

As a local resident, I am writing to strongly object to the proposed solar farm. This is on the basis of:

Scale

Its huge scale is excessive. It will cover an area about the size of Durham city within a Green Belt location and uses solar panels of a substantial size that are not typical and are unprecedented in size.

Green Belt

High adverse impact on the rural green belt through forming an enormous industrial landscape. Both the size of the solar panels and the size of the development are expected to be the largest ever seen in this country. An industrial or housing estate of this size would never be permitted in this rural location. Indeed even a single house outside of the development limits of a settlement within a Green Belt location would only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, as set out in the NPPF. This huge development completely undermines the concept of rural Green Belt protections, which is underpinned by decades of legislative protections. Thus para 142 of the NPPF defines the essential characteristics of Green Belts as their '*openness and their permanence*'. This is incompatible with extensive areas of solar panels comparable in height to a double decker bus and with high perimeter fencing and security cameras, barbed wire etc. The development is contrary to paragraphs 142, 143, 150, 152, 153 and 156. There are no '*very special circumstances*' that outweigh the '*substantial weight*' that must be given to protection of Green Belt land to justify a solar farm of this unprecedented size and scale given that this is likely opportunity for a moderately sized, appropriately designed and scaled solar farm alongside scope for roof top solar panels to existing building, which would be much less harmful. The applicant's rush to maximise their profits appears to have over-ridden the planning constraints and legislation in, for example, the 1990 Planning Act and NPPF.

Harm to Heritage

I am a heritage professional with over 20 years of heritage expertise and I am a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. I endorse the submission of my colleague and fellow Director of our heritage practice (made under Interested Party Reference number: 20047366) where he observes that the applicant's analysis is inadequate in three specific ways that render their conclusions regarding harm to the historic environment unreliable. With regard to applicant's document - Document Reference: EN010143/APP/6.1, Environmental Statement: Volume 1, Chapter 7: Cultural Heritage in conjunction with various relevant appendices - the three main concerns are summarised below and set out in detail in his submission:

- Inadequate identification of non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) that are not included in the relevant Historic Environment Record, whose significance may be harmed by the proposals.
- Inadequate assessment of the setting of identified non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) and the effect of the proposals on their significance.
- Inadequate assessment of the setting of listed buildings and the impact of the proposals on their significance.

Their submission is contrary to the heritage provisions in NPPF (in particular paragraphs 200, 203, 205, 206, 208 and 209), the government's Planning Practice Guidance and Historic England's advice note on setting.

Amenity (Noise, Daylight, Loss of Dark Skies, Heat Island Effect)

This is a much appreciated landscape attractive to locals and visitors alike (the latter of which often stay in holiday lodges and campsites nearby and cycle the lanes and footpaths). My family and other local people and visitors cherish the ability to enjoy nature in a relatively tranquil place. Access to nature is good for our physical and mental health.

The solar panels will be sited far too close to people's houses, in some cases surrounding homes on three sides. Motorised panels of a size never before used in the UK should surely be rigorously tested for noise and other impacts on amenity before being located anywhere near human habitation. It is indefensible that the people of this area should be 'guinea pigs' in this huge industrial project. This is contrary to paragraph 191 of the NPPF.

The applicant has not set out what the rise in temperatures will be. It is well established that countryside absorbs heat better than cities and industrial areas whereas solar panels reflect heat into the atmosphere. Therefore, temperatures will increase in the locality, which may increase risk of heatstroke and exacerbate underlying illnesses such as lung and heart conditions as people struggle with the increased heat.

Flora and Fauna

Animals such as deer, rabbits, hare and birds of prey will be displaced and their populations devastated. The overall loss of hedgerows and green habitats will also lead to loss of hedgehogs, insects, small mammals, and reduced biodiversity. This is contrary to policy 180(b), 180(d) and 185(b) in the NPPF and therefore the application should be rejected.

Highways Safety

My family and other residents, local businesses, farmers, and visitors regularly use the roads in this area – many of which are single track. I use these as a motorist, pedestrian and cyclist. The movement of large vehicles during construction and then ongoing forwards maintenance is an obviously dangerous safety hazard for other users of the public highway and will likely also damage the road verges making the roads less passable when vehicles attempt to pass along single tracks.

Crime

I am also deeply concerned about an increase in rural crime associated with such a large development - while high frankly prison like fences, cameras and lighting will deter some opportunistic criminals, the presence of valuable metals and materials in the solar panels and associated infrastructure will attract criminal gangs and this may spread to opportunistic theft of nearby cars, houses and garages. It will attract criminality to our communities.

Food Security

The extensive loss of food production on land used for arable and pasture will result in reduced food security at a time when international shipping and trade routes are increasingly threatened.

Degree of Permanence

I have not seen evidence of the end point of the solar farm and how it will be decommissioned, nor how the extensive concrete piles can be removed from the landscape – a huge engineering challenge. Realistically the solar farm is a permanent addition as if permitted its life can be extended. I am not aware of any planning means of ensuring that it will be removed after say 40 years.

Conclusion

Cumulatively this enormous development would have a huge impact on the wellbeing of the local communities and tourism in the area, and our ability to enjoy nature, will devastate local fauna and flora, reduced our food security, increase crime and will take decades – if ever – to become 'carbon neutral' given the mining, construction, shipping, and inability to recycle solar panels. It conflicts with multiple provisions within the NPPF and these failures all provide grounds for refusal of permission. The proposed solar farm would be a harmful development and not sustainable development, as it does not sustain, but rather harms, our natural environment, our heritage, and the health, wellbeing, safety and security of our local communities.