

The Proposed Woolpots Solar Farm Development

In event of any legal repercussions, please consider every full stop in this article as shorthand for the word 'alleged'.

In 2021, a Solar company made an agreement with two farmers to lease land for a proposed Solar farm. The two sites, Woolpots North and Woolpots South straddled Husthwaite up to Carlton Husthwaite, in the centre of the county known as 'God's Own Country'.

The Developer, Lightrock Power, began by sending leaflets to affected individuals and other bodies. These leaflets, initially, flew low under the radar. Many local inhabitants either did not get one or, like me, discarded it with the usual Monday junk (sadly seeming personalised for me): mobility scooters, retirement homes, investment advice and Rohan winter clothes for a person who remains inside during bad weather.

The Lightrock website (please do visit) illustrates solar farms in a bucolic countryside with gambolling sheep, wildflowers and rare birds prolific in a virtual Eden. Any visit to the existing Boscar Solar Farm on the road to the A19 quickly dispels that idea.

However, a group of eagle-eyed residents spotted the leaflets and, under scrutiny, the proposal seemed flawed. The group worked in concert with both Parish Councils who also opposed the scheme.

Lightrock spent the best part of a year deflecting requests for details as the groups worked tirelessly to contact agencies and formulate a plan to oppose the development.

The case went to the Planning Committee on the 19th January. The meeting was convened at 10am in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre, Northallerton.

Present were the Planning Officer responsible for the application, the Development Services Officer who facilitated technical and other aspects, ensuring the smooth running of the process. The Chairman and the elected members occupied the main part of the auditorium. The speakers, for and against the proposal, sat at the front.

The public area was almost entirely taken up by the action group and supporters from Husthwaite and Carlton Husthwaite

The first item on the agenda involved, I think, a developer who wanted to build a house on a parking space. Both developer and objector delivered unintelligible arguments. The councillors rejected the application and the developer left shaking his head. I was completely baffled by what had gone on.

It transpired that the speakers in the public seating area had not been turned on. A sensible gentleman in the public gallery pointed this out and clarity was restored

The second agenda item was the Woolpots Solar Farm proposal.

The Planning Officer responsible for the proposal, Ian Nesbitt, outlined, in detail, why the scheme should be **refused**.

Each supporter and objector could then speak for 10 minutes

The Objectors

First up were Chris Nichols and Kevin Harrison, representatives of Husthwaite and Carlton Husthwaite Parish Councils, respectively.

They shared their time and eloquently catalogued a litany of failed promises, unanswered questions and a lack of support from the local population for the proposal.

Their final conclusion was what was to become the deafening mantra:

"IT'S IN THE WRONG PLACE!"

Two other objectors, the youngest in the hall, also shared their time. They represented the villages' younger generation.

The first, Molly, described the importance of her upbringing in the area, alongside all that would be lost if this plan went through. Concluding with the quote by James Herriot that the iconic view from the White Horse was **'The best in all England'**.

The second objector, Rory, pointed out how the developer had promised but not supplied, visualisations and details of batteries, invertors etc. despite repeated requests. Rory illustrated his talk precisely with key visualisations the developer had failed to send. He concluded with a rendition of a large power station on the entrance to the village

All the objectors illustrated their points with incredible images, some being of the moving kind.

The Supporters

Next, two speakers shared their time putting forward their arguments in support of the proposal.

The first supporter, Richard Buffey, was the landowner who owned part of the proposed solar farm site.

He came forward quietly and affirmed his belief in Solar Energy and that it was a better use of the land to be used for the proposed site. He also outlined his own attachment to the land, and how it was increasingly difficult for many farmers to survive financially. Income from letting land for solar farms, he said, would underpin farming for future generations.

The next speaker was Chris Sowerbutts a director of Lightrock Power, who gave his support for the proposal. I would not doubt his integrity in proposing a Solar Farm but he had misread the room! Rather than argue on the need for and advantages of Solar Power to the members he dismissed the objectors as agitators. Within a minute, in my humble opinion, he shot himself in both feet and tore off one of his chair legs.

He implied that Ian Nesbitt, the Planning Officer, was **mistaken** in his report!

One foot gone.

He then asked the Councillors '**to use their intelligence**' in reviewing the evidence.

The other foot gone.

He then dealt with the concerns identified by a glint and glare report on the panels closely placed to Baxby Airfield. His solution was for pilots to wear '**polaroid sunglasses**' which brought unconcealed mirth to the proceedings as his balance was further challenged by a disintegrating chair leg.

The Members.

The first member was called by the chairman and detailed his objection and repeating the mantra: **It's in the wrong place!**

In an 'I am Spartacus' moment, member after member rose, each detailing a different issue with the proposal and repeating the mantra **It's in the wrong place!**

One member detailed how moved he was when looking at the view from Beacon Banks as making him:

'Proud to be from Yorkshire'.

There was only one supporter who accepted that all objections were valid but he was convinced by the need for Solar Energy.

The chair gave the virtual thumbs down in a short message to the members.

Before the vote Cllr. Philippa James (not a member of the Committee) spoke fluently against the proposal. As the member for Raskelf and the White Horse she has supported local residents in her constituency (agitators) in their efforts to deny the Woolpots scheme.

The verdict

The proposal was rejected by eight councillors, supported by one and there was one abstention.

The Future?

I hope alternative energy sources, including solar power, will proliferate. For solar, there are better locations than food producing land. The benefits of factory roofs and especially brownfield sites are detailed here: [C.P.R.E.](#)