

Campaign group takes comfort in solar farm appeal decision

Campaigners have hailed a decision to throw out a solar farm planning appeal as a "victory for democracy and common sense".

Last week, Communities Secretary Eric Pickles rejected a bid by green energy developers to overturn Suffolk Coastal's refusal for one of Europe's biggest solar farms to be built near Framlingham.

Hive Energy wanted permission to proceed with the 25 megawatt (mW) project, covering 127 acres of farmland within a Special Landscape Area in Hacheston.

District councillors on the planning committee had voted against the

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application last January, despite it being recommended for approval by the planning officers.

Hive Energy lodged an appeal that April, requesting the process be determined by written representations, but local campaign group No Hacheston Solar asked that the appeal go to a full public inquiry due to the strength of local opposition and in the absence of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The request led to a four-day

public inquiry, overseen by planning inspector Paul Jackson.

Four local parish councils voted against the initial proposal, while local MP Dan Poulter, county councillor Stephen Burroughs and a number of district councillors lent their support to those in opposition.

In October, the secretary of state announced he would recover some appeals – including Hive Energy's – to ensure they complied with new planning guidance for large-scale renewable energy developments.

Hive Energy had insisted the application was in line with local and national planning policy, that no EIA

had been required, and that the site was not considered an environmentally "sensitive" area. Last week the firm said it was "unlikely" to seek another appeal.

Campaigner Chrissie Darby said the decision to throw out the appeal proved that communities could influence large-scale applications.

She added: "This is a fine example of localism at work. It demonstrates that communities can make a difference and that they will be supported by their elected representatives. As a result, inappropriate developments will not be allowed to be built in inappropriate locations."