

5 June 2024

Rt Hon Claire Coutinho, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero
Rt Hon Ed Miliband, Shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero

Dear Ms Coutinho and Mr Miliband,

We write as a concerned community facing the imposition of an industrial scale solar energy site that crosses the North Bedfordshire Wolds and into Cambridgeshire. At 1,800 acres, it would take up more land than five Hyde Parks and would be over seven times larger than the biggest solar power site currently in the UK. Due to the scale of the plans, the developers will have to apply for a DCO and have suggested that they will submit their formal application early in 2025 – making it likely that a decision will be made in the next Parliament.

Please find our campaign website [here](#) and the developer's plans [here](#).

We urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject the application as soon as possible to give us peace of mind that hundreds of acres of our countryside will not be blighted by this development. The applicants claim in slick promotional material that the plans are positive for the local environment and community, but there are significant grounds for the applicants to reconsider their choice of site and for you to reject the application:

- East Park Energy is on an **excessive and literally overwhelming scale**. Covering 1,800 acres of countryside, dominating and surrounding several historic villages, this energy installation would be enormous. Vast tracts of farmland would vanish under glass in an industrial corridor nearly six miles long. Our villages have already accommodated small-scale renewable energy development in the past few years, but to suggest that this site – in an area recognised for natural and historic beauty – can support a development of this scale is simply wrong.
- The scheme would **take hundreds of acres of high quality agricultural land out of use for decades or for good**, leaving fewer fields dedicated to British food production and threatening our nation's food security. Current national planning policy protects agricultural land classified as high quality. The majority of the farmland the developers want to build the plant on – at least 74 per cent – is Grade 2 ('very good quality') or Grade 3a ('good quality'). Once this industrial site has served its purpose and the developers are long gone, once-productive farmland may never be able to return to food production due to long term damage to the soil.
- Imposing a power plant capable of generating 400MW would have a dramatic **detrimental visual impact on the open, attractive landscape**. Picture hundreds of thousands of solar panels mounted 3 metres high across 1,800 acres of rolling countryside. Add security fencing, lighting, CCTV, inverters, transformers, and all the infrastructure associated with industrial battery energy storage systems. Natural screening – 'green infrastructure' – is not likely to be effective. It takes years to mature. But it would not disguise the mass of glass and metal in any case – many of the fields earmarked to be filled with panels bank away from sightlines, and much of the development site features sloping terrain.

We would also challenge some of the key 'benefits' suggested by the applicants:

- They are correct that solar energy does create some of the cheapest electricity available, but **no-one in the local area would benefit directly from the cheaper energy generated**. More significantly, the developers will use the battery storage schemes included in the plans to store up energy that can be sold to the grid at the most profitable time, the **cost of which is inevitably passed on to consumers**.
- Employment opportunities through the development are dwarfed by the scale of the project. The applicants admit that the local economy would **only gain as few as ten full-time employees** on a rotational shift pattern. In fact, industrialising productive farmland would inevitably **result in the loss of some local labour** as the farm workers currently contracted across several farms would no longer be needed to work the land.

As noted, the local area already has solar schemes in place, with more in planning consultation. Our community is of course conscious of the urgency to reach Net Zero and the role that renewable energy generation plays in meeting the challenge. Our principal concern is that **this is the right energy, but it is simply in the wrong place**. [Research](#) by the UCL Energy Institute for CPRE found that installing solar panels on existing buildings and car parks would enjoy near-universal public support and, crucially, contribute 40-50GW of generation in England by 2035 – well over half of the UK's target of 70GW. Surely the Net Zero ambition is important enough to take the time to get it right, and **properly plan renewables for the appropriate sites, rather than the current developer-led farmland 'sunrush'** we are seeing?

We are in contact with many other campaign groups across the country who are facing similar plans for the development of some 82,000 acres of agricultural land around historic villages. More farmland is being targeted for solar schemes every week. It is becoming increasingly apparent that proposals of this scale pose a **serious collective threat to our nation's food security and the goodwill of people in the countryside who want to embrace renewable energy but without permanent damage to the landscapes they call home**.

We hope that you will consider the information in this letter and would be delighted if you could visit the proposed site so that you can see for yourself the impact that this development would have on our villages and countryside.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Stop East Park Energy campaign

contact@stopeastparkenergy.com