

## Item 16

## Widehurst Farm, Marden

### Reference number: 15/505971/FULL

This update supersedes the urgent update previously published.

#### 1. Late representations

6 further letters have been received since the report was completed making the following comments:

- lower grade sites would be more beneficial to place solar panels and the land should remain in agricultural use,
- 
- need to protect rural communities, farmland and wildlife,
- 
- alternative means of providing renewable energy without using farmland and destroying wildlife
- 
- adverse visual impact of solar panels on landscape, rural character and biodiversity.
- 
- Lack of woodland screening between site and Plain Road,
- 
- Government has withdrawn support for solar power
- 
- Preference should be given to brownfield rather than greenfield sites
- 
- Need for emergency lighting,
- 
- Disruption and damage to Plain Road during construction

#### 2. Marden Parish Council:

"Marden Parish Council has already made its recommendation regarding this application. Subsequently Helen Grant MP conducted her own survey amongst the residents of Marden regarding this application.

Her results showed that a majority of completed questionnaires were opposed to the installation. However, she has also raised an issue about what the designation of the land used for such an installation would be following decommissioning. There now appear to be conflicting opinions within MBC's documentation, so MPC therefore requests that the Head of Planning and Development clarifies the situation regarding this and similar applications. Marden Parish Council's understanding is that the land would revert back to agricultural use at the decommissioning point and would then not be considered as previously developed land, and our recommendation was made on that basis".

**Officer comment:** The conditions recommended for the application which seek a temporary consent for 30 years after which the site would be decommissioned

- condition 4 - following which the site would be returned back to a greenfield site (fully restored). Whilst operational, the site would be classified as previously developed land BUT this would have to be viewed in the context of the specifics of the application and the reasons - see recommended conditions 3 and 4 - "to ensure the impacts of the development exist only for the lifetime of the development in the interests of the amenity of the area..."

One cannot just use the simple terminology of whether or not the site would be previously developed land without looking at the context - which in this application is to retain the site for use for grazing purposes and as a solar farm with full restoration following the cessation of the use.

### **3. Conservation Officer:**

I am satisfied that the findings of the Heritage Statement are correct and that the proposal would have no adverse impact on any of the listed buildings in the vicinity (the nearest of which is about 450metres away) because of the lack of inter-visibility.

### **4. Applicant**

Photographs submitted showing existing solar farm at Berwick, W. Sussex, commissioned March 2015 (in presentation folder).

Further information has been submitted regarding the Grid Connection Route between the application site and the proposed connection to the National Grid to the north of Thorn Road.

**5. Recommendation** Amend recommendation in heading of report to accord with main recommendation at end of report.