Item13, Pages 28-29

Ref: 13/1456

Great Pagehurst Farm
Pagehurst Road
Staplehurst

Representation

After publishing of the Planning Committee agenda reports, Helen Grant MP has written to the Council objecting to her consultation response set out in paragraph 5.14 of the report (which sets out a summary of her letter dated 7th July). She feels that her comments have been misrepresented and that her opposition to the proposed development has not been adequately set out. The office of Helen Grant has confirmed that Helen has been opposed to this application since it came to her attention.

Officer Comment:

The summarised consultation response from Helen Grant MP at paragraphs 5.14 to 5.17 of the report states the following:

"5.14 No objection to the principle, however, the loss of agricultural land to solar arrays would harm the environment.

5.15 A survey of 1,000 homes in the Staplehurst Area was carried out. 129 responses were received. 72% opposed the scheme, 22% were in favour and 6% were undecided. I believe that solar power should play a central role in our transition to a low carbon economy. However, I am concerned that the loss of agricultural land to solar arrays damages that element of the environment.

5.16 I therefore welcome the fact that the Government now discourages landowners from constructing solar farms on the best and most versatile land, and from January 2015 has withdrawn farm subsidies from land occupied by solar farms.

5.17 Solar panels are best placed on the 250,000 hectares of south-facing commercial rooftops, where they will not compromise the success of our farming industry."

The intended meaning of *"no objection to the principle"* was intended to mean no objection to the principle of solar power and not no objection to the principle of the proposed development as submitted. It is also noted that in the last paragraph of her letter dated 7th July 2015 that it is stated that there is a 'substantial argument' for this specific application 'to be rejected'. The Council apologises for any misrepresentation this may have caused, however, this was not the intention.

As such, Helen Grant's formal consultation response letter and submitted letter to Constituents have been attached in the previous urgent update.