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Dear Sir/Madam,

**Development of a ground mounted solar farm with a generation capacity of up to 49.99 MW, together with associated infrastructure and landscaping at Land at Berden Hall Farm Dewes Green Road Berden – S62A/22/0006**

I am writing to object to the above proposed development on land outside Berden, Essex.

As a history graduate, longstanding President of the Tonbridge Historical Society and long-serving volunteer for two heritage organisations (National Trust, Tonbridge Castle), I disagree with the heritage statement commissioned by the developers, Statera, and its conclusion that the proposal site is of little importance from a heritage perspective.

Besides the loss of productive farmland and the several footpaths which provide a valued and much-loved public amenity, the following are important reasons to protect this land from insensitive, intrusive, industrial development:

1. There is a Grade I listed church, St Nicholas (not St James as erroneously stated in the report) within view from the site. Its tower currently presents a classic English country view from the fields in question, emerging from behind mature trees and visible from most parts of the proposal site, including the substation road and Ginns Road to the west and north respectively. In fact, the church tower is visible from almost every approach to Berden, underlining its importance to the village from earliest times – and it is still important to its residents, both those who worship there and those who simply value it for its beauty and historical/cultural significance.

2. The Crump, formerly known as Stocks Farm, is now a thatched family residence and no longer a working farm. Within its boundary is a ringwork, one of only c. 200 known ringworks nationally, and a scheduled monument. A wealth of interesting archaeological finds have been discovered there, and it remains to be professionally excavated. The statement by the developers' consultants, that The Crump is 'within the context of the electrical infrastructure' is misleading, as there is no electrical infrastructure at The Crump besides the usual powerline leading from a telegraph pole by the driveway entrance (in common with most rural properties in the area!) and a pylon some considerable distance away at the bottom of the lane next to the pond known as Easingwell. The views from The Crump are currently of peaceful farmland, with a small copse to the left of the house as it fronts Brick House Lane, and fields behind it as well as an ancient right of way, Blakings Lane, believed to have been in use by local people for over a thousand years, on its southernmost boundary. If the proposal is approved and the solar farm is built, The Crump will instead overlook a vast installation of solar panels surrounded by 2-metre high galvanised steel fencing. The photograph below shows the view of The Crump from the field opposite, and clearly shows that there is no electrical infrastructure nearby or on the land belonging to The Crump.



3. [Berden Hall](#) is described by Pevsner (1954) as a good example of a Jacobean hall, and although the consultants claim that it is not visible from the site, their survey was made in early summer when the belt of trees were in full leaf – the chimneys of the

hall are certainly visible in winter. The old vicarage is also very close to the proposal site, and in fact an ancient right of way leads through the vicarage garden and through nearby small fields to connect with the footpaths which cross and border the proposal site. As this description suggests, the solar farm would be installed on a historic and picturesque landscape, and would be permanent – 40 years, its estimated lifespan, is not temporary.

4. Finally, there is a second ringwork, last excavated in 1952, possibly older than the ringwork at The Crump and now almost erased by ploughing, which lies mainly (not partially, as the developers' consultants claim in their statement) within the red line of the proposed site in a field formerly known as Cumber Hills. The name is of significance, as solar farms are not recommended for sloping sites due to the glint and glare they produce, and the heritage consultants themselves concede that the overall site slopes from north-east to south-west by more than 10 metres.



*These pottery sherds were found on the surface of the soil just inside the field entrance to the field directly off Brick House End, not far from the ringwork motte Cumber Hills partially excavated in 1952. Note the tiny pieces of seashell which medieval potters mixed into the clay to prevent the vessels from cracking during firing. Note too that the smaller piece has traces of glaze. Old maps of Berden, see,*

*e.g., [REDACTED], show several farms or cottages on the edges of this field, which was not enclosed until the late nineteenth century.*

The ringwork motte, yet to be excavated using modern archaeological methods, is one of only c. 200 known nationally, and may explain why I have found fragments of medieval pottery (see above) in this field, which also contains traces of medieval field systems. A similar ringwork, discovered from the air in Bedfordshire, was subsequently granted protected status as a scheduled monument, and there is no reason to suppose that Cumber Hills, as it was once known, does not deserve to be listed as a scheduled monument too, though the extremely rapid process by which the application for the solar farm is being considered, sadly makes this unlikely to happen.

In conclusion, we cannot know what future generations will consider important to the history of our nation, but the landscape around Berden is rich in history and listed buildings. To cover this site in over 100,000 concrete pads without an independent survey to verify the claims of the developers' consultants as to its unimportance in heritage terms is surely reckless and unjustified.

Yours faithfully,

(Mrs) Patricia M. Mortlock