

As Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk, I am submitting my written representation by Deadline 1, 02.06.2026. Details are as follows:

Planning Inspectorate submission: Objection to the Drovers Solar Farm application (cumulative impacts with High Grove; unresolved grid connection)

1. Summary objection and requested outcome

- The application should be refused or, at minimum, deferred pending submission of complete and robust environmental information on cumulative effects with High Grove and on all reasonable grid-connection options, including their full onshore cable and substation routes.

- A critical material unknown: the final grid connection location and route prevent a proper assessment of effects on the Mid Norfolk landscape, communities, and environment.

- While renewable generation is supported in principle, policy requires that significant adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily. Here, cumulative landscape, environmental, agricultural, and socioeconomic harms, amplified by grid-connection uncertainty, remain unresolved and potentially significant.

2. Cumulative impacts with High Grove and other committed or reasonably foreseeable schemes

- Geographic scope: Approximately 25 villages in Central/Mid Norfolk lie within the zone of influence of the proposed High Grove and Drovers schemes. The combined footprint and in-frastructure corridors would create a de facto "solar park belt".

- Biodiversity, habitats, and environment:

- o Loss, fragmentation, and functional severance of habitats across multiple sites and cable corridors impacting upon food security and supply chains.

- o Construction-phase disturbance (noise, lighting, dust) across overlapping work windows.

- Landscape, visual amenity, and tourism:

- o The cumulative change from rural, open arable landscapes to industrial-scale infrastructure threatens the setting and visitor appeal of Castle Acre, the Peddars Way, Swaffham, and their surrounding countryside.

- o Cable corridors, haul roads, HDD compounds, and permanent substations would alter Central Norfolk's rural character well beyond anything seen before, with an almost immediate move from an agricultural region to an industrialised one.

- Construction traffic:

- o Overlapping HGV peaks, abnormal loads, and road safety risks on constrained lanes and village streets.

- o Network resilience concerns, dust and noise for sensitive receptors, and disruption to local businesses and visitor economy during prolonged multi-year works.

- Precedent and inducement effects:

- o Land-agent reports indicate c.20,000 acres "in the pipeline." Approving Drovers along-side High Grove accelerates a self-reinforcing cluster, intensifying cumulative harms beyond those appraised.

3. Grid connection: material unknowns and inadequate assessment

- Undecided grid connection location and route:

- o The application does not fix the point of connection, cable route, or substation siting. Each plausible option carries distinct impacts on hedgerows, watercourses, woodland, setting of heritage assets, rights of way, and settlement edges.

- o The absence of route certainty prevents cumulative analysis of effects with High Grove application and any other future schemes.

- o Without defined parameters, the Environmental Statement cannot lawfully assess worst case effects or propose targeted mitigation. This is a fundamental EIA deficiency.

4. Agricultural land use, soils, and the rural economy

- Immediate effects:

- o Large-scale withdrawal of productive agricultural land reduces local output and threatens agri supply chains and seasonal employment, contrary to the county's role as a leading hub of agricultural innovation.

- o Both Natural England and Applicant estimate over 50% of site is BMV land, Natural England indicating 54%, and the applicant stating 51.7%. Either percentage is hugely significant.

- Long-term soil health:

- o Multi decade panel cover (lasting 30–40 years in the application) risks soil structure degradation and reduced organic matter if not actively managed. Reinstatement after decades is uncertain; the Environmental Statement lacks binding soil recovery plans and monitoring.

I therefore request refusal, or at minimum, deferral, pending submission of complete environmental information, including location of grid connection, and enforceable, coordinated mitigation.

George Freeman MP Mid Norfolk