

Little Heath Lane Solar Park

February 2022

We've been contacted by members of the local community who have asked us for advice because they are concerned that a commercial developer wants to build an industrial-scale solar farm at Little Heath Lane. We share these concerns. We believe everyone should be getting ready to fight this proposal.

We are CPRE Hertfordshire, the countryside charity. We campaign to protect, promote and enhance the local countryside for everyone to value and enjoy. Here is an overview of our advice.

What is the status of 'Little Heath Lane Solar Park'?

While not yet at the formal planning application stage, the developer submitted a request for a screening opinion relating to the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to Dacorum Borough Council in November 2021. See application number 21/04395/SCE at

<https://planning.dacorum.gov.uk/publicaccess/search.do?action=simple&searchType=Application>

The Dacorum planning officer issued a 'delegated report' only two weeks after the developer's request saying that a full Environmental Statement is not required. Worryingly, the report included this summary statement: *"There would be no significant impact on the environment in relation to population and human health; biodiversity; land, soil, water, air and climate; material assets, cultural heritage and the landscape that cannot be considered and if necessary mitigated as part of the normal consideration of a planning application."* We believe this position is not appropriate and does not follow best practice.

The developer is now holding an online public consultation at <https://www.littleheathlanesolarpark.co.uk/> to gather views of the local community. Although this has no formal standing, the developer may cite any supporting comments, and/or the lack of opposing comments, in the eventual planning application.

➔ ***It's important that everyone responds with their concerns and objections.***

Isn't solar energy a good idea?

In the wake of COP26 and increasing awareness of the need to urgently mitigate climate change, it's tempting to think that any form of renewable energy is a good thing. We believe there is a role for solar in our collective action against climate change, but not at the expense of the environment.

We want to see solar panels on rooftops, not on productive agricultural fields. The trade association for the solar industry, Solar Energy UK, estimates there are over 617,000 acres of suitable, south-facing commercial rooftops available for solar panels. We want to see these rooftops fully utilised for solar energy before building ground-mounted solar "farms" in the countryside.

Also, solar energy is far less efficient than other renewables. The energy production efficiency of solar is estimated at circa 11-15%, while that of offshore wind is circa 50%. Solar panels produce very little electricity at night and when it's cloudy or rainy.

How do solar farms harm the environment?

1. Harm to designated protected land. The Little Heath Lane site is in the Green Belt and in the setting of (i.e. within 500 metres of) the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These are protected from inappropriate development in both National and local planning policy. Installation of thousands of photovoltaic panels and their steel / aluminium support frames, inverter / transformer stations, switchgear, storage buildings, perimeter fencing and security cameras is an industrialisation of the landscape, which is by definition inappropriate development.
2. Loss of productive agricultural land. The site is currently productive arable cropland. In accord with government policy, agricultural land should be used for food production.
3. Destruction of landscape character. The site is a prominent location on sloping land, open and visible from all directions. This image shows the proposed site from Little Hay golf course and The Hertfordshire Way long distance footpath. The open character of the landscape will be destroyed by the rows of glass panels and the security fencing.



Proposed site of Little Heath Lane Solar Park. Photo credit: Elizabeth Hamilton, January 2022

4. Harm to wildlife. The habitats of many species of wildlife would be compromised. Birds can be injured by mistaking the panels for water, mammals can be injured or killed if they get trapped in the fencing.

What can we do right now?

We think that a strong local campaign can make a real difference to the outcome of solar farm planning applications. Make neighbours aware of the proposal and set up a contact list. Use Facebook to promote the campaign more widely. Contact your parish, town and Borough Councillors and your MP to let them know about the proposal and your objections.

➔ **And above all else, please join us!** We are a membership charity and by joining CPRE Hertfordshire (£36 per year for an individual) you will get campaign updates and detailed advice on how to respond to the anticipated Little Heath planning application. It's quick and easy to join on our website at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-member/>