

## **Husthwaite challenge 'industrial scale' solar proposal**

More than 100 people crammed into Husthwaite Village Hall on Monday evening for a meeting called in response to a proposal to build an industrial scale solar farm next to the village and nearby Carlton Husthwaite.

This was the villagers' first opportunity to meet representatives of the Israeli-owned developer Econergy and its UK agent Lightrock Power, who have already secured the support of two landowners for the 250 acre facility in return for an annual fee of around £1,000 an acre. The expected lifespan of the proposed scheme is 40 years.

The Monday meeting was hosted by a village residents' action group who say this is one of the largest solar farm projects proposed to date in the UK and, together with an existing solar farm and another one in the pipeline, will have a cumulative and long term detrimental impact on the area and its economy.

A group representative told The Advertiser: "No one questions the need for and value of renewable energy to combat the growing challenge of climate change. But this scheme is of such a large scale it is inappropriate for the area and will have a fundamental impact on the environment, the local landscape and the community for a generation."

The developers say the scheme will allow for improvements in wildlife habitat and biodiversity and are also offering to set up a £100,000 trust fund to assist local ventures. A key reason for selecting the location is its proximity to an electricity sub-station which will enable construction costs to be kept at a minimum.

The scheme, called Woolpots Solar Farm, would occupy two agricultural sites totalling 250 acres located between Husthwaite and Carlton Husthwaite adjacent to the North York Moors National Park and the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The two sites will be surrounded by 2.5m high fencing complete with security cameras while ancillary equipment for the facility, such as inverters and transformers, will be housed in large shipping-type containers.

Once completed the facility would generate 50MW peak of electricity and provide the developers with pre-tax revenues of over £3 million a year.

The key objection to the scheme centres on its cumulative impact. Part of it will be adjacent to the existing 200 acre Boscar Grange Solar Farms located near the Husthwaite turning off the A19. However, another

proposed solar farm scheme is also about to be submitted to Hambleton Council. This will straddle the A19 highway and would potentially bring the total farmland acreage under solar panels to near 700 acres.

The Husthwaite action group also points out that the Woolpots scheme appears to be at odds with the Hambleton Local Plan which states that space and tranquility is a feature of the district and notes that Maintaining and improving amenity and addressing adverse impact on quality of life are identified as important aims by local residents.

On the subject of solar energy, the Hambleton Plan notes that there are "Opportunities for small scale renewables". It states: "proposals for renewable energy technologies will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal has been designed to avoid adverse planning impacts or minimise these to an acceptable level. The Council will have regard to the cumulative impact of proposals. Their significance and level of harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal."

In terms of broader government policy, the then Secretary of State for Housing, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, stated in a letter of 16 August 2021 to Sir Oliver Heald QC MP: "The National Planning Policy Framework expects local authorities to protect and enhance valued landscapes and sites of biodiversity and recognise the character and beauty of the countryside and the benefits of the best and most versatile farmland in their policies and decisions." He added that: "a number of proposals for solar farms in the countryside have been rejected as causing visual harm, harm to amenity or harm to openness ... local authorities should protect all that we value in landscapes and natural capital, as indicated above."

The Woolpots Solar Farm proposal is currently with Hambleton District Council and public consultation is due to close on 14 March.