

Sutton Solar Action Group Update

The past two Sutton Chatter's have reported on advice from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) that they would complete their assessment of the Springdale Solar development by the end of September and forwarded that to the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) for final determination. Well, October has now also come and gone and still no word on when that assessment will be completed, despite the SSAG seeking on several occasions an update from the Department.

Fortunately, the SSAG keeps an eye on the DPIE's web portal of development projects, where we found correspondence from the developer,

the RES Group, to the DPIE dated 1 October, based on a request for further information from the DPIE. That correspondence has again raised further concerns about the development.

In RES's response for further information (which is also reported on, on the SSAG's website <https://suttonsolaractiongroup.com/>), the issue of Aboriginal cultural heritage, through subsurface archaeological testing of the site, has again been raised. It was this issue that the previous developers, Renew Estate, had used as an excuse for over 18 months for not having completed their response to submissions.

The SSAG has written to the DPIE seeking clarification about when the decision was made to allow the subsurface archaeological testing to be done 'post approval'. Documents within the developer's response to the DPIE from the DPIE's own Conservation Division, raise questions about when this decision was made. Unfortunately, we have not received a response from the Department.

To add insult to injury, the DPIE has recently been promoting its processes for speeding up the assessment of state significant developments, of which the Springdale Solar proposal is one.

An analysis of the DPIE's website for solar developments, indicates that the average number of days from the close of submissions from the public, to the final determination of the proposal, including the IPC process, is 172 days. As at the 31 October 2020, the Springdale development stands at 794 days since submissions closed and we are not even at the stage where the DPIE has completed their assessment. The longest period to determination of any previous solar development to date, is 421 days. The Springdale development will likely at least double that time and still no one has provided any plausible explanation as to why this development is still at the assessment stage.

It is little wonder that some 12 months ago there was speculation that there would be an independent inquiry into the Springdale development. It would be interesting to see if the Government objected to such an inquiry, as it would clearly put the DPIE's own processes under the microscope, particularly their communication with local communities affected by such developments. An inquiry might also highlight the actions of some developers working in this space.

We encourage you to keep abreast of developments through the SSAG's website.

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