

7000 Acres Open Floor Hearing – Written Submission of Statement

Deadline 4 Submission – 28th January 2025

It is genuinely difficult to understand how to make a community's voice heard in a process such as this.

In this and previous examinations, we believe that we have made clear, rational and powerful arguments, and stated our concerns, but the relentless machinery grinds on. Perhaps some of our issues are noted in the recommendations and final reports, but they are never truly addressed.

So, we would like to issue a challenge to the Examining Authority, a request that eight specific questions are answered in full in the course of the examination. We feel it is the least the community is owed for the upheaval and major life changes that we are potentially set to endure in the face of multiple, NSIP solar and grid developments in the coming years.

First of all, this region faces not one, but multiple developments on a scale the country has never seen before. In communities with few amenities, the surrounding green space is their treasure and amenity. The examination process feels inadequately equipped to consider the impact of development at this scale.

Can you be certain that this unprecedented scale of development will not have a seriously adverse impact on the quality of life and ultimately the mental health and wellbeing of people living in affected communities, and what safeguards can you propose?

Also, we believe that the if the key purpose of the scheme is to provide decarbonised power – the detail of this should be considered in an Issue Specific Hearing related to energy, otherwise there is the potential for insufficient oversight of the Applicant's claims in this regard.

For instance, in December 2024, the Government published its "Clean Power 2030 Action Plan", which included a breakdown of the regional capacity required for different technologies, including solar, and which represents the "upper end of capacity range", balancing current and likely future network management needs. For the whole country, this includes 10.8GW of transmission-connected solar nationally by 2030, and 17GW by 2035.

By contrast, nationally, there is currently over 128GW of NSIP scale solar development in National Grid's transmission entry capacity register.

Lincolnshire alone currently has over 15GW of NSIP-scale solar capacity projects listed.

At a fundamental level, therefore, this scheme cannot purport to be essential to the country's decarbonisation objectives, when there are more schemes than required, by a factor of 10 – which, (it should be noted), contributes to the country's planning and grid connection processes being utterly overwhelmed.

The Government is scrambling to gain some sense of control of this wild-west landscape by creating “Mission Control”, establishing the National Energy System Operator and creating its Clean Power 2030 plan.

Our second question that arises therefore is this: **how does the Examining Authority plan to consider the Tillbridge scheme in light of the Government’s clear desire to improve the effective spatial delivery of decarbonisation?**

Associated with the technical, energy nature of the scheme is the contribution the scheme can make. We are a windy island, where wind is foreseen to provide over 70% of the UK’s electricity by 2050. Solar will provide a fraction of that and contribute most when demand and prices are at their lowest. It won’t provide power when we need it most. Put simply, not all energy is equal.

This lowest value energy should come with the lowest harms and impacts, as it can be delivered on rooftops.

So, for our third question: **as the Examining Authority, how can you be certain that the limitations to the energy and decarbonisation contributions of the proposed scheme outweigh the concentrated local harms communities in this region will suffer?**

Perhaps more obviously, for our fourth question: If the climate emergency demands the UK deploy solar so rapidly, **why do we continue to leave commercial and domestic rooftops vacant, and why is it fair that this community be asked to bear the impact of over a decade of failure to put solar on rooftops?** (particularly in the context of the UK now being such a marginal contributor to global CO2 emissions).

Despite the assertions of the industry, ground mounted solar at this scale is not about supporting farms and farmers. We do not oppose farmers turning over a field or two to diversify their businesses, but development at this scale eliminates farms and tenant farmers.

So, our fifth question is: **if these schemes were truly about supporting farms and farmers, why do some of them face losing their livelihoods?**

And all the land that is proposed to be used for solar, is already being used – providing food and biofuels for the country. Perhaps with one scheme, it may be tolerable not to consider how and where else this production shortfall is made up, but the solar industry is currently eyeing up swaths of the UK for solar, that would occupy a vast area of land, more than the country uses for its golf courses, more than it uses to grow potatoes... an area of land bigger than Greater Manchester. The potential impacts of so much land use change – even for the “temporary” decades these schemes demand, simply cannot be ignored, as if a life cycle of over 70 years could ever be considered temporary.

Our sixth question is therefore related to what happens to the displaced crops? **Where else do we get those food and bio-energy crops, and overall, does that represent a truly sustainable solution?**

We recognise that there are huge pressures on land use on this small island, from housing, to commercial development, reservoirs, transport, as well as farming for food and for green fuels. The Climate Change Committee also calls for land to be used for direct decarbonisation measures, including the establishment of peatlands and planting tens of thousands of hectares of trees every year...

Our seventh question, therefore is: **how does this scheme, and so many more other ground-mounted solar schemes with such a voracious appetite for land, impact on the country's ability to optimally use its land and meet all these competing demands?**

Finally, and perhaps most perplexingly, we face the prospect of this small region becoming one of the largest areas of concentrated ground mounted solar anywhere worldwide. This area, rich with productive farmland and beautiful landscape, but with some of the lowest solar-gain shown on the global solar atlas, will have as much solar panel coverage as schemes in the deserts of India, or China – but with half the power yield, making these some of the lowest-output solar panels on earth. **Please can you explain to us, and our future generations, why this is a sensible use of global and national resources?**

There almost surely has never been development that has required such sudden land use change at this scale in the UK, therefore the impacts on affected communities have never been explored – and residents in the area feel they are the subjects of a huge experiment.

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.

Unfortunately, the cluster of NSIP-scale solar schemes in the region are representative of uncontrolled, wholesale development, the cumulative impacts of which have not been thoroughly explored, leaving serious concerns that they represent a gross misstep in the quest for decarbonisation and sustainability more widely.

It is therefore no wonder there is so little support for these schemes within the region, particularly when the immediate impacts of concentrated development will fall so heavily on a handful of communities... and when such fundamental questions have failed to be addressed, or clear explanations provided over the course of multiple examinations.

Thank you.