

GRAVENEY with GOODNESTONE PARISH COUNCIL

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National Infrastructure Planning
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

By email to: CleveHillSolarPark@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Your ref: EN010085

23rd June 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

Application by Cleve Hill Solar Park Limited for an Order Granting Development Consent for the Cleve Hill Solar Park Project

Following the Preliminary Hearing held on 30th May and the Rule 8 letter published on 7th June, Graveney with Goodnestone Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to make Written Representation on the application for a Development Consent Order, as contained within this letter.

Graveney with Goodnestone Parish Council is the most local tier of government and represents those who will be most affected by this proposal, namely, the residents of the twin villages of Graveney and Goodnestone. As such, this Written Representation does not seek to repeat information and opinions which can be found elsewhere, such as in submissions from CPRE, Swale Borough Council, or other such organisations, but to provide a local opinion which can only be obtained from those living in these villages. Our representation therefore does not rely on planning policy, scientific knowledge of the habitat or ecosystems contained within it, but on local feeling and local knowledge, which can only come from truly local people.

Landscape

Graveney and Goodnestone have been settlements since the 9th century and their existence predates the Domesday Book. The larger village, Graveney, is characterised by the flat expansive nature of its marshes. People choosing to live in Graveney do so because of the wide, open and remote landscape; a landscape which is becoming increasingly difficult to find in this area of the country. Graveney Marshes are well known locally and a haven for not only wildlife, but also those seeking solitude, peace and remoteness. Visitors to the area come because of these characteristics, not despite them. The installation of solar panels, covering the marshes at the density and height proposed would destroy the landscape and its attractiveness to residents and

visitors. The applicant seems unaware, or perhaps dismissive, of the idea that such an open, expansive and wild landscape could be attractive and desirable, maintaining that the introduction of 880,000 solar panels, up to 3.9m high, across an area of 958 acres, with a larger site boundary area extending to 1,214 acres, could even be seen as ‘beneficial’. As the locally elected representative body, we find this attitude not only wrong but disrespectful to those who see beauty in this landscape and have chosen to live here.

Heritage

Graveney is home to a number of ‘heritage assets’, including All Saints Church, Graveney Court and Sparrow Court. There are, of course, other listed buildings, some outside Graveney itself, which will be affected but these are the ones that will experience the brunt of the application. To call them heritage assets, whilst being technically correct, entirely undermines their importance to the local community. As residential properties, Graveney Court and Sparrow Court are in private ownership, but they remain important, historic, 15th century buildings within the village and their entitlement to protection and longevity is indisputable. This application would have a highly detrimental effect on their setting and thus heritage value. As a place of worship that has stood since the 12th century, All Saints Church is more than just a heritage asset, it is history in material form and this medieval church has remained almost unaltered from its original design. Countless generations of local people, some of whom are still resident in the village, have worshiped there and commemorated life events there. A place of worship is more than a building, it is an ethos, an atmosphere, a character, and a large part of this is down to its setting. The installation of densely packed, elevated solar panels on what is currently an open long-distance view will materially affect the setting of the church and therefore its character and what makes it so valuable to the community. Screen planting, whilst perhaps more pleasant to look at than solar panels, would still interrupt the views that make the church so special and unique.

Traffic

Graveney and Goodnestone already have experience of a large scale construction scheme, when the London Array substation was constructed over the period 2009-2012 to serve the off shore wind farm. This project caused untold disruption to the life of the villages, with increased traffic generally, as well as a large number of HGVs travelling through the villages to reach the construction site. The verges were damaged, in many cases irreparably, and the roads suffered under the weight and volume of traffic. Graveney and Goodnestone have narrow roads, with the two mile primary route to the construction site having many width restrictions and blind bends, where it is often difficult for two cars to pass safely, let alone a car and an HGV or even worse, two HGVs. The railway bridge in the centre of the village is already a bottleneck, due to the road being almost single track and the hump causing poor visibility, the proximity of the school, its junction with Sandbanks Lane and the number of cars parking there regularly. The road, which is part of a National Cycle Route, is also very popular with cyclists, encouraged by the local pub formerly being a well known and publicised cycling café, with adjoining shop. Accidents and near misses are a regular occurrence and the parish council has investigated traffic calming measures on a number of occasions. The idea of another, larger, infrastructure project being constructed in Graveney is unthinkable. The management of the HGV movements through the village would be a logistical nightmare and would leave residents, many of whom are elderly,

and any remaining tourists unable to travel at will, and subject to the inconvenience, disruption and noise caused by vast amounts of heavy traffic travelling throughout most of the day for six days every week during the lengthy construction period.

In conclusion, Graveney with Goodnestone Parish Council cannot stress enough the highly detrimental and permanent effect this application would have on our parish if it were to be approved. We have left it to other bodies to provide information on planning policy and more specialised areas such as biodiversity and environmental concerns, but have sought to provide a tangible and authentic local viewpoint, which with all due respect, cannot be provided by less local bodies.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "SRatchford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'S' at the beginning.

Bex Ratchford
Parish Clerk
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