

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Appledore,
Ashford,
Kent, [REDACTED]

11th March 2025

**Comments on the Application to Construct a Solar Farm at Stone Street, Aldington, Ashford, Kent,
and associated documentation.**

I am a Countryside Access Warden for Kent County Council, Footpath Officer for Appledore Parish Council, and a member of the Botanical Society of the British Isles, and the British Pteridological Society.

I am a lover of the countryside, a user of many of the paths over the proposed development (I belong to the Aldington walkers group), and a beneficiary of the views and rural ambience that this stretch of the East Stour valley affords.

I am in favour of solar power generation as part of the UK energy “mix”, although it must be accepted that solar power tends to be generated when demand for power is at its lowest.

We must also accept that the greenhouse gas saving from solar “farms” on greenfield sites must be offset by the consequent loss of the CO₂ sequestration capacity of grass and other land, to say nothing of its agricultural use. This is why the ignoring of a comparable area of brownfield development capacity scarcely a mile from Stone Street is such an egregious omission in the applicant’s submission. I am referring to the Inland Border Facility at Sevington, with its associated lorry parks and industrial development. I note that France requires all new car parks above a certain size, to be roofed with solar panels. Solar panels do not seem to be a requirement for the large number of housing developments around Ashford.

I attended the hearing that related to The PROW section. Ten footpaths will either disappear or lose sections. The knock-on effect is far worse as connectivity with other paths in the network is broken. The provision of alternative path(s) is not a substitute. No-one will walk from A to B along a linear or dog-legged path between fences or high hedges through solar panels unless they absolutely have to. A number of these paths cross the river East Stour. Such pleasing places!

The applicant apparently obtained an assessment of the visual impact and environmental damage as “mild to moderate”. To a user of these paths, the damage is clearly “major”. A ten-metre-wide path between Mersham and Aldington will provide no pleasure. The diversion proposals (claiming an increase in length of no more than 18% (!)) amount to no more than an academic “box-ticking” exercise. The proposed development is sandwiched between the “permanent daylight” of the Inland Border Facility and a proposed new housing development at Otterpool, to the East. This oasis between Mersham and Aldington is of especial value.

The statement that “biodiversity will be increased by 100%” (in contrast to a government target of a “10% increase in biodiversity”) is meaningless and without definition. It is hard to see any increase of this in the vast proportion of the area that will be under panels. Biodiversity cannot be instantly created. It subtly evolves. For instance, it takes 50 years for new woodland to mature in biodiversity terms; longer than the proposed life of the “farm”. The late Oliver Rackham in his landmark book –

Woodlands - in the New Naturalist series (No. 100) says that "planting trees is a failure of conservation". Once this ecosystem is destroyed it can never be restored. It is also naïve to expect sheep to be effectively grazed beneath solar panels (as depicted in the brochures). Sun and rain do not pass through solar panels.

In conclusion, the attractive countryside, the rural ambience, the views from Aldington and Mersham over the East Stour valley; all are reasons why people choose to live in this part of Kent. Enjoyment of them, and access to them, is vital to the physical and mental well-being of those who live, work and walk here. The desecration of this priceless asset, particularly when alternatives so readily exist, cannot be justified.

(signed in the original) Paul Ripley, BVM&S, MRCVS