

EPS Project WR for 06/10/26

I wish to reiterate and expand on my previous objections to this proposal as a resident of Great Moulton who will have my health, wellbeing and way of life adversely impacted by this project. The damage that this project will cause, threatens the environment, farming, nature and the rural way of life, and far outweighs any benefits it might deliver.

Events have moved on since the EPS proposal was submitted and this must change the Government's focus on what should be prioritised. Under the umbrella of Net Zero, Private Developers and Investment Companies have largely been given free rein to select locations that are available, convenient or likely to generate the most profit for their investors without any regard as to whether there is a genuine need or whether the area is suitable for the project. The Government benefits because private investment helps deliver Net Zero targets without the requirement for the state to build or fund these. Developers benefit from access to the national network and to land they could not acquire without the opportunity for compulsory purchase. Investors benefit from regulated returns funded via electricity bills, all of which the Public pays for.

Government has realised that these projects may not deliver the required demand and energy storage, they may not be strategically located or related to network capacity. Project costs have increased over which there is no regulation and there are massive impacts on communities or the environment. Consequently the Government has commissioned NESO to develop a Strategic Spatial Energy Network Plan to match need to regions and report their recommendations, covering the period from 2030 to 2050 This is not yet complete. It is difficult to be exact with the timeline as GOV.UK information is not up to date but I believe a Transitional SSEN has been produced which is currently awaiting review by the Secretary of State for Energy and Net Zero with a first full plan to be available from 2028 aiming for projects to be sited strategically thus being approved more quickly as the case for need has already been established.

Despite, or perhaps because of this timeline, projects such as EPS which have major implications for Norfolk, continue to be approved piecemeal. If the Government really believes a SSEN Plan is required it should pause irreversible decisions on such projects until that report is complete or it risks unsuitable developments which are in the wrong place, which will not deliver what is required and which will come at a cost to the public.

EPS provides a key argument for waiting for the SSEN to complete. It is a mess of sprawling disconnected sites chosen for convenience because they can be acquired easily. The Developers have not demonstrated that this project is required, nor have they shown any valid reason why this project should be sited in Norfolk. Great Moulton has been arbitrarily chosen as a key site for the installation of solar panels, two sub-stations and a large BESS, the footprint of which is 4 times the size of the existing village. Try to imagine what it will be like to live surrounded by this. This design was a radical change from the plans used in Consultation with the public, it only appeared on the final plan with no local input and is completely contrary to local opinions and suggestions made during the Consultation process. It appears to be driven by the fact that the land they wanted was no longer available to them and with the specific intention of gaining approval before an SSEN is published.

The residents living in the areas affected by this project have had a difficult time with these proposals over the past 4 years and have found ourselves in the horrible position that our legitimate concerns have largely been ignored or dismissed simply because they are at odds with the EPS agenda. I am not against green energy, solar panels in the right place can contribute to overall National Energy production, although in my view there are now more efficient, cost effective alternatives such as new generation Nuclear plants. Large industrial scale solar factories do not sit well next to other Government initiatives aimed at protecting nature, increasing biodiversity, sustainable farming and the need for increased food production. In addition, I believe the actual useful lifetime of the equipment will be much shorter than stated due to technology improvements already in the pipeline. The Government is so concerned about food security that they are now advising citizens to stock pile food for the coming winter yet still projects such as EPS continue to remove arable land from cultivation.

There is a wealth of industrial/commercial sites in the UK which could be used without decimating the countryside, and there are many examples of such projects being used by our neighbours in Europe who see the need to preserve their resources. We are a small densely populated Country in comparison to many of these Nations, but we seem intent on ignoring their innovations and I am concerned that the Government is making a mis-step in following this route rather than using the best ideas of our neighbours.

Compulsory acquisitions are now included in the submission when at all stages of the consultation it was stated that the land was to be leased and returned to farmland at the end of the project. It feels wrong for a private company, whose sole interest is to make a profit for their shareholders, to be allowed to use Government powers to purchase land that they would otherwise not be entitled to have. Once purchased and used there is no guarantee the restoration to farmland at the end of the lifetime of this project. In fact due to the glass and plastic contamination from the solar panels it is unlikely to be possible. Some of these compulsory acquisitions include footpaths and restricted byways.

From the Inspectors site visits it should now be evident that local lanes proposed to be used to transport the loads and construction traffic to sites are unsuitable and inadequately constructed. The quality of roads in our area is poor with no footpaths, are already crumbling at the edges with many potholes (some poorly repaired). Several are single track with passing places. There will be massive disruption for local traffic which will destroy the peace and tranquility of the area and present significant risk to public safety. There has been no suggestion of how these impacts can be resolved, nor has the impact on wildlife been considered. It is proposed that some lanes be straightened and verges and trees cut back, which will damage or destroy mature trees, wildlife corridors and ruin the character of these quiet rural lanes. Part of one proposed route requires cutting back hedges, trees and road straightening to allow the provision of AIL routes, some of these are designated Roadside Nature Reserves and will be destroyed in this process. One of the proposed access routes for construction traffic and ongoing maintenance post implementation, requires vehicles to cross Hundred Lane, which is a Restricted Byway of historical significance and regularly used by ramblers, dog walkers and horse riders. The ancient character of this lane will be irreparably harmed.

Wildlife will be seriously impacted to the detriment of local species of Bats, Birds, Mammals, Invertebrates and Amphibians. There can be no net biodiversity gain, sadly wildlife and the environment that supports it, will be destroyed and once gone it will never be recovered. Whilst I feel very strongly about this my WR is limited to 1500 words, so I am leaving this aspect to be raised by my husband, however I will just say that we have monitored bird populations in our area

for the past 18 months and there are at least 24 different species of the 70 species of birds designated as at significant risk on the Red List which are resident, regular or occasional visitors to our area. It is unconscionable that these species should be put at further risk of extinction by this project.

EPS proposals for Gt Moulton include a 400kV substation increased to 13M in height, a BESS, a National Grid Substation and tracking solar panels all of which are much closer to residential areas. The Substations will require permanent access routes and clearance. Pylon heights have been increased from 53M to 61M. These will be visible for a much wider area. Post construction, there will be ongoing noise, and light pollution which is damaging to residents health and well being. High level boundary fencing running alongside footpaths would make any user feel as if they were walking the perimeter of a prison and will negatively impact on their mental health.

This is just too much for a small village such as ours to have to endure, it will cover 4 times the current area occupied by Gt Moulton. I attended the initial hearings at Dunston Hall and listening to the impact statements of local residents was heart breaking and left me feeling total despair at how large corporations have no respect for the lives of the ordinary people who live here. Property values in our village have fallen, both existing homes and new properties built in the village are not selling, so the proposed project is both making it impossible to live in the village and impossible to leave it.