

I am writing as a local resident and Interested Party to build upon the concerns raised in my original representation. I have followed the Examination thus far and, if anything, the evidence and discussions have strengthened my concerns about the scale of East Pye Solar and the consequences it would have for the communities and countryside affected by it.

My objection is not to solar power. I recognise the need to increase renewable energy generation and the importance of achieving national climate objectives. My concern is whether the scale and location of this particular development justify the environmental, landscape and community impacts that would result from it.

For me, this is also deeply personal. I have lived in this village my entire life, as did two generations of my family before me. My connection to this place is therefore not simply about where I happen to live; it is ancestral. My family has lived within, worked within and cared about this landscape for generations.

My late father felt equally strongly about protecting this countryside. During his lifetime, he fought hard against proposals that would have seen this landscape dominated by wind turbines. I find it incredibly sad that I am now making many of the same arguments to protect the same countryside from development on an even greater scale.

Throughout the Examination, effects are considered under separate topics – landscape, heritage, agricultural land, ecology, traffic, BESS, flooding and residential amenity. However, this separation risks significantly understating the overall and cumulative effect of the development. Residents will not experience these impacts individually. We will experience them collectively, every single day, as part of the same development.

An individual impact may be assessed as capable of mitigation, but mitigation of individual effects does not necessarily mitigate the effect of the development as a whole. Changes to landscape character, agricultural use, ecology, rural roads, tranquillity, views and the relationship between infrastructure and people's homes will overlap and interact.

It is this cumulative impact that concerns me most. In my view, the combined effect of East Pye Solar would result in a profound and long-term change to the character of this area which could not adequately be addressed through mitigation of any sort.

I remain concerned by the reliance upon screening as mitigation for landscape harm. Planting a hedge so that, eventually, some of the infrastructure may no longer be visible does not prevent the landscape behind that hedge from having fundamentally changed. Hiding something is not the same as preserving what was there before.

The Examination discussions around separation distances have also reinforced my concerns about the proximity of elements of the development to people's homes. What constitutes an appropriate separation distance – whether 50m, 100m or 250m – appears to be an issue on which East Pye Solar and other associated projects have taken differing approaches, and these inconsistencies have been discussed during the Examination. Distance alone cannot determine the level of impact. The nature and scale of the infrastructure, topography, existing vegetation, construction activity, noise and access arrangements will all influence what it is actually like to live alongside the development.

I therefore hope that the Examining Authority will consider the lived experience of affected properties and communities rather than relying solely upon whether a specified minimum separation distance has been achieved.

I am also increasingly concerned about the loss of productive agricultural land. This is not simply a local concern. The Government's own Land Use Framework now describes food security as a matter of national security and recognises the importance of safeguarding our best farmland. National energy policy itself states that, where agricultural land is necessary for solar development, poorer-quality land should be preferred and Best and Most Versatile agricultural land avoided where possible.

If it is deemed appropriate to remove productive land in this particular location, what happens when decisions of this kind are repeated across the country? At a time when food security, climate resilience and competing demands for land are all receiving increasing national attention, I believe productive agricultural land should be afforded substantially greater protection.

I am similarly concerned about the effect of construction traffic on the rural road network. These roads are used daily by residents, school traffic, agricultural vehicles, cyclists, walkers and horse riders. The relevant question is not simply whether an HGV can physically travel along a particular road – or whether that road can be widened to accommodate it – but whether sustained construction traffic over a prolonged period can be accommodated without significantly affecting the safety, amenity and everyday use of those roads.

Again, these effects cannot reasonably be viewed in isolation from the wider development.

Too much is being lost when all of these impacts are considered together. We are being asked to accept the profound alteration of our communities and their rural landscape because of the national need for renewable energy. That need is real and important, but it does not follow that other environmental and social considerations should therefore become secondary.

Food production, biodiversity, heritage, landscape character and the wellbeing of rural communities are also important. The connection people have with the landscape surrounding their homes may be more difficult to quantify than energy generation or land area, but that does not make it insignificant.

I do not believe that achieving one important environmental objective should require other environmental and community assets to become expendable.

Having followed the Examination, I therefore remain strongly opposed to East Pye Solar.