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HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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As the Member of Parliament for Rushcliffe, I would like to submit my objection to application 24/00161/FUL (Old Wood Energy Park).

I believe strongly in renewable energy. Since being elected in 2019, I have pushed for the roll-out of electric cars to be brought forward, made the case for solar panels to be installed on industrial buildings by default and supported the case for hydrogen and small modular reactors to replace gas and coal power stations. I have also been a vocal supporter of the Ratcliffe-On-Soar power station site becoming a green energy hub.

In Westminster, I have voted in favour of the Environment Act and numerous other measures to greatly protect and enhance biodiversity and our natural world.

But I also believe in a rules-based planning system which allows people to have a real say on things which happen in their area. I am concerned that local people feel the number and scale of solar energy developments in the south of Rushcliffe are hugely out of proportion for the area. At my surgeries and in villages across the area, I hear a huge number of serious concerns being raised.

When I saw this application had been submitted, I wrote to everyone in the areas surrounding the site and asked for the opinion of residents on these plans.

The feedback I received was significant concern about the location and configuration of this application as well as its relationship with another solar site which was approved last year.

It is important to mention that not every response was negative, some residents supported the proposals, primarily due to the importance of increasing renewable provision within our energy mix.

But the need to increase renewable provision cannot override several technical and practical concerns about this application which I have set-out in detail below:

Size and NSIP

Firstly, I am concerned that this application appears to be seeking to circumvent national planning rules around Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP). This application



will generate 49.9 MW of electricity. It is proposed to sit in very close proximity to the connected Highfields Solar Site (22/00303/FUL approved last year) which will also generate 49.9MW. The two sites together will create 99.8 MW.

The House of Commons briefing note Solar Farms published in February this year states:

'...Solar farms usually require planning permission. The size of a solar farm will determine which body decides the application. For example, in England:

- *Solar farms with a generating capacity below 50 megawatts (MW) need planning permission from the local planning authority (LPA).*
- *Solar farms with a generating capacity above 50 MW need development consent from the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, because they are nationally significant infrastructure projects' (NSIPs)...*

As far as I can see, if the entire solar scheme had come forward as a single application, it would have significantly exceeded the threshold for an NSIP.

Unless the applicant can produce a compelling explanation as to why the scheme was arranged in this way, it is difficult to see how this is not an attempt to use a loophole to circumvent this threshold and the NSIP test.

Traffic and highways

I am also concerned by the highly disruptive trench which is planned along the road to connect the site to the Highfields Solar Site and the grid.

I am particularly concerned by the applicant's statement that:

'...5.44 The cable installation will involve digging a trench in the road, laying the cable and backfilling. This document provides a brief method statement for these works, all of which would involve the installation of the cable within the bound section of the road itself, and not the verges...'

Reading through the method statement associated with this point, it is obvious this is a significant undertaking which would involve huge disruption to local roads. The south of Rushcliffe is already increasingly busy, with vehicles going to the M1, to Melton, Loughborough and elsewhere. I am deeply concerned about the scale and impact of these planned road works. The disruption is likely to be significant and the works will mean disruption for months. The applicant's Transport Assessment suggests this could last as long as 24 weeks.

I also note from the documents that National Highways has submitted a representation which was uploaded on the 20th March. This suggested a delay to the application determination of up to three months due to a lack of information on matters relating to construction traffic (specifically construction worker trips).



Given the significant pressures on roads in the area more generally, traffic management is definitely not an issue which should be underestimated or overlooked. I am concerned that the public will not have the opportunity to properly scrutinise and comment on any updated Construction Traffic Management Plan which addresses the concern that *'...would need to be updated to reflect the true number of light vehicle trips (for construction workers arriving by private car), unless the applicant can provide further evidence to satisfy National Highways that staff trips will not exceed 15 two-way trips...'*

For these reasons alone, this application should be rejected. It would clearly represent a disproportionate impact on the whole local traffic network.

Flooding

I also note the concerns raised by Costock Parish Council about possible increases to flood risk caused by the foundations of the panels. Flooding has been a significant issue for areas across Rushcliffe, it would certainly be most concerning if a development which could exacerbate this were given approval. Having read the applicant's Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy, I share the parish council's concerns about Kingston Brook and would ask that if a permission were granted that strict conditions around water monitoring and management be imposed.

Visual impact

I also have sympathy with the points raised around the cumulative visual impact to which this development would contribute. Several local solar farms have been built or are in progress; these are having a significant impact the rural landscape in the area. It seems to me that the view raised by residents, that the landscape is being turned into a pseudo-industrial area, has merit.

The delicate mix of agricultural fields, open countryside and small settlements with their own identities is impacted by the volume of solar farm applications.

I am not convinced that the mitigation measures, or the limited lifespan of the solar development, outweighs the immediate impact on residents and their communities.

I am also concerned about the plans for screening and the extent to which planned screening measures will obscure the site from neighbouring areas. The topography of the site means that it will be significantly more visible than other solar developments in the area.

I believe this application is not well-thought out, the road issues particularly are greatly detrimental to the lives of many thousands of my constituents. People understand that development is necessary but equally expect to be able to continue with their lives without major disruption. I am not convinced this application has considered the impact on local people or the road network and should be rejected.