

As the local Kent County Council member, I support the objections raised by Aldington & Bonnington Parish Council, Aldington and Mersham Support Group, Katie Lam MP, Cllr. Paul Bartlett and the many local residents who have expressed their concerns to me. The main issues are:

1. Landscape and Visual Effects

The rural character of the area, including the iconic Aldington Ridge, would undergo significant changes due to the size of the solar installation. Potential mitigation efforts, such as planting trees for better screening or lowering panel heights, might help but are unlikely to fully maintain the views that local residents value.

2. Effects on Local Communities

This project would disrupt numerous public rights of way (PROWs), including historic paths, which reduces both their recreational appeal and cultural significance.

3. Construction Traffic Impacts

The construction phase will result in increased traffic volumes, creating safety hazards on narrow rural roads which are unsuitable in particular for HGVs. The Smeeth crossroads is a notorious accident blackspot. The impact on Goldwell Lane will be considerable.

The traffic management plan does not adequately address these concerns. The minibus suggestion is not practical.

4. Environmental and Biodiversity Concerns

The development involves loss of agricultural land and risks damaging ecologically sensitive areas, threatening wildlife habitats and disrupting natural systems like soil quality and water flow.

5. Heritage and archaeological concerns - as articulated by Historic England

6. Battery Storage Concerns

It is well documented that large-scale battery systems located close to residential dwellings present significant risks, including fire hazards. Noise is also a concern.

7. Non-compliance with LPA and NPPF planning policies:

ABC's Policy ENV10 clearly states that solar developments must not significantly harm landscapes, natural or heritage assets, generate unacceptable traffic levels, negatively impact residential amenities, or fail to restore the site after use.

This proposal falls short of these requirements. The development would become an overwhelming and intrusive feature, detracting from the village's character and compromising the area's natural beauty (referencing National Policy Statement Para 2.51.2).

The proposed 40-year operational lifespan is incompatible with guidelines set out in both ABC and the National Policy Statement EN-3, which recommend a maximum lifespan of 25 years due to the limited durability of photovoltaic panels.

Furthermore, ABC's guidance for large-scale solar PV arrays emphasizes the need to preserve agricultural use and promote biodiversity on greenfield sites. A minimum 5-meter gap between arrays is required to support biodiversity. The application neglects this standard, contravening both ABC guidance and National Policy Statement (Para 2.50.10).

There is also a claim that ABC and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) policies may not directly influence the Planning Inspectorate's (PINS) decisions. This assertion could discourage public participation. However, the Planning Act 2008, along with NPPF and ABC policies, remains crucial and relevant in the decision-making process.

Conclusion:

The proposal is incompatible with both national and local planning policies. When combined with other issues—such as its environmental, visual, and operational failings—the location is clearly unsuitable for development, and the application should be rejected.