

Comments for Planning Application 22/501335/FULL

Application Summary

Application Number: 22/501335/FULL

Address: Land North Of Little Cheveney Farm Sheephurst Lane Marden Kent

Proposal: Installation of a renewable energy led generating station comprising of ground-mounted solar arrays, associated electricity generation infrastructure and other ancillary equipment comprising of storage containers, access tracks, fencing, gates and CCTV together with the creation of woodland and biodiversity enhancements.

Case Officer: Marion Geary

Customer Details

Name: Miss Lynne Jones

Address: Top Oast, Little Cheveney Farm Sheephurst Lane, Marden Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9NX

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Neighbour

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

Comment: Thank you for your planning notification letter to enable me to comment.

First of all, I would like to point out that the site address is not just Land which is just North of Little Cheveney Farm; the land being considered spans not only North, but North West and North East and takes up the entirety of the land that is farmed on Little Cheveney Farm. If you are using the farmhouse and residential buildings on the farm as a reference point then you will see that these buildings will be surrounded 75 percent by industrialised land should this development be permitted.

As per your letter, I will comment as per the matters that you take in to account as follows:

1. Visual Appearance:

- Viewpoints

Regarding the Photography, Verified Views and Methodology document produced to support this planning application; the study area only includes viewpoints from publicly assessable land and states that these locations were chosen as a result of detailed consideration of sensitive viewpoints. However, it does not take into consideration the way in which residential homes and private land will be affected by the visual impact of the proposed site and is misleading. The residents who reside on Little Cheveney Farm have highly sensitive viewpoints but have been excluded from the study and I would comment as follows:

One side of my attached Oast house faces North and the Solar Farm panels will face South and therefore looking at the proposed site from my garden bench, the solar panels will be clearly seen all year, including from the lower and upper floor windows of my house on the North side and even more when the vegetation dies in the autumn and winter. This report therefore lacks any credibility and the map being used to show the viewpoints in the study is outdated and does not show

accurately the residential dwellings on Little Cheveney Farm.

- Glint and Glare

As a consequence of being able to see the solar panels we as well as other residents of Little Cheveney Farm and houses that face onto the site will be subject to glint and glare as highlighted by the Solar Photovoltaic Glint and Glare study which states that reflections from the proposed development will potentially affect 45 out of the 49 houses and that two properties highlighted in their study on page 68 as numbers 43 and 44 Little Cheveney Farm, will experience glare over 3 months of the year (but less than 1 hour per day). However, the study argues that most of this impact is expected to be moderate and that available imagery has shown that some screening in the form of existing vegetation MIGHT reduce the views of the reflective areas for all affected properties and that planting of vegetation will mitigate the two vulnerable properties. Vegetation in and around little Cheveney farm is deciduous, so are the willow, poplar, alder and hedgerow which they plan to plant to mitigate any views. Therefore, any screening existing or new won't be around for 365 days of the year and it will take up to 10 years for any new vegetation to take effect.

Furthermore, this study is based on solar panels that are 1.84 metres high; the panels being installed will be 2.7 metres high therefore the glint and glare will be far worse than predicted. How can this study be used as supporting documentation for this planning application?

View of Solar Farm

As already mentioned, I will be impacted by the solar farm as will other residents of Little Cheveney farm, and those that reside along Sheephurst Lane where houses and gardens face onto the site which is unacceptably too close. How does a massive solar farm covering 75 hectares with 2.4m high security fencing and 5-meter-high security camera polls contribute to the countryside and setting in which I and others live and for those that regularly use the footpaths? Furthermore, the structures that will house the BESS and the HV Compound will be huge and will be seen by residents regardless of any screening; again, something which the viewpoint study has not considered. It will be like living next to a prison compound and when people use the footpaths, they will be monitored by the cameras that keep the site and storage facilities secure. This is a complete invasion of privacy; people don't mind security cameras in an urban setting such as on houses and buildings but this is not suburbia this is countryside.

2. Effect on listed buildings

The photography conveniently does not take into account the views towards or from 6 Grade II listed residential buildings that reside on Little Cheveney Farm, four of which are Oast houses. These listed buildings like any historic structure are focal points in the countryside; and contribute to the historic landscape which is seen by those walking the public footpaths as well as being enjoyed by the residents themselves. These building were farm buildings and their setting residing on farm land is also of major importance as it also contributes to this setting. A massive solar farm will impact this view in a detrimental way and will be seen as a blight on this historical landscape.

3. Noise and disturbance resulting from use

- Battery Storage (BESS) & HV Compound

Statkraft propose the installation of a Battery Energy Storage Site (BESS) and HV compound as part of the Solar Farm development. The HV compound and BESS will be sited extremely close to

residential dwellings on the North West side of Little Cheveney Farm, noted as 8 Little Sheephurst Cottages, Sheephurst Lane and the BESS near Willow Cottage which resides on Little Cheveney farm. The study identifies these two buildings as 'noise sensitive receptors'. I fail to understand how number 7 Little Sheephurst cottage which is next door to number 8 on Sheephurst Lane was not included as noise sensitive receptor? Furthermore, there are cottages diagonally opposite Little Sheephurst cottages who quite possibly when their windows are also open in the warmer months could also experience noise pollution from this transformer its cooling fans, especially in the stillness of night from their second story windows, especially when open. Also, the BESS due to be sited on the North East side of Little Cheveney farm is much closer to the Willow Barn, than it is to Willow cottage and presently has planning permission for change of use into a residential dwelling; this property should also now be considered a noise sensitive receptor.

The conclusion of the Noise Impact Assessment was 'the impact will be negligible and 'unlikely to be audible or disturb sleep' therefore the impact of the noise for the people that reside at these noise sensitive dwellings is uncertain. Furthermore, this assessment was only performed from Friday 20th to Monday 23rd August 2021 at 15-minute intervals, and was only a snapshot study and does not take into account any variables that can change over time in a real situation. For example, failing fans that become noisy, a change in wind direction altering the direction of sound and thereby impacting residents or velocity of sound increasing on a rainy day. This could also mean residents of Little Cheveney farm will hear the cooling fans from the BESS on the North East side.

I therefore, have to question. Why do both the BESS and the HV compound have to be sited so near to residential dwellings when they are not only noisy but are hazardous and present a fire risk, when there is, 75 hectares of farmland? This is totally unfair to residents in close proximity. This is a very quiet rural area, sound travels far and is it not absorbed in the same way as it would be in built up areas such as towns and cities. Noise adversely affects peoples' lives and studies have demonstrated direct links between noise and health.

Additionally, both compounds are too close to water, the pond on the North West Side and the Lesser Teise on the North East side which flood. Surely this is cause for concern should anything leak from the batteries into the water or water table with disastrous consequences; this is also a concern for the panels themselves as there is a possibility of toxic chemicals leakage. Also there does not seem to have been a Noise Impact Assessment on how the noise will affect the bats, owls and other wildlife that reside in this dark area and the deer who are also highly sensitive to noise.

Security fencing will encase the ancient woodland on the North West side of the farm by 75 percent and will alter the natural paths used by the wildlife including deer that I have seen in the woods and in the fields many times; forcing them onto roads in order to find alternative routes. The newly constructed footpath will also run alongside the ancient wood which is essentially a quite rural area for the animals and is not frequented by the public. The new footpath will create a thoroughfare of noise and human activity creating a loss of wildlife in this natural historic habitat. Displacement of existing wildlife that presently enjoy the land will also happen during and once construction of the site is completed.

4. Traffic the proposal would generate and effects on highway safety

I will not be happy to have to put up with 6 months or more of not only construction work noise being a resident of Little Cheveney Farm, but also the increase in traffic and noise along Sheephurst Lane whilst the site under construction and after construction for maintenance of the site. This will have an impact on highway safety. I may not live directly on the road but the increase in traffic is unacceptable for the residents that do and for those that use this dangerous road.

The noise of construction and increase in human activity will also cause stress and harm to the wildlife that reside and run through Little Cheveney Farm and the surrounding area; who will be forced onto the roads during and after construction looking for alternative pathways as their natural historical routes disappear, which will increase road kill and possibly cause car accidents.

Sheephurst Lane is a small country lane and lacks passing places. It is also a fast road, despite the speed restrictions, and it is a road that has no footpaths that people need to walk in order to gain access to the public footpaths.

5. Flooding

Little Cheveney farm and the surrounding area resides on a flood plain and floods as do some areas in Marden, such as Plain Road and Sheephurst lane which can become impassable. What will be the impact of having a huge 75-hectare solar installation on farmland? The installation of this industrial site with its structures will displace the water as it will no longer be able to penetrate the clay soil and soak away, causing pooling and channels which will increase flooding. Farming the land on Little Cheveney does contribute to mitigating this process as the water is able to penetrate soil due to land being ploughed and the water being soaked up by the crops. I firmly believe that flooding will become a serious issue should this solar farm be installed.

Another consideration is the new estate in Marden (East of the Farm) which also resides on a flood plain, where mitigation was put in place based on the surrounding environmental conditions at the time. A solar farm covering 75 hectares approximately 4 fields away would not have been part of this consideration. I also understand from speaking to residents along the Maidstone Road that after the water table was raised to mitigate flooding at Yalding their septic systems now flood at times of high rainfall. Little Cheveney farm also has seven ponds, a few of which are linked, that support fish and other pond life as well as the ducks and herons and other wild fowl. What will happen to the ponds and wildlife when the increased water run-off from the solar farm floods this area?

6. Local Planning Policy

This development proposal contravenes Maidstone Borough Council's Local Planning Policy DM24.

7. Other considerations & Food production

I have lived on the entrance of the farm for over 14 years and used to ride my horse around the farm for many years and I continue to use the public footpaths. I enjoy the change of seasons the fields being ploughed and the crops being grown and harvested every year by the huge combines. I feel sad that this land which is good quality agricultural land which I understand to be Grade 2, 3a and 3b could be potentially used to site a massive solar farm which by comparison with offshore wind is very inefficient.

I am well aware of the need to produce alternative energy but solar panels should be placed on

brownfield sites, warehouses, office blocks, business parks and new houses. Our agricultural land is a finite resource and we know our government is in conflict in trying to meet the needs of not only increasing our domestic food production but to also encourage the growth of green energy production. At a time of crises, due to the climate change, the war in Ukraine, we need to be able to become more food efficient; how will this happen if we continue to lose farming land to the increasing number of Solar farms being built on agricultural land?

Little Cheveney Farm is already contributing to the needs of our domestic food production, which is not causing any disruption to people's lives, harming the environment or creating loss of habitat for wildlife; completely the reverse. So why build a Solar farm on this good productive agricultural land?

I therefore strongly object to this planning application.

Regards

Lynne Jones