

Planning and Development





Ask for: Matthew Durling
Email: [REDACTED]@ashford.gov.uk

Civic Centre
Tannery Lane
Ashford, Kent
TN23 1PL
(01233) 331111
www.ashford.gov.uk

The Planning Inspectorate

By e-mail to:
stonestreetgreensolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

 @ashfordcouncil
 AshfordBoroughCouncil

Dear Sir/Madam

Date: 05/11/2024

Site: Stonestreet Green Solar
Proposal: Application for an Order granting Development Consent
Issue: Suggested locations for site inspections

Following the Planning Inspectorate's decision on 09/07/24 to accept the application for a Development Consent Order ('DCO') for the Stonestreet Green Solar project, Ashford Borough Council (the 'Council') has registered as an **Interested Party** at the Examination.

I write in the Council's capacity as an Interested Party with reference to the Draft Examination Timetable set out in Annex D of the Rule 6 letter dated 22 October 2024. Item 1 of Annex D relates to Procedural Deadline A and states that Tuesday 5 November 2024 is the deadline (Deadline 1) for receipt by the ExA of matters including '*Suggested locations for site inspections (Accompanied or Unaccompanied), including justification, for consideration by the ExA*'.

This letter contains our suggested locations for additional site inspections in accordance with Item 3 of Annex G (Procedural Decisions made by the Examining Authority) relating to '*Accompanied Site Inspection – suggested locations*'. I confirm that we have reviewed both the Examining Authority's Note of an Unaccompanied Site Inspection (USI1) on Thursday 11 July 2024 and the Examining Authority's Note of an Unaccompanied Site Inspection (USI) Inspection 2: Inspection of general site and immediate environs 26 September 2024 with specific focus on viewpoints and public rights of way.

The Council is pleased that the ExA has inspected parts of the site and has walked some sections of the various Public Rights of Way (PRoW) that cross it. The Council is however concerned that in the context of the eighteen (18) Public Footpaths and one (1) Byway Open to all Traffic affected and within the site boundary the sections walked appear to be very limited. In the absence of any plan appended to USI1 or any cross referencing between the plan and text in USI2 it is difficult to understand or interpret with any certainty the precise extent of the ExA's site inspections to date.

There are eighteen (18) Public Footpaths and one (1) Byway Open to all Traffic affected and within the site boundary. Public Footpaths: AE385, AE442, AE370, AE377, AE378, AE448, AE447, AE431, AE438, AE657, AE457, AE656, AE454, AE475, AE455, AE474,

AE436 (Ashford) & HE436 (Folkestone & Hythe). Byway Open to all Traffic: AE396 (Ashford).

The value of the PRoW network in this location is wide ranging but includes providing the means for residents and visitors to access and appreciate the countryside and local and wider landscapes for personal health and wellbeing. The PRoW also have a role in enhancing community connectivity and cohesion. To fully appreciate the scale and extent of the proposed development and the likely impacts of it on the experience of users of the extensive PRoW network in this location the Council respectfully requests that the ExA walks the following sections of the PRoW network (with reference to the extract from the Visual Appraisal Plan at Environmental Statement Figure 8.9 - Examination Library reference APP-050 below):

- Walk PRoW A385 in a southeasterly direction from Viewpoint 2 in Laws Lane to Viewpoint 5. This would enable the ExA to appreciate the commentary in Historic England's Relevant Representation relating to opportunities to reduce the harm to the setting of the Grade II* listed Stonelees House through reducing the number of solar panels at the south ends of fields 3 and 7;
- Walk PRoW AE474 in a westerly direction from Goldwell Lane to Viewpoint 28 on Church Lane. This route would enable the ExA to appreciate the commentary in Historic England's Relevant Representation relating to opportunities to reduce the harm to the setting of the Grade I listed Church of St Martin, Aldington as experienced in key views from the west;
- Walk PRoW AE376 in a westerly direction from near to Viewpoint 19 on Station Road and bearing right onto PRoW AE430 to Viewpoint 30. This would provide the ExA with the panoramic view south of the landscape towards the distinctive rising land comprising Aldington Ridge referred to in the Council's Relevant Representation;
- Walk PRoW AE428 from Viewpoint 30 in a southerly direction then bearing northwest on PRoW AE378 adjacent to the East Stour river and AE370 to Viewpoint 18 then walk PRoW AE370 from Viewpoint 18 in a southerly direction then bearing left on PRoW AE377 to Handen Farm and Viewpoint 12. This would enable the ExA to fully appreciate the density of the PRoW network in this part of the application site and the distinctive rising topography of the land referred to in the Council's Relevant Representation;
- Walk PRoW AE431 from Viewpoint 30 in a southerly direction towards Goldwell Lane. This would enable the ExA to appreciate the impact of the development in field parcels 25, 24 and 23 on the PRoW and road network in this location which forms a key rural entrance/approach into Aldington. This walk will also enable the ExA to appreciate the proximity of the development to the Grade II listed Evedgate Mill to the west.

The Council also requests that the ExA inspects the site from the following Viewpoints (with reference to the extract from the Visual Appraisal Plan at Environmental Statement Figure 8.9 - Examination Library reference APP-050 below):

- Viewpoint 11. This is identified within Historic England's Relevant Representation as relevant to appreciating the impact of the development on the setting of the Grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist, Mersham. As noted in the Council's Relevant Representation, this location on the northern side of the ridge is one with significant presence in the landscape and affords attractive long views towards the village of Mersham (which is accessible via PRoW), and beyond that, the town of Ashford is also discernible.
- Viewpoints 31 and 32. This is relevant to appreciate the spatial relationship and separation between the historic settlements of Aldington and Mersham and their churches.

The entire PRoW network and viewpoints noted are publicly accessible and no specific access arrangements are required. The site locations identified in this letter are therefore capable of being viewed on an unaccompanied basis; however on the basis of the nature and extent of the walking routes suggested the Council would be pleased to accompany the ExA as appropriate.

Yours faithfully

Matthew Durling
Deputy Team Leader
Strategic Development & Delivery Team

**Extract from the Visual Appraisal Plan at Environmental Statement Figure 8.9
(Examination Library reference APP-05)**

