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This representation is in response to the Planning Inspectorate's call for comment about the proposed Beacon Fen Energy Park (EN010151) in my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Sleaford and North Hykeham. I'd also like to declare that my husband is a farmer locally and an agricultural contractor.

Introduction

Beacon Fen Energy Park would cover 1307 acres or 740 football pitches of farmland within the Sleaford and North Hykeham constituency. This application would be approximately the same size of Sleaford (2.3 square miles), which has a population of nearly 19,800 per the 2021 Census.

I have been long campaigning for large-scale solar farm applications within my constituency to be halted. With the combined size of live NSIP solar farm applications standing at over 9,000 acres in my constituency alone, the impact of these applications will be felt keenly by thousands of my constituents and raises concerns about cumulative effects. Our transition to sustainable energy is, of course, important but large-scale solar farms on good farmland are not the right solution. The below is a summary of my concerns and does not encapsulate the entirety of my strong opinions about this application.

Agricultural Land

The impact of this application on the availability of BMV land in the area will be significant. According to the Beacon Fen Energy Park Environmental Statement Document Reference: 6.2 ES Vol.1, 6.2.14, the majority of the site is Grade 1, Grade 2 or Grade 3a BMV land. Virtually all of the remaining land is Grade 3b, which is still good farmland. Lincolnshire is the breadbasket of the county and produces 30% of the country's vegetables. The land in the county is also more productive than the UK average; the wheat harvest in our county, over the difficult past five years, was 25% above the UK average, and it is much more productive than global averages. This is the land we can least afford to lose.

Like the NPPF, the updated NPS EN-3 recommends that developers should try using poorer-quality instead of higher-quality agricultural land and avoid the use of BMV land where possible. In a written statement in May 2024, the previous government offered further guidance on the use of BMV land for solar farms instead of food production.

It explained how these "competing priorities" should be balanced, clarifying the policies set out in the NPS:

- The "starting position" for developers should be to minimise the impact on BMV land and use land in areas of poorer quality. There is "a greater onus" on developers to show the use of higher-quality land is necessary as land grade increases.
- Decision-makers should give "due weight" to the proposed use of BMV land when considering whether consent should be granted.
- The government added that decision-makers should not only consider the impacts of individual proposals but also cumulative impacts "where several proposals come forward in the same locality".

1307 acres of agricultural land could produce 4,705 tonnes of wheat – 3.2 million loaves of bread or 96 million Weetabix. The application states that the land could be out of agricultural use for up to 40 years. In this time, technology will have significantly advanced, and the soil underneath these outdated panels will have been deprived of light, rendering it much poorer quality for future generations -again creating long-term impacts for food security into the future.

Due weight must be given to the amount of BMV land which will be taken up by the proposal and, on this basis, the application should not be recommended.

Cumulative Effect

Furthermore, with regards to cumulative impact, we cannot view this application in isolation. Heckington Fen Solar Park (1300 acres) sitting in the Grantham and Bourne Constituency was approved by the Government in January 2025. This sits within the same district as Beacon Fen Energy Park (North Kesteven) and is in fact only 2 miles away from this proposed site. Nearby also sits the NSIP South Lincolnshire Reservoir proposal, plus the thousands of acres of other pending solar farm applications in North Kesteven as previously mentioned. The cumulative impact of so many NSIP projects in one District, and in this particular area of the district, is more than unreasonable for local people to bear.

My constituency is the second most affected constituency by solar proposals – with around 7% of it due to be covered by solar under existing applications alone. There is a risk that at the end of use, these sites are no longer able to be returned to good agricultural land due to the impact they may have on the site. The most affected area of all is the neighbouring Newark constituency at 8.84% and the neighbouring Gainsborough constituency is also severely affected at 5% of land proposed to be turned over to current pending or approved proposals. The cumulative impacts of this infrastructure and their impact on agricultural land in the district and wider area must be considered.

Location and Proximity

This application would dramatically alter the landscape surrounding the villages located directly nearby including Howell, Ewerby Thorpe, Ewerby, Anwick, South Kyme, North Kyme, Kirkby la Thorpe and Evedon as well as the wider community.

There are several statutory historical designations, including Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings within the nearby villages. These include St Andrews Church, Asgarby, Asgarby Hall, Boughton House, Howell Hall and Kyme Tower in South Kyme. There are also Historic Farmsteads within the Order Limits and in the locality.

One isolated rural home in the location of the site may find itself surrounded by solar panels on all sides, like the hole in the centre of a miserable glass doughnut. Many others will live on the edge of the site, and this is causing significant personal stress for affected residents.

The impacts of these applications on these assets should be considered, with the loss of nature and biodiversity, impact on house prices and the mental health effects of the industrialisation in this area of open rural countryside.

The panel height for this application is between 3.5 to 3.9m. 3.9m is roughly the height of the largest ever recorded elephant (standing at 3.96m tall).

There are many local RAF bases within the vicinity of this application, including RAF Digby and RAF Cranwell. This application is causing great concern regarding the glint and glare arising from such a large application. Moreover, RAF Digby is the HQ of the Joint Cyber and Electromagnetic Activities Group. Any interference with these defence estates would cause significant harm.

On this basis, the application should not be recommended due to the potential interference with the RAF bases, local heritage, rural communities and sheer scale of such an application.

Associated 600MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility

There is significant concern about BESS facilities because of the potential fire risk of lithium-ion batteries. Lithium-ion batteries can catch fire because of thermal runaway. While individual batteries may have to adhere to product safety regulations, this does little to give reassurance in the context that there have been two documented incidents of a BESS fire in the UK in recent years and there are no laws that govern the safety of BESSs specifically. Recent incidents include a fire at a BESS site in Liverpool in September 2020 and a fire at a BESS project under construction in Essex in February 2025.

Energy Efficiency

Most large-scale solar systems (that have a capacity of at least 1 MW) in the UK are ground-mounted (94.5%; 1,145 systems). Only 5.5% (67 solar systems with a capacity of at least 1 MW) are installed on rooftops.

Some 90% of respondents to my local Solar Farm Survey, which was sent to thousands of residents, said they would favour solar on industrial roofs.

It is estimated that there are 600,000 acres of south-facing industrial roof space not currently used for solar in the United Kingdom. A push to prioritise industrial, brownfield and poor-quality land must be prioritised.

Furthermore, Hinkley Point C, under construction in Somerset, will produce 26TWh of electricity per year for 60 years.

Hinkley Point C spans 430 acres in total, making it roughly one-third of the size of Beacon Fen, despite producing a significant amount more energy, for much longer.

Currently, 2,000 acres of solar panels are required to power around 50,000 homes, but one small modular reactor, requiring the space of just two football pitches, would power 1 million homes.

Local Opposition

Last year, I conducted a survey in my constituency in the areas most affected by the large-scale NSIP applications in our area, including Beacon Fen Energy Park. Letters were sent directly to thousands of households in Sleaford and North Hykeham, and I received over 2,000 handwritten responses.

These were not simple online forms that could be clicked and submitted multiple times; they were thought-out responses, many of which contained pages of heartfelt comments. Of the respondents, 90% were concerned about the enormous scale of the proposals, 68% were extremely concerned about the use of productive farmland, and 55% were extremely concerned about the visual impact.

Lincolnshire is the nation's breadbasket and produces 30% of the UK's vegetables. My constituents understand the importance of backing our farmers. This is why the most common response from my survey was that we must protect our prime agricultural land in the interests of food security.

I fear that NSIP applications such as Beacon Fen Energy Park take out a level of local decision making, bypassing local authorities and local people to an extent, however, the responses to my survey and local feeling on this issue speaks volumes.

Our Net Zero transition is important, but, unfortunately, the consequences of these applications signify a shift from small, unobtrusive solar farms on brownfield sites and poor-quality land, to massive industrial installations in completely the wrong places based merely on grid connection.

I urge you to not recommend this application.