

Rt Hon Graham Stuart, MP
Minister of State for Business,
Energy and Clean Growth
Department of Business Energy and
Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria St,
London
SW1H 0ET

Your contact for this matter is: Leader of the Council
E-mail: Cllr.O.Bierley@west-lindsey.gov.uk
DD:
Date: 21 September 2022

E-mail : - grahamstuartmp@parliament.uk

Dear Minister

Solar NSIPs in West Lindsey

One of the lessons taught by the global pandemic within the last two years is that, as a Country, we need to be more self-sufficient. The impacts of Climate Change and the war in Ukraine bring this into sharper focus and have created a sense of even greater urgency. This is understood and supported by the members of West Lindsey District Council.

West Lindsey District Council recognises and actively promotes the key role rural districts like ours can play in the Country achieving self-sufficiency through sustainable food production as well as positively contributing to the realising net zero by 2050.

Members of the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee, which has Member representation from West Lindsey, North Kesteven District Council, City of Lincoln Council and Lincolnshire County Council have been very proactive in relation to Climate Change by developing planning policy, which supports a Net Zero Local Plan.

The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, in conformity with National Policy, seeks to balance a number of challenges; notably the need to improve social and economic conditions through growth, whilst at the same time ensuring that the environment is improved, that efforts are made to make the region net zero carbon and to ensure that growth does not erode the area's environmental and heritage assets, of which open countryside and agriculture is key, nor exacerbate pressure on natural resources.

In submitting the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate, Members are satisfied that the plan does just that and moreover contributes positively to broader national objectives around sustainability, net zero and self-sufficiency.

As such it is considered by Members of West Lindsey District Council that the number of Solar NSIP applications and sheer scale of the proposals within West Lindsey and

neighbouring local authorities is at odds with both Local and National Policy and does not effectively balance the need for local social and economic prosperity, self-sufficiency in terms of food production and the protection of open countryside against the need to generate green energy nationally.

For context, of the 17.1Giga Watt (GW) of ground mounted solar PV planned across the whole of Great Britain, 5.3GW is planned in the East Midlands, which equates to 30% of the supply. Moving to the specific NSIP proposals, within a very small area of the authority boundary of West Lindsey, there are 4, known, solar NSIP projects. The total amount of energy these proposals will generate is 2.08GW. This is almost 40% of total energy generation of the projects proposed across the East Midland and over 12% of the energy generation of all the project's proposed across the whole of Great Britain.

Members of West Lindsey District Council are extremely concerned that the amount of solar PV planned within a small area of the District and the potential effects of this, if it were allowed, will fundamentally undermine the Countries ability to balance other competing priorities, specifically the sustainable production of food to feed the Countries population, as well as impacting on the Districts Visitor Economy. When considering the net worth of the visitor economy in West Lindsey currently, the latest STEAM figures indicate visitors to the areas generated a total economic impact of £43.67mil for local business, generating the equivalent of 1,343 full time jobs.

West Lindsey's unique selling point is access to the great outdoors, big skies and open countryside, development on an industrial scale is not conducive to protecting or enhancing this critical income stream for a rural area's like West Lindsey.

It is Members firm belief that readily available connections to the National Grid cannot be the only factors considered when appraising these schemes. The potential impact on the local communities who will effectively be surrounded by solar PV and the cumulative impact on the landscape character are but two other fundamental considerations, which shouldn't be discounted on the basis of economic expediency.

As a rural authority Members are well aware of established agricultural practices and the linkages between the production of food for human consumption, growing crops for animal feed and the increasing need for glass-housing to produce soft fruits and vegetables here within the UK promoting a sustainable food supply. It is important to note that glass-housing, an emerging diversification opportunity for many younger farmers, does not require land to be 1 to 3a, indeed the land classification is immaterial, the topography of the land, however, needing to be flat, is fundamental, of which the land across much of West Lindsey and Lincolnshire is.

It is important to understand that the food needs of the UK population is not entirely met through land graded as 1 to 3a in agricultural land classification terms. Whilst best and most versatile land provides a benchmark in planning terms; when considering

development of such scale, the value of all land, in the context of agriculture, cannot and should not be undervalued.

Members are also aware of the challenges currently faced by farmers due to uncertainty around future subsidies and accepted farming practices, and consider that in many cases, the financial incentives and security these large scale NSIPs provide are inducing farmers to part with land that they would otherwise continue to farm, if the direction of future national policy were clearer.

The Members of West Lindsey District Council are assured that if these NSIP proposals and others like them are allowed to go forward, driven by market forces and economic expediency alone that the impact on the countryside and rural communities would be catastrophic. Allowing the market to drive these schemes removes the ability for the Country as a whole to appropriately plan future land use requirements and ultimately will affect the Countries ability to deliver sustainable food supply for future generations.

I have also enclosed a "Letter of Support for Visitor Economy Businesses" – communications received in response to ongoing public consultations across the District in respect of large-scale solar farm developments. I hope this further demonstrates the concerns across the local area and potentially serious adverse impacts such developments would have on the District and the wider Lincolnshire area.

Yours Sincerely



Councillor Owen Bierley
Leader of West Lindsey District Council

Enc: - Letter from Destination Lincolnshire entitled "Re: Letter of Support for Visitor Economy Businesses"

Destination Lincolnshire
Office BT1
The Terrace
Grantham Street
LN2 1BD

26 July 2022

To whom it may concern,

Re: Letter of Support for Visitor Economy Businesses

Destination Lincolnshire is the official Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for the Lincolnshire and Lincoln. DMOs have been recognised by national Government (DCMS) and Visit England as having a crucial role to play in:

- Identifying the needs of destinations which have a dependency on the visitor economy;
- Developing and promoting experiences which attract visitors which in turn supports local jobs;
- Marketing and developing destinations;
- Adding to the Place Agenda, which is currently being championed in the Levelling Up Agenda;
- Fostering supportive relationships with businesses to aid covid recovery and growth;
- Working with local authorities to deliver joint strategic tourism agendas;
- Enabling communication horizontally within the destination and vertically with national bodies like Visit England and national government departments like BEIS, DCMS and MHCLG.

Destination Lincolnshire works with hundreds of tourism, leisure, hospitality and retail businesses and we are firmly committed to supporting the development and growth of the visitor economy in Lincoln and Lincolnshire.

As a DMO we actively lobby for - and represent businesses - that make up the visitor economy in Lincolnshire. We use our data set and intel from national bodies such as DCMS and Visit England to ensure organisations have the right information to hand when they are asked to make decision that will have long term implications and impact on the viability of the visitor economy sector.

Having reviewed the information about the Solar Farm Development, we fully support the calls of West Lindsey District Council, our visitor economy business partners, and other operators working in tourism, leisure, retail and hospitality to reject this project from happening in this area of Lincolnshire.

The project will have a direct, long term negative impact on the visitor economy. We will outline the reasons why the visitor economy is so important in Lincolnshire below:

Headline data which outlines the importance of the visitor economy in Lincolnshire (pre covid):

- Lincolnshire's visitor economy is worth £2.4bn (STEAM data Lincolnshire County Council)
- The sector supports 30,000 jobs, and a far-reaching supply chain across Lincolnshire.
- Food and drink spending generates £44m into Lincoln's economy.
- Recreation spending generates £18m into Lincoln's economy.
- Shopping is by far the highest at £59m a year into Lincoln's economy.
- The Visitor Economy is a significant sector for people's livelihoods.

Headline data showing the impact of Covid and lockdowns to Lincolnshire's Visitor Economy, and the depth of the recovery businesses face:

- 52% reduction in all tourism spending in Lincolnshire (STEAM Data 2020).
- Full time jobs in tourism reduced by half, from 2,500 jobs to just over 1,200.
- 52% reduction in visitor numbers.
- 50% reduction in the number of visitor days.
- Food and drink spend fell from £44m to £21m (a reduction of £13m)
- Shopping spend fell from £59m to £29m (a reduction of £20m)
- Recreation spend fell from £18m to £8m (a reduction of £10m)
- Overall Lincoln SMEs working in retail, tourism, hospitality and leisure have had to survive against a backdrop that saw over £100m wiped off their revenue.

The data above shows how deep covid has hit this sector in Lincolnshire. Economists have predicted that it will take up to 2025/26 for businesses in this sector to recover to pre-covid level. All activity that risks this recovery needs to be mitigated.

The negative impact the proposed Solar Farm Development will have on Lincolnshire and the damage this will do to Lincolnshire's image & experience as a visitor destination:

- Visit England champions the role of destinations in attracting visitors to England. Lincolnshire is currently underperforming in the Visitor Economy compared to other destinations in England. There are deep seated challenges with productivity and seasonality – and we think this project would exacerbate them.
- Continuing with this project, knowing the long-term impact that it will have on Lincolnshire as a destination, is totally counterintuitive to the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda, as it hinders a key sector and businesses working in it.

Strategic Fit

As the DMO we work with local, regional and national stakeholders on policy reviews and implementation. I believe the objections to the Solar Farm Development have a strategic fit with several local and national tourism policies which have been developed to support covid recovery and growth. I've outlined my reasons below:

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)

I believe that our objections to the location of the Solar Farm Development is aligned to the latest post coronavirus direction from national Government. On our recent calls with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) it was very clear that the Government is encouraging positive visitor experiences within the sector utilising themes (rural destinations) which have domestic and international appeal. The rural landscape in West Lindsey gives Lincolnshire the opportunity to deliver this ambition, and work is already in progress with Cycling product development and campaigns. This could be jeopardised.

As the sector recovers from the worst of the pandemic there has been an overwhelming demand for more tourism experiences from a domestic market which enhance the *Place DNA* and appeal of UK destinations – and Lincolnshire’s countryside offers just this.

Government has gone to extraordinary lengths this year to financially support the sector over the last 18 months with emergency covid grants (£53 billion in total across the UK). As covid financial support has now ended, this project has the potential to undermine all this work, as the business model of visitor economy operators will be disrupted by the Solar Farm Development.

National Tourism Recovery Plan (DCMS and Visit England)

In June 2021 DCMS announced its National Tourism Recovery Plan which sets out the plans for long term covid recovery across the sector. It focusses on:

- Extend the tourism season
- Enhance productivity of the sector
- A commitment to develop and adopt a sustainable development plan to reduce environmental impacts

As tourism sits within a wider eco-system of the visitor economy (retail, leisure, hospitality and tourism) it is imperative that local providers work together to create the right environment for recovery. Also for Lincolnshire to benefit from some of the upcoming Government interventions outlined in the Tourism Recovery Plan we have to demonstrate our commitment to the sector with a ‘visitor first’ vision across all interventions. The Solar Farm development does not support the ambition of the Tourism Recovery plan.

Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP)

The National Tourism Recovery Plan also compliments the Local Industrial Strategy from the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The LEP has identified 5 areas to focus on Greater Lincolnshire’s strongest specialisms and opportunities, including a high-quality inclusive visitor economy.

The GLLEP’s ambition is to support a high-profile, high-quality tourism industry, enabling innovation across tourism services and facilities to transform it into a modern, culturally and creatively vibrant visitor economy. We are currently working with the GLLEP’s Visitor Economy Board to champion retail in their work.

In conclusion, I hope this letter of support outlines the wider landscape of tourism nationally and in Lincolnshire, plus the current, and future, demand in continuing to protect / invest in quality visitor experiences and lobbying for local businesses.

I urge you to consider the long-term implications and negative consequences of having a solar farm of this scale in this location of Lincolnshire. I believe it will impact not only on immediate businesses but to the whole ecosystem of Lincoln and Lincolnshire as a visitor destination.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Charlotte Goy, Chief Executive, Destination Lincolnshire.