

To the planning inspector for Cottam Solar Farm Project (written representation)

Our thoughts on living with the proposed solar industrialisation of farmland.

Approaching retirement age, we decided to purchase a property and move to an area that would be peaceful and quiet. We wanted a country setting where we could enjoy walking locally and appreciate the wonderful wildlife and birdlife in the area. Noise and light pollution have always affected us. We were delighted to find just such a property. We decided to compromise on a few things, namely no shop, pub or bus stop in the area. On the plus side we have a few neighbouring houses.

We purchased the property just prior to lockdown. The one thing we always commented on was how lovely and quiet it was. Tranquil in fact. The birdsong is incredible. Something friends and family always comment on too. The huge skies at night with no light pollution is amazing. To see the stars unadulterated by artificial light is something we really value and appreciate.

Within the first year of us purchasing the house we received correspondence about a proposed solar 'farm'. We were horrified. Then suddenly the 'gold rush of glass' hit all the surrounding areas with 4 such applications (plus a fifth small one, which is to be decided by West Lindsey District Council). How could anyone want to put thousands and thousands of glass panels onto fields where crops are successfully grown? Field gradings were suddenly important because solar panels could be installed on 'low grade' fields where crops were being grown. It would be advantageous to have the soil sequentially tested by somebody independently appointed. The applicant has supposedly had this done (some incorrectly labelled as 3b when in fact they were 3a), but it is in their interest to have lower readings, even though crops are currently grown on those very fields with good yields. Apparently the yield in 2023 has been the best for a very long time.

We are staggered to learn of the number of solar applications in the pipeline for Lincolnshire as a whole. Lincolnshire the arable county, the 'bread and vegetable basket' of the UK will become the solar capital of the UK! Please can the total number of applications in Lincolnshire be made public for all the residents of the County to know about. The public will be horrified when they know the truth.

What has shocked us the most is when we researched the size of the largest solar 'farm' in the world, Bhadla Solar Park in India came up as the largest recorded in 2023 with a total of 14,000 acres. These four adjoining sites are approximately 10,000 acres, so not far short of the biggest one in the world! The site in India is built in a desert so does not affect too many people. Is Lincolnshire so worthless as a County that anyone wanting to make huge profits can target us?

What was to be our idyllic home in the countryside surrounded by wildlife (deer, fox, hares, swans and their signets, squirrels, owls and many bird species), enjoying very low light pollution, hardly any noise and extremely low crime rates will change for the worse. If these applications are passed, we will be surrounded by claustrophobically high glass panels (up to 4.5m) for 40 to 60 years, noise, light pollution at night and an unsafe area. These timescales are whole lifetimes! When family members stay with us, they always go for dogs walks or runs through the fields (on the designated public footpaths) and photograph or video the amazing scenes, including deer leaping through the crops, birds of prey calling and circling above and views of the cliff edge and the beautiful Cathedral. They have said that if we are surrounded by 10,000 acres of glass panels, visiting us in what should be the beautiful and peaceful countryside would be the same as having a weekend away in an industrialised area. Likewise, people visiting local holiday lets will be put off from holidaying in these areas for the same reasons.

The noise not only from the construction process, but from the general running of these sites and battery noise will be unbearable. We really worry not only about our mental health, but everyone else's too with these applications. We would like our thoughts and this letter to be considered for each of the four applications. These applications should be seen as one application rather than cleverly separated into four. We are also disappointed, but not surprised, that a lot of the public meetings/consultations are during the holidays when many people are away or are held in venues which are not easily accessible to the local communities. Each application should be held in the area where it is proposed to be installed. The farmers who have willingly given up their land for easy 'farming' should attend these meetings too. We know a few of these farmers do not live in the area, which is even worse.

We do realise that we need to become greener and more energy efficient, but when you see all the huge warehouses (along the A1, M1 etc.) that have been built over the last few years and are still being constructed, solar panels on the roof should have been a non-negotiable inclusion for planning applications to be considered. Brown field sites should be used before healthy farmland is considered. Farmland is precious and should be protected.

We are very concerned about the crime levels that will no doubt increase due to criminal gangs coming from other counties to plunder what is to be put into the fields. We worry about security fencing, security lighting, CCTV cameras etc. All of this is an intrusion into our lives.

What consideration is being given to our basic human rights? We know that the applicant refers to us as 'human receptors' which is insulting and disrespectful, but living in the area should give us some degree of relevance.

Then there is the wildlife! What will happen when creatures, great and small, are barriered out of their natural habitats? The insects and birds that use areas for nesting and/or migration routes will also be affected.

We feel this has been a short-sighted, knee-jerk reaction by the Government which has afforded companies an opportunity to climb onto the 'green' bandwagon to make huge profits at the expense of local communities. Unfortunately, some people may still think that we as locals will benefit from this so-called energy capture, but sadly it is going to make millions for a few people, many of whom do not even live in this country. It is total greed at Lincolnshire's expense.