

Reference number: 15/505974/FULL

I have now received the views of Headcorn Parish Council on the amended details:

"The committee reviewed the amended details at length and the Chair asked the committee if the revised detail changed their views of the application. The committee unanimously agreed that they continue to support refusal of the application. The amended application does nothing to mitigate the Councils previous concerns.

The application the site is still at odds with policy 28 of the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan, in that, the proposed size exceeds 5 hectares;

In fact upon completion the solar farm would form 15% of the built environment of Headcorn and this is wholly unacceptable.

Even with the proposed screening the council believe there will be a detrimental and irrevocable impact on the rural landscape of the Low Weald and the three widely used footpaths around the site will be adversely affected.

In addition to harm to neighbouring heritage/listed properties there will be loss of green fields and agricultural land. Food is an important commodity and land classification is a contentious issue.

It was noted that Kent Wildlife Trust continue to object in the strongest terms to the application due to the lack of the appropriate studies and mitigation actions.

The developers do not feel it necessary to assess the impact of the connection to the grid at this stage of the planning application. The Council feel this should already be clearly defined. Installation of cabling in an area such as this, if not appropriately buried would cause significant impact on the landscape.

The flood risk continues to be an issue, there have been no steps taken to mitigate any increase in the problems that are already widely suffered in Headcorn.

Recent announcements by the British Renewable Energy Association have raised concerns about fires at solar sites. This risk has not been assessed for this site.

Some assessments are flawed and the Council note that Natural England will not be in a position to grant a licence on the basis of the current application.

The Council believe that any benefits from this site (energy production) would be insufficient to outweigh the harm this development will cause to the landscape, land use and heritage assets of Headcorn.

Lastly the development does not meet all the criteria for renewable energy sites as set out in the NPPF/NPPG. Nor does it meet MBC's own guidelines for development in the countryside.

The Council therefore wish to see the application refused and referral to the planning committee is required.

It was noted that the Chair of HPC wishes to speak at the Committee and the Clerk will contact MBC when the agenda is published."

Helen Whately MP states:

"I wrote to you about the above application on 7 October 2015, to communicate residents' views from the public meeting I hosted on 2 October 2015. I have since visited the site for myself.

I feel I have to write to you again because I continue to receive emails and letters from constituents who remain extremely concerned about this proposed solar farm. In addition to the concerns I have already raised with you, I have been advised by residents that the application is contrary to recent government statements which indicate that developments of this type should be focused on previously developed land or commercial roof space - see [Speech by the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, the Rt Hon Gregory Barker MP, 25 April 2013](#) and - [Written Ministerial Statement - Solar Energy: protecting the local and global environment - 25 March 2015](#).

Everyone I speak to about this application recognises the need for more renewable energy sources. However, I also hear that when considering a development, the local environmental impact must be weighed up against the bigger picture, and the pursuit of global goals should not be at 'any cost'. It does seem there is a strongly held view locally that Great Tong Farm is not an appropriate place for a solar farm to be built, and that it would have serious adverse effects on the historic landscape of the Low Weald and Greensand Ridge, heritage buildings and protected species.

I would be very grateful if you could ensure these strong local objections are taken into consideration when the decision is made on this application."

My recommendation remains unchanged