

Whitlock, Melissa

From: Catrin Fieldson <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 20 September 2023 11:29
To: Cottam Solar Project
Subject: Cottam Solar-Concerns

Categories: Deadline, HEO

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to express our very real concerns regarding the sheer number and scale of plans to cover 10,000 Lincolnshire agricultural acres in industrial solar panels and ask that as a Planning Inspector, you analyse the workings of the various developers, scrutinise the way they have and continue to behave and accept, as we who live here have, that just because several applications to develop individual solar fields are made, does not disguise that fact that they are, in fact, one.

Here are some of our many concerns:

- Firstly, Grade 3B land has successfully grown crops for hundreds of years and has played a huge part in feeding the nation, especially during times of global conflict when farmers became part of the war effort, given special status to remain at their posts and keep the crops growing and food on the tables, much on 3B land!! Based on what we know this land is capable of, to imply that 3B land is non-productive or “lesser” in some way is misleading and distracting. Surely, to take 10,000 acres of good quality farmland out of production for 40 years when we really don't know what the next 40 years is going to bring, seems short sighted. and potentially dangerous. Using farmland for solar energy would take away our regions ability to react at times of food crisis or be able to take advantage of new and more effective carbon capture or energy creation technologies that may come along during the next 40 years. At the pace of technological advancement, it's a very real concern that these solar panels could be obsolete before they can be plugged into the future upgraded energy infrastructure.
- Everyone shares the concerns that are driving these proposals. No one can deny that as a World, we need to respond to the threat of Global warming by creating green energy, but to take 10000 acres of prime agricultural land to produce it, surely negates its impact, as all we would be doing is **swapping out** one kind of energy for another. Land with the ability to grow food has, and will always be, a huge driver in global economics. With the current state of the planet, now surely is not the right time to take growing land out of the potential for production. To decommission agricultural land for 40 years, deny its use in the fight to capture carbon and react at times of need must be fully scrutinised. We turn to you, as the planning inspector, to do this on behalf of those affected.
- You cannot imagine what the impact would be for farmers and everyone living in site of these solar fields, of having land bordered by 10ft high illuminated security fencing instead of hedges and walls. To be denied the beauty and freedom of the open landscape for the duration of our lifetime would be devastating to many. Our famous Lincolnshire night skies would be obliterated by security lighting and the air silenced as wildlife migrate to other areas. How will any wildlife cope in this newly industrialised landscape?
- Regarding roaming Deer, there have been no environmental impact studies that we are aware of, to look into the impact of 10,000 acres of Deer fencing on open agricultural land. Deer have been free to roam for millennia, the high Deer fencing designed to keep Deer out of solar fields will have the opposite effect on farmland beyond them, effectively trapping them onto neighbouring farmland. We have expressed these concerns but as yet, they have been un answered.
- In line with the Governments **levelling up agenda**, proper consideration and compensation should be given to those whose livelihoods will be **affected** and possibly **lost** should these schemes go ahead, and should at the very least, **equal** the compensation given to the absentee landowners whose lives and livelihoods remain **unaffected** and in fact, very likely **improved** by the deployment of lucrative solar panels on their land. What is levelling up **for** if not to reduce such inequality in our society. We are concerned about the impact on those who rely on the countryside for their living, no

one should lose their job or have their livelihood affected without financial compensation. Tenant farmers are not only losing their employment but their sense of self as farming is often more about being custodians of the countryside and all who reside in it, there can be no comparable livelihood.

- And what about those who work in the Visitor Economy. Lincolnshire has a thriving visitor economy, its often regarded as the hidden gem of England, delightfully discovered with visitors returning year after year. They come for the peace and solitude, for Lincolnshire sunsets and for dark skies and recently, even the Aurora Borealis, seen in Lincolnshire because we have these wonderful unpolluted dark skies!! Guests comment on wonderful long views, open countryside and lovely quiet walks and a real sense that they are indeed "Far from the madding crowd". There can be no doubt that if the proposals go ahead, eventually the visitors will stop coming along with this vital income, but when recently asked about what plans there would be to compensate those affected, we were told **there were none**, that losses could **not be anticipated or quantified**. This is ironic when you consider the significant time and expense it must have taken to convince the landowners that the solar lease fees would compensate them for lost farming profits for 40 years ahead!!.
- As custodians of this countryside, we greatly fear for the future of this land. We fear that in 40 years time, when we are all long gone, promises made to return the land back to agriculture and safely decommission the toxic panels will be long forgotten. Governments and budgets will change and commitments filed away. We must protect Lincolnshire land and retain it for future growing generations. We won't be around to ensure this, few will, the prospect of abandoned fields and rusting panels being the legacy we are passing onto our children is chilling. As our Planning Inspector, we ask you to protect this land.
- Lastly, to turn up at village and Parish halls months **after** secret negotiations with absentee landowners and be told that **despite local concerns**, the siting of panels would not be negotiated, **must contravene this very process**. From that very first meeting, local people felt that this was not a real consultation at all, but insidious, albeit very polite, corporate bullying and the tone and wording of responses from the various interested parties simply serves to confirm our fears. Many residents simply cannot respond to their legal references and counter arguments, and even struggle to manage their timetables, those who would be **affected** do not have legal representation, so we look to you to ensure that we are represented, we look to you to ensure that a long term strategy for power capture protects our ability to react to changes over the next 40 years and our national commitment to green energy is not handed to private offshore enterprises who care little about the environmental or human impact of those living in Lincolnshire.

In summary: We are not in opposition for opposition's sake here. This community has had to tolerate government scheme after government scheme, from Environment Agency enforced flood schemes on farmland to save urban areas, the acquisition of historical airfields by the Home Office, robbing Lincolnshire of future investments and opportunities and now, plans for an unprecedented 10,000 acre loss of habitat.

For the people living here, our livelihoods and lifestyles would change overnight and will have a huge impact on our individual sense of personal control and well-being. It cannot be right to ignore the potential of many **other** suitable sites and turn to the countryside for a last minute solution because the countryside is already besieged by the onslaught of developers and the rather dubious methods deployed to circumnavigate environmental and local planning concerns. The Green Belt has disappeared and more and more agricultural land is being swept up for housing and warehousing. Lincolnshire agricultural land, the bread basket of the nation, should be seen as a priceless national resource beyond the reaches of developers, whatever they want to develop it for.

Lets also not forget that we need our countryside and wide -open spaces and vistas, everyone does, they are integral to improved wellbeing. A walk in the countryside is officially socially prescribed by Doctors to help people manage their mental health and our countryside, and farmland in particular, should be viewed as a priceless resource, to be protected and nurtured, not exploited.

No offset by the solar companies can ever replace what would be lost.

Yours Hopefully

Catrin and Peter Fieldson
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