

Ashford Borough Council – summary of RR-018

The Council is an Interested Party and the local planning authority. Kent County Council ('KCC') is the relevant authority for a number of specialist area. The Council will support KCC but reserves that right to review and make further comment including any instances where views expressed by KCC conflict the Council's submissions.

The Council is committed to reducing the reliance on fossil fuels. It does not raise objection to the principle of large-scale solar photovoltaic generation developments subject to appropriate siting and contextually appropriate mitigation.

Context is critical in order to minimise impacts in a rural location. Countryside combined with topography creates landscapes with distinctive character and places with different settings. This creates local distinctiveness and sense of place.

Protecting countryside and landscape and public rights of way (PRoW) is an important aspect of the planning system. Doing so requires good 'macro-level' if National Policy Statement expectations and requirements are to be met. The Council requested information and analysis from the applicant at pre-application stage as to how such design had informed and shaped scheme extents and layout. This information was not forthcoming, and Design Review was not taken up.

The Council requested the applicant adopt design approaches including 'removal' of panels from higher ground, 'fragmentation' of the largest area of development to break up the scheme and softening by reducing proximity to PRoW and key approaches alongside tree and other planting. Softening would help reduce impacts on how PRoW AE474 is experienced and help reduce harm on the Grade 1 listed church.

Impacts on PRoW may displace use elsewhere. The applicant references PRoW enhancement and connectivity opportunities, but these are not taken forward into the proposals. Existing and new settlements would benefit from improved connectivity. An opportunity exists to help deliver such off-site aspects.

Cumulative impacts are important. The Council notes Written Ministerial Statements and the identified need to carefully consider and keep under review the issue of solar groupings and 'hot spots'. Existing solar development already exists east of the site, and more is proposed through application 22/00668/AS.

Summary	346 words
RR	4021 words