

**Great Stainton Parish Meeting**  
**Submission to the National Infrastructure Planning Inspectors**  
**6pm Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

Good evening gentlemen, my name is Colin Taylor and I am the chairman of the Great Stainton Parish Meeting and a resident of the village.

The proposal by RWE will see Great Stainton surrounded on three out of four points of the compass by a sea of black glass, fencing and battery storage facilities, some as close as 70m and, due to its' elevation, impossible to effectively mitigate the visual impact on the community.

In my written submission to the Inspectorate, on behalf of the community, I raised a number of points, some of which I will expand on. I would like to begin by speaking on several other points that have emerged since that submission.

1. We believe and accept that there is a need nationally for more clean, green renewable power generation, and that climate change is one of the most important strategic issues of our generation that demands to be addressed at national and international levels.

Notwithstanding this, the community has been dismayed by the decision of Mr Miliband, the Secretary for Energy Security and Net Zero, on 12<sup>th</sup> July, to grant the approved of three major solar power projects – Gate Burton in Lincolnshire, Mallard Pass on the Rutland/Lincolnshire border, and Sunnica in Suffolk. I note that in approving these projects, at least one of the approvals overruled the expert examining authority amid concerns about the safety aspects of the battery storage solutions. I hope then that the Inspectors can empathise with the community in the view that there appears little point in investing considerable time and money in presenting a case against the, wholly unwelcome, development of Byers Gill, when the recommendations of the planning inspectorate, have been given the appearance of, being overridden, despite safety concerns, because of short sighted political dictates.

However, I do also note that The Energy Secretary has said in relation to solar panels on rooftops:

“We will encourage builders and homeowners in whatever way we can to deliver this win-win technology to millions of addresses in the UK so people can provide their own electricity, cut their bills and at the same time help fight climate change.” (Independent Newspaper)

The call from the minister has not been for more solar factories on prime agricultural land.

2. The community has also noted that there have been two significant changes of policy since the submission of the RWE proposal.

a) **Firstly, the permitting of onshore wind farms.** I understand that the Proposer of Byers Gill has an obligation to show that the planned development is the best solution to the issues associated with the development of the energy requirements of the country. I would, therefore, raise the question as to whether the business case for solar generated energy on 739 acres of prime agricultural land is a 'best case' solution.

We do not believe that generation of energy through solar factories is best suited to the local area (being in the North East with low light levels and a prevalence to be windy). Had the de facto ban on onshore wind developments not been in place at the time JBM / RWE started the process, we would question whether a large scale, land hungry, solar farm such as Byers Gill would have been put forward.

Wind is a more efficient power source than solar. Compared to solar panels, wind turbines release less CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere, consume less energy, and produce more energy overall, throughout the year. In fact, one wind turbine may generate the same amount of electricity as seven football fields of solar panels.

The Conservative government created the ban when Footnotes 57 and 58 of paragraph 163 were added to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). These stated that onshore wind would only be allowed in areas either allocated in a development plan or through Local Development Orders, Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders or where the proposal has proven community support – meaning that any opposition could see the proposal rejected.

We understand that the new Labour Government has now removed these two tests, which will mean that onshore wind is treated in the same way as other energy proposals, and that a consultation is being launched on the prospect of onshore wind being brought under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime.

When considering, if passed, Byers Gill would be in operation for 40 years we believe that it would be unwise to progress with a large scale solar project, now that it is possible to consider onshore wind that would use less land and arguably better suited to the local area, with less detrimental impacts to the community at large. A single wind turbine generates the equivalent of many acres of solar panels and allows agricultural land to be farmed productively.

**We acknowledge that JBM/RWE have spent a considerable resource on putting forward the proposal for the Byers Gill project but would request that the Proposer demonstrates that the planned development is still the best solution**

**to the issues associated with the advancement of the national green energy strategy, now that onshore wind is permitted again.**

**b) The Supreme Court ruling last month, regarding an oil project in Horse Hill, Surrey,** ruled that permission had been unlawful because it did not consider the emissions from burning the oil. Currently there is a hearing in the High Court in relation to the development of the coal mine at Woodhouse Colliery, Whitehaven where it has been reported in the local media that the government is no longer supporting the development due to concerns over the net zero issue.

If that ruling is applied to this project, the wider carbon generation issues would appear to relate to:

- The mining of the raw products for components;
- The manufacture of the components themselves;
- The transport of the panels, batteries etc from the place of manufacture to site;
- The construction of the solar factories and the storage facilities;
- The maintenance of the site over the 40 years;
- The deconstruction of the sites at the conclusion of the term;
- The disposal of all the panels and materials used;
- The restoration of the land to its' former state or, as the Applicant states, 'better'.

We have to question whether this application will result in the net zero contribution that has been identified by the Proposer? This is particularly relevant as many of the components for the development will be manufactured outside of the UK and, we are informed by other sites, many of the construction workers are likely to come from countries outside of the UK with few jobs created for local people.

**We would urge the ExA to consider whether these developments have resulted in the Byers Gill submission being superseded by changes of policy, to the extent that it does not represent the most effective solution to national priorities relating to energy security, net zero carbon emissions targets and food production for the UK.**

### 3. The effect on the health and wellbeing of the community

I have looked through the 536 relevant submissions to the Planning Inspectors from members of the public in May and note that objections to the Byers Gill proposal make up approximately 98.3% of the total. Within Great Stainton there is now total opposition to the scheme with the one household that offered support to the initial proposal realising the extent of the project, and expressing their objection.

The residents and community are concerned that, in the local area surrounding Great Stainton, there is already a clustering of multiple solar farm projects primarily driven by grid capacity at the Norton substation. The size and scale Byers Gill would adversely impact the area by adding to the cumulative effect of a localised area that already has three wind farm developments in close proximity.

I have highlighted in my previous submission, on behalf of the Parish Meeting, that In the document '*Planning Inspectorate review of Early Adopter Programme products associated with Byers Gill Solar*', it is noted that:

***Para 3.51 references local policies in relation to good design, which include creating 'attractive and desirable places' as an objective.***

***Para 4.7.1 of the 2024 EN-1 states: 'Applying good design to energy projects should produce sustainable infrastructure sensitive to place, including impacts on heritage, efficient in the use of natural resources, including land-use, and energy used in their construction and operation, matched by an appearance that demonstrates good aesthetic as far as possible.'***

It is also noted in the application by RWE that they acknowledge that the residents of Great Stainton will be adversely affected and mitigation measures will only be minimally effective. The *Environmental Statement Section 6.1.1 states:*

***'From Great Stainton, there would be frequent, close views of the Proposed Development, and it is likely the solar farm would become a key characteristic of the area..... The effects are considered moderate adverse and greater during operation, considered a significant adverse effect.'*** (8.3.1)

***'Following the maturity of new planting in years 10-40 some of these effects would reduce, although would still be considered significant for the majority of receptors.'*** (8.3.3)

The effect on the community of Great Stainton is admitted by the developers to be adverse, substantial and long lasting. This appears to be at odds with the principles of good design and has the hallmark of an application that has been designed on a desktop using digital maps and without the necessary consideration of the effects of such a proposal on the local community.

The proximity of the solar panels to residents dwellings and gardens is a considerable concern with some panels as close as 70m. If you have driven around the area you will have noted the elevation of the village and we will suggest a range of places for you to view within the village for your future visit. Seasonal variation will be

considerable, even in respect of the marginal degree of mitigation that the Proposer suggests is possible.

**It is hard to encapsulate how much of an effect this proposal is having on the local population but the sense of gloom and impending doom is a prevalent and a number of people have told me of the adverse effect it is having on their health and wellbeing.**

**We wish you well in your exploration of the issues involved and in your discussions with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.**

**Thank you for your time and attention today.**

Colin Taylor

Chairman Great Stainton Parish Meeting

24<sup>th</sup> July 2024