a Rooftop Solar Revolution.

And yet, thousands of rooftops continue to be built, every year, without solar.

Beyond decarbonisation, there are imperatives for house building, for commercial development to drive the economy, for reservoirs, as well for green spaces for leisure and recreation – all of which place more demands on our land.

Therefore, it is vital we make the right decisions regarding how we decarbonise and how we manage these competing land uses. We cannot commit significant areas of land to solar panels which can make very limited energy or decarbonisation contributions in the UK – and regret using land in this way, when it may be better used for direct decarbonisation measures, or other pressing needs where there is no alternative.

The Applicant describes the need to act urgently, but it is worth considering that perhaps their urgency is driven more by there being 130,000MW of other solar developments in National Grid's capacity pipeline, excluding the 16,000MW currently installed, or any potential future rooftop solar installation. Understandably, with an ambition for only 70,000MW of solar, the race is on for developers to get quick decisions and bank their schemes.

Looking holistically at land use across the piece, about what genuinely will deliver decarbonisation is not the Applicant's concern. It must be ours.