

Open Floor Hearing 2, Tuesday 25th February 2025

My name is Anna Ross; I am a resident of Aldington, off the [REDACTED]. I am not a NIMBY and I do not oppose solar technology (I have solar panels on my own roof). However, I am a strong opponent of so-called solar farms installed on agricultural land instead of industrial sites, commercial and domestic roofs and developers investing in new solar windows and solar roof tiles technology.

I chose to live in a rural area because I like the countryside and I fear that this project, if granted permission, will change it forever for me and others. I fully appreciate that there is a need for securing renewable energy in the unstable world that we currently live in, but not without forgetting that the technologies that can help us address climate change also have the potential to cause harm. Taking this seriously is crucial. Low-carbon energy sources like wind, solar, and batteries may not add to the global problem of climate change, but many of these installations are, in effect, industrial sites, and their effects can still be felt by local communities, especially when things go wrong. And they do.

There are obvious concerns about the industrialisation of the area. The visual impact that, I do not believe can be easily mitigated against with the usual “hedges type screens”. The scandalous use of quality agricultural land in times when food security is becoming an issue as vital as energy security.

However, I am most concerned about the damage to the environment that seems to be quite overlooked and pushed into the “rare event” category that may be caused by this project. The particular rare event I refer to is called battery thermal runaway. It happens when a battery generates more heat than it can dissipate, causing it to overheat and potentially catch fire. The likelihood of fire occurring in a single cell battery is rare indeed, however the risk can increase significantly in large battery systems with many cells, due to potential cascading effects between cells if one starts to overheat. Due to the self-sustaining process of thermal runaway, Lithium-ion battery fires are also difficult to put out and they may reignite hours or even days after the event, even after being cooled.

If I say Erin Brockovich, I believe most people will recognise the name even if they do not necessary link it to a specific event (which was a legal case on ground contamination by oil/gas company). Well, these days Erin Brockovich is part of a legal team that represents residents living near Moss Landing Power Plant in California that, not for the first time but the fourth, experienced a storage battery fire in January this year. The reason for the lawsuit – air, soil and water contamination being the result of the fire and its effect on the local population.

Closer to home – in 2020 there was a fire at Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) site in Liverpool. The site was located approximately 4 miles from Liverpool City Centre, with the nearest wholtime fire station less than 3 miles from it; it took (according to a BBC report) several days to extinguish the fire.

For reference:

- there are 13 wholtime fire stations in Merseyside, there is one in Ashford,
- It's reported that the US Fire Department used 24,000 gallons of water to put out a Tesla fire in a parking lot,
- A standard UK fire engine holds 1,800 litres of water.

Fire caused by BESS batteries can release hydrogen fluoride gas (which is highly toxic and corrosive, can burn skin even at low concentration, cause respiratory damage and, if inhaled in high concentrations, can be fatal). The report from the Liverpool fire includes note: “Once water was applied, the resulting run-off contained hydrofluoric acid – a highly toxic substance which can dissolve concrete (it also dissolves glass) and whose fumes can be fatal to life.”

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The whole report from the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service makes rather disturbing reading, particularly when one looks at the proposed site in Aldington, its size, accessibility, design and its proximity to residential dwellings. I don't believe the residents were made aware of any of the risks that BESS may bring or properly consulted on them.

In the lawsuit against Moss Landing, Brockovich said. "We will not stand by while families breathe in toxic air and worry about the long-term health effects of this disaster." As Erin has found out, it is clear to me that any environmental damage caused by Stonestreet project far outweighs the potential benefits of the renewable energy generated. I, therefore, urge you to be like Erin and not stand by either while our community suffers the terrible impact of this project.