

Byers Gill Solar. Post Hearing Submission

ISH7 'Environmental Affairs'. Cumulative Effect.

Note I signed in to speak at the relevant hearing but my transport was unavailable so I did not attend. Below is what I would have said had I been able to travel. This is a deadline 6 submission.

Myra McKeown representing the McKeown family.

Focus: 'The Cumulative Effect deriving from Developments' panel 'A'; Brafferton, part of the Byers Gill Solar Plan.

Note: for purposes of identification I will refer to the largest satellite site on the above panel as 'the spur'.

Brafferton, a central part of Panel 'A' is no stranger to development.

[APP-083]. The coming of solar renewables to this area 'fills' in the gaps already created on a strategic corridor which envelops this village. This corridor on both sides of the village carries seven

routes of different types and there are essential for the functioning of north-east England.

the first to the left is the River Skerne, which is formed from the melt of the glacier. There are links between this river and the challenge of water on panel 'A'. The Skerne's flood plains and erratic tributaries are a key factor on the nature of panel 'A'.

The first land-based routes were formed by post Ice Age hunters who making their way round the glacier followed the Brafferton ridge.

The Romans often used the routes already there and so it is that the line of the Catkill Lane, identified by Durham County Council Archeologists and in the Spur site, was formed as an invader route. Brafferton has a strong medieval character as on the basis of good trading they survived the Dark Ages.

By the side of Brafferton is the Main Line Railway. Again the watery surroundings were conquered to create this Line, the third of these essential routes. The A1M came in the 1960s. Both went direct across the footprint of the glacier. One was successful and that was

rail: the other may yet prove to have difficulties. In 2023 for instance the Skerne rose on the Carrs and the resultant water crept towards this important road.

In solar terms why is it that future climatic change does not feature enough in their estimations?

To the east of Brafferton the regional broadband though somewhat wandering on its has survived, similarly the National Grid with its

lack of deed excavation. However those handling the important gasline actually on 'the Spur' site found it the operation to be very difficult in the 1950s.

Here is a snap shot of the intense development pressure on this area and even then it does not include the Darlington North Link Road as

proposed for spades in the ground in 2026 by the current Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority. This road has two aims: to build up the Ketton Valley to Brafferton and to relieve the HGV traffic in and around Darlington. So there is already evidence of many cumulative factors.

Indeed housing was an option as recently within our present decade when options were out for the very land south of Brafferton

which is proposed by Byers Gill as their mains site.

Solar started to take the rest of any developable land in c.2020

I was then that Whinfield set out an extremely environmentally driven solar for the north of Lime Lane. It was welcomed and processed

quickly through the planning authorities involved.

At that very same moment the DNL (SNNR) set out a revised plan as one of two only option routes. This went to public consultation during Covid.

The space left now to develop on reasonable ground was now limited.

Into that space came Byers Gill adjacent to the new line for the DNL. High House Farm is enclosed by these three.

Cumulative effect by proximity. 3 more major developments and the twists and turns of past developments had led to them being placed closely together.

In [RR515] as owners of High House Farm we did not raise this plethora of development on the grounds of proximity.

Instead we

related our concerns to the glint and glare which would inhabit the space around our tenants as they worked in the fields.

There follows an update on that situation of cumulative impact.

Whinfield has changed hands twice since sold by the developers.

Most of the mitigating features on our common boundaries have yet

to appear. They were numerous ranging from tree replacement to

generous hedge provision. Now in the turmoil of changing hands so frequently we do not expect any provision. My tenants are now in an

adverse situation regarding the phenomena known as glint and glare.

Is there no regulation or monitoring of mitigation regarding solar?

Whinfield is 114 metres to the north and Byers Gill is 118 metres to the south.

It is obvious at some point the strategic corridor will shrink and should the DNLR and Byers Gill effect the same plans which they can here then they will inhabit the same land.

The site of the 'spur' is a steep sided valley and now in the latest

manifestation of mitigation by RWE we expect there to be a strengthening of the hedges only, not trees as indicated in earlier planes. Those who live at High House Farm have witnessed a gradual chipping away of what is nothing more than promises.

Promises that fall to cost-cutting. What value is there placed on mitigation? Solar companies appear intent on working in their own 'vacuum'.

**BYERS GILL SOLAR. POST-HEARING SUBMISSION.
ISH7: 'Environmental Affairs'. Cumulative Effects.**

Myra Mckeown, representing the Mckeown Family.
IPR: BGSF ATP 337

Focus: 'The Cumulative Effect deriving from Developments'
Panel 'A' Brafferton, part of the Byers Gill Solar Plan.

Note: for purposes of identification I will refer to larger satellite site on this panel as the 'spur'.

Brafferton, a central part of Panel 'A', is no stranger to development [APP-083].
The coming of solar renewable could be said to 'fill in' the gaps on this strategic corridor.
Imagine this village as a small window with the heavy curtains drawn.
On the curtain folds rest already established routes, all north-south.
In all there are seven examples which are essential to the North East of England.

To discover the causes of the recent significant 'cumulative effects' on Panel 'A' Byers Gill one needs to dig deep and go back 10,000 years.

As the glacier to the north of Brafferton melted its contents ran south and became the River Skerne, one of two UK rivers flowing away from the Coast.
The River Skerne introduces that notoriety of water that has figured greatly in the Byers Gill examination. The Skerne's flood plains and tributaries inhabit all of Panel 'A'.

Avoiding the encircling waters a hunter-gatherer skirted the glacier, followed the ridges, and walked the first of the land-based routes around Brafferton.
The Romans chose local knowledge in their quest north and adhered to the tribal paths for trading purposes. One such remains and it strides up from Catkill Lane and sits within and to the right of the largest of the two satellite sites, the one called 'Spur' [REP2-016].

Rich pickings on this Lane for the occupants of Brafferton and they thrived on the fertile basin of the Skerne river.
Into the Dark Ages they were one of the few surviving villages of the area.
From that period onward, Brafferton, unlike surrounding holdings, maintained its strong medieval character.

This is not a romantic era and maybe that is why nobody has referred to Brafferton's strength in this regard during discussion of village character in the Examination.

The Manor of Brafferton was tended well and it grew in size.

The Enclosure Act of the mid-18thc came and went and as it did it created High House Farm, our tenanted farm

Not until the Industrial Revolution did the next route appear.

George Hudson said "I will bridge that gap". Rail had been born in this area, but nobody wanted to tackle the Carrs and the land sitting between Darlington and Durham.

George conquered the mire by means of Piranesi-like culverts and huge amounts of wool which provided flexibility on the embankments.

This successful plan brought a busy rail route right next to the village Brafferton.

In that, modern Brafferton is low on desirability compared to others on Byers Gill.

It does not have retired professionals in great numbers, nor is it 'gentrified'.

There would be here no action groups opposing that solar farm.

Another factor for their reticence was their successful rebuttal of the original Route 'A' DNLR (Darlington North Link Road), designed to come to the entrance of High House Lane. As this is a recent event, I suspect they did not want to take on such again.

Why attempt to stand against a conglomerate and follow success with failure?

When asked, the inhabitants of Brafferton shrugged their shoulders and said of solar "At least it is not a road".

They could be thinking of the nearby A1M, as it can be noisy across the Carrs.

It is the most westerly of the routes we mention. To build it came the Scots in 1965.

Coming from afar, maybe they did not realise what they were taking on.

A direct and new route across the Carrs, and their section was from Bowburn to Aycliffe.

They left bankrupt, rid of the liabilities?

In 2023 the Skerne rose at the lowest point near Bradbury, at a place called 'Hell Kettle'.

The Scots had tried to keep the water at bay on their route by planting trees in that place.

Maybe the 'hell kettle' drained the water away or perhaps it added to it.

The subsequent flooding stopped just short of the motorway.

In solar terms one wonders why the nature of future climatic disturbance is not given much profile in the Byers Gill application?

The large gas pipe, a utility route on this strategic corridor situated to the east of the 'spur' was similarly challenged. An observer recorded 'a feat of engineering'.

The land around it was remarkably wet.

The National Grid trod lightly by this site, after all it was not excavating, and similarly the regional broadband, which whilst taking a wandering course, did not sink.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century.

Within the last decade an extremely well-known builder of domestic houses descended.

It was planned that Brafferton would be a mini-town. It was barely a decade ago.

In 2017/18 their plans looked like they were based on most of the area south of the village.

This offer for housing options lasted six weeks.

Things might have been very different for the community had they stayed.

Nobody knows why. Perhaps it was pointed out to them it was too wet?

What would be left alone in this heavily congested strategic corridor?

We had not reckoned with solar, and they began 'infilling' in c. 2020.

Space for them was left below Brafferton and beyond to the east near High House.

It was now that their cumulative effect gained pace.

Whinfield Solar plan appeared c.2020.114 metres north of High House Farm.
A pink boat in Piccadilly Square and a very environmentally-minded developer who caught the moment. Whinfield's credentials were welcomed by local authorities and it proceeded quickly. Only three farmers/landowners opposed.

The team of designers of the DNLR now chose this moment to decide on their alternative to Route 'A'. For many reasons it needed to swing in an arc from the local A1M junction. The arc widened and it landed on High House Farm.[RR-515/ill.4].
It was a remote public consultation for this the second version of option route 'A' and Covid added to the desolation, as did the style of approach adopted.
We were widely affected land-wise, and all those who are involved in High House Farm reached a very low ebb.

The space was getting less and less for the developers.
It was Byers Gill that stepped forward and negotiated that space around our steading with a 32 acre satellite site. It was the 'spur', planned some distance from the main site and also using High House Lane as it's construction access.

Cumulative affect by proximity to possibly two other major developments was achieved and the twists and turns of other schemes had played their part.[RR-515/ill.5].

Addendum

Lets turn to the formalities and provide an up to date picture
In solar planning events do not always go smoothly. The original developer of Whinfield had offered screening on the boundary, a mosaic of shrubs, infill planting for hedges, a mention of surface water draining provision and even renewal of the trees.

No mitigation of this type has been planted on the joint boundary and little is even added. Our tenants are looking directly on to a shiny 'lake' of glass. (Photograph1).
The deer fence in other parts consists of second wooden stakes and a disconsolate length of pig netting. Our hopes are not high that there will ever be any screening of note.

Is there no regulation or monitoring of solar farms?
(Whinfield solar farm has now the property at an asset company.
They are the third business in as many years with the responsibility to those surrounding them. Who will the community contact if an untoward situation occurs?).

The unitary authority who are master-minding the Darlington North Link Road have yet to make a final decision. Will it be Route 'Aa' or Route 'B'?
They keep their powder dry but the Mayor says "spades in the ground by 2026" in his recent election rallies.

Byer's Gill's 'spur' is effectively on the same land.
The strategic corridor is finally shrunk, or is it?

RWE's own mitigation for the 'spur' is shifting as in the DCO they refer to 'trees on northern boundaries', but they add no mention of which specific trees or boundaries and "if the trees do not affect the efficiency of their solar panels".

Some of the 'spur' fields rise from a valley and it is doubtful whether trees will mitigate against solar on the steep slopes. In RR-515 we mentioned the cumulative effect of 'glint and glare' from both sites as the tenants moved around the fields.

As you see this has not got better.

The definition of a stressor is runs true:-

"A situation on which you have no control and with little idea of when it will end".

In ISH7 on Wednesday 27th more matters regarding Whinfield Solar were raised. If more information on that particular solar farm is required reference it is on the web. Google Durham County Council Application No: DM/21/02816/FPA Committee Report.

Also included is the Diagram of Proximity between Whinfield Solar, Byers Gill, the 'Spur' and the proposed Option 'Aa' of the Darlington North Link Road

1. PHOTOGRAPH
WHINFIELD SOLAR
IN RELATION TO HIGH
HOUSE FARM.



← BOUNDARY POINT

UT WHINFIELD SOLAR, UNDER CONSTRUCTION SPRING 2024 VIEWED FROM HIGH HOUSE FARM LOOKING NORTH

2. DIAGRAM Proximity

