

Statement Regarding the Proposed NSIP Solar Farm Development RR359

I am deeply concerned about the proposed Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) solar farm and the significant impact it will have on our local community.

The proposal appears likely to result in the closure, diversion, or severe restriction of access to established Public Rights of Way, including bridleways and footpaths, for a period approaching three years during construction. These routes are not merely recreational amenities; they form an essential part of daily life for local residents. They provide opportunities for exercise, horse riding, dog walking, access to nature, and support both physical and mental wellbeing.

The loss of access to these green spaces for such a prolonged period raises serious concerns about the rights of local people to enjoy and benefit from their surrounding environment. Many residents rely on these routes as part of their everyday lives, and their removal or restriction would represent a substantial reduction in the quality of life available to the community.

Beyond the construction phase, the long-term character of the landscape will be fundamentally altered. Open countryside views will be replaced by extensive security fencing, CCTV infrastructure, and large areas of solar panels. This transformation risks industrialising a rural environment that residents have valued and enjoyed for generations and also our privacy.

Equally concerning is the growing perception among local people that the outcome of this process has already been decided (landowners of the project have been heard saying). We are repeatedly being told that approval is inevitable and that the Secretary of State, currently Ed Miliband, will authorise the project regardless of the objections raised by affected communities. Reports that landowners are already being advised to prepare for implementation by 2028 only reinforce the impression that local consultation is a formality rather than a genuine opportunity for public participation.

If this perception is accurate, it raises serious questions about public confidence in the planning system and the democratic process itself. Communities should have confidence that their voices will be heard, their evidence properly considered, and that decisions will be made fairly and transparently. Consultation should not be viewed as a procedural hurdle but as a fundamental part of democratic decision-making.

I recognise the importance of renewable energy and the need to address climate change. However, achieving national energy objectives should not come at the expense of meaningful community engagement, access to cherished public rights of way, or the protection of rural landscapes without rigorous scrutiny and proper consideration of alternatives and mitigation measures.

The residents affected by this proposal deserve assurance that their concerns matter, that the planning process remains impartial, and that democracy is more than simply being informed of decisions that have already been made.

I would also like to raise another concern. Having now learned that the information relates to BESS 1 rather than BESS 2, (unlikely BESS 2 will be gained) and that the data and assessments were based on BESS 2, it appears that the current planning application may no longer meet the criteria required for the Secretary of State's Zero Emissions Project objectives.

Considering this, can it be confirmed whether the project will now be halted and the ongoing disruption, uncertainty, and distress experienced by residents ended?

An alternative route has been identified from Bushmead Crossroads to connect with the adjacent solar farm currently under construction near Staploe on the Bushmead road by Pathfinder Clean Energy. It is understood that this option would result in significantly less disruption, would have minimal impact on Public Rights of Way (PRoW), and would affect very few residential properties.

The land required for this alternative route is understood to be owned by [REDACTED], one of the landowners associated with EPE. However, it has been suggested that this option was not pursued because the landforms part of a private shooting estate.

If this information is correct, it is difficult to understand why a route that appears to offer substantially reduced impacts on residents, public access, and the surrounding area was not given greater consideration. This raises legitimate questions about whether all reasonable alternatives have been fully and objectively assessed in the interests of the wider community.

I welcome written replies to these questions and statements.