



Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen
Leader of the Council
Breckland District Council
Elizabeth House
Walpole Loke
Dereham
NR19 1EE

Wednesday 25th January 2023

Dear Sam,

3PL/2022/1215/F – Construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic farm with battery storage and associated infrastructure, including inverters, substations, security cameras, fencing, access tracks and landscaping at land west of Palgrave Road, Great Dunham and Little Dunham

I am writing with regards to the above application that has been submitted by Low Carbon for a new solar farm at Great Dunham and Little Dunham.

(In the interests of transparency, I must declare that I am currently a Minister of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. While Energy falls under the remit of my colleague the Energy Minister, I have previously responded on the Department's behalf to a Westminster Hall debate focused on large solar farms. I write to you here, however, in my role as a local constituency MP).

As you will be aware, this application has elicited strong views within the local communities – on both sides of the debate: those in favour of the application and those who oppose it. Given my ministerial role, as well as the fact that this is a local planning matter, and the fact that there is quite clearly a mixed view from within the local community, it would not be appropriate for me to express my support or opposition. However, due to the strength of opinion being raised with me (and more widely) by those on both sides, I thought it was important that I helped highlight several of the key points that have been raised with me to ensure that they are properly considered.

Arguments in favour of the application

- 1. Clean, green, renewable energy** – As the UK increasingly looks to tackle climate change and move towards a Net Zero future, a number of constituents have expressed their belief that solar energy must play its part in those efforts. They therefore signal their support for this application and their willingness to have such a solar farm nearby.
- 2. Cost of living and energy price crisis** – With current inflation and high energy prices having been driven by the global pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine, a number of constituents have highlighted the UK's need to embrace clean, green, renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and tidal in order to ensure that our domestic energy markets are in future more resilient to, and less impacted by, by such variables. In turn, they highlight that this is important if the UK is to ensure that consumers are not impacted by ever increasing energy costs.

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- 3. Biodiversity/Land Use** – Several constituents have highlighted that, often, solar farm sites actually serve to boost biodiversity, with wild flowers and plants able to grow freely. Such land can also be utilised for grazing animals.

I think it is also important to highlight some additional points being made by some within their supportive submissions for the application:

- 1. Community Benefits** – Some constituents have stated their belief that the applicants should ensure that the local communities receive some form of benefits or recompense for having such a large solar farm installation nearby.
- 2. Associated HGV and vehicle movements** – A number of constituents have requested that all associated HGV and vehicle movements for the site (should the application prove successful) be required to utilise approved routes – agreed following consultation with the local community.
- 3. Air conditioning fans** – Several constituents have requested that (again, should the application prove successful) any air conditioning fans on the site are only allowed to operate between the hours of 8am-10pm.
- 4. Visual mitigation** – Several individuals, as well as Little Dunham Parish Council, have asked that additional mitigation to that included in the current proposals be implemented should the application receive permission (especially with regards to visual screening).

Arguments against the application

- 1. Loss of arable land** – A number of constituents have argued that, in the current international climate, it is wrong to use agricultural land for this proposed solar farm. They argue that the UK should be strengthening the resilience of its domestic food markets, producing far more of what it eats. Therefore, while the land in question is not prime 1a land, such sites should not be sacrificed for solar farms – particularly when there are available brownfield sites, or disused airbases, in the area that could instead be utilised.
- 2. Industrialisation of a rural landscape** – A number of constituents have pointed to the sheer size of the proposed solar farm, highlighting that it would completely change the character of this rural area. They draw particular attention to the fact that the application is of the maximum size permitted to be determined by the local planning authority. Were the application any bigger, it would be required to go through the Nationally Significant Infrastructure process in order to secure a Development Consent Order.
- 3. Visual Impact** – Given the size of the application in question, and the topography of the land that it would be built on, a number of constituents argue that the visual impact to properties, especially in Great Dunham, would be immense, and that visual screening (even were it to be increased significantly from that currently proposed) would never be sufficient to conceal the solar farm were it constructed.
- 4. Noise/Light Pollution** – Again, given the size of the application and its proposed location in a quiet, very rural spot, a number of constituents highlight the likely impact of the proposed solar farm in terms of noise and light pollution on the surrounding communities.

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George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk
House of Commons, London SW1A
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5. **Environment** – Some constituents have drawn attention to the possible environmental impacts that the construction and operation of the proposed solar farm could cause – including on local habitats, soil quality and biodiversity.
6. **Lack of community benefit** – A number of constituents have voiced their concern that, despite the potential of having a large solar farm nearby, there is no mention in the plans of any form of community benefit or recompense.

As you will appreciate, these lists of key points are by no means exhaustive. However, these are the main ones I have seen and heard from constituents and, given the strength of feeling on both sides of the debate, I felt I must, as the local MP, help ensure they are being considered as part of the planning process.

I would appreciate if this letter can be shared with the members of the Planning Committee.

Yours,

George Freeman MP

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