

To the Planning Inspectorate

Application by East Pye Solar Limited for an Order Granting
Development Consent for the East Pye Solar Project (Ref: EN0110014)

From [REDACTED], Norfolk County Councillor for West Depwade

I am making this submission on behalf of affected residents in my division regarding the application process and the health and wellbeing impacts of the proposal.

The application process

There are serious concerns regarding the transparency and accessibility of the application process.

Residents have found it extremely difficult to understand and engage with the documentation. Key documents have been available only online, often through links within other documents. Some of these links have been difficult to navigate or have not worked. This has created clear barriers to public participation.

Digital exclusion is widespread in rural South Norfolk. Connectivity in West Depwade is poor, there are no public libraries and there are few community facilities offering internet access. Many residents have therefore had no practical means of taking part.

South Norfolk has an older-than-average population, with a median age above both regional and national averages. Census data shows that approximately 45% of residents are aged 50 or over. Many older residents face barriers relating to digital skills, confidence and accessibility. A process that relies so heavily on online engagement risks excluding a significant proportion of those most affected. Older residents are also more susceptible to the stress and anxiety caused by prolonged uncertainty over their homes and communities.

Communication throughout the consultation and examination has been unclear. Residents have been left confused about how to engage, which documents are relevant and how to make their views known. This has added considerably to their distress and left many feeling excluded and unheard.

Much of the documentation is highly technical and not presented in plain English. There is also a perception that some documents are misleading

or incomplete. The onus should not fall on members of the public to identify shortcomings. Information should have been presented openly and transparently from the outset.

Health and wellbeing

Cumulative impacts

The application fails to adequately assess the cumulative and combined effects of this proposal, both of itself and alongside other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects proposed, consented or under consideration across Norfolk. Assessing impacts in isolation, topic by topic, understates and distorts the true scale of change residents face.

A comprehensive assessment is required of the wider health, wellbeing, social and service provision implications of large-scale solar development across Norfolk. The impacts extend well beyond visual change and land use. They affect sense of place, community identity, mental wellbeing, financial security, access to the countryside and confidence in the future. These effects must be assessed collectively.

Attention must be given to solastalgia, the distress and grief experienced when a familiar and valued landscape is fundamentally altered. For many residents, this landscape forms part of their personal history, family life and community identity. Families have walked the same footpaths for generations. The industrialisation of this rural environment will have profound psychological consequences.

The loss of historic footpaths and long-established recreational routes must also be assessed as a heritage and wellbeing issue. These routes form part of the social fabric and collective memory of local communities, and their loss would erode a shared cultural inheritance.

Residents have lived for an extended period under the threat of significant change to their homes. Many feel trapped and unable to plan for the future. Chronic uncertainty is a recognised driver of stress and anxiety, and chronic stress harms both physical and mental health. The assessment must address this, with regard to those who are vulnerable through age, disability, pre-existing health conditions or caring responsibilities.

Although not yet formally documented, there is considerable anecdotal evidence of worsening anxiety and depression and the exacerbation of existing long-term conditions. Residents have described feelings of

desperation, powerlessness and exclusion. These concerns are not irrational. They are legitimate concerns about a development of unprecedented scale in a predominantly rural area.

The health effects of construction activity, operational noise and increased traffic, including disturbance to sleep, must be evaluated. The World Health Organization has highlighted the harmful effects of chronic noise exposure on health and sleep. The loss of tranquillity and green space must also be considered, as access to nature is a recognised protective factor for physical and mental health.

Detailed risk assessments are required for fire, air quality, traffic safety and water resources. Residents are concerned about the potential for fire, smoke and harmful emissions from the Battery Energy Storage System. The substantial increase in traffic on narrow rural roads raises concerns about road safety, access for disabled residents, active travel routes and access to green space. Many properties rely on private boreholes, and construction could affect water quality or cause contamination. These risks are foreseeable and must be objectively assessed.

Many households have invested a lifetime of work and savings in their homes. There is widespread concern about the effect on property values, marketability and remortgaging. Retirement plans built over many years are now overshadowed by uncertainty, and many residents feel unable to move, sell or remortgage. The mental health impacts of potential financial loss and diminished security must be recognised in the assessment.

This community is being required to shoulder a disproportionate burden in pursuit of national policy objectives. Residents are being asked to accept extensive and potentially irreversible impacts, despite significant uncertainty about the long-term consequences of developments on this scale. Many feel their communities are being used as a testing ground for large-scale solar projects in the absence of peer-reviewed evidence on its cumulative social and health effects.

The absence of evidence must not be used to justify limiting assessment. Uncertainty strengthens the case for more rigorous assessment. The precautionary principle should apply, and the Applicant must be required to demonstrate, through robust evidence, that all foreseeable social, health, environmental and economic impacts have been fully considered and mitigated.

This application would bring major change to rural communities across West Depwade. Residents have raised serious concerns about access to the process, the quality of consultation, the complexity of the documentation and the failure to assess the cumulative impacts of this and other major energy projects across Norfolk.

Concerns about health and wellbeing, the countryside, local roads, private water supplies, property values and residents' ability to remain in their homes are genuine. They must be properly assessed, not dismissed because evidence is currently limited. The application does not provide a clear picture of the combined impacts, and the true scale of change has been understated. Further work is required before any decision is made.

Requested actions

The Examining Authority and the Secretary of State are respectfully asked to:

1. Require a full cumulative impact assessment covering this scheme and other major energy and infrastructure projects planned, approved or under consideration across Norfolk.
2. Require a health and wellbeing impact assessment covering stress, anxiety, uncertainty, noise, loss of countryside, solastalgia, community impacts and the effects on vulnerable residents.
3. Require a detailed assessment of the financial impact on residents, including property values, marketability, remortgaging and retirement planning.
4. Require further assessment of the risks from the Battery Energy Storage System, including fire, smoke, emissions and emergency response arrangements.
5. Require further assessment of traffic, road safety, accessibility for disabled people, and the effects on local communities during construction and operation.
6. Require a detailed assessment of the impact on private water supplies, boreholes and groundwater.
7. Require the application documents and key information to be provided in a clearer format, with plain-English summaries and non-digital alternatives such as paper copies.
8. Give significant weight to residents' evidence about the effects on their health, wellbeing and quality of life.
9. Apply the precautionary principle wherever evidence is limited or uncertainty remains.

10. Refuse development consent unless it can be shown that the cumulative social, health, environmental and economic impacts have been fully assessed and can be effectively mitigated.

Yours faithfully,

██████████ Norfolk County Councillor for West Depwade

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