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**Sent:** 11 October 2022 08:15

**To:** Marion Geary <[MarionGeary@Maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:MarionGeary@Maidstone.gov.uk)>

**Subject:** 22/501335/FULL-Land North of Little Cheveney Farm

Hi Marion

My consultation response is detailed below:

The east part of the site is located in the Teise Valley landscape character area (57), as defined in the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment and the western portion in the Laddingford Low Weald area (39). There is a designated Ancient and Semi Natural Woodland area situated adjacent to the western boundary and many significant trees and potentially 'important' hedgerows within the site.

The Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study: Sensitivity Assessment - January 2015 considerations for the 2 character areas are set out below:

Teise Valley landscape character area (57) :

Key Characteristics:

- Flat, low lying landform
- Narrow rivers, ditches and ponds
- Rivers and ditches lined with native vegetation belts comprising much willow
- Large open arable fields and pasture
- Isolated oak trees within arable fields and pasture
- Scattered orchards
- Very little development and few roads

Landscape Character Sensitivity: High

This is a simple landscape with very few interruptions. Key features include the flat, low lying topography, the rivers and ditches, the large open field pattern and the undeveloped character. There are few visual detractors comprising some fencing and weirs along the rivers, large pylons and a small number of polytunnels. Whilst the tree belts and ditches provide a coherent habitat network there are large swathes of intensively farmed arable land. There are some new orchards, and the sparsely scattered built elements respect local vernacular and evoke a distinct sense of place. However there is little evidence of a traditional field pattern. The open largely undeveloped character of the landscape with its few narrow lanes, and its low lying situation which is evidenced through the series of tree belt lined ditches, is distinctive. The style of development, which mostly comprises converted farm buildings, contribute to the sense of place. Visibility is high, because of the large, open field pattern which extends across the flat landscape

Visual Sensitivity: Moderate

There are long distance views of the elevated Greensand Ridge to the north, which is covered in orchards and polytunnels. Within the immediate landscape, views extend across large open fields of pasture and arable which are enclosed by tall tree belts. The white cowls of oast houses rise above the vegetation, drawing the eye in many directions.

Settlement within the Teise Valley is largely limited to a few scattered farmsteads. This means that over the vast majority of the area there are relatively low numbers of people in residential properties with views over the valley. The exception to this is at Marden where the western village edge abuts the valley floor, allowing views out across the open valley. There are also numerous footpaths throughout the area.

The Teise Valley is assessed as being of high overall landscape sensitivity and is sensitive to change. Pressure for development to spread onto the visually sensitive valley floor, notably at Marden, should be resisted to maintain the open character of the floodplain. Minor development to support existing scattered settlements and farmsteads could be considered.

#### Guidelines and Mitigation:

- Consider the generic guidelines for Valleys in the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012
- New development should respect the local vernacular in scale, density and materials
- Conserve and encourage grassland and pasture to improve water quality and biodiversity within ditches
- Conserve native tree belts, ensuring that they are correctly managed and gaps replanted
- Encourage the restoration of lost hedgerow boundaries in arable areas
- Conserve isolated oaks within arable land and pasture, and plant new specimens to replace ageing examples
- Create stronger features at crossing points along the rivers, utilising local ragstone for bridges
- Conserve remoteness by avoiding the development of new buildings and roads

#### Laddingford Low Weald landscape character area (39):

##### Key Characteristics:

- Landscape forms part of the wider Low Weald landscape
- Low lying landform
- Intricate network of ditches, ponds and reservoirs
- Small and mostly broadleaf woodland blocks
- Orchards, hops and pasture surround settlements
- More expansive arable land within surrounding landscape
- Much linear settlement with clusters of development at road junctions

##### Landscape Character Sensitivity: Moderate

This is a coherent landscape where the pattern of elements is provided by linear development along the roads and the regularity of field pattern, which becomes larger scale away from the settled areas. Visual detractors comprise large barns and silos, polytunnels, pylons and fencing. Whilst the network of ditches and frequent ponds, hedgerows and shelterbelts provide a coherent habitat network, this is weakened by extensive arable fields and hedgerow boundary removal. Although there is evidence of some new orchard planting, others are derelict. Built development has a moderate impact on the landscape, with a strong contrast between traditional properties and more recent development.

Sense of place is provided by the orchards and hops, ditches and ponds. Although linear development provides continuity throughout the landscape, the individuality of separate settlements has been lost. Similarly whilst there are some striking examples of local vernacular, recent development often degrades the setting of traditional buildings, reducing the sense of place.

##### Visual Sensitivity: Moderate

Generally views are contained by the small scale field pattern with hedgerows and tall shelterbelts often enclosing orchards. However views from the wider landscape are more extensive across large scale arable fields. Vegetation belts across the flat landscape largely restrict longer views, although there are some long distance views of the elevated Greensand Ridge to the north.

The population is predominantly concentrated within the key settlements of Laddingford and Benover and there is also development along the road network. Yalding is adjacent to the north. This means there are moderate numbers of people on residential properties with potential views of the landscape. However the public footpath network is not particularly well developed.

Laddingford to Low Weald is assessed as being of moderate overall landscape sensitivity and therefore has scope for change with certain constraints. Housing development should be focussed within and immediately adjacent to existing settlements in keeping with existing. Other development could be considered to support existing rural enterprises, although extensive, large scale or visually intrusive development would be inappropriate.

Guidelines and Mitigation:

- Consider the generic guidelines for the Low Weald in the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment 2012
- New development should respect the local vernacular in scale, density and materials
- Conserve the network of ponds and improve habitat connectivity with native vegetation corridors and maintain a landscape framework
- Reinstate traditional hedgerow boundaries and gap up existing hedgerows where they are in poor condition
- Improve the sense of arrival and individuality of separate settlements by avoiding further development between them
- Soften the visual impact of large agricultural barns and silos with native planting

No arboricultural reports appear to have been submitted with this application but consideration has been given to retention of all existing trees and the need for protection around root protection areas of trees (RPAs). Reference has also been made to veteran trees although none appear to have been identified. Therefore it would be helpful to be able to consider the associated arboricultural survey. Additionally I would want to ensure that an appropriate buffer area can be achieved around the ancient woodland.

The submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment appears to be in general accordance with GLVIA3 although there are some areas that I would like to see considered in more detail eg. there doesn't seem to be much weight given to the landscape and visual effects during the construction phase of the development. However, I do agree that this solar farm needs to be considered as a temporary and reversible development. The decommissioning statement is therefore a very important component of the application.

I have a number of concerns about the location of the proposed topsoil stockpile bunds. They need to be sited to avoid tree RPAs and areas proposed for new planting and if bunds are proposed to be a long term feature on the site they need to be clearly marked on the mitigation, landscape and ecology enhancements plan. They are not characteristic of the local landscape and, if possible, I would not want them to form permanent features. We certainly need to see site sections in this regard.

The level of detailing provided for the soft landscaping is generally appropriate except for the lack of information regarding the new hedgerow lining the edge of the site and the proposed gapping up. I would also like to ensure that species are consistent with the Maidstone Landscape Guidelines, for example, *Quercus ilex* is not a native Oak and should be substituted with something more appropriate.

Regards

Deanne

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