

WOODHAM WALTER PARISH COUNCIL

Response to Planning Application to be determined by Maldon District Council.

Response from: Woodham Walter Parish Council
Planning Application Reference: 23/01036/SCR
Location: Land East of Tom Tit Lane, Maldon Road, Woodham Mortimer
Proposal: EIA Screening Opinion request for a proposed solar photovoltaic farm together with associated infrastructure.

The application location is stated as Land East of Tom Tit Lane, Maldon Road, Woodham Mortimer, however a significant proportion of the proposal is on land south of, and adjacent to, Old London Road in the Parish of Woodham Walter. It is therefore considered that the described location should be corrected to reflect the fact that the proposed solar photovoltaic farm spans across, and will have a major impact on, two parishes.

Woodham Walter Parish Council have considered the screening opinion request at a meeting on Monday 13th November 2023 and is unanimously of the opinion that a full Environmental Impact statement is extremely necessary for the following reasons:

Natural Resources

- The location and the whole of the Woodham Walter Parish is classified as an arcadian village within the adopted Woodham Walter Village Design Statement and the Maldon District Design Guide. With only 6 such arcadian villages in the district we consider that the impact on this Arcadian landscape should be fully explored.
- According to Natural England Regional Land Classification maps, Woodham Walter including the proposed site falls into category 2 (Very good). The information available on land classification is therefore at variance and further independent investigation is necessary in an EIA.
- Wood Corner Grove (Ma21) is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and is adjacent to the proposed solar farm. This has been identified and assessed by the Essex Wildlife Trust as a site of biodiversity value and county level of significance. Independent investigations are therefore necessary in an EIA.

Pollution and Nuisances

- There will be an impact for those residents in the immediate vicinity of the site, specifically those at Wood Corner Caravan Site which is in very close proximity and would undoubtedly be impacted both during construction and operation phases of the project by noise and light pollution. The residential properties at Lodge Farm and Willow Cottages are also within a very close distance.

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- The current location is rural in nature with little or no sound or light pollution. Therefore, even though a noise assessment may be submitted with any planning application, an EIA is required.

Population and Human Health

- There could be an impact on the population and human health of those residents in the immediate vicinity of the site, specifically those at Wood Corner Caravan Site and the residential dwellings at Lodge Farm and Willow Cottages.
- This would be a large-scale industrial use of agricultural land in very close proximity to residential caravans and dwellinghouses.
- The potential environmental impact on adjacent residents and properties, including the Wood Corner site, during construction and use requires evaluating especially during the construction phase and references throughout to CEMP's and DEMP's are suitably vague as to the extent of impact.

Biodiversity (Species and Habitats)

- The proposal has the potential to impact on the biodiversity of the location and wider area (Species and habitats) including on areas designated for nature conservation or designated landscapes.
- The impact of the proposals on the existing hedging and tree boundaries of the current fields with their potential removal will have a resultant impact on wildlife movements appears understated. Any hedge and tree destruction or modification will also affect the long-view vistas as detailed in this response and requires detailed consideration.
- The impact on the biodiversity of the location and wider area (Species and Habitats), including areas designated for nature conservation or designated landscapes, appears to be underestimated.
- A Woodham Walter SSSI in near proximity and the colonies of Barbastelle bats from the Woodham Walter SSSI requires full evaluation as the proposed site appears to be within foraging range.
- Wood Corner Grove (Ma21) is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and is adjacent to the proposed solar farm. This has been identified and assessed by the Essex Wildlife Trust as a site of biodiversity value and county level of significance. Independent investigations are therefore necessary in an EIA.

Landscape and Visual

- Woodham Walter is considered to be an Arcadian village set within a true Arcadian landscape and great importance should be placed on the arcadian landscape (as described in the adopted Woodham Walter Village Design Statement).

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- The Maldon District Design Guide which at B04_04 describes what an Arcadian village is and emphasises that Woodham Walter is one of only six in the District.
- Impact on the long, unfettered views needs evaluation.
- The visibility of the solar farm from public footpaths FP17 and FP16 and Bridleway BR30 and from the wider village area. This will require full evaluation as there is insufficient information submitted.
- Because of its Arcadian character Woodham Walter is a popular destination for walkers and the footpaths within the Parish are used extensively.
- the impact of the addition of light and noise pollution on the entirely dark skies and the peace and tranquillity of the area
- the urbanisation of the outskirts of the village
- The visual impact on the topography within the Arcadian landscape appears to have been underestimated especially the site setting in the open vistas from a large area of the very rural WW parish. It is considered that this impact from the wider village area will be highly significant. This applies to not only the solar panels but also the 2m high fencing, CCTV, security lighting, alarms and the location of the necessary infrastructure of internal roadways, cable paths inverters and other associated structures.

Transport and Access

- the impact of the addition of light and noise pollution on the entirely dark skies and the peace and tranquillity of the area.
- The impact of the proposals on the road infrastructure appears underestimated and requires detail consideration. Access to the site from Old London Road will require access from the A414 and is a narrow country lane with very restricted width and unsuitable for large commercial vehicles. The road is already heavily used and any major construction project involving large HGV's will impact on the environment and village residents.
- There will be an impact on local infrastructure including access to the site along Old London Road from both east and west, but particularly from the east and especially for large construction vehicles.
- Tom Tit Lane is an extremely narrow lane with a 6'6" width restriction and is unsuitable for HGV's. The route along Old London Road contains narrow bends and is also unsuitable for large vehicles.
- The visibility of the solar farm from public footpaths FP17 and FP16 and Bridleway BR30 and from the wider village area. This will require full evaluation as there is insufficient information submitted. Because of its Arcadian character Woodham Walter is a popular destination for walkers and the footpaths within the Parish are used extensively.

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Land Use

- The loss of agricultural land is of concern and it is not considered that the impact of this has been fully evaluated. It is stated that other agricultural uses could be considered but have not been evaluated.
- For example, the idea that Sheep can graze amongst solar panels is not unanimously considered ideal and with the difficulties of farming in this environment for example as described in a Farmers Weekly article dated 17 October 2022
 - only using specific breeds,
 - minimal rounding up due to danger of injury from the mounts of the panels,
 - managing the grazing can be tricky.
 - Not possible to reseed and impact of shade - so there is nutritional penalty
 - Stocking rate has to be reduced as quality of grass becomes poorer.

The reality is why would, and how many farmers actually graze sheep within solar panels?

- The cumulative effect of a significant number of such developments within the area, either constructed, approved or proposed will result in a very significant loss of agricultural land to the detriment of food sustainability. This does not appear to have been fully evaluated.
- The site joins with another earmarked for development (between The Maldon Cemetery and Wood Corner on Old London Road) . This huge site has been earmarked as suitable for housing development (MAL/HY15) and already one proposal for part of the site (Maldon Woods) is at a pre-application stage.

Cumulative Effects

- The cumulative environmental impact appears to be underestimated. The proposal, when considered with other current development proposals such as Maldon Woods will in effect link WW with Maldon. This will create an urban and industrial environment within a rural one thereby destroying the Arcadian village and landscape and creating an industrial aspect to a village gateway.
- The potential is for there to be housing up Old London Rd from Maldon Cemetery to Wood Corner and then for this Solar application to be located from there up to Tom Tit Lane. In the event that both areas were developed (one for housing, the other for a solar farm) Woodham Walter would be subsumed into Maldon, the character of the village and the local environment destroyed. The huge site that has been earmarked as suitable for housing development (MAL/HY15) has only one proposal for part of it at the moment (Maldon Woods) and that is only at a pre-application stage but this should still be assessed.

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- The loss of farmland should be considered, not just at this site but the cumulative effect of similar proposals
- The cumulative impact caused by the number of solar farms approved for the local vicinity.
 - Approved solar farm sites at
 - Danbury
 - Hazeleigh, Woodham Mortimer
 - as well as the wider Essex area such as the large solar farm at Terling.
 - Those waiting decisions from the LPA or in progress such as
 - 23/00807/FULM at Purleigh
 - Southminster
 - Marsh Road Burnham-On-Crouch Essex

Therefore, Woodham Walter Parish Council RESOLVED to respond that this council considers an Environmental Impact Assessment is required due to the significant environmental impact that the proposal will have on Woodham Walter and the Maldon District.

Signed: 

Date: 24/11/23