



Hearing Transcript

Project:	EN010140 - Helios Renewable Energy Project
Hearing:	Open Floor Hearing 1 (OFH1)
Date:	3 December 2024

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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:05:11 - 00:00:35:11

It's now 5:15 and it's time for this hearing to begin. Um, I'd like to welcome you all to this open floor hearing. So my next question is going to be, I just want to check everyone can hear me clearly. Okay. And can I also confirm with the case manager and the audio visual team that the live stream and the recording of this event has commenced? Thank you very much. Okay, so my name is Ken Taylor. I've been appointed by the Secretary of State as a single examining inspector to examine this application.

00:00:35:13 - 00:01:13:07

You will also hear me referred to as the Examining Authority or the Exa for short. Assisting me today, as Mr. Ciardi is the case manager and Mr. calls his case officer and online we have Miss Whitlock. She's also a case officer assisting me, although I believe we've got no online attendees at the moment just to deal with a few quick housekeeping matters. We're not expecting any, um, fire drill or testing today. So in the event that an alarm does go off, then you you would need to proceed through the French doors on the side of the building and, and congregate on the lawn, which is just, just outside this building.

00:01:17:02 - 00:01:35:00

So for this type of hearing and open floor hearing, a detailed agenda hasn't been prepared as this hearing, um, is to hear from representations from interested parties who have registered to make an oral representation, um, elaborating on their relevant representation that's previously been submitted. Um.

00:01:41:00 - 00:02:11:02

A recording of today's hearing will be made available on the project um webpage for this project, on Planning inspector, its website, and that will be available as soon as practicable after this hearing. With this in mind, please could you ensure that you speak clearly into a microphone stating your name and who you are representing if you are representing anybody. Each time before you begin to speak. Um, when we get to to calling people up, I'll call people up to, to the table.

00:02:11:04 - 00:02:21:28

And if you could sit at the microphone that's directly in front of me. Um, and then if you turn it on by pushing the button in front, and then just make sure the little red light is on, and then we know that you're you're being recorded.

00:02:28:07 - 00:03:00:13

A link to the planning Inspectorate's privacy notice was provided in a notification for this hearing. I assume that everyone here today has familiarized themselves with this document, which establishes how the personal data of our customers is handled in accordance with the principles set out in the data protection laws. If you have any questions, could you please speak to a case manager about this and

on that matter when you speak? If you could try to avoid saying anything that would divulge personal information or details that you wouldn't wish to be recorded and subsequently Published.

00:03:00:18 - 00:03:01:25

That would be helpful

00:03:03:13 - 00:03:34:21

in terms of the purpose of this hearing. It is your opportunity to raise anything directly to me as the examining authority that is important and relevant, and that you think I should know about and consider. This hearing is not about a particular location or topic. The topic of your presentation is therefore up to you to ensure fairness. I am going to set a time limit of five minutes per person. Or if you're representing a group or an organization, then up to ten minutes speaking time.

00:03:35:11 - 00:04:00:18

And then when you're speaking, I'll, I'll give you an approximation of when you've got one about one minute left. Once you've spoken, if you could just say sits at the sat at the table, because I may have some follow up questions. And then finally the applicant will be given an opportunity to respond if they wish to. Um, but any detailed matters could be raised at subsequent hearings if that's more appropriate.

00:04:02:21 - 00:04:15:26

There is also an opportunity at deadline one, which is the 13th of December for anyone who speaks today to submit a written summary of what they've said. And typically I find that very helpful. So, um, if you're able to do so, I would be grateful.

00:04:17:12 - 00:04:30:02

Before I hear from any speakers, I'd first just like to check with the applicant who would be speaking on behalf of the applicant if they choose to do so at the end of the hearing. Okay. Thank you. That's Mrs. Tracy for the applicant. Thank you.

00:04:33:05 - 00:05:03:16

In terms of representations by interested parties, um, so I have been informed that councillor Mike Jordan would wish to speak today. Um, and I also believe Mrs. Battersby, who representing the Byrne Gliding Club, may wish to speak. Is that correct? Okay. Thank you. Are there any. Is there anyone else in the room that would wish to speak? Okay, I'm seeing two hands. It would be helpful if we could even get the. Could we have the roving microphone just so you can introduce yourself now? um, and then I'll call you up in that order.

00:05:08:25 - 00:05:11:08

Um, Pam. Strictly concerned resident.

00:05:11:22 - 00:05:12:28

Okay. Thank you.

00:05:13:14 - 00:05:27:08

Hello. Lesley Marson. I'm concerned resident. But I'm also here representing Holt Group, which is, um, a group of interested parties in the local community, um, in relation to the proposed solar farms in the Selby area. Okay.

00:05:27:22 - 00:05:29:21

And what does Holt stand for? Could you just.

00:05:29:23 - 00:05:33:01

It's a Helios agricultural land threat.

00:05:38:12 - 00:06:02:28

Thank you very much. Okay, I'll just double check if there's anybody else in the room. I haven't missed anyone. I'm not seeing any hands. Okay, so I'm going to move on. So if if. Councillor Jordan, if you would like to come first and if you could sit in this seat here, um, and then. Yes, you have are you, can I just confirm you're representing Yourself or are you here speaking as ward member or both?

00:06:03:13 - 00:06:05:21

Both. If that's okay with you, sir.

00:06:06:04 - 00:06:13:15

Fine. Thank you. I mean, in which case, if you need to, I'll allow you up to ten minutes to to to speak the longer period.

00:06:14:03 - 00:06:15:02

I shan't need that.

00:06:15:04 - 00:06:16:27

Okay. Thank you. Please go ahead.

00:06:17:07 - 00:07:04:28

Uh, well, first of all, thank you for allowing me to speak. And I apologize for taking the wrong box to say that I didn't want to speak, so that's my fault. Um, basically, I have, um, I am a local resident, and I live in an area where it is extremely flat and I go cycling in this area, and there's a consequence of it being extremely flat. It's also extremely windy. As regards this planning application. Um, I take it into context with the other planning applications because basically we have, in theory, 4500 acres of land that could be taken out of full production and put into electricity production.

00:07:05:00 - 00:07:40:09

I've been sitting on the fence for a long time on this one, simply because I wanted to amass the, um, opinions of the public. And the public are, um, somewhat in favor of wind farms rather than solar farms. And as a consequence, I just wanted to give you a little bit of history, if it's okay. Um, the, um, solar farms was certainly being proposed back in 2008, 2009 when I was a counselor at Selby District Council.

00:07:40:18 - 00:08:14:28

Um, but there was 1 or 2 residents that were absolutely opposed to wind farms. And so they went down the road of, uh, talking and harassing the local MP from 2010 onwards. And that MP had severe influence, um, within the government of the day and as a consequence, hardly any windfarms got built in the area. The only one of any note is the Russian wind farm, which is out um, towards, um, the east of Drax power station.

00:08:15:10 - 00:08:50:03

I understand the need for the electricity, and I understand the need for having such sites close to Drax power station, because basically they've got to plug into somewhere and you can't put, uh, these large, um, electricity production units out miles from anywhere because of all the wiring that naturally comes with it. But there's a disruption that comes with it. And, um, basically, Campbells within particular will be completely surrounded by wind farms.

00:08:50:06 - 00:09:22:09

And, um, a lot of residents are up a very upset about it simply because the loss of public rights of way which the supposed to get back. So they're losing them. So my view. My personal view is that we should concentrate on wind farms in this neck of the woods, simply because the wind is there. Solar farms are not as efficient as our, um, they are in Italy, um, in this part of the world.

00:09:22:11 - 00:09:51:16

And we do still need to produce food. Wind and wind farms allow you to do that because they don't take anywhere near the room. I have first hand experience of the owner of Russia and wind farm area, and whilst there is disruption putting the wind farm up probably more than with their solar farms, in the end there is still farmland. Thank you.

00:09:53:20 - 00:10:05:19

Thank you very much, Councillor Jordan. Um, and we are we are discussing some of the matters you've raised today at the issue specific hearing tomorrow, particularly, um, impact on food production and so on. Thank you.

00:10:08:03 - 00:10:13:06

Could I have missed. Miss Battersby from Byrne Gliding Club, please?

00:10:18:03 - 00:10:20:12

If you could introduce yourself before you start speaking.

00:10:21:22 - 00:10:56:22

Thank you sir. Yes, I'm Ann Bartleby and I'm assisting Burn Gliding Club in trying to address the the proposals that the applicant has made. Um, one of the things that they burn gliding Club is extremely interested and keen to emphasise is that they see the operations of the airfield, and not just the part of the airfield that's used for gliding, but its wider role as a centre for recreation.

00:10:56:24 - 00:11:28:27

And there are a wide range of recreational activities going on there. And we understand that the presence of the airfield is very much appreciated by the, um, local community. Um, both Burn and the community around there. And one of the it's really a question I wanted to pose tonight, sir, which is

where does the benefit come to that community? Bern and the surrounding area from the Helios proposals.

00:11:29:12 - 00:11:30:06

Thank you.

00:11:31:21 - 00:12:08:00

Thank you, Miss Battersby. Could you just remind me? Because I just have a few queries, um, for you. So we did at the preliminary meeting earlier, earlier this afternoon, discuss a number of matters that may end up affecting the the Bern Gliding Club. Yes. And then potentially forming written questions from me and potentially site inspection and potentially an issue specific or an element of an issue specific hearing focused around them. I just had a few questions. Just if you're able to answer them now, that just might help me understand the function of the club, that at this early stage can then help me begin to process matters.

00:12:08:02 - 00:12:36:26

If you are not able to answer them directly, there is the opportunity in this in following this this hearing at deadline one to. Yeah to to put that detail there. Yes certainly. So I first of all, I'm just keen to understand where the kind of main elements of the club are. I think I saw that it's to the west of the kind of main airfield where the buildings are, and then the aircraft is stored. Am I correct in my understanding of where that element of the club is?

00:12:37:03 - 00:13:09:21

Yes, it's certainly on the western side of the site, sir. Um, you may have noticed a corrugated iron building which is where the gliders are parked when they're not in use. Um, you may have seen a small red brick building that the club built as its, um, functioning area, if you like. Um, so there's a collection of buildings on that western side. Beyond that, there's not really a need for much other infrastructure.

00:13:09:24 - 00:13:44:15

But alongside the runways, there are, um, cabins from which the operations take place. Um, I was lucky enough this morning to be offered the opportunity to go up in a glider. Yes. Um, and so therefore, I got a feel for the way the operation works. Interestingly, this morning, there were 7 or 8 people there on a quite windy, cold morning. So it's it's busy even in the middle of the week. So there's not really other infrastructure, what the club did some time ago.

00:13:44:22 - 00:14:02:15

Um, obviously it's an old RAF aerodrome and they completely resurfaced a strip down the middle of the main runway to make sure that their gliding operations are as smooth as possible, particularly obviously when they're they're towing aircraft.

00:14:03:17 - 00:14:16:09

Thank you. Because that was going to be my next question, because I observed the airfield. And I did notice that some of the previous runways didn't seem to be in particularly great condition. So I just wanted to understand which runway they use, how well they.

00:14:16:11 - 00:14:30:01

Use all three sets. So but it depends on weather conditions and it depends on the nature of the launch that they are doing, which can be an aero tow, or it can be, um, a system.

00:14:30:09 - 00:14:31:01

A winch, a.

00:14:31:03 - 00:14:32:26

Winch system on the ground. Yes.

00:14:32:28 - 00:15:00:20

Again, that was going to be my next question is how how they land, how they're launched. So yes, that's helped me. Um, it would also help me if, if in a written summary from what you've said at this hearing, if you would be able to provide a plan that just indicates those elements you've just discussed. And I just think visually that would help me. And then probably the applicant and other interested parties, if we can have that within the examination and then going forward that that that might prove helpful.

00:15:00:22 - 00:15:01:15

Yes, certainly.

00:15:01:17 - 00:15:15:28

And then the other thing I wouldn't mind expanding on, not not necessarily here verbally, but in a, in a written submission, is this wider recreational use, if you could just provide clarity on what that is so that I have an understanding of that going forward as well.

00:15:17:01 - 00:16:01:17

Yes. Certainly sir. It does have a, a very significant recreational use, um, every day. Um, and one of the things that the, the club did some time ago, um, when North Yorkshire Council, in embarking on a new local plan, um, sent out a call for sites. We collated together all of the recreational value of the site and have proposed it to the council that they should allocate the whole airfield and the surrounding area that's used for cycling and walking as a recreational facility serving the local community.

00:16:02:08 - 00:16:03:20

Okay. Thank you.

00:16:03:22 - 00:16:06:20

But I can provide you directly with some information on that.

00:16:06:22 - 00:16:17:11

So that would be helpful. And I think it'd be helpful because this is a primarily written process, the examination, it would be helpful to have it in writing. Certainly. Okay. That's all the questions I had. Thank you very much.

00:16:17:13 - 00:16:18:00

Thank you sir.

00:16:18:06 - 00:16:18:24

Thank you.

00:16:22:11 - 00:16:28:21

Could I then ask if, um, Mrs. Brickley is able to come forward? Thank you.

00:16:36:21 - 00:16:38:23

And if you could introduce yourself first, please.

00:16:41:27 - 00:17:12:17

Um, Pam Brickley, a concerned resident. A couple of issues from me, on top of the 17 comments that have already put forward as my, uh, in terms of my objections to the project. Just to reiterate, I'm not against solar farms per se, but I am totally against this massive the massive scale, domination and cumulative impact of this project on top of the ones that have already been agreed. My first issue is about public engagement with regard to this proposal, sir.

00:17:13:23 - 00:17:45:24

I suggest that the vast majority of residents in the local area affected or oblivious to the existence, in many cases under the nature, extent and enormity of this proposal, only a relatively small minority who happen to have access to the Facebook page online and due to the valiant efforts of the Holt Group, are really the only ones up to speed with what's going on. Consequently, many people are not aware. Many may be aware but do not appreciate the scale and impact.

00:17:45:26 - 00:18:17:12

Some believe already that it's already happening because they can see the the development that has already been agreed starting to take place, and some have been given misinformation and that this is either the solar farm or it's a housing development, which is totally incorrect because that land could not be used for housing development. Excuse me. My understanding is, is the applicant held an open meeting in Campbell Smith over two years ago that was advertised by a leaflet drop. Not sure of the circulation of that drop.

00:18:17:14 - 00:18:53:20

Not sure whether it got as far as Carlton, for example. Um, and there were some posters on lampposts. At the meeting there was many questions that couldn't be answered. The applicants then encouraged feedback via a leaflet that they could pick up at the meeting, or they could actually access online. No response was received from that feedback that was submitted. Those that were living close to and were most impacted by this proposal were told also that they would be visited in their own homes individually so that they could discuss their concerns.

00:18:53:29 - 00:19:18:26

None of that happened. Nobody heard anything. The applicant also said that they were happy to share and liaise with the parish councils, the local parish councils. Yet Campbells Parish Council invited them, which is the main parish council, whether the direct impact is going to have. They were invited three times to their meetings and on three occasions it was declined.

00:19:20:11 - 00:20:02:05

I do not believe the applicant, to satisfy satisfactorily fulfilled its obligation to communicate and consult with residents, and I would like to really know what now is to be done, to fully inform, involved and engage them, as at the moment there is a complete vacuum on something that is going to severely impact all of their lives in so many different ways. That's my first concern. My second concern is, is that the site that's already been approved on Camilla Lane in Camp Bosworth has had a six foot wire mesh fence placed around it, the apertures of which would not allow larger creatures to pass through, such as deer.

00:20:02:18 - 00:20:11:26

So from an ecological perspective, the migration of animals is already being disrupted and at such an early stage of that development.

00:20:14:03 - 00:20:20:22

I could go on, but I shall leave the rest until the most appropriate time at the meeting tomorrow. Thank you sir.

00:20:21:13 - 00:20:35:01

Okay. Thank you very much. Yes. So we we are discussing some of the issues that you've, you've raised today, tomorrow on this specific hearing, which is the appropriate venue to do it because it's some of the more technical matters. Um, but thank you for your time. Thank you.

00:20:39:21 - 00:20:47:07

And then can I have Miss Marson, please? Thank you. And once you're at the table, if you could just introduce yourself for the recording.

00:20:50:27 - 00:21:23:19

Hello, I'm Lesley Marson. I'm a concerned resident of Campbell's Perth, and I'm also here representing the Holt Group, and which is a Facebook page that was formed from concerns raised by residents coming together and to share their views and possible things that needed to be known about the project that weren't being circulated at the time. Thank you. We, as a majority in the group and not against solar farms, um, or solar panels per se.

00:21:23:23 - 00:21:57:15

Um, what we are against is the vast amount of agricultural land that is to be taken up with projects such as the Helios project and the Cpre. England has had a rooftop campaign, which we would very much support in the majority. Um, there are also other places, um, that we could learn from, such as France and Italy and which have gone down different avenues. France, for example, making it mandatory to have solar panels on car parks, for example, and Italy banning them on agricultural land.

00:21:58:20 - 00:22:29:25

The area in question is 96% BMV land. In the initial proposal it was actually 94% BMV land. So even though the proposal looks as if it's taking out areas and making it look much smaller, a lot of the land in question that was taken out appears to be where the underground cabling would have been, and the

actual use of BMV land has gone up by 2%. This is, of course, the best agricultural land for growing of cereal crops and vegetables.

00:22:29:27 - 00:23:07:00

If we don't have farmland for this, we could face food security issues as a nation and this could rise the amount we need to import. The cumulative impact is a major concern, and these various projects seem to be getting looked at in isolation. I think there needs to be more of a look at the bigger picture and looking at these all together. There are already two solar farms accepted on either side of the village of Campbell's. First the Helios solar farm, along with these would completely surround the village, taking up land the size of 1200 football pitches for the next 40 years.

00:23:07:11 - 00:23:34:01

It's classed as temporary because the structures can be removed at the end of that 40 year period, but in reality it's very much a permanent fixture for that period. There are also other aspects such as Drax Power station, the carbon capture plant, the energy pipeline from Scotland and the Barlow Ash plant all happening within the same area around the same times, all adding to the cumulative impact on one very small village.

00:23:35:16 - 00:24:13:05

When looking at biodiversity, they've developed us very much. Look at improvements to biodiversity by adding of things such as sheep and meadow flowers that are not currently present. This doesn't, however, mean improvements for the natural biodiversity, which could be greatly impacted upon. There are red list birds, bats, badgers, moles and deer in the area, to name but a few of the species that are likely to suffer as a result of the development. When looking at traffic with all the developments going on in the local area, we can expect to see a huge increase in vehicles on our roads, particularly heavy goods vehicles.

00:24:13:10 - 00:24:20:06

A lot of the roads around the site in question are small country roads not made to withstand this kind of traffic.

00:24:22:04 - 00:24:59:14

If we were to consider noise disturbance, although when we do understand the solar panels themselves make limited noise, there may be some as the panels rotate, the battery storage, inverters and transformers alongside cooling fans do produce noise. And we're not just talking about noise associated with one inverter or cooling fan. There is cumulative effect of having 100 shipping containers of battery storage in very close proximity to housing. This is not a one off sound, it's a continuous, high pitched buzz that we can expect to hear for the next 40 years, both day and night.

00:25:00:15 - 00:25:35:23

There has also been a lot of news coverage associated with battery fires. The implications, should this happen, are huge. The battery storage sits close to residential properties, as I say, and the prevailing winds in this area could take potentially toxic emissions of gases such as hydrogen fluoride, carbon monoxide and hydrogen straight towards the village of Campbell's First and thereby be a potential

hazard to health and safety of thousands of residents. The area in question sits on a flood zone two and three, a medium and high risk flood areas.

00:25:35:25 - 00:26:06:06

The compaction of the ground during the construction phase, alongside the concentrated runoff from the panels, could add to the risk of flooding. So even think of placing such a huge battery storage facility on a flood zone to myself appears ludicrous. We've also seen flooding in recent years on one side where the solar farm is expected to be near her. Courtney, the actual solar farm in that area actually sits at the very end of people's gardens.

00:26:06:08 - 00:26:29:11

And when screening is spoken about, there isn't even screening to some of those houses. The land in question sits on a source protection zone and contains a principal aquifer. The construction activities, such as piling over such a large area, has the potential to alter the groundwater channels should there be any leakage. This could result in groundwater contamination as a result.

00:26:30:27 - 00:27:01:18

If we were to consider the public amenity, many local residents use the roads and public rights of way as part of their leisure activities walking, running, cycling, dog walking and horse riding. This area is chosen due to the tranquility which is good for the body and mind. Many will not want to do the same when they are faced with what will be potentially an industrial zone. This could add to mental health issues and add to the burden already upon our national health system.

00:27:02:05 - 00:27:17:10

These are just some of the concerns that I myself have and have heard from various other local residents. Our group has over 800 members who all raise equally the same sort of concerns. I hope you will take these into account. Thank you for listening, sir.

00:27:18:22 - 00:27:49:06

Thank you very much, Mr. Moss. And so, as you're aware, tomorrow at the specific hearing, some of the matters you've you've raised are going to be discussed directly, and then some of the other matters you've raised are likely to form part of the examination going forward through written questions and potentially future issue specific hearings. But thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Okay. I mean, that's everyone who had indicated they wish to speak. I will just do a final check to make sure there's nobody else in the room who wishes to speak. Okay.

00:27:49:08 - 00:28:01:24

In which case, um, I'll invite the applicant. Mrs. Tracy, do you wish to say anything? No, sir. No. Okay, so I'm just recording the applicants confirm they didn't wish, wish to to raise any matters at this stage.

00:28:02:23 - 00:28:03:14

The responding.

00:28:03:26 - 00:28:10:03

Yeah. And the applicants confirmed their respond in writing which is is common after an open floor hearing.

00:28:13:11 - 00:28:49:18

So so arising from this meeting is no real action point other than those that I requested that the Burn Gliding Club put into writing. Um, so I don't I don't propose to publish an action points list. Um, in this particular case, um, but I'd just like to thank everyone for their contributions today. Everything you said will be carefully considered. And as I've indicated, much of it will be, will will form the ongoing elements of the examination in writing and and hearings. So I just want to thank the case team and audiovisual team for supporting the hearing today, and thank everyone for their participation.

00:28:49:20 - 00:28:51:16

This hearing is now closed. Thank you.