

WRITTEN REPRESENTATION RELATING TO EN010085 – Cleve Hill Solar Park

1 Introduction

This is a joint representation opposing the development of the Cleve Hill Solar Park submitted on behalf of the Ramblers, Faversham Footpaths Group, Swale Footpaths Group and the Open Spaces Society. Faversham Footpaths and Swale Footpaths Groups are independent local walking groups who are associate members of the Ramblers.

I am Ian Wild, Coastal Access Officer for Kent, and I represent the Ramblers who are stakeholders in helping Natural England develop the England Coast Path. I have held this voluntary post for ten years. I have walked and surveyed the entire Kent coastline.

To avoid repeating the representations of other organisations and individuals, our representation mainly relates to the Principal Issue of "Landscape and visual effects". However, I have listed all the Principal Issues and indicated where we have a view.

2 Principal Issues

2.1 Biodiversity and nature conservation (including Habitats Regulations Assessment)

We share the concerns of other organisations more directly concerned with wildlife as to the impact on birds, in particular, and habitat loss. As walkers we derive great enjoyment from the area's distinctive flora and fauna. It is immaterial to us that it is classified as low grade arable farmland. It still changes throughout the seasons and there is great pleasure to be gained by the sighting of a flock of Brent geese grazing in the winter, a fox hunting along the reed beds or an occasional marsh harrier.

2.2 Compulsory Acquisition

No representation.

2.3 Cultural heritage

No representation.

2.4 Draft Development Consent Order (DCO)

No representation

2.5 Environmental Statement general

No representation.

2.6 Landscape and visual effects

This, from our perspective as walkers, is the key issue as it impacts so much on our enjoyment of the area. The Saxon Shore Way Long Distance Footpath (ZR484/CW55), which will also be the route of the England Coast Path, runs along the northern and western boundaries of the proposed park along the top of the sea defence. The solar panels will be located only 70-80m or closer from the path with limited or no vegetation screening. The

photomontages confirm that the solar panels will completely dominate the landscape for some 5 km of the Path creating a monotonous industrial landscape. It will take at least an hour to walk from one end to the other. The photomontages of this area are in panoramic mode which is not how the human eye works. The solar panels will appear a lot nearer and more dominant in real life. While there are other stretches of the Kent section of the England Coast Path that are heavily industrialised and not particularly pleasant walking, none are new or as long or so flat and repetitive.

The footpath (ZR485) that crosses the site will become an alley dominated by the panels on either side.

The Graveney marshes are a very special area with a unique beauty – huge horizons, both out to sea towards Sheppey and across the flat landscape to the Blean. It is their very remoteness and isolation and the feeling of “being away from it all” that is their attraction for walkers.

While most people associate the iconic White Cliffs with the Kent coastline, the reality is that much is made up of reclaimed marshland. This particular section of the Coast Path will be almost unique in that the path is along the top of the sea defence with a view of both the sea and over open farmland. Along most of the Coast Path, where it borders reclaimed marshland, it will be located on the landward side below the sea defence. Where it goes along the top, most of the inland view is spoilt by urbanisation, that is, an adjacent road or housing as along the Romney Marsh.

2.7 Noise

I quote a colleague “One of the great attractions of being out on this section of the coast is the virtual complete absence of man-made noise. I was at Castle Coot recently and was struck by the fact that all I could hear was the cry of gulls, terns and oystercatchers and the sea breeze”.

This could be lost.

2.8 Socio- economic

People visit this area because it is accessible and unique. If it is spoilt for their enjoyment then they simply won't come and this will impact on local businesses. Both the Sportsman Inn at Seasalter and the Ferry Inn at Harty on Sheppey, which would overlook the site, have both recently invested in holiday accommodation.

One of the main reasons for the England Coast Path is that it will bring people and business to the coast. This has been recognised by both the conservative and labour governments who have held office during its delivery and why the target for its completion was brought forward. The Welsh Coast Path, which has been open some years, has proved immensely successful. If this section is marred by this development, then this area will not benefit.

2.9 Traffic and transport

No representation.

2.10 **Water, flooding and coastal defence**

No representation.

2.11 **Need**

We do not dispute the need for renewable energy but we do dispute the need to locate a huge solar park in this location. The prime reason appears to be that it is immediately adjacent to a point of connection to the National Grid!

3 **Conclusion**

While we fully support the provision of renewable energy we are totally opposed to this application on the grounds of its vast scale which would have a massively detrimental environmental and visual impact, ruining the enjoyment of the many people who clearly take great pleasure in walking the paths in this area.

Ian Wild

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Coastal Access Officer for Kent

The Ramblers