

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 William Brandreth

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

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Neighbour

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

Comment: Productive BMV agricultural land is a limited and scarce resource. The land at Little Cheveney Farm that has been put forward for the development has been farmed back for generations, used to cultivate hops, top fruit and combinable crops. The most "effective use" of this land is for agricultural production, whilst it can also continue to provide landscape and heritage benefits to the local community.

"The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policy DM24 & NPPF CH2.P7.)

The planning application treats a solar farm as a reversible, yet the project lifespan is 37 years, which means taking the land out of production for more than one human generation.

For a multi-decade development it is important to consider present and future pressures on land use. Key trends to consider are the increasing global population and demand for calories. In addition, "climate change creates additional stresses on land, exacerbating risks to...food systems" (2). The IPCC report identifies the Mediterranean, Southern Africa, drylands, and the tropics as all projected to have crop production negatively impacted by climate change. In this context, the UK's productive agricultural sector, aided by its temperate climate and BMV land (including this site), will become more significant both economically and for food security. UK agriculture is always undervalued as it contributes 0.58% to GDP, yet "There are only nine meals

between mankind and anarchy."

"Preference will be given to existing commercial and industrial premises, previously developed land, or agricultural land that is not classified as the best and most versatile." "including making effective use of land...using natural resources prudently...mitigating and adapting to climate change" (NPPF CH2.P8)

47% of the site is grade 2 & 3a BMV land based on submitted documents. BMV land is capable of arable cropping is therefore limited national resource, just 20% of the UK's land is used for arable crops (1).

Siting solar farms on lower grade agricultural land including grassland sites would offer comparatively higher income than more marginal agricultural activities such as livestock grazing and a greater net climate benefit as livestock are the greatest source of agricultural emissions. A kg of wheat has a carbon footprint 1/20th that of a kg of lamb (3). Whilst these issues have been raised in the UK government's latest Food Strategy along with the need for a strategic land use framework, due to the time-lags in policy making we may have to wait years before any concrete policy filters through the planning system.

In addition, I'd note that the landowner has been published in the farming press stating the success of the land for cropping in a regenerative way that sequesters carbon to tackle climate change whilst producing yields of 10 t / hectare, (4) these carbon farming practices are stated as essential to meeting the NFU's net-zero targets (5), enhancing natural capital and offering carbon related revenue streams. We should be supporting these win-win agricultural systems which can only be practised on our best land.

Whilst economic benefits will go to investors and contractors, there will be no value added locally. The solar farm will be very close to several properties impacting their value and the lives of those who live in them. Most significant will be the impact on 7 & 8 Little Sheephurst Cottages & Little Cheveney Farm. More broadly the rural heritage offered by the grasslands, ponds, woodland, oak parkland and hedgerows; would be largely lost in value to locals whose views would now be constrained to security fencing and raised solar panels. There has been no community engagement on the application, this failure to "reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being" is evidenced by the local lack of knowledge of the development and objections posted.

The application states that the site can deliver biodiversity net gain on site based on the Biodiversity Net Gain calculator metrics. The issue here is that arable land has the lowest biodiversity value intrinsically, it produces food. The land can produce 10 t of wheat per hectare (4), whilst the global average is just 3.5 t/ha (FAO). If the grain isn't produced here, it will be imported from lower yielding global producers, that requires more land to produce the equivalent amount of grain and risk greater cropland expansion and biodiversity loss elsewhere.

Kent is known as the "garden of England" due to its agricultural production, fertile land and growing climate. We need to carefully consider its most effective use from both local and global perspectives.

(1)https://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/229130/274017-0

(2)IPCC - Climate Change and Land (2020) SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf (ipcc.ch)

(3)You want to reduce the carbon footprint of your food? Focus on what you eat, not whether your food is local - Our World in Data - <https://ourworldindata.org/food-choice-vs-eating-local>

(4)<https://www.cpm-magazine.co.uk/2022/03/10/climate-change-champions-food-that-doesnt-cost-the-earth/>

(5)<https://www.nfuonline.com/archive?treeid=137544>