Energy Alton supports the Godsfield Lane Solar Farm Planning Application

Background

Energy Alton is affiliated to Alton Climate Action & Network, which brings together people from Alton and the surrounding villages to tackle the climate crisis, by reducing CO2 from energy, waste, transport and food, and campaigning and lobbying for change in local and national policies.

In 2015 Energy Alton supported the application for the Wilsom Road Solar Farm near Alton. Then we said:

1 As individuals and communities, we have a responsibility to future generations to stop using fossil fuels by reducing our demand for energy and replacing what we need with renewable energy.

2 Electricity from solar panels is one of the easiest renewable technologies to install and offer decades of largely maintenance free solar power.

3 We consider that our town, parish and district councillors, as community representatives, have a responsibility to support and promote renewable energy including solar panels on roofs of houses, factories and public buildings. The town and surrounding villages have plenty of capacity to install more renewable technology in a way that will not dominate or impede the life and the growth of the town.

Since that time – this 5MW installation has provided renewable energy to the adjacent communities without noise or fuss and in fact many people who pass close by will not know that it is there.

The Climate Emergency

The climate emergency that the whole world and all communities face is real and urgent. It is not something that others will sort out. Our Government has clearly stated that we must decarbonise our economy and way of living by 2050. Our councils at County, District and Town level have all declared a climate emergency and agreed policies and plans to make this a reality. Change is required across our whole society to abandon fossil fuels to heat our homes and run our cars and lorries, use renewable energy instead, cut waste and recycle more.

The Need is beyond doubt

Yes, we agree that brownfield sites should be developed for solar energy and potentially other types such as heat pumps. Yes, we should be putting solar PV on homes especially new houses and on commercial properties. But it is not either or.

We agree with Hampshire Count Council in its recent climate change work programme 2021-25

"*One of the major gaps in Hampshire is the limited amount of renewable energy generated in the County, which is currently less than 3%. The opportunity to generate our own energy that*

is low carbon and local is significant. However, the path to viable, funded schemes is complicated and not that simple to navigate without extensive experience. For the County to reach carbon neutrality, local renewable energy will be essential, and it would also build energy resilience in Hampshire."

We do have enough land to develop solar farms without detriment to the countryside.

The UK has 59m acres of land, of which 43.5m acres is in agricultural production. 10GW of solar PV needs less than 60,000 acres or 0.1% of UK land area. (Solar Trade Association)

Solar PV capacity in the UK was 13GWs in 2019. Annual generation in 2018 was 13TWhrs or 4% of UK consumption, less than half of Germany's output with a similar amount of sunshine. (Wikipedia). If we doubled UK capacity to 26GW it would only require 2.2% of land in the UK. By increasing solar PV in Hampshire, we are increasing local energy resilience, growing the local economy and jobs, supporting the farming community and shifting towards a fossil free energy future.

Impact on Biodiversity

We agree with the views of WinACC that a solar farm will improve biodiversity.

'*Some opposition to the planning, cites loss of biodiversity. In fact, the reverse is true. At the moment the site is an agricultural field, of relatively low ecological value. The new planting and the hedgerow reinforcements will increase biodiversity on this site, more nesting sites will be available for birds, more wildlife will be able to access the site for foraging. It is predicted that there will be a 136% increase in biodiversity.*'

We believe that this field has been under monoculture production for many years producing cereal crops with attendance pesticides used to minimize weeds. We believe that the solar farm will improve biodiversity not the opposite.

Impact on the landscape

Member of our team of volunteers have visited the site and conclude that it is sheltered and well away from communities for which it might detract in some way. Where the site is visible to homes some way off natural screening can be placed to minimize the impact.

Impact on the community

From our knowledge of other solar farms in the area including locally in Alton we conclude that the impact will be minimal and insufficient to justify rejection of the application. We support the application.

We do however believe that similar solar farm projects are ideal candidates for community ownership where the farm is in part or wholly owned by the community. As well as locally generated renewable energy, long term profits from the project can be reinvested in community infrastructure and priorities. We would recommend that a tangible community benefit is guaranteed with the application.

Energy Alton

February 2021