



HELEN WHATELY MP
Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Alison Broom
Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King St
Maidstone
Kent ME15 6JQ

HW/AE

7 October 2015

Dear Alison,

**Planning Application: 15/505974/FULL
Construction of a solar farm, Great Tong Farm, Headcorn**

I recently met my constituent, Shellina Prendergast, in her capacity as a member of Protect Our Weald, a group with over 500 local supporters who are committed to safeguarding the environment in this special part of Kent. Shellina raised a series of concerns that the group has about this solar farm application, many of which I believe are salient and require further investigation.

One of the issues raised was a lack of local consultation on the proposal, and in response I hosted a public meeting on Friday 2nd October in Headcorn. The developer was invited but to our disappointment was unable to attend as we had hoped they would present their plans and respond to questions. However, over seventy residents attended the meeting. There was heartfelt concern around the room about the development

On behalf of my constituents, I am writing to urge MBC to give appropriate regard to the views of local residents in the planning process. I have summarised the most widely held concerns below:

- The threat from flooding: There are already significant problems with flooding in Headcorn and there are serious concerns that the solar farm will exacerbate the problem. I understand Kent County Council have raised the issue of flooding in relation to this particular application.

Cont/...

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All personal information will be treated as confidential, but the MP may allow access to it by authorised staff, and may pass it on to official agencies where it will help your case. The MP may contact you from time to time to keep you informed. Please let her know if you have any problems with these arrangements.



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- Negative impact on the landscape: The field proposed to house the solar farm is located within a special landscape area as detailed in the emerging Local Plan. There are concerns about the visual impact of the solar farm, tall wire fencing and other features that will form part of the site. This will affect the immediate area, and also views across the Weald and to the Greensand Way. The proposed methods of concealing it were considered inadequate.
- Harm to the heritage setting: The application does not consider the potentially harmful impact on the many heritage assets surrounding the site of which there are circa 26. CPRE advised that Historic England should be consulted as part of the planning process.
- Discrepancy over agricultural land classification: The field was previously classified as Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land. A separate soil study commissioned by the developers has downgraded it to Grade 3b. There are questions about the credibility of the developer's study, and clearly this is relevant given Government guidance against developing solar farms on good agricultural land.
- A lack of consultation: Residents feel that they have been given scant opportunity to discuss the proposal with the developer or planners. Note was made that Ulcombe Parish Council has rejected the application, Cllr Jenny Whittle has written a letter of objection, and the two borough councillors are opposed.

I would be grateful if you could please ensure that these matters are considered in relation to the application. This is an important issue for local people and, whilst support exists for the general principles of generating sustainable energy, the suitability of this particular location for such activity is questionable.

*Best regards,
Helen Whately*

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