

New Gant Farm
Swaffham Prior Fen
Cambridge
CB25 0LQ

Monday 27th January, 2014

Dear Sir / Madam

Re: Lapwing Fen pre-planning application (reference number 13/01160/screen)

We were alerted by friends and local residents to an article that appeared in the Ely Standard on 16th January, 2014 which led with the headline 'Opening approach over solar farm'. This article went on to state that a company called Solar Associates has submitted a pre-planning application to East Cambridgeshire District Council for a 250 acre solar farm that would be located 'at New Gant Farm'. As the residents of New Gant Farm, this was our first knowledge of the pre-application submission that I understand you will be meeting Solar Associates this week to discuss. This letter is to set out our objections in the strongest possible terms to this proposal on any number of grounds.

Scale and Impact

The proposed development of 250 acres, generating 45 MW of electricity would make this the largest solar farm to date in the UK. The proposed scale and size is vast and its impact on the open fenland landscape would turn this rural landscape into an industrial one.

Screening and enclosure

The fenland environment is characterised by its open field structures: this land is sweeping and open with boundary formations typically created by ditches. The proposed enclosure of 250 acres of this land by a 2.5m security perimeter fence complete with cctv is totally alien to the character of this landscape and the offered screening would in itself be incongruous. This landscape has few visual barriers such as hedgerows or woodland features that would be typical in other UK landscapes. The screening and security fencing that would be undertaken by Solar Associates would therefore be totally inappropriate in this fenland setting.

Grade 1 Agricultural land

The land behind our property at New Gant Farm (which includes more than half the proposed development area) is all classified as Grade 1 agricultural land, with the remainder of the proposed development classified as Grade 2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for solar pv development states that "*Ground Mounted Solar PV projects, over 50kWp, should ideally utilise previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land, industrial land or agricultural land preferably of classification 3b, 4, and 5 (avoiding the use of "Best and Most Versatile" cropland where possible).*"

To take this prime agricultural land out of production at a time when national and global policy is focussed on increasing global food supply is nonsensical and is in direct contravention of the National Planning Policy Framework for solar pv development.

Wicken Fen Vision

The land proposed for this development by Solar Associates falls right in the heart of the National Trust's Wicken Fen Vision land. The Wicken Fen Vision is a "*National Trust Strategy to create a 53 square kilometre nature reserve for wildlife and people in Cambridgeshire.*" This vision was widely consulted on in 2008 and the upshot of the public consultation enshrined the idea and the area as a nature reserve for Cambridgeshire. The Wicken Fen Vision has the following aims:

- To greatly expand the space for wildlife and people.
- To encourage habitats that benefit wildlife.
- To provide access to the Vision area and encourage local people to become involved in our work.
- To learn continually from our experience and influence policy development at a national and international level.
- To ensure a secure financial future strategy

It is impossible to see how the proposed development by Solar Associates meets or supports any of these aims, bordering, as it would, the National Trust's newly reclaimed open grassland of Tubney Fen and enclosing it on two sides with security fencing and industrial scale pv arrays.

Rural amenity

Integral to the Wicken Fen Vision has been the creation of amenity access to the Wicken Vision lands, which have included the recent building of the bridge over Reach Lode to provide a 'spine route' through the reserve connecting Wicken Fen itself to Anglesey Abbey and Waterbeach. Since the building of the bridge there has been a welcome increase in the number of visitors to the area using both the 'spine route' cycleway and the National Trust land at Tubney Fen. From the new bridge over Reach Lode there will be no possible way in which Solar Associates would be able to screen the visual impact of their industrial scale development and the first sight greeting a visitor to Swaffham Prior Fen will be the UK's largest installation of 2.4 m mounted pv arrays. It is hard to conceive that this supports the Wicken Fen Vision of creating a nature reserve for the people of Cambridgeshire.

Recently we have been aware of increasing numbers of visitors coming to the hide at Tubney Fen to view the birdlife. The recent starling murmurations, the summer visits of the great cranes (which regularly feed on the fields which the proposed development will cover), the avocets, the herons, the barn and short-eared owls all attract visitors at different times. We have had horse-riders starting to transport their horses onto Swaffham Prior Fen and then ride locally using the excellent off-road riding that the area offers. The growth of the amenity value of this area in the four years since we have lived here has been significant. This proposal runs counter to all that has been achieved for these visitors and the landscape they are coming to enjoy will be damaged not only for them but also for the rare and diverse bird life that it supports.

Glint and Glare

While solar pv panels are designed to absorb not reflect solar irradiation, the issues of resultant 'glint and glare' are well known since glint is produced as a direct reflection of the sun on the surface of the PV panel and glare is a continuous source of brightness reflected from the bright sky around the sun. As the proposed development would be immediately to the north of our house we have very serious concerns about the likely glint and glare that would result from the installation of any panels in proximity to our property. What modelling would the Council ask Solar Associates to undertake to demonstrate that no problems would occur and what enforcement measures would the planning department have to enforce remedial action upon Solar Associates to remove any offending panels if any such installation were to occur?

Given that this is the largest solar installation yet proposed in the UK, we are aware that East Cambridgeshire District Council is faced with a significant challenge. The construction of huge numbers of PV arrays in an open sensitive landscape would create significant visual impact by virtue of their number, site coverage, their effect on the colour of the landscape

and degree of reflection, together with access tracks, security fencing and ancillary components such as substations and power lines. Yet set against this will be the undoubted gains that would come from ECDC meeting its renewable energy targets through supporting commercial scale energy generation.

As supporters ourselves of the local community solar farm proposed for a five acre site less than half a mile from our house, we are no strangers to the need or the case for renewable energy sources. But on such a scale and in such a landscape seems totally wrong. We urge the planning department at ECDC to come and look at the site to understand the enormous visual impact that the proposed development would have and to deter Solar Associates from considering any further planning application with reference to this site.

We would be glad to invite someone from ECDC planning to visit our property and to see the proposed area for themselves to understand the full visual impact of this proposal and why it cannot be considered on this scale in this landscape.

We look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely

Mr A and Mrs J Trump