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2nd August 2024

For the attention of:
Right Honourable Ed Miliband
Secretary of State
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
3-8 Whitehall Place
London
SW1A 2AW
2nd August 2024

RE: Solar Schemes – Gate Burton, Cottam and West Burton Solar

Dear Sir

Firstly, I would like to extend my congratulations to you on your appointment as the new Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

I am writing to you in my private capacity to express my concerns as to the process surrounding the above applications with regards to the assessments made concerning Health and Wellbeing. My home is situated in close proximity to one of these schemes and I am the author of the Health and Wellbeing documents that have been submitted under 7000 Acres, which is the action group opposing these large schemes on farmland. I have worked in this area for 25 years as a General Practitioner, and served on both the West Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire CCG boards as an executive, and continue as a clinical lead for the West locality (Lincoln and Gainsborough) for the Lincolnshire ICB.

1. I have issues on the way the scoping documents were presented to the then Lincolnshire CCG. Each scheme was individually sent to the CCG and submitted to Planning and Estates. They were probably assessed for the Section 106 assessments, and then filtered through to Quality Assurance for signing off as a process. Presented in this way, with no reference to the cumulative effect of all 4 schemes, does not alert anyone in the CCG to the fact that these schemes cover an extensive area encompassing many villages and could have potential issues around Health and Wellbeing which needs scrutiny. The NHS statutory bodies hold a wealth of data and would need to ensure that these schemes would not affect population health, health inequalities, worsening mental health and issues around the delivery of social care. These schemes surround Gainsborough town which has 2 of the most deprived wards in England. Furthermore, the completed applicants EIAs contain all the chapters on Health and Wellbeing and the CCG would not have seen these. Their Equality Impact Assessments also need scrutiny by the local NHS, Public Health and other NHS Statutory bodies to ensure no people with protected characteristics or health inclusion are affected. I am not sure that any of this has been done, and therefore the applicant's documents are taken as a given, so where is the scrutiny? Lincolnshire's rural depression rates are increasing, and it is well known that suicide rates amongst farmers is high. We also have many veterans living in rural areas of Lincolnshire who benefit from the countryside to improve their mental health and wellbeing. I as a CCG board member did not see any of these scoping documents. It feels as though this has been a tick box exercise with lack of scrutiny.

2. Throughout the Inspectorate hearings for all of the above three NSIP's, I have advocated for a full Health Impact Assessment and further hearings to discuss health and wellbeing. This has so far been ignored. The context for this request is based on the cumulative effect which these schemes will have. IEMA Guidance, the body representing the industry, in fact advocates that a Health Impact Assessment should be done as good practice. Even our Central Lincolnshire Local Plan advocates that planners complete a Health Impact Assessment for submission projects such as housing. PHE have provided excellent guidance around this. The reason is, that health is way beyond air and water quality, noise, light pollution, and public byways which form the basis of their health and wellbeing assessments. It is important to go beyond the issues around construction and decommissioning and to consider the long term impacts these schemes potentially could have. Furthermore, these documents on health have been prepared by town planners who advocate they are experts. The guidance is clear, they should be prepared by Environmental Impact Assessment health practitioners who understand the impacts these schemes could potentially have on the local population and in my view, the applicants should have outsourced this work. A wider stakeholder involvement is necessary to ensure all relevant data (deep dive) is captured to facilitate the Inspectorate to fulfil their duties providing you with well appraised facts. Unfortunately, all these schemes complete the Health and Wellbeing section of the EIA using a desktop approach which does not provide adequate local knowledge. In 2019, West Lincolnshire CCG carried out a detailed report on Gainsborough, as we were concerned about the health inequalities faced by the people who live there. The data we saw concerned our board. How come such large NSIP's do not require a full Health Impact Assessment when local councils recognise this as part of the planning process? If you read the EIA Health and Wellbeing sections in all 4 applications, they are all presented in the same way with the same desktop data, interpreted by non-experts forming opinions which quite frankly should be disregarded.
3. I note that you have requested further information on Cottam Solar. The EIA is supposed to look at how these schemes affect the environment and people. However, when looking at these 4 schemes, there is a massive cumulative affect which seems to have been overlooked when it comes to evaluating the effects of health and wellbeing on the local population affected. Besides One Earth to the south, there is already a further company Voltarus looking at a NSIP scheme 1 kilometre away from where I live. This now is an onslaught. I cannot but stress the importance of now carrying out a full detailed Health Impact Assessment across all 4 schemes. These schemes will have a consequence to people's physical health, mental health and on social care. It is not the EMF effect on fish in the Trent as per your question to IGP that is the issue, even though important, it's the people, many who are unaware of all of this because of lack of knowledge or lack of awareness. People will only realise how devastating these schemes are when the building starts and they are surrounded by rows and rows of, in some fields 4.5-meter-high tilting solar panels. Then people will comprehend the scale and impact this industrialisation will bring to their lives. Many people live in the countryside out of choice. Destroying this will have dire consequences for people now and for the generations who want to live here, if any. The largest schemes are in deserts for a reason. Not just for the sun, but away from humans. I therefore urge you to delay any decisions on the next schemes and request an urgent full Health Impact Assessment to be carried out by the local health statutory bodies. Let the experts in health, not lawyers or town planners guide you or your inspectorate on this, as has been the case.

4. Please take the time to look at the documents on health that I submitted under 7000 Acres on Health and Wellbeing for clarification. This will inform you as to gaps on this subject submitted by the applicants. Due diligence is all that I can ask of you.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I look forward to your response.

With kind regards

Dr John Parkin

Hard copy in the post

cc: The Right Honourable Edward Leigh MP Gainsborough