

Statement of Disagreement: Helios Solar Application – Selby

I am writing to formally express my objection to the Helios application for the proposed solar farm in Selby. While I recognize the importance of renewable energy in addressing climate change, this proposal raises significant concerns that outweigh its purported benefits.

Use of BMV (Best and Most Versatile) Agricultural Land:

The proposed site is classified as BMV land, which represents high-quality, versatile farmland critical for sustainable agricultural production. Converting this land to a solar farm will irreversibly reduce its potential for food production, which is increasingly vital given current food security concerns. The government's planning guidelines emphasize the need to protect BMV land from non-agricultural uses, and this application conflicts with that principle.

Cumulative Impact of Solar Farms in the Area:

Selby and its surrounding areas are already experiencing significant pressure from existing and proposed solar farms. The cumulative visual and environmental impact of these developments cannot be understated. The industrialization of the rural landscape risks altering the character of the area, reducing its aesthetic and recreational value for residents and visitors alike.

Rights of Way and Recreational Access:

The proposed development risks obstructing or negatively impacting established rights of way, which are integral for public access to the countryside. Footpaths and bridleways in the area provide valuable recreational opportunities and support the physical and mental well-being of local residents. Any obstruction or degradation of these pathways would undermine their purpose and disrupt the enjoyment of the area by walkers, cyclists, and riders.

Proximity to Housing:

The proposed site is located in close proximity to residential areas, raising concerns about the impact on local communities. Residents may face issues such as noise and light pollution during construction and operation, as well as the long-term visual intrusion of the solar panels. This proximity could also negatively affect property values and quality of life for those living nearby.

Concerns About Battery Storage and Fire Risk:

The inclusion of battery storage systems in the proposed solar farm presents significant safety and environmental risks. Lithium-ion batteries are prone to thermal runaway, leading to fires that are difficult to extinguish and may release toxic chemicals. In the event of a fire, standard firefighting methods risk contaminating the soil and local water sources with hazardous substances from the battery chemicals and firefighting materials.

The application does not adequately address how such incidents would be managed without causing long-term damage to the ecological environment and the surrounding agricultural land. This is a critical omission that raises serious questions about the site's safety and the preparedness of emergency services to handle such events.

Risk to Tall Trees Providing Windbreaks:

Tall trees around the proposed site serve as vital windbreaks, protecting the land from soil erosion caused by strong winds. The removal or disruption of these trees as part of the development would increase the vulnerability of the land to erosion, particularly on exposed agricultural land. Soil erosion not only reduces land fertility but also contributes to runoff that can harm local watercourses and ecosystems. The application fails to adequately address how the integrity of these natural windbreaks will be preserved or mitigated.

Environmental and Ecological Concerns:

Large-scale solar farms can disrupt local ecosystems, including habitat loss for wildlife. The long-term effects on soil quality and drainage systems on BMV land are also concerns that have not been adequately addressed in the application.

Alternatives for Renewable Energy Development:

There are less impactful alternatives for solar developments, such as brownfield sites or rooftops, that do not require sacrificing valuable agricultural land or encroaching on residential areas. Prioritizing these options would balance renewable energy goals with the need to preserve our natural, agricultural, and community resources.

In conclusion, while I support the transition to renewable energy, I strongly believe that the Helios application for a solar farm in Selby is not an appropriate use of the site. It would cause disproportionate harm to the local environment, agriculture, public access, and residential communities, while introducing significant safety risks with its battery storage systems and increasing the risk of soil erosion through the loss of critical windbreaks. I urge the planning committee to reject this application and instead consider more suitable alternatives for renewable energy development.