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At the Open Hearing on 17th March the comments opposing the East Park Energy proposal were wide ranging and utterly convincing. They were summed up most effectively by [REDACTED] and all pointed to the conclusion that this is the wrong site for this vast size solar park and it would cause harm on every point of consideration.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to address the proposal's impact and Environmental Statement on agricultural land, particularly Best and Most Versatile farmland, 'BMV' for short.

National planning policy recognises this land as a finite and nationally important resource for domestic food production. The evidence currently available indicates that large parts of the proposed site consist of Grade 2 and Grade 3a agricultural land, both of which fall within the 'BMV' category. The Environmental Statement relies on a field soil classification exercise undertaken at only half the recommended sampling rate. Without a proper survey, it is difficult to determine how much high-quality farmland would actually be affected, or whether the scheme has genuinely avoided the best land where possible.

Furthermore, the developer's estimate of the proportion of BMV land appears to be understated. The calculation includes areas where solar panels cannot be installed; roads, woodland and other non-productive land. These areas should be excluded from the calculation to show the true increase in the proportion of BMV land within the developable area.

The scale of the proposal is also significant. The scheme would take hundreds of hectares of BMV land out of conventional agricultural use. Intensive arable farming land in this area can produce thousands of tons of cereal crops each year. Over the lifetime of the project, that represents a substantial loss of domestic food production, yet the Environmental Statement does not clearly quantify this loss.

Importantly, this impact should not be viewed in isolation but be considered alongside other solar developments that have already been consented in the immediate area – several operating, one under construction, another due to begin – the cumulative effect would see around 2,800 acres of farmland removed from food production. A very substantial loss within one rural area.

The development is described as temporary because panels and related infrastructure may be removed after around 40 years. But in farming terms that is effectively a generation with no guarantee the land would ever fully return to farming.

Current energy policy strongly supports the repowering or “re-energising” of renewable energy sites, meaning that sites are often extended for far longer than the initial consent period. The current owner of one of the local solar schemes, Manor Farm, has already applied to extend its lifetime, barely a decade into its original 25-year operational term.

At present, key questions remain unanswered about the true quality of the land, the scale of food production lost, and whether lower-quality land options were properly considered.

Renewable energy is important, but national policy does not suggest it should come at the expense of extensive parcels of high-quality farmland without clear evidence and justification.

Thank you.