

Hillam Parish Council
Chair: Councillor Seph O'Connell
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To Planning Comments Selby,

RE: ZG2023/1271/FULM Erection of a solar farm together with ancillary development thereto | Hillam Grange, Austfield Lane, Hillam

Hilam Parish Council Concerns re Hillam Solar Farm

It should be noted that the Parish Council recognises, in current times, there is a need for an effective renewable energy strategy. This, however, needs to be a well thought out strategy that considers other needs and strategies as well as the potential harms that it may cause or implement.

Community Engagement

On the 22nd January 2024 the Parish Council held an open forum meeting, inviting residents from Hillam and neighbouring villages including Monk Fryston and Burton Salmon. The overwhelming consensus among attendees was opposition to the solar farm application, highlighting a clear and unified stance against the proposed development.

Greenbelt

The developers recognise that the site is in the green belt but believe they have "very special circumstances" to consider this application acceptable. We believe this application has failed to acknowledge resident sentiment to preserving the green belt within the boundaries of Hillam. Over the past couple of years, the Parish Council has spent considerable public funds in planning related disputes to preserve the green belt. If a development such as this were to go ahead, it would make a mockery of all the good work undertaken by Parish Councillors, local government councillors and Selby District Council as was.

There are anecdotal articles (Simon de Bruxelles, The Times) that suggest that allowing development such as this in the greenbelt may pave the way for future residential development.

Ecology

The Parish Council supports the concerns raised by the Ecology Team regarding inaccuracies in the application's assessment of wildlife impact. Local residents, who frequently observe diverse bird and mammal species on the agricultural land in question, have contributed valuable feedback emphasizing the need for a more thorough evaluation of ecological implications.

Based on the proposed 40-year duration of the Solar Farm the Parish Council are unable to understand how the government's safeguarding soils strategy can be met to ensure sustainable and secure food production, this is especially relevant when over 70% of the agricultural land being proposed is either classified as Grade 2 or 3A.

Scale and Dominance

The Parish Council believe that the scale and dominance is a significant factor in the concern that this development raises. Based over 4-6 plots, this is a substantially sprawling development which would be less imposing if reduced in size or on a single site.

Visual Amenity

The solar farm would be a large and visually intrusive development in a natural countryside setting. The Parish Council can see no direct or indirect benefit to the wider Hillam (and Monk Fryston) community with a loss of visual amenity due to the changing landscape either by a) the siting of the solar farm or b) the introduction of screen plants. Either solution is considered a significant detraction from the current Open Space outlook.

Looking East from the top of Duncce Mire Road, you can, on a good day, have a long unspoilt view out to the Wolds. With the anticipated 40-year lifespan of the project, there are many residents who will never get to fully appreciate the views and countryside aspect available to them.

Vehicular Access

There are an anticipated 1000 vehicle trips over the 6 to 9 month development phase. The Parish Council appreciates that the traffic management plan avoids passing through the centre of Hillam's conservation area but is concerned about the number of HGVs navigating the narrow northerly end of Austfield Lane. There are limited opportunities for vehicles to pass on the northerly section and it can be a busy road, also well used by dog walkers and walkers alike.

Overall, the lack of footway on these roads is a concern with increased HGV traffic. The roads are generally narrow, of minor road construction with many verges that have been previously damaged or eroded. There are also old dyke bridges that may be in danger of collapse based on the proposed volume and weight of traffic that will be generated by the development.

The Parish Council notes that the plan has been amended to show that access to site 3 and subsequently sites 4,5 and 6, avoiding trying to get heavy traffic from Chapel Street onto Stocking Lane. To facilitate heavy vehicle access, it is assumed that this "access road" is quite substantive.

The PC, on behalf of the users of the sports facilities (and other events) would like the developer to consider a long term "access road" that could be utilised as a "one way" exit route from the Stocking Lane sports fields. There are an increasing number of parking and congestion issues caused by the increased use of the venue.

Connection to the Grid

The Parish Council note that the grid connection phase will be a secondary application, but the work will be done in tandem with the solar development. We think it is worth noting this future application at this point. There is likely to be significant disruption along Hillam Lane towards Burton Salmon and Brotherton. This is the main southerly route out of the village and the construction works will have a significant effect, not least with the potential of 6 HGVs a day already affecting other routes.

Industrialisation of Agricultural Land

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) suggests we are facing “a tidal wave of solar farms on greenfield sites and working agricultural land”. With an increasing number of applications around the county leading to a change of use of 100’s of acres of land we feel this is an inappropriate industrialisation of the rural landscape and that for such development brown filed sites should be considered.

Effects on House Prices

Hillam and Monk Fryston are both attractive and sought after villages. The villages have quite a unique feel about them compared to others in the area. This is in part due to the limited residential sprawl but also due to the lack of industrialisation of the immediate rural landscape. Some residents have voiced concerns that there may be detrimental effects on house prices in the village. By completing a basic Google search, it is easy to establish that homes within close proximity to such developments do see reductions in price and those few properties that will be surrounded by the development will become much less desirable without their currently sprawling views of open countryside.

Domino Effect

The Parish Council recognises the attraction of this option for landowners. Based on a review of Savills web site, the suggested after-tax benefit is in the region of £600 per Ha. Based solely on these figures, the current application is an attractive proposition financially, both in the short and long term.

The Parish Council is concerned that this could cause a domino effect in the area with other landowners following suit resulting in a situation like the proposed 1200 acres at Camblesforth, which is not an attractive prospect.

Alternative Generation

The developers have been asked if alternative methods of generation have been considered. They state wind generation has been ruled out due to current legislation. The Parish Council interpret the current guideline to be a) a suitable site is identified and b) there is no local objection.

Plots 4, 5 & 6 are adjacent to a field which already has a wind turbine. Anyone local will tell you that Hillam Common is a very windy plain. We would suggest that this may be a suitable site. In terms of local objection, that is an unknown quantity until appropriate canvassing has been undertaken.

Evidence suggests that the same amount of generation can be achieved by a much smaller number of wind turbines and the loss of approximately 10% of the agricultural land.

Concerns around land availability are likely increase over the next couple of years due to other developments, climate change and geopolitical issues affecting UK supply. These factors should also be taken into consideration when looking at this application.

Community Benefit

We feel it is worth recognising the community benefit letter sent to the Parish Council on 4/12/23. Potentially this letter of intent provides an offer of up to £100,000. (Based on an offer of £1500 per Mw). This represents a share of approx. £133 per leafleted property (The engagement strategy cites over 750 properties were leafleted). It is hard to quantify an appropriate “benefit” based on the perceived “harm” to all residents in the affected area.

Ideally the “benefit” would not be monetary, but there appears to be little obvious gain from this development, for all affected residents. The effects of a “one off” monetary injection will be short lived, considering the “harms” associated with the development will be felt significantly during the construction phase, somewhat during the early years and possibly waning in the longer term towards the end phase.

It would be remiss of the Parish Council not to capitalise on any “community benefit” if a decision to proceed goes ahead.

Proximity of Solar Farm

Expressing apprehension about the solar farm's proximity to Hillam village, the Parish Council is concerned about the potential increase in solar-related crime incidents, a trend documented nationally. Drawing criminal activities closer to the village could result in a rise in residential-related crimes.

Furthermore, uncertainties persist regarding health risks associated with living near a solar farm. Given the concentration of village residents within half a mile of the proposed development, and considering its size and projected duration, the Parish Council strongly urges North Yorkshire Council to reject this application and similar ones in other rural villages. Instead, emphasis should be placed on identifying more suitable brown belt locations within the county for solar farm development.

Yours sincerely,

Hillam Parish Council