

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: Mr Michael Williams

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: Planning Application Reference: 22/501335/ FULL

Site Address: Land North of Little Cheveney Farm Sheephurst Lane Marden Kent

I object to this planning application.

I support the need for alternative green energy but not on agricultural land. This is productive agricultural land, Grade 2, 3a and 3b - Why would you take this land out of production when the UK is facing food security issues not seen since World War Two due to COVID, Brexit, the Ukraine War and Climate change. Statkraft claim the land is no longer viable for agriculture but all the fields on Little Cheveney Farm are currently planted with crops.

I have lived on Little Cheveney Farm since 2007 and during my time living here the fields have always been planted. If the land is not suitable for agricultural why did the current farmer purchase the farmland in 2010?

Solar farms should be sited on brownfield sites, disused airfields, poor quality land, new buildings, office blocks, business parks and warehouses which are more suitable. Solar farms are not the most efficient form of green energy and this is the reason why the government favours offshore wind. The countryside is a sensitive location and Brownfield sites are the preferred location see Policy SP17 - Maidstone Local Plan p70

In the Virtual Consultation video which can be found on the Statkraft website Gareth Hawkins, Development Manager states "We are working through some proposals to put a solar energy farm on the fields behind me primarily for the reason that we can connect to this overhead pylon line you can see running across the field. It's very difficult to find places to connect solar farms and this is one of the few opportunities". This claim is not correct, solar energy farms do not have to be

sited close to overhead pylon lines. I refer to the Great Wilbraham Solar Farm, Cambridgeshire which connects to the substation 11km from the solar farm site. Behind Gareth in the video, you can also see the ancient wood which Statkraft intend to surround with high fencing which will prevent free movement for the wildlife living in the wood which includes deer and badgers. In the planning application the Glint and Glare report refers to solar panels 1.84m above ground level, Statkraft intend to use panels 2.7m above ground level which means the impact of glint and glare on 45 out of 49 homes will be greater and for a longer time period. This report is therefore inaccurate and flawed.

Statkraft have also submitted an incorrect boundary map which includes land not owned by the farmer.

What other mistakes and errors have Statkraft made in this planning application?

Statkraft disinvested from offshore UK wind power in 2018, if they were successful with this application, what happens to this site in the future should they disinvest out of UK solar energy farms?

Consultation with local residents has been practically non-existent and I was not aware of the application until I received the planning letter dated 10 June 2022. I had no knowledge of the Marden Parish Council meeting last August 2021 where Statkraft delivered a presentation. I have since spoken to neighbours on Little Cheveney Farm and Sheephurst Lane and have discovered like me, most residents were unaware of the solar farm application. This application should have been delayed until public meetings could have been held and the whole community properly consulted.

This application will not create any local employment (specialist contractors will be used) and it will be of no benefit to the local community. This is an opportunistic proposal motivated by financial greed and only benefits the farmer and the Norwegian investors

My objections to the application are outlined as follows:

Visual appearance

The solar farm will be extremely close, less than 15m to Willow Cottage and Willow Barn which has recently received full planning permission reference 21/ 503656/Full to convert to a residential property.

I find it absurd that a HV compound has been placed alongside 7 & 8 Little Sheephurst cottages on Sheephurst Lane and the second large structure sited near a river which can flood.

The industrial scale size of the solar farm will impact the outlook for many homes including Grade 2 listed properties and is not in keeping with an agricultural heritage setting.

The sheer size and industrial nature of the site is not suitable for a rural landscape. The solar farm will be surrounded by 2.4m high metal security fencing which means we will have a large industrial compound in the middle of the countryside seen by the residents of Little Cheveney Farm, Sheephurst Lane and during the winter months by people living in Marden and Collier Street.

The two structures to be built on site including a 7.5m high electrical substation will be seen by most of the residents who live on Little Cheveney Farm and Sheephurst Lane. The photographs submitted by the applicants to support the proposal were all taken from public points and at a time

of the year when vegetation is dense. No photographs were taken from the properties which will be impacted by this industrial size development. What about the winter months when the existing trees and hedgerows lose their leaves? Statkraft have stated it will take up to 10 years to successfully screen the solar farm.

The 5m high CCTV camera poles will not only have a visual impact but will also cause privacy issues for footpath users, the residents in close proximity to the proposed development and the people who use Sheephurst Lane such as walkers, cyclists, runners and other road users.

Little Cheveney Farm and Sheephurst Lane have no street lighting. Will the proposed solar farm have lighting?

Little Cheveney Farm consists of nine residential properties and Willow Barn which has recently been granted planning permission to convert to a residential property. The farmhouse is the largest property and all the other properties are in close proximity with most previously agricultural buildings. Six of the residential properties are Grade 2 listed including the farm house, a barn and four oast houses. The Little Cheveney Farm entrance on Sheephurst Lane for seven of the properties is opposite another oast house. This is an agricultural setting of historic importance.

Traffic and highway safety

I am concerned about the volume and the impact of construction traffic on a small narrow country lane with weight restrictions and a single lane bridge. The lane floods most years where the single-track bridge crosses the Lesser Teise river.

The fencing of the ancient wood and solar farm will force animals such as deer who move through the farm onto the roads which will cause road accidents and the animals will most probably be killed.

Sheephurst Lane is a major cut through to the A21. Increased flooding and increased water from the fields because of water run - off flowing onto Sheephurst Lane will impact traffic and also make the lane more dangerous for other road users.

Noise, smells and disturbance resulting from use

In addition to the noise and disruption from eight months of construction. My main concern is the noise from the fans cooling the battery storage facilities. Sound testing took place over one weekend in August with full foliage. How did this study factor in the noise from the fans and what about the noise during the winter months when trees and hedges have no leaves? Statkraft have stated it will take up to ten years for the screening to be in place.

The flawed Glare study has identified 45 out of 49 houses will be affected. This is an unacceptable impact on residents and based on a flawed hypothetical study the consequences for residents will be far greater.

Risk of pollution - Storage battery leakage and sulphur mist would both have a detrimental environmental impact on the river and land. I am also concerned about the materials used to construct the panels and the impact of the chemicals used to clean the solar panels.

Loss of trees or other important landscape features

This solar farm on an industrial scale is at odds with the countryside and a loss of landscape features.

Footpath users will be faced with fencing and CCTV cameras more appropriate to an industrial location not the Low Weald countryside.

Rain water run - off creates set channels without proper dispersal and greater potential for more flooding.

Permanent shadow will degrade the land with little potential for biodiversity.

Construction of the solar farm would displace existing wildlife and birds and ducks will perish flying into the panels.

Design, appearance and materials proposed to be used

Not acceptable for a rural setting and certainly not appropriate for productive agricultural land.

Can the materials used be recycled and what impact will these materials have on the environment and bio diversity? Who will be responsible for decommissioning the solar farm and will they actually remove the significant infrastructure and roads constructed. This I fear will be a permanent change of land use.

If planning consent is given this land will never again be used for agriculture and in future will most likely be used for housing.

Effect on listed building

This industrial complex will have a major impact on a heritage setting.

Layout and density of proposed buildings

The location of the battery storage facility by the river makes no sense, this area of the farm floods. Why have they decided to build next to the cottages on Sheephurst Lane?

Flooding

Constructing the solar farm would increase water run-off and this will enter a river already prone to flooding which is well known to the planning department at MBC. Increased water running off the fields during heavy rain could have serious consequences for Sheephurst Lane (both ends)

Marden village and properties along the B2162.

I am also concerned this will mean increased danger to all road users.

In conclusion:

- This application would harm the character and appearance of the countryside.
- Substantial screening would be required to hide this industrial complex which does not belong on productive agricultural land and would fundamentally alter the landscape.
- The solar farm including battery storage facilities surrounded by high fencing and CCTV cameras will be highly visible to many properties, local residents, walkers and visitors who enjoy the countryside.
- The views from the Grade 2 listed properties across the proposed site would impact on the setting of these heritage assets.
- I am concerned about flooding and pollution caused by this development and the impact on

wildlife.

- This application is too close to residential homes and the noise from the solar farm will be a major issue.

- Solar energy farms should not be established on productive agricultural land.

Finally, taking a break for lunch from writing this objection letter on Wednesday 29/06/22 I watched PMQ and heard a question from Sir Oliver Heald MP who raised the concern about food production and food security and argued productive farm land should not be covered with solar energy farms and suggested brownfield sites were more suitable. The government supports this view.