

Peter Wood, Bishopton Resident & Chair of Bishopton Village Hall Association. (20047761)

Byers Gill Solar

Written submission of verbal comments given at meetings for the above project on 15 & 16 October 2024 (specifically item 4 of ISH 3)

I object strongly to the above application, part of my grounds are-

Flooding & Drainage issues

So far RWE will have only carried out a desk top assessment, computer modelling, reviewing Environmental Agency maps & a brief visit to consider these matters in our immediate area.

From this remote work they say they have ESTIMATED that our surface water flooding to be in a LOW flood risk zone.

We, the local residents are fully aware of the actuality of drainage & flooding issues around the village of Bishopton.

For many many years, even before climate change became an issue, flooding has been a severe problem on the roads into & out of the village.

The village is served by six public highways & four of these flood on a very regular basis, mainly in winter but also in the spring & autumn. At these times three or four of the roads become impassable to vehicles at the SAME time.

They have flooded several times over this summer & last week on October 9 four of the roads again flooded becoming impassable to most vehicles.

This is all happening before we get into the proper winter wet weather.

It is a regular sight to see non locals having to abandon the cars in floods or have to be towed out by local farmers sons earning pocket money on their tractors.

The village is in a low lying bowl only 140-150 feet above sea level, therefore much of the surrounding land naturally drains down onto roads & over them into the water meadows which wrap around the village to the south & west.

Specifically,

1. Mill Lane, leading east from Bishopton past the local school.

This is regularly impassable due to flooding & when I say regularly I am not exaggerating in the slightest.

The field proposed to be part of Area F at their rear of the school rises up gradually from the village. It therefore naturally drains down to the field corner where the school playground meets Mill lane.

That corner of the field & the road are the catchment for all of the flood water .

Darlington BC, our local authority have tried to cure this problem over many years, without any success.

The problem being that that part of the road is very low lying compared to surrounding fields & water cannot flow uphill !

It is that very corner of the field in Area F that RWE, as part of their Community Benefit package, wish to construct a new car park for the school with access from Mill lane.

Local residents think this is a joke as that very part of Mill lane where the access will be, is regularly flooded, as will be the car park itself.

It will therefore be inaccessible to all for long periods of time, a typically crazy idea made from a distance by a consultant doing only a desk top review.

In this last winter the road was impassable for up to a week at a time.

If the scheme goes ahead & Area F is constructed, the drainage & flooding problems will only worsen as the degree of run off from the glazed areas will be accelerated into the flood basin.

This cannot be allowed to happen

2. Folly Bank road leading SSW from the west of Bishopton to Little Stainton

This floods regularly at the junction between the western end of the The Green in the village & Folly Bank Rd, near to Bishopton Beck.

When water levels rise in the beck up to the adjacent water meadows, the road drainage system backs up as it is unable to flow into the beck.

The field forming Area E, rises sharply from that junction, water naturally drains down from it onto the the road for about a quarter of a mile towards the junction until the road itself rises sufficiently to be the same level as the field itself.

Large rivulets of water flow down Folly Bank itself along the road, accumulating at the road drains near the junction.

Again, Darlington BC have tried to deal with this problem for many years without success, as the road is approximately the same level as the beck & the water meadows, when the beck water level rises there is nowhere for the drains to flow until the beck level eventually subsides.

Once again, if Area E goes ahead, the panel area will act to exacerbate the flooding problem due to accelerated run off from the glazed areas.

This cannot be allowed to happen.

3. Junction SSE of Bishopton where Redmarshall Rd meets the road to Whinney Hill.

This area floods regularly becoming impassable to vehicles for long periods.

It is another very low lying area & surrounding fields naturally drain into this basin.

Darlington BC have again tried to alleviate the problem over many years without success due to the low lying topography when compared to Bishopton Beck.

It is this very junction where RWE propose to excavate for cabling, leaving the fields south of Bishopton, to follow Redmarshall road towards Norton substation.

These excavations can only worsen an already bad flooding problem.

This cannot be allowed to happen.

4 Whinney Hill Road south of the junction at 3 above

This regularly floods in two places within 100 metres of the junction with Redmarshall Rd up towards the entrance to Bishopton Lake Surf School.

The surrounding fields towards the lake flood at the same time often affecting the bungalow at the Surf School road entrance.

Again these floods are deep enough so as to be impassable to most vehicles

This cannot be allowed to be made worse

The flooding at 1,2 ,3 & 4 usually occur at the same time , this means that residents who wish to travel east to Teesside for work or otherwise cannot.

They must plan their journey to first travel west to Great Stainton ,then to Sadberge before turning east towards Teesside. This again happened last week.

This cannot be allowed to be made worse by Byers Gill Solar.

Not only will the concentrated glazed areas increase rainwater run off .

The problem will be massively worsened by the random destruction of field drains during the construction process.

There are no accurate or reliable maps of the routes of field drains, some of which will be hundreds of years old.

During the piling process for each leg of a solar panel, field drains will be random hit & damaged or broken .

This will considerably add to the drainage & flooding problems mentioned above .

Our existing flood problem is so regular that Darlington BC leave the FLOOD signs out permanently rather than remove them.

My above local analysis of our drainage & flooding problems shows, very clearly, the difference between local knowledge & desk top reviews undertaken by a distantly remote paid consultant. Consultants would always use tolerances in the reporting system to couch their findings inline with the desires of their paymasters.

4. Agricultural land quality.

Governmental land quality classifications have been done on a broad brush approach & RWE have paid consultants to work on their behalf to take soil samples locally to assess their take on soil quality.

As outlined above, it is well know that there are tolerances in the interpretation of value judgement results by paid consultants.

This is only natural as they will wish to report inline with the wishes of their paymasters as far as possible.

However, my direct family have been farmers on several farms in the immediate Bishopton area for over 150 years.

I therefore have extensive personal knowledge as to the productivity of local land.

In times of the need for national food security, we should be retaining as much of our productive land as possible.

Our Government has a conflict between the need for Net Zero & enhancing National Food Security, when it comes to the vast amounts of land taken out of food production by Solar farms.

Someone, somewhere needs to do some joined up thinking !

It appears to the public that the Governments left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing .

There are no figures yet available for the 2024 harvest but for 2023, the vast majority of land around the area of Great Stainton & Bishopton achieved wheat yields of over 4 tonnes per acre. This means that for the 1200 or so acres proposed to be taken out of production by Byers Gill Solar, the country will lose food production of almost 5000 tonnes of wheat etc.

To combine the acreage lost by other solar farms in our immediate area, that loss massively exceeds 15000 tonnes per annum.

If the solar farms take land out of production for 40 years, then this areas contribution to the loss of the country's food availability is 40 times the above figures!

If these tonnages are expanded nationally to included all other solar farms installed or proposed then the losses are incomprehensible.

We should not be allowing our food security to be massively jeopardised by installing grossly inefficient Solar farms.

There are many more efficient sources of renewable energy than solar, which do not at the same time take vast tracts of farmland out of food production for 40 years +

This cannot be allowed to happen

Conclusion

It is for the above & many other reasons that the Byers Gill Solar application should be rejected.

Peter Wood
Bishopton
11 October 2024