

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting: PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: 22nd August 2024

Time: 7pm

The Public and Press were invited to attend

PRESENT:

Councillors (5) Cllr Glover (Chairman), Cllr Jackson, Cllr Saridja, Cllr Adams, Cllr Hollington

Also in Attendance (1) - Adriana Jones – Clerk

Members of the Public (10)

Members of the Press (1)

PLAN.001/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Tallon.

PLAN.002/24 OTHER ABSENCES

None.

PLAN.003/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

PLAN.004/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were a number of members of the public present to raise concerns about the proposed Solar Farm at Berwick Lane. These included District and Parish Councillors from neighbouring parishes, EFDC Cllr Clive Amos, and Tricia Moxey from the CPRE. Each member of the public was provided with time to address the Parish Council and raise their comments and / or concerns. The Chairman thanked those for attending.

PLAN.005/24 PLANNING CHANGES AT EFDC

As reported at the July Parish Council meeting, EFDC was in the process of considering changes to how it operates its planning committees. Councillors **NOTED** that at the 8th August EFDC Council meeting, the following changes were agreed:

- There will be 2 committees that consider planning applications instead of 4.
- EFDC District Councillors would not be permitted to vote at these committee meetings on any application within or pertaining to their own wards, however they can attend and make formal representation on behalf of the community without time restriction.
- If the Parish Council objects to a planning application, this will go to Committee for consideration, however this is subject to the objection containing clear and valid planning matters on which the objection is based. This will involve referencing relevant policies in either the EFDC Local Plan, or the National Planning Policy Framework.

Councillors noted that this was not a full list of the changes that have been made, full details of which would be included in the minutes of the EFDC Council meeting when they are published, and on the September 2024 Parish Council agenda.

PLAN.006/24 PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. To CONSIDER any planning applications submitted to the Parish Council for comment as detailed below		
EPF/1546/24	Land at Nickerlands, Berwick Lane, Stanford Rivers, Ongar, CM5 9PX	Proposed Installation, operation and decommissioning of renewable energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays together with transformer/inverter stations, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements. Councillors took into account all the comments made by the public present under the earlier agenda item, and agreed to offer an OBJECTION to this application. A full copy of the objection is appended to these minutes.
2. To NOTE any planning applications where EFDC would not normally accept comments;		
NIL		
3. To NOTE any planning applications that have been responded to by way of delegated powers:		
NIL		

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

4. To NOTE any other planning matters:		
EPF/1356/24 For Info	Land known as The Paddocks, Stanford Rivers Road, Ongar	Residential development of 36 dwellings including affordable housing, access from Stanford Rivers Road, associated estate roads, parking, open space and enhanced landscaping. NOTE: This application was incorrectly included in the weekly list as being in Stanford Rivers Parish, however is in fact in Ongar Parish, albeit just on the border. As such, Cllr Jackson requested this item be placed on the agenda for information given its location.
EPF/0486/24 APPEAL	Land adjacent to Willows End, Cumley Road, Toot Hill, CM5 9SJ	Construction of new dwelling. PC Objected to the application Appeal Ref: 3347206 Deadline for responses: 20 th September 2024

PLAN.007/24 PLANNING DECISIONS

Councillors **NOTED** the following planning decisions made by EFDC:

EPF/0814/24	Millside, Toot Hill Road, Ongar, CM5 9LJ	Single storey side/rear extension. Extension of roof space into new extension with new front, side and rear dormers. Renewal of previous approval EPF/0862/21	Approve with Conditions <i>The PC had no objection to this application</i>
EPF/1205/24	Land at Steers Farm, School Road, Essex, CM5 9SD	Non Material Amendment to EPF/2618/22 (Application for Variation of Condition 2 for EPF/3119/21 (Amendments to internal layout & minor alteration to external façade). (Proposed new infill detached 5 bedroom house with detached carport) - Addition of a Rooflight	Approve <i>As this was a NMA, the PC was not informed.</i>
EPF/1248/24	Land North of Shonks Mill Bridge, Shonks Mill Road, Stapleford Tawney	Application for approval of details reserved by condition 11 'Hard and Soft Landscaping' on planning permission EPF/2702/22 (A Hybrid planning application. Full planning application for a Flood Storage Area upstream of the M25 on land to the north of Shon	Approve <i>DRC – PC not able to comment</i>
EPF/0998/24	Surrywood, 12 London Road, Stanford Rivers, Ongar, CM5 9PH	Demolition of the existing bungalow and the construction of a proposed new two storey dwelling	Refused for reasons of excessive scale, loss of a bungalow, and negative impact on street scene. <i>The PC had no objection subject to specific materials and PD rights being removed.</i>
EPF/1105/24	Wayletts, 28 London Road, Stanford Rivers, Ongar, CM5 9QD	Two storey detached garage	Refused for reasons of excessive scale, prominence and impact on Green Belt. <i>PC objected due to excessive scale and lack of justification for storage space</i>
EPF/1120/24	Little Croft, Toot Hill Road, Ongar, CM5 9QP	Variation to condition 2 'Plan no's' on planning permission EPF/2538/22 (The development proposes to demolish and remove the existing stables and barn and replace this with a new detached single storey dwelling slightly larger than that recently granted	Approve with Conditions <i>PC had no objection to this application</i>

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

EPF/1159/24	3 Church Cottages, Rosary Cottage, Church Road, Stanford Rivers, Ongar, CM5 9PS	Extensions and remodelling works to the main dwelling	Refused for reason that the addition is disproportionate to the original dwelling <i>PC had no objection to this application</i>
-------------	---	---	---

PLAN.008/24 ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

None

Meeting closed 20.45

Signed Date

STANFORD RIVERS

PARISH COUNCIL

Ware Farm, The Street, High Roding, Essex, CM6 1NT

Tel: 077 377 36365

Fax: 01992 524756

Email: stanfordriverspc@gmail.com

Clerk to the Council
Adriana Jones

Muhammad Rahman
Planning Department
EFDC
323 High Road
Epping
Essex

Sent via email: appcomment@eppingforestdc.gov.uk
mrahman@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

25th August 2024

Dear Muhammad

EPF/1546/24 - Land at Nickerlands, Berwick Lane, Stanford Rivers, Ongar, CM5 9PX - Proposed Installation, operation and decommissioning of renewable energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays together with transformer/inverter stations, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

This planning application was considered at the 22nd August 2024 meeting of the Stanford Rivers Parish Council Planning Committee, which was open to members of the public and press, and advertised in accordance with statutory requirements. Please accept this letter as the statutory consultee response from Stanford Rivers Parish Council to the above stated planning application.

When considering this planning application, the Committee decided that the main points of consideration were as follows:

- Impact on the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it
- Impact on Local Rural Roads
- Environmental Impact, including potential loss of Agricultural Land
- Impact on two listed properties adjacent to the proposed site
- What harm would be caused (visual, noise, traffic)
- If the applicant had proven very special circumstances.
- Impact on two neighbouring Airfields
- Benefits of the proposals
- Impact on recreational use on local lanes

1. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Request

As detailed within the planning statement submitted by the applicant, a planning application was made for a Screening Opinion from EFDC (EPF/1142/24), the result of which (dated 23rd August 2024) has been partially reproduced within said planning statement. However, an important paragraph has been omitted from the planning statement but was included within opinion, which states the following:

“Notwithstanding the above, a recent similar development has come forward (currently at

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

pre-app stage) which would extend from this site to the north, so there may be a cumulative impact should both schemes come forward together and be approved.”

The Parish Council argues that knowledge by way of pre-application discussions had by EFDC of a possible similar site north of this site is a clear indication of **potential cumulative effects**, and thus an EIA should have been completed for this proposal in order to ensure the green belt is protected.

2. Impact on the Green Belt

The site lies wholly within the Green Belt. It is rural by nature, and largely untouched. Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts and that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by **keeping land permanently open**; the essential characteristics of Green Belts being their **openness** and their **permanence**.

The Landscape Character Assessment (Local Plan evidence base EB709¹) identifies that the land on which the solar farm is proposed has a very strong sense of tranquillity, with sensitivities to change which include:

- Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within this Landscape Character Area include the network of hedges and hedgerow trees
- A small-scale, historic settlement pattern
- **Framed views** across this area are visually sensitive to potential new development, particularly large-scale or tall vertical elements.

It goes on to state that as a result of the above factors, overall this Landscape Character Area is considered to have **moderate to high sensitivity to change**.

The suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines within the Landscape Character Assessment include:

- Maintain characteristic framed and open views across the area
- Ensure that any new development within the farmland is small-scale

It is generally accepted (by planners, planning inspectors, and policy itself) that a solar farm causes a degree of damage to the landscape and the Green Belt (Planning Appeals reference APP/J1535/A/12/2173989, APP/J1535/A/13/2208676, and APP/J1535/W/23/3334690 refer, all of which are within the Epping Forest District), with a subjective view taken as to the level of damage. This is also true for this proposal. The proposed site is rural, open, tranquil, peaceful, with expansive fields stretching out to the horizon creating a sense of openness and freedom. The site is recognised as having a moderate to high sensitive to change, and having visually sensitive framed views of the open countryside, loved and cherished by not only those who live in the area, but those who visit. These are characteristic of the countryside and rural life which makes the countryside what it is.

The creation of a large solar farm, fenced off to the public at this location neither protects nor enhances the countryside in any way shape or form. It restricts access, damages views, and fails to protect its openness or permanence as required by Green Belt Policy. In fact the justification of the proposals being ‘temporary’ goes directly against the word ‘permanence’ as defined in both the NPPF and the EFDC Local Plan, the word permanent being defined as ‘intended to last or **remain unchanged indefinitely**’. A solar farm clearly changes the landscape.

Paragraph 156 of the NPPF states that when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development and in such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. It goes on to state that such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources. It is incumbent on the applicant to prove such very special circumstances exist, and the Parish Council argues that the applicant has not proven this to be the case. The circumstances suggested by the application are the wider benefit in terms of renewable energy supply, however this simply does not outweigh the negative impact on so many aspects of this rural location.

¹ <https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EB709.pdf>

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Planning Practice guidance (PPG) 013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327 dated 27th March 2015² states that the deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in undulating landscapes. The undulating nature of the local topography is referenced on numerous occasions within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment³ submitted by the applicant in support of the application, and is a well-known, recognised and valued feature of the local landscape.

Policy DM3 of the EFDC Local Plan (Landscape Character, Ancient Landscapes and Geodiversity) states that applicants should demonstrate that the proposal will not, directly, indirectly or cumulatively, cause significant harm to landscape character or the nature and physical appearance of ancient landscapes, and should be sensitive to their setting in the landscape, in particular in settlement edge locations, and to its local distinctiveness and characteristics. A solar farm undoubtedly causes harm to the character, nature and physical appearance of this recognised ancient landscape and its setting.

It is for these reasons that the proposals FAIL to adhere to the following Green Belt planning policy:

- Paragraphs 142, 153, 156, and 180 of the NPPF
- Policies DM3 and DM4 of the EFDC Adopted Local Plan.

3. Loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land

The applicant has provided an Agricultural Land Classification Report which sets out that the entirety of the site is either Grade 3a or Grade 3b Agricultural Land. However the Parish Council questions the accuracy of this report. The Natural England Open Data Geoportal⁴ identifies in fact that around 50% of the land is actually classed as Grade 2 Agricultural Land, the second highest grade you can get (see Annexe 1 attached to this response), with the remaining 50% being grade 3. This is also corroborated by Natural England's Likelihood of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land - Strategic scale map Eastern Region (ALC020)⁵ (see Annexe 2) which shows there is a greater than 60% chance of the area being the best and most versatile agricultural land. This makes a **HUGE** difference to the impact a solar farm would have on food production in the UK.

There is concern that the site has been specifically chosen due to its proximity to the overhead lines close to the site to ease its connection to the electricity distribution grid, making it cheaper for the applicant. The applicant has failed to prove (and there is no evidence of) other areas of poorly quality of agricultural land being fully considered. Within the Green Belt Assessment, the applicant simply states that they approached landowners within the unconstrained search area to see if they were interested in leasing the land for solar development, and the owner of the proposed site was the first and only landowner to engage. This is hardly a robust assessment, and this in of itself does not make the land suitable – it simply means the applicant only pursued one option. There is no further evidence as to what work has been undertaken to source areas of poorly quality agricultural land.

The applicant states that the proposals have been designed to enable low intensity sheep grazing amongst the solar panels, thus the site maintains its agricultural use, however there are no details regarding the care and management of the sheep. How would they be rounded up? How and who would care for them, and how often would this be needed? What is the maintenance regime for the ground underneath the solar panels?

The footnote to paragraph 180 of the NPPF states where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy#solar-farms>

³ <https://eppingforestdc.my.site.com/pr/s/planning-application/a0hTv0000019bNx/epf154624?tabset-dc51c=2>

⁴ <https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/>

⁵ <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6205542189498368?category=5208993007403008>

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside the other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development. Best and most versatile agricultural land is land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification. Paragraph 4.23 of the EFDC adopted Local Plan states:

“The predominant land use of the District by area is agriculture, and the countryside provides the setting of its rural communities, villages and towns in addition to providing part of the setting for London. The mosaic patchwork of countryside, Ancient Woodland, hedgerows and trees (including many Veteran Trees) is a distinctive characteristic of the landscape, as are the river valleys. Therefore the landscape character forms an important consideration in planning for the District’s future development, and the Council seeks to maintain a careful balance between managing change to the landscape character and providing much needed new development.”

Planning Practice Guidance 013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327⁶ states that particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider when considering solar farms include:

- encouraging the effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and **non agricultural land**, provided that it is not of high environmental value;
- where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether
 - i. the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and
 - ii. the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays

Paragraph 4.27 of the EFDC Adopted Local Plan states that the future development pattern of the District must recognise its setting, and respond to the particular landscape characteristics which vary in their sensitivity to change.

In July 2024 the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) reported that there has been a hundred-fold increase in our best farmland lost to development in little more than a decade, and that their newly published research found almost 14,500 hectares of the country’s best agricultural land, which could grow at least 250,000 tonnes of vegetables a year, has been permanently lost to development in just 12 years⁷. Crispin Truman, previous CEO of the CPRE stated that maintaining agricultural land for domestic food production is critical and that this must be achieved in the context of addressing and adapting to climate change, reversing the loss of nature and increasing demands on land for other purposes, not least housing and production of renewable energy.

It is for these reasons that the proposals FAIL to adhere to the following planning policy:

- Paragraphs 180 (and footnote 62) of the NPPF
- Policy DM3 Landscape Character, Ancient Landscapes and Geodiversity, and policy DM5 Green and Blue Infrastructure of the EFDC Adopted Local Plan.

4. Traffic and Transport

The Council has a number of serious concerns regarding highway safety. The two rural roads that lead to the development site are Berwick Lane and Tawney Lane, both of which are extremely narrow, rural in nature, and entirely unsuitable for heavy goods vehicles. Both roads are known locally for being regular locations at which vehicles need to be pulled from ditches – a frequent occurrence especially in the winter months when visibility is poorer. The suggestion in the application is that the 26 week construction period is ‘temporary’, and as such any impact can be dealt with by way of mitigation. However, in these particular circumstances this means placing at risk the safety of the local residents who use this road every day for a period of 6 months by suggesting these roads are ‘temporarily suitable’ for HGVs, which they simply are not. It is accepted that these roads are used by farming vehicles, however this is a necessity to cultivate the land in rural locations. To actively direct HGVs onto narrow, rural lanes, knowingly increasing the risk to road users is irresponsible and

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy#solar-farms>

⁷ <https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/building-on-our-food-security/>

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

unacceptable. These lanes have a high level of outdoor recreational use, including Byway 26, including cyclists, ramblers, hikers, Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, and equestrian use. Safety for such use would be a major concern during the construction phase with the potential of fatalities.

Paragraph 4.27 of the EFDC adopted Local Plan states the landscape sensitivity studies and Historic Environment Characterisation Study, undertaken on behalf of the Council, provide key evidence in this respect against which to measure the impact of proposed development and its design. In December 2015, and as part of the Local Plan Evidence Base, EFDC conducted a review of its Protected Lanes (EB717)⁸, and **Berwick Lane is a recognised Protected Lane (EPPLANE20)**. The report states that:

“Historic lanes are an important feature in our landscape: they continue to have an articulating role, providing insights into past communities and their activities through direct experience of a lanes historic fabric; contain the archaeological potential to yield evidence about these past human activities and to provide insights into the development of a landscape and the relationship of features within it over time; have considerable ecological value as habitats for plants and animals, serving as corridors for movement and dispersal for some species and acting as vital connections between other habitats; and allow people to enrich their daily lives by accessing cherished historic landmarks and landscapes, encouraging recreation within the countryside, thereby promoting well-being.”

In addition to the daily HGVs, there would be 50 construction workers required each day for 6 months. This is a highly unsustainable location, with no public buses or rail connection. The A113, Berwick Lane and Tawney Lane are extremely difficult to safely navigate for a cyclist (albeit well used by both recreational and club cyclists), and as such these 50 workers will, in reality, be reliant on a private vehicle to access the site. The Construction Management Plan suggests this will necessitate 25 vehicles, which in reality it will be more like 50 vehicles. This is additional traffic on what are rural, local roads which are already dangerous to navigate, and to actively support more vehicles on these roads is simply irresponsible and unsafe – even if it would be for a temporary period.

Some of the specific concerns include the following:

- Unsuitability of both Tawney Lane and Berwick Lane for 16.5 tonne lorries
- Applicant states that both these lanes will be used during the construction phase, however the routing plan only suggests access via Tawney Lane, and fails to detail or consider Berwick Lane – a recognised protected lane.
- The routing plan suggests vehicles come through Ongar Town and along the A113, however this is not supported by the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan
- Compromised safety for all local road users, cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians who use both Tawney Lane and Berwick Lane (an equestrian site being located on Berwick Lane very close to the site)
- Danger of the proposed access point and ‘swing trajectory’ of the HGVs onto Byway 26 from Berwick Lane, and the risk this poses to other local traffic using the road.
- Disruption to living conditions of 42 & 43 Berwick Lane due to proposed significant increase in traffic movement
- Lack of justification for a need to have a secondary access point for construction traffic off Berwick Lane.

Both Tawney Lane and Berwick Lane already suffer from damage and degradation as a result of the farm vehicles, so to add additional HGV's would exacerbate this. In addition, the applicant states that after construction the maintenance vehicles will access the site roughly twice per month using the secondary access off Berwick Lane, however the supporting evidence does not set out the vehicle movements and access route for management of the proposed sheep and their welfare, hedge and tree maintenance, solar panel cleaning and maintenance, CCTV and weather station maintenance. In addition, the proposal does not detail any information concerning the decommissioning of the site and

⁸ <https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EB717-Epping-Forest-District-Protected-Lanes-Assessments-Place-Services-December-2015.pdf>

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

the associated vehicle movements.

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states:

“Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport).”

This application does none of these things.

Policy T1 Sustainable Transport Choices (part E(i)) of the EFDC adopted Local Plan states that development will be permitted where it can be demonstrated, where appropriate, that it does not result in a cumulative severe impact on the operation of, or accessibility to, the local or strategic highway networks or compromise highway safety. For a 26 week period this proposal **WILL** compromise safety on the local road network.

It is interesting that Policy DM12 Subterranean, Basement Development and Lightwells of the Local Plan states that “applications should demonstrate through the submission of a Construction Management Statement that the construction will not cause harm to pedestrian, cycle, vehicular and road safety, adversely affect bus or other transport operations, significantly increase traffic congestion, nor place unreasonable inconvenience on the day to day life of those living, working or visiting nearby.” This policy is written to relate to basement, however would clearly be relevant for the circumstances of this application, as the construction **WILL** cause harm to all these factors. It is odd that this policy section concerning construction is not referenced elsewhere else in the Local Plan, but indicates there is a clear acceptance by EFDC that construction **can cause harm** to local road safety, and the Parish Council argues this section of the policy should be applied in this case. The applicant has failed to demonstrate within the Construction Management Plan that highway safety will not be compromised. In fact, the supporting statement for the application sets out that compromising safety will only be temporary! This is not acceptable, nor policy compliant.

Paragraph 4.55 of the EFDC adopted Local Plan sets out that Protected Lanes are covered by Policy DM7 Historic Environment, which states that ‘Heritage assets (both designated and non-designated) and their settings will be preserved or enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance in accordance with national planning policy and guidance’. There has not been any assessment completed to ascertain what damage would be done to the protected Berwick Lane as a result of the traffic movements associated with these proposals.

Page 74 of the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan⁹ states that “Any new employment or industrial site **in or near Ongar** which creates traffic movement, including HGVs, which will adversely impact on the attractiveness and congestion in the historic centre will be unacceptable.” The routing plan clearly directs these HGVs through Ongar Town. This is linked to Policy ONG-CT3: Transport and Movement (part 1a) which states that all development must include a balanced range of transport options which includes “Ensuring sites are served by adequate roads and footways with particular regard to traffic capacity and pedestrian safety.”

It is for these reasons that the proposals FAIL to adhere to the following planning policy:

- Paragraph 89 of the NPPF
- Policies T1, DM12 (part c), and DM7 of the EFDC Adopted Local Plan
- Policy ONG-CT3 (part 1a) of the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan

5. Impact on properties at 42 & 43 Berwick Lane

⁹ https://adef9e45-3d9d-4e89-ba68-a972d0bc80df.usrfiles.com/ugd/adef9e_891ebaabcf1410d9de3e21fc6b4868c.pdf

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

The main concerns are around impact of construction traffic on these two listed properties, views, noise, loss of amenity and wellbeing of its residents. It is clear that to consider the use of the proposed secondary access point off Berwick Lane for the 26 week construction period is entirely unsuitable⁹, and will undoubtedly have a negative effect on the wellbeing of the residents. This option should be removed as a possibility as its necessity has not been proven with the documents submitted, and the need for two access points has simply not been justified.

Table 4.2 in the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment accepts over the lifetime of the proposals there will be a moderate to minor impact of these two properties, the minor impact being during the latter part of the scheme. By way of mitigation the applicant is proposing planting 1.2m high hedging along with Oak Trees, with the hedging being maintained at 3.5-4m once established. Oak Trees are notoriously slow to grow and reach maturity, and thus any benefit of the trees would not be evident for around 20 years. The proposed screening is too small, and would not provide the required reduction in visual impact for at least the first 10 years. There is, therefore, an acceptance by the applicant that these properties will have to accept some form of harm for at least 10-15 years.

Whilst the proposed reduction in size of the solar farm from the original proposals is appreciated, the proposals as submitted, especially during the construction phase, continues to have an unacceptable level of impact on these two properties.

Policy DM9 High Quality Design Part I Privacy and Amenity states that “Development proposals must take account of the privacy and amenity of the development’s occupiers **and neighbours**, and integrate occupier comfort and wellbeing within the design and layout.” These proposals fail to consider the wellbeing of the two closest neighbouring properties.

6. Visual Impact and Glare

The proposals identify numerous visual receptors that will be negatively affected by the proposals, including the previously mentioned two closest properties, Byway 26, the historic Essex Way, and numerous footpaths and byways in both Stanford Rivers Parish and Stapleford Tawney. Whilst some mitigation measures are proposed, the proposals will still be visible to these sensitive receptors, and there is no substitute to being able to walk through the countryside for the sake of doing so. A solar farm is an entirely unnatural feature of a rural landscape.

Policy DM9 High Quality Design on the adopted Local Plan states that all new development must achieve a high quality of design and **contribute to the distinctive character and amenity of the local area**. The same policy goes on to state that the Council will require all development proposals to be design-led, relating positively to their context, drawing on the local character and the natural and historic environment and make a **positive contribution to a place**. This application does not demonstrate in way how the solar farm will make a positive contribution to Stanford Rivers.

With regard to Glare, there are two Airfields in the vicinity of the site – Stapleford Airfield and North Weald Bassett Airfield. The applicant provides evidence suggesting that only Green Glare is predicted to impact the Runway 10 approach path at Stapleford Airfield, and none for North Weald Bassett Airfield, summarising that the impact on aviation assets is low and Not Significant. However the Glare and Glint Assessment provided by the applicant states at paragraph 3.14 that the FAA guidance states that for a solar PV development to obtain FAA approval or to receive no objection, the following two criteria must be met:

- No potential for glint or glare in the existing or planned Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT); and
- No potential for glare or “low potential for after-image” (Green Glare) along the final approach path for any existing or future runway landing thresholds (including planned or interim phases), as shown by the approved layout plan (ALP).

The current Air Traffic Control Tower at North Weald Airfield is about to be replaced by a new tower, located in a different position on the Airfield (EPF/0297/24¹⁰). As such, this application has not assessed the impact on this new tower. It is also unclear as to the level of impact of Green Glare at Stapleford Airfield.

¹⁰ [Planning Application: EPF/0297/24 \(site.com\)](#)

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

PPG 013 Reference ID: 5-013-20150327¹¹ regarding considerations that relate to large scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms states that the particular factors a local planning authority will need to consider in the deployment of large scale solar farms includes the proposal's visual impact, the effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety. Therefore, a decision on the application should not be made until such time as it has been confirmed by both Stapleford Airfield, North Weald Bassett Parish Airfield, and the FAA that the proposals meet the FAA requirements in terms of Glare, and there will no negative affect on the airfields or ATCT.

It is for these reasons that the proposals FAIL to adhere to the following planning policy:

- Policies DM9 of the EFDC Adopted Local Plan

7. Community Benefit

The Parish Council and local community first became aware of the proposals in May 2023, which at which time promotional material was provided to the local community setting out the benefits of the scheme, which included a sum of £25,000 to be invested in community projects which directly benefit the local community (see Annexe 3). At the time of the first consultation, the Parish Council responded to the site promoter setting out a number of questions, including why this proposed figure of £25,000 was deemed sufficient (see Annexe 4), and the developer stating it was 'a starting point'. The current proposals make no mention of any such community benefit, or investment in any community projects. The Parish Council would have expected the applicant to not only have stuck to this commitment as a minimum, but to have increased the amount and set out within the current planning application details of exactly how any local community benefit would be achieved, and for this to be conditioned by way of a Section 106 agreement.

The planning statement submitted with the application states that the proposals would provide the equivalent annual electrical needs to approximately 5,624 family homes. There are c.316 households in Stanford Rivers Parish (2021 Census) - should permission be granted for this application it would surely makes sense from a sustainability perspective that these households should directly benefit from the solar farm for the duration of its operational lifetime, with particular support for 42 and 43 Berwick Lane.

8. General

There are a number of other matters which were looked at by the Parish Councils planning committee, including:

- Impact on wildlife and the deer fencing, owls, bats, newts, etc
- Lack of examples of solar farms on agricultural land coming to the end of their lifespan and what this means for the land
- The lack of a current food production strategy for the Country
- Water runoff from the panels and how this would change the natural drainage of the site
- The possibility of technological changes in the future and what this would mean for the solar farm.

Conclusion

Whilst it is accepted that the proposal would provide benefits in terms of electricity from a renewable source, the Parish Council believes the applicant has failed to demonstrate the very special circumstances necessary to outweigh the significant adverse effect on the Green Belt, local landscape character, and visual amenity. There are clear examples above where the proposals do not meet the policy requirements of the NPPF, the EFDC adopted Local Plan, Planning Practice Guidance, and the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan.

It is for these reasons that the Parish Council requests this application is **REFUSED** by EFDC.

The Parish Council is willing to attend any committee meeting at which this application is considered.

¹¹ [Renewable and low carbon energy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-practice-guidance/planning-practice-guidance)

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

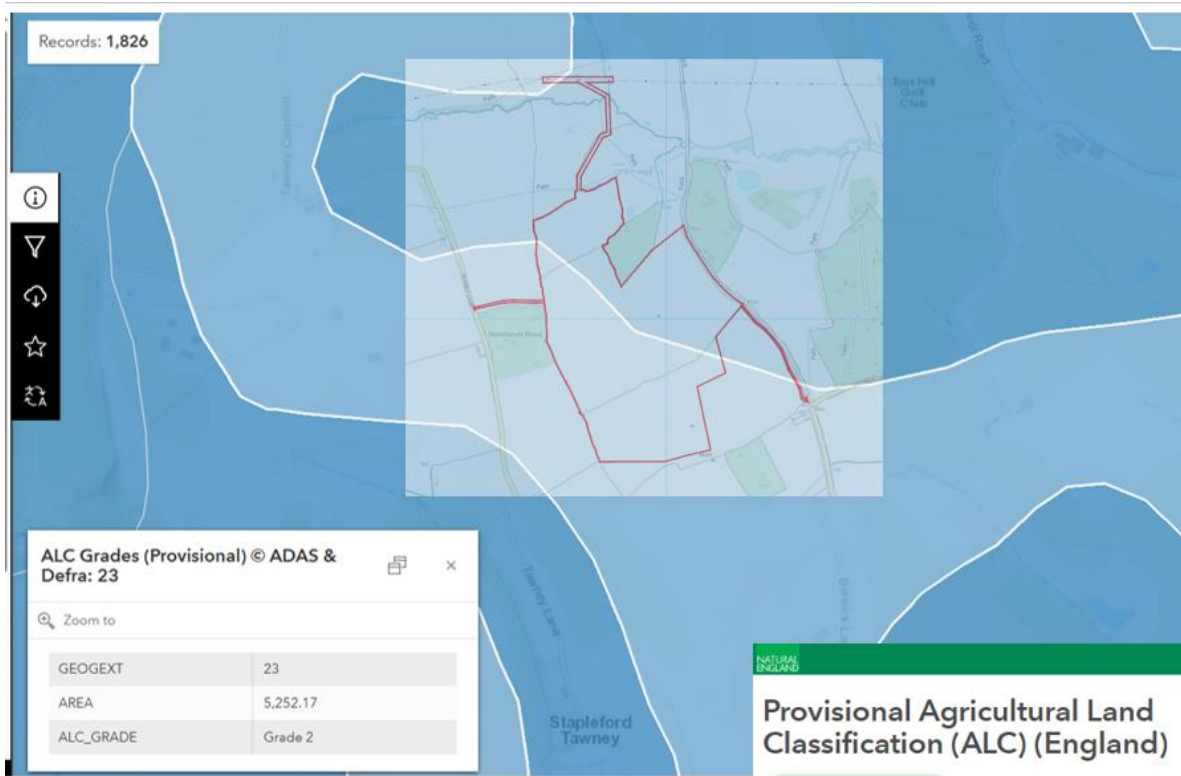
Yours sincerely

Adriana Jones
Parish Clerk

cc. Stanford Rivers Parish Councillors
EFDC Cllr Amos, Cllr Cornish, Cllr Jones, Cllr Dadd
ECC Cllr Mclvor
Stapleford Airfield
North Weald Bassett Airfield
Neighbouring Parish and Town Councils

Annexe 1

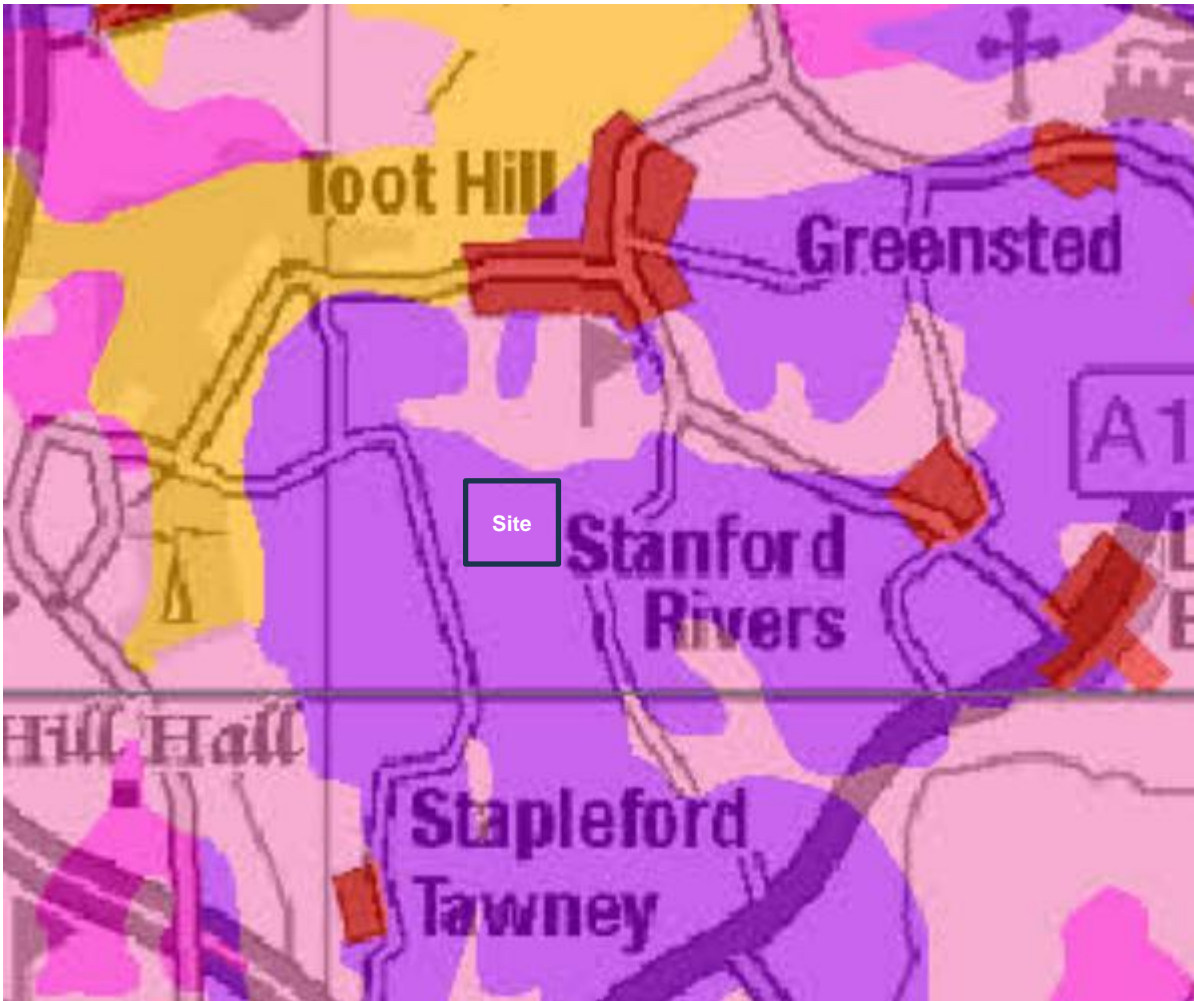
Data obtained from Natural England Provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) (England) website <https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/>, with overlay of site plan.








Light Blue is Grade 2 agricultural Land
Dark blue is Grade 3

Annexe 2

Natural England Likelihood of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land - Strategic scale map Eastern Region (ALC020)



Predictive BMV Land Assessment © Defra

-  High likelihood of BMV land (>60% area bmv)
-  Moderate likelihood of BMV land (20 - 60% area bmv)
-  Low likelihood of BMV land (<= 20% area bmv)
-  Non-agricultural use
-  Urban / Industrial

Annexe 3

Page 3 of the original promotional material provided to the community by the site promoters in May 2023.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE SOLAR FARM?

- It will assist Epping Forest District Council in meeting its pledge to become a carbon-neutral authority by 2030, in addition to supporting its response to the Climate Emergency the Council declared in 2019.
- The proposed development will contribute towards the security of energy supply in the UK through the provision of local, renewable energy supply.
- No public rights of way will be closed during or after construction of the solar farm.
- New tree and hedgerow planting is proposed alongside planting to gap up existing hedgerows. This will contribute to the biodiversity and landscape scheme which will be developed as part of the proposed solar farm.
- This is a temporary development, allowing the land to rest for the period of operation up to 40 years.
- The proposed solar farm will not require Government subsidy.
- Anglo Renewables is committed to using local suppliers during construction and operation where possible.

COMMUNITY BENEFIT

We hope to set up a community benefit fund of £25,000 which will be invested in suitable community projects directly benefitting local residents.

This project is subject to local business rates and will generate significant income for Epping Forest District Council. Over its lifecycle, this project will generate millions of pounds which will help fund local services.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The support for renewable energy was strengthened in September 2019 when a Climate Emergency was declared by Epping Forest District Council and a motion passed to do everything in its power to become a carbon neutral District by 2030. To act on this commitment, they have drafted a Climate Change Action Plan that was approved by a Cabinet meeting on 11 April 2022. The Action Plan identifies the main sources of carbon emissions, both within the Council's own operations and across the District, and outlines actions to reduce them.

Annexe 4

Email to Site Promoter setting out a number of questions from the Parish Council after the first public consultation on the proposals in May 2023.

stanfordriverspc@gmail.com

From: stanfordriverspc@gmail.com
Sent: 08 July 2023 16:05
To: 'Elinor Bale'; feedback@alpacacommunications.com
Subject: RE: Solar Farm Public Consultation

Dear Elinor

I hope you are well.

With regard to Anglo Renewables offer to meet with Stanford Rivers Parish Council, the Parish Council would like to reserve this option to meet, however in the meantime would like to put forward a number of questions to Anglo Renewables for a formal response. These questions have been agreed following the majority of our Councillors attending the public consultation event in Toot Hill Village Hall, and after liaison with the local community. Could I please ask that these are passed on to the relevant person(s) for response:

1. The site is located on approximately 34ha of Grade 2 agricultural land – Grade 1 being the best and most versatile land for farming. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. What justification is there as to why this area of land been chosen, and are there not other less versatile sites that could be used?
2. The location of the Solar Farm will have a seriously detrimental affect on two properties, as well as disruption for many other properties within the area. So far all the feedback received by the Parish Council from local residents has been unsupportive of the proposals, for reasons which are entirely valid from a residents perspective, and reasons which will undoubtedly affect the quality of their daily lives. Can you advise:
 - a. What measures have you taken to ensure these residents will not be unduly affected?
 - b. Has consideration been given to siting the solar panels further from the two most affected cottages?
 - c. How will these residents benefit from the proposals?
 - d. What benefit, in terms of energy supply, will the residents of Stanford Rivers Parish receive (a number of other solar farms in the east providing 'local' energy supply)?
 - e. Are you liaising directly, and having discussions with, the two properties in Berwick Lane directly adjacent to the site?
3. What evidence do you have, citing other schemes across the country as evidence, that prove the landscape character will not be affected, and that the land can be returned to agricultural use after the 40 years?
4. Deer protection Fencing is to be erected around the site – what measures will be taken to ensure this does not detrimentally affect the movement and wellbeing of deer?
5. The plans state that 'proposed vegetation' will be planted to the rear of the two cottages. Can you please advise what this means, what will be planted, and what height it will be at when planted, and in five years time?
6. Berwick Lane is for the most part a single track rural road, unsuitable to heavy traffic. What measures will be taken to ensure the road surface is made good as a result of the damage caused by the vehicles travelling to and from the site during the construction phase?

Stanford Rivers PARISH COUNCIL

7. It is understood that it takes between 5-10 years to pay off the costs associated with creating a solar farm, after which time the site is in essence solely making a profit. It is stated that you hope to set up a community benefit fund of £25,000 which will be invested in suitable community projects directly benefiting local residents. Can you explain why you feel the amount stated is a reasonable amount given the expected profit and the disruption to residents, and how any monies would be managed and for what?
8. Can you explain why this proposal does not affect the openness of the green belt?

I would be immensely grateful if you could provide answers to these questions, which will then be put to Council.

If you require clarification on any of the above, don't hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards
Adriana

Adriana Jones
Clerk
Stanford Rivers Parish Council, c/o Ware Farm, The Street, High Roding, Essex CM6 1NT
Tel: 07737736365
www.stanfordrivers-pc.gov.uk