

Longfield Solar Farm
Responses to Consultation Questionnaire
2nd November 2020 – 14th December 2020

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council welcomes this opportunity to comment on the proposed Longfield Solar Farm.

1. Do you have any comments on our initial proposals for:

(a) The solar energy generation element of the scheme?

This is a massive infrastructure project involving the construction and installation of large engineering structures. There is scant information about the size and visual aspect of the engineering works. The positioning of the structures on the proposed site has yet to be provided. The lack of detailed information concerns the:

- (i) Height and size of the solar panels which contributes to their visual impact
- (ii) Massing of the solar panels which also contributes to their visual impact
- (iii) Extent, height and visual impact of the battery storage installations
- (iv) Extent, height and visual impact of the switch gear housing and other ancillary equipment
- (v) Extent, height and visual impact of security fencing. There is no indication which buildings and installations are to be surrounded by high metal industrial security fences and gates or where they will be located
- (vi) Quantity of industrial and security lighting, its visibility from roads and nearby settlements and light pollution generated
- (vii) Percentage of the site that might be under panels
- (viii) Quantity of noise generated.

Since none of this basic information has been supplied, the Parish Council can neither fully assess the impact of the scheme nor make fully reasoned responses/feedback. Whilst it is appreciated that this questionnaire comprises the first round of consultation, the paucity of information renders this process fundamentally flawed. The consultation and the conclusions that the applicant/proposer arrives at - can only be as good as the quality and amount of information that it supplies. That same information is insufficient.

Subject to that, see the response to Question 6 below for comment on the solar energy generation as a component of the proposals as a whole.

(b) The battery storage element of the scheme?

See the response to Question 1(a) above relating to the lack of information provided and as a result the inability to provide meaningful responses or draw substantive conclusions.

The battery storage element when combined with sub-station equipment could be particularly intrusive in a rural setting. The information provided does not detail the size, height and visual impact of these units. And it does not explore how many units are planned. The drawing on page 8 of the consultation booklet is particularly misleading. It

shows the battery storage as being half the height and very much smaller than the representation of the solar panels, a sub-station or the fencing. It is understood that these will be much larger than the panels and fencing and probably bigger than the switchgear housing.

See the response to Question 1(c) below in relation to the possible siting of battery storage in the Fuller Street area – the comments relating to the cabling apply equally to the installation of battery storage in that area.

The information states that the battery storage units are safe as they are protected by cooling systems and the danger of fire is negligible. It is noted that similar units in use have been in place for a very limited time compared to the anticipated lifespan of this project. It is worrying that no information is provided on action expected to contain any fire or explosion that might occur or the effect in terms of a possible pollution incident arising from any such event.

Subject to that, see the response to Question 6 below for comment on the battery storage as a component of the proposals as a whole.

(c) The cable routes and grid connection?

See 1(a) above relating to the lack of information and as a result the inability to provide meaningful responses or draw substantive conclusions.

Information provided is not clear as per the applicant/proposer's intentions in relation to the cabling and its specifications. A critical question needs to be addressed:
Are the cables to be underground or overhead?

This is not a credible position. Cabling is a crucial part of this engineering project and the applicant/proposer must have determined what cabling will be required. Perhaps this omission boils down to cost? Is the applicant/proposer willing to voluntarily spend money to minimize the visual and environmental detriment of this project?

The suggested positioning of battery storage in the Fuller Street area would be entirely inappropriate. It would be difficult to access and would have a major environmental impact including a road and bridge across the Ter. This would extend the site unnecessarily into unspoilt countryside to the north and leave the battery storage exposed.

If the battery were to be situated in the middle of the site instead of Fuller Street, it would be away from roads and public access. It would thereby minimize the detrimental effect on its visual amenity. It would be a more secure location for potentially hazardous installations and mitigate the danger posed by them to the public.

If the battery storage is placed in the Fuller Street position as indicated on the plan, the attendant cabling connections would have to cross the River Ter and 'The Essex Way'. This would negatively impact an important walking route and would be rendered objectionable to countryside walkers.

Subject to that, see the response to Question 6 below for comment on the cabling as a component of the proposals as a whole.

(d) The construction and operation of Longfield Solar Farm?

See the response to Question 1(b) above relating to the lack of information and as a result the inability to provide meaningful responses or draw substantive conclusions. Among the issues that are not feasible to assess at present are the:

- (i) Light pollution from industrial lighting
- (ii) Noise and low frequency hum and vibration from the operation of the equipment
- (iii) Danger of explosion of lithium batteries
- (iv) General effects on health of the equipment and its operation.

There is no doubt that the construction will be disruptive. This is compounded by the fact that no real indication of how this upheaval and the effect of ongoing operations can be minimized by the final agreed location of the PVs, battery storage, substations and ancillary features.

Subject to that, see the response to Question 6 below for comment on the proposals as a whole.

2. Are there any local environmental enhancements you feel could be included as part of the scheme?

This is a most aesthetically pleasing and un-spoilt piece of countryside. It has been traditionally farmed for hundreds of years. As the site stands, it does not require any enhancement.

The solar farm would blight the landscape and any adjustments made to the proposed scheme would not begin to mitigate the resultant environmental damage.

In order to give a meaningful answer to this question, results from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) need to be known. It would be helpful to be notified as to whom - what body or institution - would be carrying out this exercise to confirm objectivity and impartiality.

3. Do you have any comments on how the scheme could contribute to local employment and skills development?

The construction phase will no doubt be carried out by major national civil and electrical engineering contractors. They will import the skilled personnel required to carry out the work. There is insufficient skilled labour in Hatfield Peverel and Terling to contribute in any significant extent to the construction process which will in any event be temporary.

In operation, solar farms are not labour intensive. Maintenance of the major units such as switch gear etc. tends to comprise significant works carried out periodically and therefore suitably skilled labour will be imported from time-to-time to undertake it. The small number of people employed in this activity in Hatfield Peverel and Terling goes no way near to justify or outweigh the disadvantages of the scheme.

Further information is needed to answer this question. The applicant/proposer should be able to provide information from similar projects but it is likely the contribution will be relatively small.

4. Do you have any information relevant to the scheme and/or local environment which you think we should take into account?

The area in question is a quiet and attractive part of rural Essex. It is a pocket of countryside that is much loved by walkers and cyclists. The solar farm would constitute an industrialisation of this piece of countryside and thereby blight the landscape.

The land in question is also best and most versatile agricultural land. The resultant food production loss would be ill-advised on sustainability grounds.

An email reply from Longfield Solar Farm has suggested the expectation is to generate 350MW. This would require over 1 million PV panels and an area of around 500 acres (208 ha). This calculation is based on an analysis of 5 existing or planned solar farms.

See also the response to Question 6 below.

5. Is there anything you would like to know more about the next round of consultation events?

As per the above listing (i)-(viii) in response to question 1(a), a great deal of information will be required as to the extent, positioning, size, height, visual amenity, light pollution and noise in relation to the engineering components. It is imperative that the specifics of the solar panels, switch gear and other ancillary equipment - battery storage, cabling, security fencing and industrial lighting will be forthcoming. This pre-offering of data by the applicant/proposer is critical if the next round of consultation is to be useful or indeed credible as a consultation exercise.

Information on the consultation procedures are clearly required and are awaited. They should be not merely in outline but adequately detailed.

6. Do you have any further comments?

Insufficient information has been supplied by the applicant/proposer. As a result, the Parish Council are unable to provide meaningful responses or draw substantive conclusions. The Council can merely comment in general terms as to the selection of this site and the effect of the proposal on it.

The generation of renewable energy is both noble and essential. Any major engineering project to generate it will come with disadvantages and involve compromise. A green energy solution however does not imply an unfettered license to carry out projects where the benefit delivered is outweighed by damage to the environment. It is a matter of balance and proportionality. The Longfield Solar Farm project falls foul of this test because:

- (i) The site - and its environs - comprises Grade 2 agricultural land which is a finite resource. It is a resource that is in limited supply. The site is a tract of land that is essential to the maintenance of food security in a small island country with a large population. The appropriate location for solar panel farms is on industrial land or alongside 'dead' ground such as motorways. Panels attached to new build housing and industrial units can also make a significant contribution. If the sacrifice of agricultural land is necessary and unavoidable, it certainly should not be agricultural land graded 1 to 3.
- (ii) The site area has enormous visual amenity having been traditionally farmed for hundreds of years. The imposition on this landscape of such imposing industrial installations - many surrounded by high security fencing and industrial lighting - would result in the total destruction of the landscape's visual amenity.
- (iii) Power generation - green or otherwise - is an industrial use. It remains to be seen whether the battery storage component is classified as green energy.
- (iv) There are many more suitable sites for solar farms in Essex and the South East of England. It appears that no other sites are under consideration and evaluation. Instead of that, it seems that the only reasons for this particular site being considered is because the grid runs through it and it is being supported by a willing land-owner. These reasons are not sufficient to outweigh the significant disadvantages of the scheme in this location or the failure to seek alternative, more suitable sites.
- (v) No consideration appears to have been given to the effect of changes in technology in a quickly evolving environment over the lifespan of the project. This could result in further large-scale rounds of disruption on the scale of the original construction as equipment is refurbished or replaced.
- (vi) Will associated infrastructure be removed on decommissioning and what exactly will they be i.e. access tracks, construction sites and so on?
- (vii) The local roads which will be used for construction and ongoing maintenance are woefully inadequate for the purpose some being very narrow in places. Large vehicles trying to pass other traffic could cause serious degradation of the byways.

In conclusion, Hatfield Peverel Parish Council believe it is ill-conceived to allocate this land to solar generation and energy storage. In this location the impact on the rural landscape setting and loss of agricultural land would be total devastation. The infrastructure of the site is wholly unsuitable during construction and operation phases. The disadvantages of the scheme in its proposed location far outweigh any purported benefits. The solar panel farm and battery storage should be sited elsewhere - in a more sustainable location.