

I wish to formally object to the proposed Green Hill Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). While I support the transition towards renewable energy, this proposed scheme is inappropriately located, excessively large in scale, and fundamentally at odds with the adopted local policy framework and the interests of the local community and countryside.

1. Loss of Agricultural Land and Food Security

The proposal would convert approximately 550 hectares of productive agricultural land into solar arrays and associated infrastructure, within a total development area of roughly 1,200 hectares.

Such a substantial loss of farmland undermines local and national food security, especially in the context of global supply-chain instability, rising food costs, and increasing emphasis on domestic agricultural resilience.

Under the adopted North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) the strategic policies require that development should safeguard natural resources, including high-quality agricultural land. For example:

- Policy 25 – The Rural Economy: supports land-based economic activity “where appropriate in scale, and respects the environmental quality and character of the countryside”.
- Policy 3 – Landscape Character: requires that development should respect and where possible enhance the key characteristics of the local landscape.
- Policy 26 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy: says that infrastructure should be sited where impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated and where it does not conflict with other key environmental and land-use objectives.

By placing an industrial-scale solar farm across high-quality farmland, the scheme directly conflicts with those policies. Moreover, Island Green Power has not sufficiently demonstrated that lower-value land (e.g., brownfield or previously developed sites) or rooftop/satellite generation options have been exhausted before using high-grade agricultural land.

2. Landscape Character, Visual Amenity and Countryside Industrialisation

The proposal's scale is unprecedented: nine separate sites, two 400 kV substations, multiple 132 kV and 33 kV substations, long underground cable corridors, access roads, fenced compounds, CCTV and monitoring infrastructure. Such a large-scale development will profoundly alter the rural character of the area around Wellingborough, Grendon and the surrounding villages (e.g., Mears Ashby, Easton Maudit, Bozeat, Walgrave) and result in industrialisation of open countryside.

Under JCS Policy 8 (Place-shaping) development must respond to local context, form, character and setting, and avoid unacceptable harm to amenity. The sheer size and spread of this scheme means that it fails to respect local context and will cause a major visual and landscape intrusion. Additionally, Neighbourhood Development Plans in the area (for example: Earls Barton Neighbourhood Plan policies EB.OS1 – Protection of Open Green Places; or Ecton Neighbourhood Development Plan Policy 10 – Important public views and vistas) emphasise protection of open countryside, vistas and visual amenity.

3. Mental Health, Well-being & Loss of Countryside Recreation

Open countryside offers enormous benefits to mental health and wellbeing through access to green spaces, tranquillity, natural views, public footpaths, and informal recreation (walking, horse-riding, birdwatching). The proposed development's conversion of open fields into fenced, monitored, industrial infrastructure and the likely reduction in recreational appeal will thus negatively impact local community wellbeing.

The applicant's Environmental Statement (Chapter 17: Socio-Economics, Tourism & Recreation) acknowledges that the scheme is located within and adjoining areas covered by Neighbourhood Plans which protect open space and views. The change in character, restriction of countryside experience and reduction in visual amenity are material planning considerations affecting health and quality of life.

4. Safety, Environmental & Amenity Concerns Associated with the BESS

The inclusion of a dedicated Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) of up to 500 MW capacity increases the industrial nature of the development, and raises distinct concerns: risk of fire/thermal runaway in large lithium-ion systems, potential release of toxic gases, requirement for large safety exclusion zones, and continuous operation of cooling/monitoring equipment generating noise, heat and light.

Locating such infrastructure in a rural/agricultural setting adjacent to farmland, public rights of way, villages and valuable habitats is inappropriate and inconsistent with the requirement for sensitive siting under JCS Policy 26.

5. Construction Phase Impacts & Infrastructure Footprint

The construction and decommissioning phases involve major activities: underground cabling across multiple sites, temporary compounds, widening of access roads, heavy traffic, noise, dust, vibration, soil compaction, disruption of wildlife corridors and disturbance to local residents. The applicant's documentation shows the scale of these works is extensive. JCS policy requires development to avoid unacceptable impacts from construction; here the scale and spread of works make such impacts likely and long-lasting.

6. Cumulative and Long-Term Effects; Permanence of Harm

The scheme will lead to irreversible or at least very long-term loss of agricultural land, soil health, landscape character, biodiversity and recreational amenity. When combined with other solar and infrastructure proposals in the region, it contributes to cumulative loss of countryside character. JCS policy explicitly requires consideration of cumulative effects; this proposal fails to demonstrate that these have been properly addressed.

7. Policy Conflict & Lack of Suitable Alternatives

The proposal conflicts with key policies in the adopted Development Plan:

- JCS Policy 3, 8, 25, 26 as noted above.
- The Kettering Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan (adopted 1 December 2021) is part of the Development Plan and emphasises that development must respect the countryside setting.

Furthermore, as the applicant's PEIR states, the emerging North Northamptonshire Local Plan is at an early stage and not yet adopted, so it has limited weight.

Island Green Power has not convincingly demonstrated that lower impact alternatives (brownfield sites, rooftop solar, low-grade land) were exhausted. Approval of this scheme would set a damaging precedent of using best agricultural land for industrial energy.

In summary, the proposed Green Hill Solar Farm & BESS would:

- Permanently remove a large area of productive farmland, harming food security;
- Transform open countryside into industrial energy infrastructure and degrade landscape, amenity and recreation;
- Negatively impact mental health, wellbeing and access to countryside uses;
- Introduce significant safety and environmental risks via large-scale BESS;
- Cause major construction disruption and long-term cumulative effects;
- Conflict with adopted planning policy without sufficiently demonstrating alternative options.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the application be refused. I further request that local voices continue to be heard, and that environmental concerns and community wellbeing are properly represented in the Examination process.