

COTTAM SOLAR DEADLINE 6 – TUESDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY 2024 - FINAL STATEMENT

IP: 20037189

I have attended meetings, submitted written representations at every opportunity AGAINST this application by Island Green Power for an order granting Development consent for the Cottam Solar Project in Lincolnshire. This and the two further solar schemes, West Burton Solar and Gate Burton Solar, has been my focus for TWO years of my life in challenging these inimical schemes. Including Tillbridge Solar, Luminous Energy and Steeple Renewables this land grab totals 13,000 acres all within a 10 km radius. The Coalescence and Cumulative effects of these and scale will be catastrophic to the area.

My own home is in the epicentre of the proposed four (now six) solar projects which surround communities to the North, South, East and West. Most of the residents of the 30 affected communities across this incredible open and beautiful landscape, feel they been disadvantaged throughout the Examination process – unable to keep up with the process of three solar project examinations - there are many who still don't know about this/these schemes or did not have access to the technology required to take part in the Examination process and have consequently been fully excluded from the process. These 30 communities, affecting 40,000 people, will be destroyed if Cottam Solar and the other five solar schemes now, either in examination or coming forward are approved. Add to these Voltis Solar (currently scoping), One Earth Solar, Fosse Green, Great North Road, Springwell, Heckington Fen, Beacon Fen and Mallard Pass and Lincoln City and Lincolnshire as a County will be majorly detrimentally affected. The landscape will be an eyesore – industrialised by a sea of black glass, dangerous BESS batteries and other paraphernalia and completely altering landscape character. Boundaries changed by security fencing and the intrusion of CCTV.

The NPPF includes an overarching objective to protect and enhance our natural built and historic environment. In 20 years these industrial solar schemes will be white elephants and obsolete within just at the time when replacement solar panels will be required and we will be left with a barren landscape.

Being renewable does not mean being zero carbon.

The grave concerns of the 30 affected villages and communities are well founded – we are faced with a David and Goliath situation.

- **FOOD SECURITY**

All of these projects are on agricultural food producing land and represents a wholly inappropriate change of use of a substantial land area when food security and the farming sector are under massive stress.

Mr Rishi Sunak told farmers on 24 February at the National Farmers Union Conference and circulated on TV News channels that he believed 'food security was a vital part of our national security'. Who is going to feed Great Britain as a country ? We can't keep relying on imported goods when the countries importing them are also experiencing their own climate change issues, drought and growing populations worldwide.

The summer drought of 2022 had a significant impact on UK food production and, coupled with climate related issues in Spain, Portugal and Morocco, led to winter shortages of fresh foods in UK shops including 30% of fresh fruit and vegetable imports from the Netherlands and Spain. With more droughts likely in future years, maintaining good land in production is an increasing priority. 60% of our food is imported – is this environmentally sustainable ? The EAC was correct in its warning.

- **LOW ELECTRICITY GENERATION VERSUS LOSS OF LAND - GREAT RISK OF THE FARM LAND NOT BEING REINSTATED**

This application is not being made to counter global warming or contribute to the UK target of net zero by 2030 or as latterly stated by 2035. This is exploitation by the Applicant at an enormous scale and cost! Developers promote the cheapest solutions only and do not consider a range of feasible options. There are simply no benefits for the local community. All the energy generated goes direct into the National Grid which could go anywhere in the country and, when on average, solar will only deliver 11% of its stated output in the UK.

What if solar farms covered every other productive field in the UK ? Where are the limits ?

The amount of arable land in the UK is in decline. Our food security would then be gravely threatened. It currently stands at 14.8million acres, which is the lowest since World War 2.

The fact that BMV land happens to be available from a farmer who wants to abandon farming is not compelling evidence and BMV and Grade 3b land should be avoided.

If there is no **poor quality land** within a district the only logical conclusion is that industrial scale solar plants are not the right renewable solution for that area.

This land will not be available to return to agricultural use for a minimum of 60 year. Will the land ever revert to agriculture ? What condition will the land be in in 60 years time ?

- **HARMFUL IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMICS, TOURISM, RECREATION AND AGRICULTURE**

The greater Lincolnshire visitor economy is currently estimated to be worth over £2.39bn per annum with long-term growth potential. It is high quality and varied offered across city, coast and countryside and supports at least 30,000 fulltime equivalent jobs. It is absolutely essential to the area. Tourism and visitor footfall is an important feature of the 30 affected communities all year round. These villages and their surroundings have history in abundance – they are tourist destinations including the beautiful and historic City of Lincoln.

The region is responsible for growing 30% of the nation’s vegetables, and producing 18% of the poultry, with a total agricultural output of over £2bn in 2019, representing 12% of England’s total production with major arable, poultry and meat processors spread right across the area.

- **HARMFUL IMPACT TO LOCAL EMPLOYMENT**

Loss of businesses and employment (tourism, tenant farmers and others) to the affected villages and beyond which fall within the 13,000 acre solar projects. Holiday lets and many other businesses. There will be significant harm to local agricultural businesses, especially those which may be made the subject of compulsory purchase.

- **IMPACT ON HERITAGE SETTING / HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT**

Historic structures act as a focal point in countryside views and make a huge contribution to environmental quality. Their setting is often a major part of their significance. Solar farm development deprives them of their context, minimising the extent of the setting of individual buildings and down-valuing their significance.

- **WAREHOUSE ROOFS FOR SOLAR PANELS AND DOMESTIC ROOFS**

Solar PV on warehouse rooftops would provide a reliable source of energy at lower cost for businesses, and also generate sufficient extra power to double the UK’s solar capacity in line with net zero targets, particularly at a time when warehousing and logistics is transitioning to electrification and consumption is rising along with prices.

The UK’s 20% largest warehouses can provide 75 million square metres of roof space, equivalent to the footprint of 500,000 houses. An independent research report, commissioned by the UK Warehousing Association in 2022, and produced by specialist consultancy Delta Energy & Environment (Delta-EE), shows UK warehousing has the roof space for up to 15GW of new solar power, which could:

- Double UK’s solar capacity;
- Reduce carbon emissions by 2 million tonnes/year;
- Cut warehousing electricity costs from between 40-80% ;
- Save the warehousing sector £3bn/year
- Provide a more secure power supply;
- Enable the sector to become a net producer of green electricity.

The UKWHA has published a paper to this effect, “Investment-Case-for-Rooftop-Solar-Power-in Warehousing”

As I understand it, a recent Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) report into Solar PV on warehouse rooftops confirms that not only would this provide a reliable source of energy at lower cost for businesses, but it could also generate sufficient extra power to double UK's solar capacity in line with net zero targets.

Why use precious farmland ?

- **HARMFUL TO WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY. HEDGEROWS, TREES**

Grazing Sheep and bee-keeping on industrial scale solar projects are a pretext, a subterfuge.

There is so much wildlife in this area. Local residents have photographed / witnessed Barn Owls, Tawny Owls, Long tailed tits, Kestrels, Great Tits, Red Kites, Chiffchaff, Linnet, Brown Hares, Long-eared bats, Pipistrelles, Hedgehogs, Roe Deer, Muntjac Deer, Butterflies, Dragonflies, Moths, Common Toads, Frogs, Lizards, Grass Snakes, resident Swans, Canadian Geese, Badgers, Fox, the list is never ending. The existing fields and hedgerows are their homes – WHY destroy the habitat and wildlife already there ? Swans reside on the fields for several weeks every year. We must protect and regenerate their existing habitats for the wildlife to prosper into the future not remove and replant which would lead to a bio-diversity net loss not net gain. Hedgerows are the 'reservoirs of life'. The present hedgerows and verges bring ecological benefits.

The biodiversity improvements, which include attempts to green over the high perimeter fencing, does not mitigate the harm the solar farm will cause to the local deer population and other free-roaming wildlife. Transitory animals will have their traditional routes blocked. Deer will be diverted onto roads.

Birds and bat deaths are commonly mistaking the solar panel glass for water.

Many modern farming practices have had a negative effect on the ecology of our countryside. This is something that is now recognised and that the government, the farming industry and various environmental bodies are seeking to change through various measures. These include a new structure for farm support payments and the encouragement of wildlife areas, tree-planting and re-wilding which I support.

- **IMPACT ON LANDSCAPE AND AMENITY / MENTAL HEALTH**

The impact on the landscape of this development would be monumental and last up to and exceeding sixty years. The loss of the natural and agricultural landscape to fencing, screening and tracking panels over 4.5 metres tall would fundamentally alter the area and communities based there. These changes will deeply affect the residents of the 30 affected communities as many will be surrounded not only by Island Green Power's Cottam Solar project but the cumulative effects of West Burton Solar, Gate Burton Solar and Tillbridge Solar and now Luminous Energy and Steeples Renewables in the mix.

Over 3,000 acres of development (13,000 acres of cumulative solar) will have a negative impact on the health and mental wellbeing of residents, most of whom will be unable to escape from this/these effects and due to the disproportionate size of the proposal. The proposed walkways and permissive paths by the developers ignore the fundamental change in the landscape itself, forcing ramblers to either walk through thick concentrations of solar panels or choose alternative sites. This will be particularly isolating for residents.

- **FLOODING RISKS**

There is a long history of flooding around and on the Cottam 1 proposed site particularly so in recent years and continues to be at risk. Any increase in the risk of flooding is unacceptable given the current flooding problems in the area.

Whilst the developers have sought to address the flooding risks that would arise, they have neglected to properly investigate and mitigate enhanced flooding risks both on and off-site. These issues must be addressed.

It is undeniable that structures such as the battery containers, concrete supports, foundations for fences and other impervious equipment will result in less land that can take up excess water.

- **SOLAR PANELS / CARBON BENEFIT**

While scrutiny of solar supply chains has increased, transparency has decreased in the solar industry since the initial reporting on the complicity of the industry in state-imposed forced labour in the Uyghur Region, where millions of Uyghurs and other Turkic ethnic groups face mass oppression. The lack of transparency has made it increasingly difficult for the average person to verify whether supply chains are free from risk of Uyghur forced labour and reduces trust in the solar industry.

There are questions over where the panels will be built and with what energy source.

Canadian Solar manufactures panels in China, Thailand, and Vietnam, likely relying on coal power stations for the required energy input.

In 2022, 38% of Vietnam’s energy came from coal, c20% of Thailand’s energy came from coal and in 2021 61% of China’s energy came from coal.

These panels would then have to be shipped to the UK and questions remain over how they can be safely disposed of after decommissioning.

Serious questions remain over the environmental benefit of the application, and it should not be recommended for approval by the Secretary of State.

The lorry below has discovered the complications and difficulties of travelling on an unsuitable, single track lane

in Willingham by Stow on 4th March 2023. Another instance of the risks and dangers of HGV’s on these single track country lanes around the Cottam 1 Solar site which are totally unsuitable for HGVs.

We do not want the Solar Companies widening these narrow lanes used by cyclists, dog walkers, horse riders, hikers and walking groups to accommodate their transport problems.

The incident in the further images below, previously submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and included again for ease of reference in this submission, show a HGV crane has toppled into a drainage dyke on the Narrows on the outskirts of Stow on the Ingham Road, alongside the fields of the location of the proposed Cottam 1 solar site on 19 February, 2024, just two weeks ago. This road is known as ‘The Narrows’ for obvious reasons. This is the third incident involving a HGV in under 12 months on these narrow lanes. It is wrong for Cottam Solar and the other three solar companies intentions to widen these lanes to accommodate their heavy machinery under their Transport and Access Construction and Operational Traffic Management Plan.

More ruination of the area by digging up the grass verges and the single track country lanes which we care about and which in turn will destroy the habitat and bio-diversity already present.



These incidents cast doubt on the various statements submitted during this process by Cottam Solar (West Burton Solar and Gate Burton Solar) in respect of transport access on the narrow and winding roads around the proposed solar project(s). The roads are unsuitable for abnormal load vehicles and HGVs as has been stated by many Interested Parties in their submissions. In relation to the Cottam 1 site this is the second incident on the Ingham Road on the outskirts of Stow in the past year where a HGV has toppled into the ditch on this access road to the A15 and surrounding villages resulting in road closure. A further crane was needed to remove the overturned crane !



Finally, we have to remember first and foremost that the ‘experts’ **have been commissioned** for their ‘advice/reports’ by the Applicant(s).

CONCLUSION

The Planning Inspectorate should recommend that the Secretary of State reject this application on the basis of:-

- ***Loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land.***
- ***Evidenced forced labour in Canadian Solar’s supply chains (Sheffield Hallam University Reports – “In Broad Daylight”, May 2021 updated 2 November 2023).***
- ***Inadequate consultation and poor public engagement***
- ***Impact on landscape and amenity***
- ***Lack of community consultation***
- ***Biodiversity and environmental concerns***
- ***Flooding risks***
- ***Questionable carbon benefit***
- ***Questionable solar energy output (11%)***

P Mitchell – March 2024