

The 7000 Acres Group

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**The Planning Inspectorate
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Copied to:

**Lincolnshire County Council
West Lindsey District Council
Sir Edward Leigh MP**

Dear Inspector

Cottam Solar Project

The 7000 Acres Group is a collection of concerned residents formed from over 30 villages in and around the footprint of the Cottam, West Burton, Gate Burton and Tillbridge Solar Farm Projects. We have grave concerns over the Pre-Application consultations and how they have been conducted by the Applicants.

In the case of the Cottam Solar Project, we believe that Island Green Power has not followed the Planning Act 2008 Regulations and Guidance, has made deliberately partial or misleading statements, has not made information widely available and overall not consulted in good faith. Our case is summarised below, with specific examples provided in an Annex:

- The National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure -Draft (En-3) paragraph 2.49.15 requires an Applicant to set out a worst-case option. Island Green Power failed to provide a worst-case scenario during the consultation phase. During public open days Island Green Power quoted the “Rochdale Envelope” as a reason why detailed information did not need to be provided at this stage. However, Advice Notice Nine: Rochdale Envelope paragraph 3.4 states:

“There is opportunity within the statutory Pre-application procedure for applicants to determine the most appropriate consultation programme for their needs and to time the

consultation to appropriate stages in the evolution of the Proposed Development. However, the consultation must be undertaken on issues that have been clearly identified and on a Proposed Development that is as detailed as possible. The bodies consulted need to be able to understand the proposals. The details of the Proposed Development should therefore be described as clearly and simply as possible. Obviously fewer options and variations within a project description make it easier to understand, especially by those less familiar with the PA2008 process.”

As detail was missing, or only made available in the PEIR, the average local resident was effectively excluded from the consultation and therefore does not have the necessary information to form an opinion

- The Applicant has failed to assess the cumulative effects of the four solar NSIPs in the area. This results in a failure to explain to local residents the likely cumulative impact on their environment but is also contrary to Advice Notice Seventeen. Even the PEIR provided by Island Green Power paid scant regard to a Cumulative Effects Assessment, required by Advice Notice Seventeen, and so did not allow local residents to make an informed decision on this project.
- Either Island Green Power does not understand the capability of their project, or they are deliberately misleading the public:
 - The publicity material promulgated by Island Green Power stated that the Cottam Solar Project could replace 30% of the power generated by the Cottam Power Station. This information is at best only partially, but certainly not wholly, true in that it only describes the proportion that the scheme can produce at maximum power on a sunny summer day. Island Green Power are being selective in the way they are presenting the information. By looking at the headline “maximum capacity” figure, it gives this as 30%, but by any other practical measure it is much smaller. For instance, load and capacity factors widely used in the industry are as follows:
 - In DUKES (Digest of UK Energy Statistics), the long-term annual average power delivered by solar is between 9%-11% of rated power, i.e. for Cottam Solar at 600MW x 11% = up to 66MW average over the year.
 - The UK Capacity Mechanism uses a combination of technical availability and intermittency (for renewable generators) to create a “de-rating factor” for capacity. For solar, this is typically 2% - 3%, providing an indication of

the amount of capacity that could be relied upon when most required, i.e. for Cottam Solar at $600\text{MW} \times 3\% = 18\text{MW}$.

- By contrast, for coal sites such as Cottam, as chosen by Island Green Power in their comparison, the de-rating factor is typically only 80%-84%. Therefore, for Cottam Power Station, at $2000\text{MW} \times 80\% = 1600\text{MW}$ average capacity would have been available over the year. The actual Cottam Solar Project would therefore provide a maximum of 30% (summer day) to 0% (winter evening) of the Cottam Power Station, but over the year, the average will be around 4% ($66 / 1600 \text{ MW}$).
- The material from Island Green Power also states that the scheme could “Generate enough clean energy to power 180,000 homes”. Clearly, the development cannot do this in practice. The scheme produces insufficient power during the winter and during the night to provide such power, and the excess power produced in the summer is not adequately captured by the proposed batteries to redistribute this power to the winter. The claim made neglects that the timing of when power is produced is an essential element of producing power for customers.
- The steps taken by Island Green Power in consultation, namely distributing leaflets and holding events, have not been effective in informing the community:
 - From the Island Green Power consultation feedback, 9000 addresses were sent leaflets. If the indicative population of the area is therefore around 20,000, their figures for attendees to events at 300, represents 1.7%, and the 700 pieces of feedback represents 3.9% of the population, of which, over 70% were strongly opposed to the proposals.
 - Levels of awareness of the community engagement sessions were generally very low. Often the developers outnumbered the local residents, e.g. Marton 25/06/22. At one on-line call (nominally covering the whole region), there were only 4 members of the public on the Island Green Power call for the webinar 27/06/22, i.e. attendance of 0.02% of the region. In terms of general reach, it is also not clear whether attendees are counted more than once if they attended more than one event. Similarly, whether the 1600 visits to the digital platform are from unique users. By any measure, therefore, the level of community awareness is extremely low.

Despite being aware of this, Island Green Power have chosen not to explore other consultation routes, e.g. social media, TV or radio advertising of the development or consultation events. Therefore for the scale of this development and local impact, an inadequate consultation has taken place. The Government has placed great emphasis on the effectiveness of consultation, in its “Code of Practice for Consultation”. The consultation by Island Green Power has, by contrast, been a combination of “going through the motions” and “hiding in plain sight”.

- The drawings and photographs provided during the Pre-Application Phase were misleading. Additionally, Island Green Power refused to provide further information during public open days. For example, none of the information provided in leaflets, display boards or on the Island Green Power website mentioned that solar panels would be 4.5 metres high. Indeed the drawings and photographs provided indicated they were much lower.
- Island Green Power publicity states that only low value farming land will be used. Evidence, including crop yields, prove this statement to be inaccurate. Indeed Island Green Power has already been found wanting when they had to remove their adjoining West Burton Four site due to inaccurately grading the land. The statements on the land quality are highly questionable and further testing is needed.
- Island Green Power has consistently provided false statements over their credentials and intentions. For example, their website states:

“We specialise in the development of solar photovoltaic plants, by sourcing land, managing the permitting process and overseeing the plants construction until it is operational. We provide a complete end to end service.”

This gives a misleading impression regarding their capabilities and intent. The schemes proposed by Island Green Power are 100x bigger (by electrical power capacity) than anything they have developed in the UK (typically only 5MW). Although IGP have developed schemes of around 100MW in Australia, the higher solar gain there means the land used per MW installed is far lower. In short, IGP have no experience of developing a single scheme as large as either Cottam or West Burton. One of their representatives admitted at the Willingham open day that they intend to sell off the project immediately they achieve DCO, which would seem logical given the capital

required to develop these schemes but painting the picture in promotional material and on websites that the region is in capable and experienced hands is misleading.

- Island Green Power has not considered and documented the use of all Brownfield Sites, contrary to draft EN-3 paragraph 2.48.15:

“It is recognised that at this scale, it is likely that applicants’ developments may use some agricultural land, however applicants should explain their choice of site, noting the preference for development to be on brownfield and non-agricultural land.”

Currently three of the five largest solar farms in the UK are on brownfield ex RAF Airfields (Lyneham, West Raynham and Wroughton). Lincolnshire is not short of disused airfields, but none were considered in the PEIR. They also informed our Group that the Cottam Power Station site was not available for solar development, which is untrue.

- Island Green Power made a number of inaccurate statements about increasing environmental diversity, whilst in fact they will be imposing a monoculture on the region and will be industrialising the landscape.
- Island Green Power failed to provide hard copies of the consultation documents in a timely manner to local bodies.
- The Island Green Power pre-populated feedback forms do not allow local residents to express their concerns in an easily accessible way.
- Island Green Power has failed to respond to questions and enquiries.
- Local concerns over issues such as flooding have not been addressed by Island Green Power during the process.

In summary, during the Pre-Application Phase, Island Green Power has made a number of misleading statements in their consultation material and has consistently underplayed the impact of what will be the largest solar farm project in Europe. It has limited access to information and so the average local resident has not been provided with accurate, timely and comprehensive information on the project, which has denied them the right to understand the proposal.

During a Public Consultation the Gunning Principles should be applied. In this case it is clear that two Principles have been ignored: firstly, there has been insufficient information provided to give "*intelligent consideration*" of the project; secondly, there has been inadequate time for consideration and response due to the enormity of this and the other three adjacent solar projects.

Therefore, we insist that the Pre-Application consultation phase is extended and Island Green Power is required to provide comprehensive and accurate information to local residents. Where processes such as the Rochdale Envelope are invoked, the relevant Planning Guidance must be followed.

Yours Sincerely

Jamie Allan on behalf of the 7000 Acres Group

Annex A: Specific Examples of Where Island Green Power has Not Consulted in Good Faith

Misleading Information

Generation capabilities - literature states that energy created will reach 30% and 24% respectively of energy supplied by Cottam and West Burton power stations. However, only generating capabilities of 4 and 3% respectively on a total footprint of 5,000 acres will be achieved. The combined operational area of Cottam and West Burton Power Stations is less than 1,000 acres. The two Island Green Power schemes combined, therefore will produce less than 4% of the capacity, for 5 times the space.

Brownfield site availability – Island Green Power stated in its feedback that Cottam (EDF) have their own plans for the power station site and therefore it cannot be utilised as a brownfield site for the solar farm projects. This is not the case. The site is for sale and the 7000 Acres Group have written evidence from EDF's Director of Thermal Generation that '*no solar developer has approached them for the land*'.

This evidence shows that Island Green Power's policy is not to utilise available brownfield sites, contrary to the guidance in EN-3, and therefore industrialise thousands of acres of farmland. No consideration of all available brownfield sites was shown in the PEIR.

False statements over company credentials – Island Green Power states¹ that "*We specialise in the development of solar photovoltaic plants, by sourcing land, managing the permitting process and overseeing the plants construction until it is operational. We provide a complete end to end service.*"

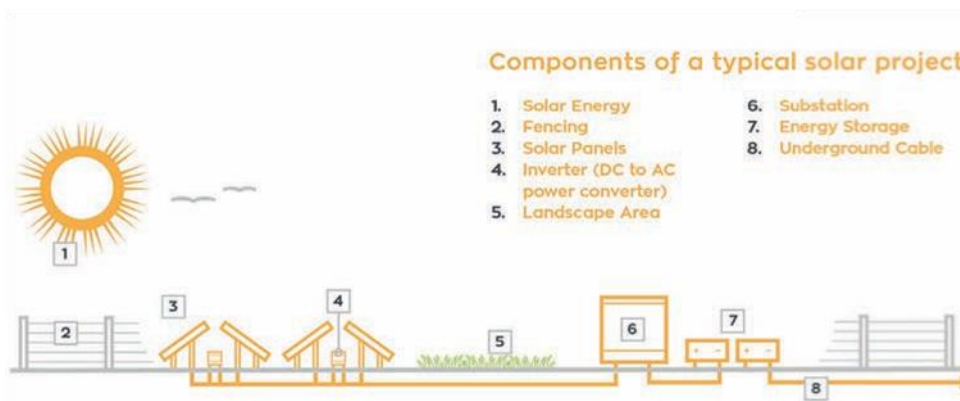
In fact they intend to sell off the development if they achieve DCO.

¹ <https://islandgp.com/about-us/>

Buried/Biased Representations

Solar Panel Height. Most residents were, and still are, under the impression that the panels will be 6 feet in height, i.e. similar to the height of a screening hedge. The actual height will be in the region of 4.5m or 15ft (over double the size). This most important piece of information is found in the Island Green Power PEIR document after extensive examination but was not made available in publicity material or shown during consultation meetings.

The Island Green Power leaflets distributed to households depict solar panels aligning in height to fencing. There is no scale in the literature. The literature belies the reality of what local residents will actually face.



Excerpt From an Island Green Power Leaflet Distributed to Households

A reasonable person would infer the panels (marked as 3 in the diagram above) are not unusually high unless they expected the security fencing (marked as 2) to be 4.5m high as well². The PEIR Vol 1 4.3.11 states the fencing will be a maximum height of 2.5m, so the diagram is deliberately misleading.

Photographs of current Island Green Power projects shown in their literature also give a false impression of what is intended for the Cottam Project.



Misleading Photograph from the Community Consultation Leaflet

Inaccuracies and Anomalies

IGP claims that the majority of the 5,000 acre Cottam and West Burton Solar Project land is Grade 3b and of little farming value.

Just before the statutory consultation period ended on IGP's adjoining West Burton Solar Project, the final soil analysis results reported that the West Burton 4 site was to be reclassified from 3b land to grade 1,2 and 3a making it BMV. Yet all other site's which were

allegedly retested remained unchanged from the preliminary results. We find a total change in just one site and not even the slightest change in any of the other 6 sites hard to believe.

The fact that the WB4 site had a very vocal campaign group that had been insisting on independent ALC tests for months and had been a "thorn in IGP's side" make us think that using ALC was a way for the developers to rid themselves of this troublesome and standalone site.

We believe the farmland on the Cottam Project sites to be as highly productive and important as the conveniently upgraded WB4 site and local farmers support this claim. This area is a UK arable stronghold and the quality crops highly visible.

As the IGP ALC testing regime has already been found deficient in the adjoining West Burton Project, we request independent testing is conducted over the Cottam Project sites to verify the true ALC.

Mis-application of the 'Rochdale Envelope'

Worst Case Effects. During Island Green Power open days no detailed information was provided other than that the solar panels may come from China. For example, at the Willingham open day further details were requested, a response was promised by Island Green Power and contact details left, but no information was provided. Therefore, no adequate or accurate assessment of environmental, safety or cultural impacts could be established by residents.

There are two different options for energy storage sites. There is a considerable difference in area used and length of construction time. Why has this not been resolved before the PEIR? Which version do residents have to consider?

Errors in Public Consultation Process

Parochial Church Council of the Parish of Stow-in-Lindsey - St Mary's Church, is the hub for access to project materials. However, the lever arch files containing Appendices to support the PEIRs were not provided. These appendices were received on the last date of the consultation period in hardcopy format only. The church council stated in correspondence to Island Green Power that they felt this was a '*deliberate attempt to disenfranchise consultees of relevant information*'.

There are many examples of the failure to reply to queries that were posed at the consultation meetings, in emails and in phone calls/messages during the consultation period. People did not, and still have not, received replies to questions.

Failing to Consult in a Reasonable Manner

Low Carbon asked for a noise recorder to be placed in a garden in Kexby Lane to record road traffic noise. The owner agreed providing they were given access to the data. When the recorder was removed the occupant was not given the data.

Statement by a resident of Ingham Road:

“They didn't believe us about the flooding. They insisted that there was only 20cm depth of water when we flooded and when I showed them the pictures proving differently, they laughed at me.

They also said that they had visited and spoken personally to EVERYONE down Ingham Road that is going to be affected which was a lie because no one had spoken to us until I went to the consultation evening at Saxilby. They then said that they weren't aware that 'The Pastures' even existed - even though we are clearly marked on their maps.

Their offer of coming to the house was quite obviously an attempt to gloss over their mistakes. Clearly that didn't work either. “

A number of residents of Ingham Road gave evidence to IGP representatives at the Marton event and again to different representatives at a meeting in a private house, of flooding well in excess of 1m in areas to the north of Ingham Road that are currently included in the solar panel site area. There are photographs on social media from inside 4WD vehicles trying to drive on roads and looking towards the relevant fields. IGP representatives were offered photos showing drowned sheep and the level of surface water. If this local evidence is considered, often viewable on local community Facebook pages as part of road closure warnings etc it invalidates the desktop analysis in the PEIR.

Another resident reports that:

“IGP promised to move the solar panels back away from my property into the next field and use established hedges and the land gradient to help mitigate their presence. We gave positive feedback to the project because of their decent attitude and proposed mitigations.

However they have now gone back on this promise saying it was never asked for and to take it up with the Planning Inspectorate. This is not working in good faith with the local community.”