

Tim Hubbard. Drovers Open Hearing Representation 6th May 2026

Good afternoon Sir. My name is Tim Hubbard, I am the Chair of Castle Acre Parish Council, I have been a resident of Castle Acre for the last 27 years and have personally worked in Norfolk's Agricultural industry for over fifty years. I am here to represent Castle Acre and some residents of South Acre as they have no Council. In this brief, I am confirming the continued objection from both communities to the proposed Drovers Solar Farm complex and sub-station as laid out in our representation made to the Planning Inspectorate 24th February 2026. The proposed site would be situated west of the A1065, north of the Breckland SPA and Historic Market Town of Swaffham south of the River Nar SSSI and Historic Conservation Village of Castle Acre and the village of South Acre all areas of natural beauty. We are **not** opposed to renewable energy, we are however strongly opposed to, and deeply concerned about the inappropriate location for The Drovers Solar complex and the overwhelming negative impact it (along with the potential High Grove Site, if approved) will have on the local area and communities for the next sixty years!

As we understand Solar generation is only 10-15% efficient and has to be highly subsidised by the taxpayer for it to even be considered as a commercial energy source.

Surely Renewable Energy should not be delivered at any cost!

Further to our representation which you will have read, I would like to briefly summarise and highlight some of its contents ...

The Drovers Solar Complex will Harm the Setting of an Exceptional Heritage Cluster.

Sited alongside the A1065, a major Gateway Route for most visitors to North Norfolk, the development will introduce large scale industrial infrastructure into the open, rural landscape that forms the historic and experiential gateway to our unique villages and the local area, all of which is fundamental to their identity. It will directly impact the setting of Scheduled Monuments and Grade 1 Listed Buildings at for example the BCKLWN, suggested site inspections document 22nd April 2026, location '7' A1065, while undermining the attractiveness and amenity value of the local area to communities and tourists alike. This surely conflicts with Local Plan policies that seek to safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Impact on Statutory Heritage Assets and Their Setting

The proposed solar farm lies within the setting of multiple designated heritage assets all listed in our representation, five being Scheduled Monuments. While the applicant may characterise the development as temporary, the visual and experiential harm caused by the scale, fencing, permanence of substations, additional pylons, BESS and all associated grid infrastructure of the proposal along with ground disturbance and the long operational lifespan mean the impacts on landscape character, archaeology, soils, and heritage setting will be significant, enduring and in many respects, irreversible, compromising the cultural landscape around one of Norfolk's most important heritage clusters.

The Landscape and Visual Assessments, underestimate the magnitude of harm by treating the landscape as visually containable through screening and planting which in themselves will change the character of the historic landscape. The application fails to fully assess the **cumulative and sequential impacts of all multiple existing, consented and proposed developments**, resulting in progressive industrialisation of the historic Nar Valley and surrounding visually sensitive landscape.

Impact on the Breckland SPA, River Nar SSSI, Biodiversity and Local Nature Recovery Goals

The site lies within the catchment of the River Nar, a chalk stream designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Chalk streams are globally rare, with approximately 280 worldwide. The River Nar and Valley have a range of important Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, including chalk stream areas, fens, wet meadows and woodlands, described by the Norfolk Rivers Trust as 'arguably Norfolk's most unspoilt and beautiful example'. The bird surveys submitted appear to be 'insufficiently' comprehensive to provide us with confidence that all protected and red-listed species namely 'Stone Curlew' which have previously been recorded on the proposed site and in the surrounding area have been properly identified and accounted for.

Loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMV)

There is a critical need for Agricultural Land to be maintained for domestic food production supporting future UK food security. The use of BMV land is under increasing pressure from development, Housing and Renewable Energy production (**Infrastructure and Energy Crops**). Surely, now is not

the time to facilitate the destruction of a valued, irreplaceable asset, **land**, when there are obvious alternative locations for energy generation, brownfield sites and rooftop, among others. This proposal, well over 2,000 acres (along with others soon to come forward) will represent resource destruction on an industrial scale spanning over generations, East Anglia is the Breadbasket of England. The application fails to appreciate the ability of lower 'grade' soils to be highly productive and versatile when, for example irrigation is introduced (which is already available on some parts of the proposed site) for growing specialised root crops such as Carrots, Parsnips and Potatoes. Removing this land from agricultural use for six decades undermines sustainability objectives which support continued agricultural use and rural character.

Public Rights of Way & National Trail Impact

The Peddars Way (a National Trail) and the Nar Valley Way would be significantly affected by the proposed development impacting the amenity experience of users. The Peddars Way is a nationally designated route of historic, recreational, and tourism importance, following the route of a Roman road and later medieval pilgrimage trail.

Impact on our Dark Skies

The impact of operational and security lighting from the proposed solar farm, regardless of mitigation, on our near dark skies is an additional concern, adversely affecting their quality and their value to nocturnal wildlife.

Noise Pollution

Though we recognise that the solar panels themselves do not emit noise, the infrastructure surrounding the solar farm (once built) will generate operational noise, particularly the sub-station and battery storage, inverters and fans.

During the construction period, noise generated by piling for the panel supports, the installation of associated infrastructure and construction traffic on local roads in this rural and tranquil landscape will all be intrusive, constantly affecting the quality of life for residents and all those using the Public Rights of Way and Footpaths on or near the solar installations as well as being damaging to local wildlife.

The application does not adequately assess the cumulative impacts of construction traffic on highway safety, residential amenity, tourist activity,

and the tranquil character of the area, particularly during peak visitor seasons.

Cumulative Impact, more than 3,800 hectares of solar developments proposed across Norfolk, (including the neighbouring High Grove proposal)

The cumulative impact on landscape character, biodiversity, and heritage must surely be assessed at a strategic level, considering the legal requirements to:

- Protect designated and non-designated heritage assets and their setting.
- Conserve ecological networks and sensitive habitats.
- Avoid inappropriate development in open countryside and rural landscapes.

The application relies on generic national need for renewable energy but fails to demonstrate why this particularly sensitive site, within an exceptional heritage and ecological landscape, with its natural beauty is necessary to meet that need.

In conclusion.

Castle Acre Parish Council concludes that the Drovers Solar Farm proposal (alongside that of the High Grove Solar Farms) would result in significant and enduring harm to the local landscape character, the historic villages of Castle Acre and South Acre and their heritage assets, archaeological resource, biodiversity and protected species, BMV agricultural land, public enjoyment and amenity use of the Nar Valley and its nationally important heritage setting.

While national policy supports renewable energy development, that support is explicitly conditional upon the avoidance of, or clear justification of harm to designated heritage assets and their setting, best and most versatile agricultural land, valued landscapes, ecological networks, and rural amenity.

In this case we believe, the application fails to demonstrate that such harm has been adequately avoided, minimised, or convincingly justified, hence our communities continued objection to the proposal.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.