

## Planning application reference: 14/03084/FUL

### Construction of 6.3mW solar PV park with transformer housing, security fencing & cameras, landscaping & other associated works. Land east of Manor Farm, Wadswick, Box, SN13 8JB (Resubmission of 13/04055/FUL)

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#### The local anomaly

There is a fundamental inaccuracy at the heart of this application. Unless I am missing something, the stated size of the park in 'The Proposal' does not match the calculated size from detail contained within the 'Statements/Surveys'. The *Design and Access Statement* states: "In total, there would be approximately 34,000 solar panels"; the park developer has stated (in a telephone call) that each panel is rated at 240W. The (maximum) output of the park can be calculated by multiplying these two figures: 34,000 x 240W gives 8.16mW, not the 6.3mW stated.

In an email (to me) dated 19<sup>th</sup> February, the landowner stated: "I can confirm that the number of panels in the revised scheme to generate 6.3mW will be in the region of 26,000 panels". If we apply the above calculation (number of panels x panel rating) to this figure, we do arrive at the stated park size in 'The Proposal' (26,000 x 240W = 6.24mW or 6.3mW if we round up).

So, 26,000 panels or 34,000 panels, 6.3mW or 8.16mW? I am at a loss to see how such fundamental discrepancies could be presented at the starting point of this revised proposal. This does not augur well for other data contained in the 'Statements/Surveys'.

#### The local issue

At the heart of project is the issue of who benefits? Mr Barton has told me on a number of occasions that he would prefer to see the farm operate without subsidies, yet it is subsidies that are driving this project. The cost/benefit equation was described in detail in my objection to the initial planning application (the 6-page 'representation letter', dated 25<sup>th</sup> October, can be found on the 'documentation' page of planning application 13/04055/FUL on Wilts CC planning pages here: <http://services.wiltshire.gov.uk/UniDoc/Document/Search/DSA,521623>).

In the above objection, I estimated that the profits (through subsidies) for the landowner/developer over the 25-year life of the park would be in the region of £16,000,000. At a meeting with the landowner, this figure was discussed and not challenged. Yet it could well be that, as with many or most solar park installations, the landowner is offered a rent per acre by the developer and this is index linked for the life of the park. However, what the private profits of this publicly subsidised enterprise will be remain a secret. A cost/benefit analysis must have been made but figures are not disclosed. I assert that if the private profit of solar parks was revealed then there would be such a public outcry they would never get off the ground. So figures remain secret.

Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy's solar park project at Chelworth in east Wiltshire (a 'community' energy project) intends, after a 7-10% return to local investors (which could well be spent locally), to distribute 80% of 'excess' profits to local community funds and the remaining 20% to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to reinvest in environmental projects.

Contrast this with 'private' schemes, such as Wadswick, where the financial benefits accrue to a very small number of people - the landowner and his/her family and the park developer. The local community sees no substantial benefit (other than rather inconsequential permissive paths and teaching areas). Indeed, this state of affairs is deemed to be a kind of noble cause i.e. that "the

viability of the holding should be improved". Section 2.10 of the *Planning Statement* states: "Potential to deliver benefits to the landowner as a way to secure an economical use for the land holding and gain a measure of financial security"; section 5.17 states: "this proposal supports economic growth in rural areas by enabling the farm enterprise to benefit from increased financial security by way of diversifying its operation and securing income over the operational period for the solar park development". Sections 5.8 and 5.9 of the *Agricultural Assessment* state: "A long term income from solar energy would provide the farm business with an additional source of regular, predictable income for the duration of the scheme" and "Income and expenditure associated with agriculture can be volatile so the provision of a relatively stable income would further enhance the resilience and viability of the holding". But why is the taxpayer or energy consumer required to subsidise the income and financial future of just one family and its businesses? There appears to be an assumption here, dating from our feudal past, that we serfs are required to support our landowning families.

We are told in section 7.61 of the *Planning Statement* that: "Once operational the level of movement associated with the development will be extremely low, at circa 20 visits per year for the purposes of security and maintenance". So we will have 14-hectares' worth of solar panels and associated paraphernalia, manufactured in the Far East (so providing no UK jobs) using dirty coal energy sitting in a Cotswold landscape with effectively no maintenance required over its 25-year life (so providing no jobs for local people) supposedly providing vital green energy and helping to save the planet (see global section). Section 7.42 of the *Planning Statement* quotes from 'saved' Local Plan policies which state that developments should: "i. promote or maintain the long term economic health of the local economy and ii. promote or maintain socially inclusive communities and their access to community infrastructure. I argue that this proposal does neither, it will merely (as stated in the *Agricultural Assessment*) "enhance the resilience and viability of the holding" (through consumer energy subsidies).

If we wish businesses to benefit from increased financial security through subsidies (energy or otherwise) then why limit subsidies to landowning/farming businesses/families? Recently a well-used 'community' enterprise known as The Bear in Box has gone under. If we had applied the landowning model to this business then we could perhaps have raised the local rate by a few pounds in order to support Chris Lilley. After all, (to paraphrase the *Agricultural Assessment*) "income and expenditure associated with the hospitality trade can be volatile". And this business, as well as being a community hub, provided some local employment (bar, kitchen and cleaning staff). In spite of the landowner's disavowal of subsidies, the solar park enterprise would never have seen the light of day if it was not for the significant green subsidies provided for such projects.

It is perhaps worthwhile repeating two paragraphs from the *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (which quotes from the NPPF) here:

5.3 NPPF Section 3, Supporting a prosperous rural economy notes that 'planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.'

5.4 NPPF Section 10, entitled 'Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change' explains that planning plays a vital role 'in supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. This is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.'

This is typical of the drivel at the heart of the NPPF and the quotes therefrom. No local jobs will be created by this enterprise and the proposed park will have no impact whatsoever on climate change.

It (the L&VIA) then goes on to quote from the North Wiltshire Local Plan as follows with regard to 'sustainable principles of developments' (I appreciate that the first two points were highlighted earlier but I was quoting then from the *Planning Statement*) :

- Promotes or maintains the long term economic health of the local economy
- Promotes or maintains socially inclusive communities and their access to community infrastructure
- Promotes or maintains the quality of the natural and the historic environment
- Demonstrates the prudent use of natural resources and incorporates, where relevant, recycling, renewable energy and energy conservation measures

As indicated earlier, the proposed park will:

- only improve the economic health of the landowner and the developer, not the local economy
- divide the local community - scores of local people objected to the initial proposal and a few were supportive
- certainly not promote or maintain the natural and historic environments
- and definitely not demonstrate prudent use of natural resources with the raw materials and manufactured products of the park being sourced from the Far East

And so the *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, the *Planning Statement* etc go on repeating trite statements attempting to justify the unjustifiable.

### The global anomaly

Let's start with a quote from James Lovelock (*The Ages of Gaia*, *The Revenge of Gaia* etc):

“The adjective ‘renewable’ is human value judgement: it has no basis in science”.

While Britain attempts to reduce its CO2 emissions by 20% by 2020, those of China and India are increasing massively. Our CO2 production rate is 6% of China's but China's rate is growing at 9% per annum (China plans 450 new coal-fired power stations which will be burning 1.2 billion extra tonnes of coal per annum). **What matters is not our 'production' but our 'consumption'**. It makes no sense to cut our carbon production (by closing down coal-fired power stations and building solar parks for example) whilst importing £billions of goods from China (including solar panels) which increases our carbon consumption (goods produced using 'dirty' coal energy). According to Dieter Helm in *The Carbon Crunch*, UK carbon production fell by 15% from 1990 to 2005 but carbon consumption went up by 19% and that situation continues today.

The following table, taken from the April 2014 National Geographic, shows the massive increase in coal consumption in China (and India) to 2011 fuelled by the West's demand for consumer products (including solar panels). The UK does not even register in this table; by global measures, the impact of UK solar parks on global warming and climate change is beyond negligible.

We would do far better to concentrate on trying to reduce our dependence on Chinese-produced goods, forcing fewer private car journeys by raising fuel taxes (to say £5 per litre), reducing unnecessary air travel (which would have a massive impact on greenhouse gas production) etc. The ‘taxes’ (subsidies) being pumped into solar parks would be better used in re-establishing our lost rail network (as is beginning to happen with, for example, the reinstatement of the northern part of the Waverley route) and further subsidising our ridiculously expensive local bus services, the cost of which, at present, makes the choice between the private car and buses a ‘no-brainer’.

Whilst appreciating that this is ‘big picture’ stuff and may not form part of Wilts CC Planning Department's decision-making on this issue, I feel it necessary to put the other side of the litany of climate change claptrap (looking for alliteration here) echoed in the supporting documentation.

## WORLD COAL CONSUMPTION

# AN APPETITE FOR ENERGY

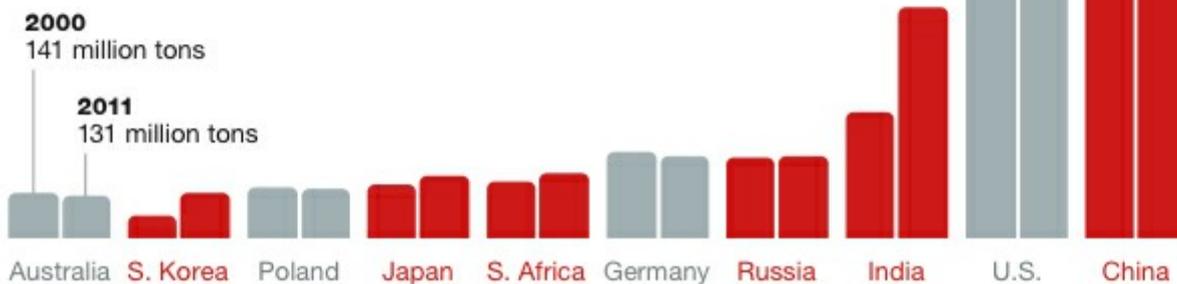
Though coal burning has plateaued in countries like the U.S., it has soared in rapidly industrializing countries like China and India, which manufacture many of the West's consumer products. World coal consumption rose by 54 percent from 2000 to 2011.

2011  
3.8 billion  
tons

### TOP TEN COAL-CONSUMING NATIONS, 2011

Change in consumption since 2000

■ INCREASE ■ DECREASE



### The candle industry and Good Energy

If the devotees of solar parks would like, to use the vernacular, 'put their money where their mouth is', then let them try to watch 'Corrie' on a winter's night supping a freshly-made cuppa using solar energy. Using my base supply of gas/coal/nuclear I can do this but until the problem of energy storage is solved, energy generated from large-scale solar installations must, like base supply, be used directly as it is generated. So our solar park disciples will be watching the flames of their candles flicker while the kettle heats on the open fire (actually, perhaps this is not a bad idea - if we all did this we might save the planet and at the same time give a massive boost to the candle industry).

And it seems that green energy companies do not really believe their own 'hype'. My energy contract is coming to an end so I thought I would give a green energy company a try. I contacted Good Energy (<http://www.goodenergy.co.uk/>), which is based at Monkton Hill in Chippenham, on 19<sup>th</sup> March explaining my view on green (but particularly solar PV) energy but asking if they could convince me of the benefits and offer me a contract for the coming years. They did not respond so I wrote again on 31<sup>st</sup> March and as of today (16<sup>th</sup> April) they have still not responded. So much for the merchants of green energy.

## **The environment**

The photographs on the following pages perhaps give some indication of the nature of the environs of Wadswick Lane. They were taken over many years and illustrate the open nature of the landscape. One of the photos shows (what I believe to be) a fluffed-up skylark in the depths of winter. Skylarks have been a perennial delight in the fields of Wadswick Farm but, to quote the RSPB, “are unlikely to adapt to nesting on land that has solar panels”.

## **The application**

I request therefore that Wilts County Council planners reject the revised application.

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16<sup>th</sup> April 2014













