

Sheepwash Solar Farm

On Thursday 20th October, Maidstone Borough Council will decide on the planning application for Sheepwash Solar Farm.

This innovative solar project, located between the villages of Claygate and Marden, will generate enough electricity to power approximately 14,200 homes every year, assisting in Maidstone's progression to its goal of reaching Net Zero.

Our plan includes:

ENHANCING BIODIVERSITY

value of the site by:

51%



Generating electricity to power equivalent of:

14,200 HOMES



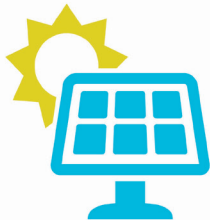
Consumption of 3578 kWh pa (BEIS, Dec 2020)

COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND: FOR LOCAL PROJECTS



CLIMATE EMERGENCY:

declared by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in 2019



Business Rates to MBC:

£90,000

PER YEAR

49 MW SOLAR, generating renewable electricity



Business Member 2021/22

Information contained in planning application, January 2022

Bringing biodiversity benefits

As well as delivering renewable energy, our plan includes extensive landscape and biodiversity enhancements over double the local targets.

51%

Biodiversity net gain



2

New ponds



2.2 HA

New woodland and community orchard



132

Bat & Bird boxes



17 HA wildflower meadow



1.5 KM of new hedgerow



2 New footpaths



Information contained in planning application, January 2022

Response to key issues in officer's report



1. Best and most versatile agricultural land

Planning policy does not preclude the use of BMV land for large scale solar developments. We have provided compelling evidence to demonstrate the necessity of the use of this site for solar. Our analysis demonstrates that there are no suitable alternative sites. Additionally, the site will remain in agricultural use through ongoing sheep grazing around panels.



2. Harm to the character and appearance of the countryside

There would only be very localised visual impacts on the surrounding area. We have sought to address this through significant landscaping improvements and enhancements. They include 1.5km of new hedgerow and 2.2ha of tree planting, a woodland and a community orchard which will mitigate the impact of the proposal whilst making a positive contribution to the Laddingford Low Weald. This will effectively screen the proposals once mature.



3. Less than substantial harm to the setting of heritage assets

The heritage officer has objected to the scheme on the basis that it will result in harm to the setting of Little Long End and Little Cheveney Farm. The harm to Little Long End and Little Cheveney Farm is considered to be 'minor and at the lower end of less than substantial'. The scheme has been amended to move the solar arrays further away from the heritage assets in order to reduce any impact. In line with Government policy this limited harm should be balanced against the public benefits of the proposal.



4. Harm to ecology and physical habitats

The ecology officer supports the ecological mitigation proposed but has a concern about skylarks and badgers. Solar farms do retain nesting skylarks and there is evidence from several studies that they do return to the grassland areas between the solar arrays. Badger tunnels and gates are provided within the fence line so that badgers can continue to forage. An increased buffer to the Ancient Woodland can be included within the proposal. However, given that farming with machinery takes place up to the edge of the woodland, we believe the concerns raised by the ecology officer are unfounded.



5. Residential amenity – noise

The proposal has been amended to remove the main potential source of noise, the energy storage system. The remaining potential noise sources are the transformer in the High Voltage compound and the string inverters at the rear of the solar panel arrays. Given the scale and location of this equipment, it is highly unlikely to give rise to noise disturbance to adjoining occupiers. However, a further acoustic report could be secured by condition.

Get in touch

If you have any questions or would like further information, you can contact us by:



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