

Good Afternoon and thank you.

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a Parish councillor representing Bolnhurst and Keysoe Parish Council.

We have submitted a comprehensive argument as to why the planning inspectorate should recommend refusal of the project and we are also a co signatory of the statement from the 5 local parish councils all opposing the scheme

Rather than simply repeat the many arguments we put forward in our submission I want to concentrate on two themes today.

Like just about all submissions today the need for sustainable energy is understood and supported by the parish council however as a rural community we understand and support the need for sustainable food supply as a nation.

Both requirements are vital for the country and given the current global political instability both should be high on the governments agenda with equal weighting.

Much of the rhetoric around sustainable energy and specifically this proposal suggests that solar energy is somehow more important than food security and it creates a battle of two opposing forces where what to do with 1900 acres of countryside is an either / or choice.

It creates a narrative where locals should take one for the team irrespective of the harm such a scheme will cause to food security

This however is not true and the planning system should consider this in a wider context rather than on a few fields in middle England.

At the heart of this choice should be options driven by sensible policy and the national planning policy framework should reflect this.

So what are the choices, Well renewable, sustainable energy production can be put in fields but they can also be built in the sea, on brownfield sites , on industrial facilities and even on rooftops.

On the other hand sustainable food crops have a more limited choice, you cant grow wheat in the sea, you cant grow barley on brownfield sites and the prospect of growing rapeseed on rooftops is a challenge to say the least.

We are determining the future of 1900 acres of prime agricultural land. Irrespective of attempts to diminish the agricultural value we as residents have seen the food productivity of this land over many years and what appears to be indisputable is that 74% of this land is a high value contributor to the nations food production.

And let's be clear this is not a temporary project. This is a 40 year commitment with no plan or obligation to return it back to food production. It is a project that will generate on average 40 MW of power when the marginal efficiency of the location and technology are factored in not the impressive 400MW which is simply a theoretical maximum

So if for a minute we strip away the emotive issues of this proposal we are left with a choice.

Retain 1900 acres of prime agricultural land to sustainable food production and find somewhere else to produce 40MW of power or permanently take out of production those 1900 acres with no thought to a wider joined up plan which balances the need for sustainable energy AND sustainable food

For my second theme I want to highlight one word

Overwhelming!

Like most of the local area, Bolnhurst and Keysoe is an unmistakably rural parish.

Aside from countryside it has few facilities, little infrastructure and a road network that is barely able to support its own community and the odd commuter rat run.

The development phase of this project will be simply overwhelming both in terms of traffic movements and the temporary workforce required to build out the proposal

Looking further afield the scale of the project isn't just an issue for the parish when put alongside other infrastructure projects it threatens to overwhelm the whole of the area.

East West rail, Tempsford new town, Universal studios, Luton airport, Hinchinbrook hospital, industrial and logistics parks along the A1/A14 corridors and the oxford to cambridge growth corridor.

These are all major infrastructure initiatives planned or already in build in this area and it appears difficult to argue that this level of development will not overwhelm the regions infrastructure

And what if this project is built what will we be left with. Well simply put we will have a cumulative 2,800 acres of industrial furniture which will be completely overwhelming.

The loss of nature will be overwhelming, there will be private properties, footpaths and rural roads that have 360 degree views of industrial plant, we will have created something completely out of character to the area when there are much better solutions to the challenges of sustainable energy. In short we will have created an overwhelmingly poor solution to a valid challenge and for this reason the Parish council strongly objects to the proposal

Thank you