

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: Mrs Vickey Petrie

Address: Bottom Oast, Little Cheveney, Sheephurst Lane Marden, Kent TN12 9NX

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Neighbour

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

Comment: I object to the planned Sheepwash Solar Farm for the following reasons:

1) Loss of prime agricultural land:

The Government Food Strategy makes it clear we have to "deliver a sustainable, nature positive, affordable food system..." on domestic land (i). We need to be food secure and self-sufficient. Our agricultural land is now more precious than ever given the current geopolitical climate and cannot be lost to proposals which are highly likely never to see the land returned to food production. It is good quality productive land grade 2 and 3a (best and most versatile) and the remaining half is grade 3b (moderate good). It is not "not relatively low grade" as claimed by Statkraft. It has been farmed since the 16th century and has huge historical agricultural significance. Solar farms "should be limited to brownfield land and poorer quality unproductive land" (ii), of which Kent has plenty of alternatives.

2) Limited, ineffective pre-planning consultation:

The consultation process that Quatro have undertaken on behalf of Statkraft is shockingly limited given the size and scale of this proposal. I note that although press releases were written to three local media outlets, they were never published and it would be good to understand why. As a resident on Sheephurst Lane, neither were we one the 588 homes to receive a leaflet in the consultation area during the pre-planning stage. It seems this is the case for the majority of all our neighbours bordering the proposal. There has been an absolute paucity of information by Statkraft in direct contradiction of the Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 (iii), which states that: "Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve

designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot." Of the 23 responses that were received, only 11 were the result of the leafleting by Quatro. A return of 1.9%. This does not demonstrate effective and proactive engagement with the community, if anything it is just progression of this proposal by stealth.

3) Over development:

"...it is considered essential to conserve and enhance the natural environment and the landscape of the parish. Careful treatment of the village periphery is required to maintain and improve the appearance of the edge of Marden village, by avoiding suburbanisation and sprawl, and minimising the visual impact on the surrounding fields and wider landscape" (Marden Neighbourhood Plan, 2017) (iv) . Marden has experienced considerable development in the last 5 years and this proposal is in direct contradiction of the Plan. It stipulates that "nature conservation was deemed the most urgent issue" by residents and that only "the installation of small-scale renewable energy schemes" should be considered. The proposed 75 hectares of the Sheepwash solar farm generating an approximate output of 49.9 megawatt, has clearly been designed to fall just short of the 50 megawatt threshold requiring Secretary of State for Energy approval (v). This cannot possibly be considered small-scale, neither can it be considered in keeping with the avoidance of suburbanisation sprawl and minimisation of visual impact.

4) Adverse ecological and heritage impact:

It is reportedly critical that solar farm installations should not be near valued landscape or historic buildings (vi, vii). Equally, the proposals should not "fundamentally alter the landscape in a contrived way to seek to accommodate the solar panels... Screening development from view does not negate harm to the intrinsic qualities of the landscape or make otherwise harmful development acceptable." (The Planning Inspectorate comments rejecting Great Pagehurst Farm Solar farm Ref 13/1456) (viii). In the area of Little Cheveney at the centre of the proposal, there are at least four listed properties of historical significance that would directly overlook the proposed solar farm. Their views will be blighted by the 2.4m perimeter fence, 5m CCTV cameras and solar arrays. To read that the development will have a "net gain" on biodiversity is also preposterous. The site encloses on three sides an ancient woodland home to countless native species including owls, adders and migrating nightingales. Nearby pondlife is home to great crested newts, water voles and wildfowl. There are migrating birds such as swallows and swifts plus a great number of bats. Wildlife will experience significant displacement, further compounded by the removal of interconnecting wildlife corridors. The land is also already classified as at severe risk of flooding, and the proposal will have a huge knock-on effect with surface water run-off into the nearby River Teise, with nearby housing likely to see an even bigger increase in flooding.

To conclude the net benefit of this proposal does not outweigh the significant net loss, and as such I object to the proposal to the installation of a 75 hectare solar farm on the land north of Little Cheveney Farm.

References:

- (i) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-food-strategy>
- (ii) <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2021/10/The-Problem-with-Solar-Farms.pdf>
- (iii) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf
- (iv) https://maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/281750/190528-Marden-Neighbourhood-Plan-with-Maps.pdf
- (v) <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/providing-regulation-and-licensing-of-energy-industries-and-infrastructure/supporting-pages/planning-and-consents-for-national-energy-infrastructure>
- (vi) <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2021/10/The-Problem-with-Solar-Farms.pdf>
- (vii) <https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1690297/solar-farm-ruled-landscape-heritage-grounds>
- (viii) https://pa.midkent.gov.uk/online-applications/files/D5A0EE5AF545F4923783093415D5E7/pdf/13_1456--3965987.pdf