

7000 Acres

7000 Acres Response to the Tillbridge Solar Application on the subject of:

Land Productivity

Deadline 2 Submission – 14th November 2024

Land Productivity:

Within EN010142-000228-6.1 Chapter 14 Socioeconomics and Land Use, or EN010142-000229-6.1 Chapter 15 Soils, and Agriculture there is no mention of the existing crop production that will be lost if the acreage is covered in solar panels despite them both supposedly covering Agricultural Production (C) and Farming Circumstances (D). There is also no mention of the associated businesses that will be impacted by this loss of crop production.

Within section 14.3.6 it states that there is a net effect which factors in the displacement of existing jobs on-site. Existing employment is currently estimated at 10 jobs engaged in agricultural activities. In Table 14-20 they assume that only 1 of these jobs is staffed by a person who resides within a 60-minute drive time of the Study Area. If the applicant had carried out detailed consultations with the local population, rather than a desk study, they could have identified accurate employment and residential details. We are further dismayed with the applicant's statements in section 15.3.8 Farming Circumstances that a farming circumstances baseline has been completed as far as possible, but not all of the twelve agricultural occupants have been interviewed. The assessment is based upon Farming Circumstances for five farm businesses operating within the Principal Site. 5 out of 12 farm businesses is a very poor consultation process considering that the applicant has had almost two years to contact these directly affected people.

It also states that the Scheme is likely to bring a direct benefit to local landowners through payment of annual ground rent which is anticipated to be in the region of £1.2 million per annum which demonstrates the greed of the landowners at the expense of the local employees.

The developer, Tillbridge Solar Project, should provide an assessment of this topic of Land Productivity with quantifiable data covering:

- a) What crops have been produced in the past?
- b) What quantity and grade of crops have been produced?
- c) What percentage of UK production is this?
- d) Where else are these crops produced that can replace the lost production?

Soil Resource section 15.8.17 states that while the Scheme is operational, the soil resource at the Principal Site will remain under a perennial grass cover, therefore all of the current crop production will be lost for 60 years.

Recognising land use pressure as a cross-cutting national challenge, the Geospatial Commission initiated the National Land Data Programme (NLDP) which has explored key land use challenges and demonstrated where innovative data analysis and evidence can support better land use decisions.

The impacts of land use changes at a systems level are not always well understood. For example, if we convert agricultural land to use for energy production we would need to consider whether this would necessitate increased food imports to meet our supply needs and therefore if it would relocate rather than resolve negative environmental impacts.

Tillbridge Solar should also explain how they have integrated the concept of "agrivoltaics" i.e. systems in which farmland is effectively combined with solar power. At present all they have quoted in Farming Circumstances 15.8.21 is during operation, grass below and between the solar panels will need to be managed. This management can include grazing by livestock where appropriate. Further investigation and alternative farming initiatives needs to be carried out by the applicant.