

Staploe Parish Council Eastpark Energy Consultation Response (Draft)

Staploe Parish Council object to the Eastpark Energy Scheme for the following reasons:

1. **Excessive in scale.** We object to this scheme on the grounds of its excessive scale. We already have many existing solar schemes either in existence or approved in the parish of Staploe. Top End and Little Staughton (50 MW existing), High Wood (approved, 50MW), and Cobholden (approved, 50MW currently in construction). The cumulative effect on the landscape will be excessive. This clustering of solar farms around an electrical substation can transform the landscape of an area and should be avoided.
2. **Roofs first.** Insufficient evidence has been provided that the energy needs could not be delivered by fitting solar panels to roofs of domestic and commercial buildings or brownfield sites. These should be considered before using agricultural land.
3. **Loss of agricultural land.** The scheme will use a high proportion of the best and most versatile agricultural land. 74% of the land is best and most versatile. This is needed for our own food security. Importing food is not good for the environment. The extent of land (c. 768ha) being taken out of food production is huge. This is against government policy which states that solar farms should be on previously developed, non-agricultural land.
4. **Subjective land assessments.** We are concerned that agricultural land quality assessments are not sufficiently objective as the landowners pay for them and it is in their interests to achieve their desired outcome eg. low quality classifications when wanting to develop the land and high when wanting to sell for agricultural purposes.
5. **Insufficient sampling.** We don't believe that the sampling was sufficient to make an accurate assessment of agricultural land quality. It was only 1 auger per 4 hectares. Natural England state that it should be 1 auger per hectare. Therefore it is not clear what the agricultural land classification is for the areas concerned.
6. **Harm to the landscape.** One of the attractive aspects of our landscape are the wide open views. Walking or riding in a narrow corridor between solar panels does not make for a pleasant experience. One particularly precious view is the

view behind Little Staughton Church down into the Kym valley. This should be preserved free from solar panels.

7. **Implementation and maintenance of landscaping, mitigation and biodiversity.** In our experience with the existing solar farm in our parish a lot of hedging was planted about 18 months after the solar farm was constructed and then most of the whips died due to lack of water and maintenance. They have then had to be replaced with took another year and again, many have died and not been replaced. Therefore we are now 5 years on with only tiny whips in place. The proposed mitigations to the visual impact and biodiversity are unlikely to be effective for many years.
8. **High Wood.** We are concerned about the impact on the Ancient Woodland of High Wood (County Wildlife Site). It already has a solar farm to its west. One has been approved to its south and east (High Wood solar farm 22/01998/MAF at Bedford Borough Council) and now this proposal will create a solar farm close to its northern edge. It will be almost surrounded if Eastpark goes ahead and this will isolate it with very little access for wildlife.
9. **Access in Duloe.** The plans include a temporary access point in Duloe to lay the cables from site D (near Hail Weston) to Eaton Socon Substation SA17 and 18 access points on the road east of Duloe. We have been assured that these are temporary access points to be used for laying the cables during construction and for removing them during decommissioning. We have been told that the hedge will be reinstated and the track removed after the cables have been laid and the solar farm is in operation. The Parish Council's comments are as follows:
 - a. The road is narrow and designated as unsuitable for HGVs so we don't think it is suitable for construction traffic
 - b. There is no pavement and the road is a well used route for pedestrians and cyclists. We are concerned about the safety of these vulnerable road users during laying of the cables.
 - c. There is an existing solar farm behind Bassmead Manor which is in a similar location to site D. This did not require access to lay cables through Duloe. Why does this scheme require this access?
 - d. There are a number of footpaths in the area of the proposed access points. This could present a danger to walkers.
 - e. There is nothing in the scheme to assure us that hedges removed will be reinstated and the temporary track will be removed and the land revert to agricultural use immediately after construction and again after decommissioning with a timeframe.

10. **Soils damage.** Soils are living habitats. If they are compacted and kept in shade with no augmentation of organic material over a period of 40 years it could do irreversible harm to the soil and make it difficult to return the land to agricultural production.