This proposal is intended to cover 1900 acres of prime agricultural land, currently being used to grow crops, with nearly 700,000 solar panels. This is, in its entirety, bigger than Gatwick airport. The developers themselves, Brockwell Energy, admit that the whole site is high or good quality agricultural land. As the array sites are not contiguous, it also means large access tracks, battery arrays and huge cabling corridors being required, so it is not just land lost to the panels themselves.

This will mean the loss of thousands of tonnes of food per year. This at a time when food security is an oft-mentioned phrase.

The nearly 700,000 solar panels, some 3m high, will have a direct detrimental effect on nearby settlements, in particular Keysoe, Little and Great Staughton and Pertenhall, owing to existing solar arrays. To the extent that the panels in some cases are right up to the gardens of houses and some villages will be surrounded by solar arrays.

The noise for these householders during the suggested three years of construction, which will include the use of pile-drivers, will be appalling.

Visually, Brockwell suggest that tree planting will screen the houses from the view of panels. However, these trees will in fact be whips, young trees approximately 1 year old and no more than about 30 cm high. This will mean they are unlikely to screen anything for over 25 years.

This brings up the problem of the longevity of the site. Brockwell propose this will be a ‘temporary’ scheme - of forty years. This is not temporary. By then, current photovoltaic technology will have long been superceded, but none of the developers, or members of this Government, will be by then in a position to make sure that the site is properly decommissioned, so the land may never be able to be used for agriculture again.

This ‘fields first’ approach to projects has already been discounted by European countries such as France, Italy and

Germany where warehousing and car parks must first be used, or green field sites are banned altogether.

Solar panels could be installed on nearby warehousing, of which there is a large quantity in this area, or other large roof surfaces, or car parks as is standard in Europe, instead of this prime farmland.

No attempt appears to have been made to change some of the solar panels for onshore wind turbines so the land can still be farmed and to cover when the sun doesn't shine. All of these options were raised with Brockwell at public consultations and refused.

There is also the issue of the large battery storage array of 100 MW in the East Park Energy scheme. These are all lithium batteries, the size of large shipping containers. There is a risk, with all lithium-ion batteries, of experiencing what is called 'Thermal Runaway' a phenomenon where a chain reaction in one battery cell causes it to increase in temperature at an astonishing rate eventually leading to all the other cells in the

battery catching fire – or exploding. The fires are extremely difficult to put out owing to their feeding on themselves, so are normally treated as ‘controlled burns’. The smoke from such fires is highly toxic and highly flammable. The chemicals both from the battery array and the firefighting solutions are contaminants and can lead to long-term water and land contamination. The battery array is close to the affected surrounding villages and not too distant from St Neots, thus any such fire would generate enough smoke to reach these settlements requiring evacuations.

Many people will have seen the effects of a lithium fire on the news from an e-scooter or a charging car, or a vape in some cases. Imagine that many, many times larger. There are many examples online of battery arrays going up in flames, such as Thurrock BESS in February 2025, which took 200 firefighters to try and control and still had to be left to burn itself out. And our local area has nowhere near 200 firefighters.

On top of all this, there is the problem of flooding. Much of the site is a ridge where falling rain can percolate through the soil and not just quickly run off. If the site is covered in closely packed solar panels, the installation of which will lead to soil compaction, this percolation cannot occur leading to high levels of run-off in an already flood-prone area.

Such a large site can also cause a heat island effect for the surrounded settlements. Hard surface areas are already known to raise temperatures by at least 2%. The current open fields would no longer be a rain or heat sink.

This is a purely commercial scheme. It is cheaper and easier to build on green field land. There are numerous large schemes proposals such as this as developers hope to benefit from generous energy pricing structures and the potential for arbitrage (buy it low, sell it high) which is one of the reasons for the large battery storage. No matter the cost to local people, food production or the environment.

As this is a proposed NSIP, Brockwell avoid the problem of facing different Local Authorities as this crosses both Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, both Authorities being against the scheme, along with all nearby Parish Councils. Bypassing all local public bodies does not appear to be a democratic process.

I would, therefore, ask that when this scheme is considered, it be refused, on the basis of the harm that would be inflicted, both to local residents, the environment, food security, and democracy, if it were to go ahead.

Carol Pattison
[redacted]