

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:

FAO Maidstone Borough Council

Case Officer: Marion Geary

To Maidstone Planning

Planning Application Reference: 22/501335/FULL

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I refer to my previous objection to this planning application of 30th June and would comment to some of Statkraft's responses to Public Comments and Objections as follows:

1. Agricultural Land - Loss of good quality agriculture land

Statkraft argue that "there are no opportunities within MBC for solar farm developments on brownfield land where there is a grid connection"

Just because there are no opportunities within MBC for solar farm developments on brownfield sites where there is no grid connection is not justification to build on good arable farming land.

Solar farms do not need to be near a grid connection, an example of this is the Great Wilbraham solar development which is connected to a sub-station 11km from the actual site. The fact that the Local authority boundaries are used to limit the search for alternative sites is wrong.

Statkraft document also states "Brownfield land is land which has previously been developed and not currently in use that is potentially contaminated". This is incorrect the NPPF definition of Brownfield Land is "previously developed land".

2. The development is proposed for 37 years and Statkraft argue that 37 years is temporary - 37 years is longer than what is stated as temporary in MBC's Planning Policy advice note: Large

Scale (>50kW) solar PV arrays, under the Planning Application Considerations section which says "Be for a temporary period only, and a maximum period of 25 years from the commissioning of the facility should be applied". 37 years therefore contravenes the maximum period of 25 years.

3. Flooding of local ponds

It is stated that "Flooding of local ponds is not a likely consequence of the proposed development". Not likely is hardly reassuring when there are 6 ponds on Little Cheveney Farm.

4. Ecology - Threat to wildlife / Prevent free movement of wildlife due to fencing.

Mitigation for most wildlife is mentioned and 'justified' with Statkraft arguing that "animals will be free to roam outside the fenced area of the development and that there will be small gaps for small mammals to pass through the site". This still prevents how they transverse the land today and is a poor compromise but this also contravenes the MBC document (Planning and policy advice note: Large scale (50>kW) Solar PV arrays) which states that 'appropriate measures should be in place to facilitate continued access by larger mammals, such as badgers and foxes' to pass through the site. There also has been no mention of the deer that live on and roam the land with no mitigation measures put in place for them. Deer are large animals and can cause road accidents, leaving them to divert onto roads due to a change in their habitat is unacceptable.

5. Roads and Traffic - Safety

The document responds by saying 'The level of traffic during the temporary construction phase is not considered to result in a material impact on the safety or operation of the local highway network'

Construction traffic and HGVs for this site will go through Marden passing the local primary school and then East along Sheephurst Lane. I feel this is unacceptable for the following reasons:

Construction traffic and HGVs going through a built-up area is already dangerous for pedestrians and road users but particularly dangerous when parents are taking and collecting their children from school. At these times parents' cars are parked either side of the main road outside the school reducing the road to one lane with cars on the road trying to pass each other whilst parents and children are crossing the road.

Sheephurst Lane, despite the speed restrictions can be a fast dangerous road that lacks passing places, has blind bends and has no footpaths for pedestrians however, people have to walk the road to gain access to the footpaths and because of lack of transport. It is also heavily used by cyclists. Lorries are banned from using the road apart from access and do not frequent the lane on a regular basis but this frequency will increase because of the construction traffic making the road more dangerous.

How then does Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTP) ensure the safety of pedestrians and road users in Marden and Sheephurst lane whilst construction traffic is using this route?

Pedestrians and road users do not seem to have been a consideration of this plan.

6. Construction Phase - other concerns

I also understand from the CTP that construction of the Solar Energy Farm is expected to take approximately 24 weeks. And that construction at the site will be carried out Monday to Friday 08:00 to 18:00, and Saturdays 08:00 to 13:30 and that no construction or deliveries will take place on Sundays or Bank Holidays. Why should residents have to put up with construction work over a weekend whilst having to put up with it from Monday to Friday for 24 weeks or more? Why are residents and road users only considered for 1.5 days out of 7 days including Bank Holidays? Construction work and lorries travelling along Sheephurst lane will be particularly disruptive dangerous and noisy to those that live on Sheephurst Lane and for those that in close proximity to the construction site. This area is rural and quiet as a consequence noise is magnified due to the lack of buildings that absorb sound. Also, on a weekend's there are more pedestrians, cyclists and people walking their dogs using the road. The increase in construction traffic will also increase pollution which is harmful to the public and the environment.

7. Too large - it is argued by Statkraft that because "solar farms no longer subsidised by the UK Government, they have to be financially viable and that the key factor that influence the size of a solar site is the availability and cost of the grid connection".

The withdrawal of government subsidies came into effect in 2015 instigated by the then Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss, to ensure agricultural land is dedicated to growing crops and food. Subsidies for solar farms were therefore cut to help safeguard farmland.

Maidstone Borough Council have already raised an objection on heritage grounds on the 10th August which is positive but;

"The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) requires the presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the agricultural land classification) to be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations. The framework expresses a preference for development to be directed to land outside of this classification (3b, 4 and 5)".

In light of the above why is Maidstone Borough Council even considering this application to be sited on good agricultural land which has been continually farmed for years? Our food security should not be jeopardized by sacrificing productive farmland which is already meeting a government national target.

We all know that solar farms are a hugely inefficient source of energy. How can the installation of this solar farm actually outweigh the harm it will cause to the community and the environment? If Maidstone Borough Council allow this solar farm to be part of the Grade II listed historical landscape, how then can we take their planning guidelines seriously, especially in light of the refusal of Pagehurst Solar farm which was refused by the Planning inspector Andrew Hammond on the grounds that:

"The harms to the intrinsic and visual qualities of the landscape are substantial, both in significance and scale, and would not be mitigated by the landscape proposals which seek to screen the development from view rather than integrate it into its setting in a satisfactory manner"

The solar farm only really benefits the farmer and Statkraft and gives very little back to the local community. The sheer size will be a blight on the agricultural landscape seen not only by those living close by but also by those who frequent the footpaths if this proposal is allowed to progress. The disruption to wildlife and environment will be immense. Statkraft cannot completely mitigate the glint and glare from the solar panels for those residents that live in close proximity; and for those residents Little Cheveney Farm their lack of inclusion in the viewpoints study by Statkraft is unfair and questionable.

There is also a lack of concern regarding pedestrian and other road user safety during the construction phase, which has not even been considered by Statkraft and Kent County Highways and Transportation. Notwithstanding the fact that local residents will have to experience the impact of noise not only created by the increase in construction traffic but also by the construction work itself (5.5 days a week) which has also not even been considered by Statkraft or Maidstone Borough Council from a planning perspective.

I feel that the benefits of this proposal do not outweigh the potential harms it will cause and I therefore once again object to this planning application.