

7000 Acres

Summary of Oral Submissions – Open Floor Hearing 1

16th October 2024

Tillbridge Solar Project

Deadline 1 – Tuesday 29 October 2024

When the country wakes up, and finds it doesn't have the land it needs to house its people, to grow its food, to do the commercial business it needs, to travel, to create new reservoirs – or to plant the trees and establish the peatlands it needs to decarbonise...

People will look around at the hundreds of thousands of hectares of solar, and there will be an outcry.

The clamour will grow and there will be an inquiry...

People will demand answers.

How did all this get so out of hand?

How did it reach the point where a small corner of Lincolnshire became one of the highest concentrations of ground mounted solar development on earth, in a country that has some of the lowest solar gain anywhere in the world?

How did the country see it is necessary to consume so much productive farmland, ahead of rooftops, without really exploring the consequences?

How could all this have been done in the name of the environment – and such short-sighted thinking be considered “sustainable development”?

It's not such a fanciful scenario.

There have been plenty of examples recently of the state getting things badly wrong, public outcry, public enquiries and damning findings and people held to account.

What is to stop this being the scandal of the future?

When, in a 6-mile radius, we face 4 NSIP scale projects, with two or more on the fringes, which could result in between 3000 to 3500MW of ground mounted solar – (depending on the degree of over-planting) putting this scheme in its size, within the largest 5 solar developments in the world...

Typically, these are in China, India, the Middle East or North Africa...sunny, inhospitable places, where few, if any, people live, and where no crops grow.

How could the UK's planning system have failed so spectacularly to let this happen? And yet, with two schemes approved, we're already part-way there.

Developers are hungry to get their schemes through. For all the talk about them taking “less than golf courses”, the National Grid face a ground-mounted solar development queue which could occupy twice the size of Greater Manchester...

How could it be that no-one joined the dots to figure out that the country was set to lose more farmland than the country uses to grow its potatoes and horticultural crops

And how could it be that the planning process failed to consider the consequences of such wholesale change...

Will planners simply say, they followed the process, claim that it wasn't in their remit?

We are proud of our region and what it contributes to the United Kingdom, particularly in the case of its farming and food production.

No doubt the region would love to be similarly proud of the contribution of local energy schemes in the fight for decarbonisation.

And we understand that sacrifices will need to be made in the pursuit of decarbonisation –

But if such development is truly needed, make the case

Explain why, when Germany has already installed 80,000MW of solar, with $\frac{3}{4}$ on rooftops, why can't this be the blueprint in the UK?

Explain how Germany achieved that capacity without a single scheme even half the size of Tillbridge?

Convince us that this isn't a gross waste of productive farmland that the country will regret.

Answer the questions around where else crops will come from that are displaced by this scheme that comes dressed in the clothes of sustainability

And push the developers to tell the truth about their scheme

Don't be distracted by the claims about the cheap installation cost of solar, focus on the high price the consumer will pay

Don't allow them to talk about security of supply, without understanding how this scheme will contribute to keeping the lights on, when the country needs power most.

Don't fall for the oversimplified claim to power 300,000 houses, when all those houses would be dark and cold every evening throughout the winter

Don't allow the developer to get away with saying their scheme is essential to meet the Government's target of 70,000MW of solar – when, every day, commercial and domestic rooftops are built without solar.

And don't allow them to say their scheme is essential...

If the UK achieved the same rate of rooftop capacity as Germany, the UK would only need no more than 20,000MW of ground mounted solar

And even though Solar UK, base their land use calculations on needing a further 38,000 MW of ground mounted solar than today...understand that this scheme is part of a queue of 150,000 MW of ground mounted solar projects in National Grid's queue.

In short – there is the opportunity to be hugely selective in which schemes should be allowed to come forward, after fully understanding the limited benefits, and harms of each.

So, welcome to West Lindsey.

As you drive around to conduct site inspections, look around you. Take it in.

The country roads and narrow lanes, the small villages, hamlets and isolated homes, set in wide-open landscapes, with long views across fields of crops, dotted with trees and lined with hedgerows.

This is where we live. It's our home. It's beautiful.

We have no faith that the case has been made for this place to bear the consequences of a half-baked approach to decarbonisation, only to be a cause for future regret

And for all the cheap talk that communities should benefit

We have had two schemes approved...in what way do we benefit?

In fact, exactly what is there that could possibly be offered, when all we can see, is a road to the devastation of this region, vast areas of construction, disruption, the decimation of views, much loved spaces used for walks and rides, and all for what?

Surely, in all honesty, the answer can't be "in the name of the environment"

You will note that none of the NSIP schemes have gone to judicial review...perhaps unsurprising, given the deep pockets the developers have – and the "David verses Goliath" nature of this undemocratic process...

but we can't help but wonder in 10 or 20 years from now, whether this will be looked at again, with fresh eyes, that struggle to make sense of such irrational decisions – that were so unreasonable that no authority could seriously have made them...

What will your role be in this Scandal of the Future?