

P-05-1115 Stop giant Solar farm which will destroy ancient meadows near Abergavenny, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 13.01.21

Petitions Committee

Subject: P-05-1115 Petitions Committee 26.01.21

I have read the response from Julie James and would comment thus:

I first became aware of this proposed development on 14th October 2020 when a screening application was posted on the Welsh Government's planning website prepared by Neo Environmental on behalf of Great House Energy Ltd. The size and location of the proposal was, I felt, completely inappropriate – a view shared by residents in the neighbourhood and surrounding areas. On further scrutiny of this (largely cut and paste) document I could not believe some of the conclusions. I am convinced that there were (are) many omissions and errors which to my mind call into question both the impartiality and competence of the authors.

In the meantime the Welsh Planning Inspectorate requested in a letter dated 16th October 2020 that Monmouthshire County Council provide assistance as they (Welsh Planning Inspectorate) had and I quote **“limited information before us as to the potential environmental issues related to this site”**.

Monmouthshire County Council's reply dated 5th November 2020 was by way of an 18 page highly detailed document which put forward many doubts with regard to ecology, visual intrusion and significant landscape changes. Part of its conclusion stated **“the scale of this development is insensitive to the pattern and character of the Monmouthshire landscape failing to harmonise with or enhance the land form and landscape of this unspoilt landscape”** and **“creates an urbanising presence within a rural and unspoilt landscape on a scale which is incompatible with the character”**.

Monmouthshire County Council stated that **“a full environmental impact assessment should be undertaken to inform any future application”**.

This response by Monmouthshire County Council took the form of a screening report. Welsh Planning Inspectorate were quick to inform Monmouthshire County Council that such a screening opinion was not within the remit of the local authority and would be placed on register. Shortly afterwards the Welsh Planning Inspectorate agreed to accept Neo Environmental's screening application. Whilst the Welsh Planning Inspectorate make reference to some of Monmouthshire County Council's concerns, the preponderance of the phrase **“unlikely significant**

effects” throughout their screening assessment surely demonstrates the Welsh Planning Inspectorate is clearly more comfortable with the findings of Neo Environmental (an organisation based more than 300 miles away) than Monmouthshire County Council’s opinions. This beggars belief. Am I to conclude that this whole process is at risk of becoming nothing more than a “rubber stamping” exercise?

Taking into account all of the above on the 1st December 2020 – 18 days after the Welsh Planning Inspectorate agreed to allow the screening request I decided to launch the petition. Of the 247 signatures collected so far some 25% are from people who live outside the area. I have been contacted by regular tourists to this area who have all expressed dismay at the proposal. News like this travels fast and it is reasonable to expect a decline in visitors. There are a number of holiday venues in the area, the owners of which are worried at the prospect of a huge blot on the landscape. It is this very beautiful landscape that attracts the tourists.

I feel it should send an important message to the Welsh Planning Inspectorate that their high handed approach to this matter has not gone unnoticed. I anticipate further representations at the consultation and application stages.

John Sullivan

Petition Organiser

Footnote: I am a founder member of **H.U.S.T.L.E (Help Us Stop The Looming Eyesore)** a local protest group formed to organise legal representation to fight any application associated with this development.

