

Essex County Council
**Energy & Low Carbon
Environment & Climate Action**
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The Planning Inspectorate
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Date: 26/01/2023
Your ref.: S62A/22/0006

FAO Case Officer,

Re: S62A/22/0006 | Development of a ground mounted solar farm with a generation capacity of up to 49.99MW, together with associated infrastructure and landscaping at Berden Hall Farm, Ginns Road, Berden.

Thank you for providing Essex County Council (ECC) with the opportunity to assess and advise on the proposed energy & low carbon strategy/plans for the aforementioned planning application. Following our previous letter dated 31/08/2022, we would wish to maintain the comments below.

Energy & Low Carbon

ECC is committed to taking action on climate change and established the [Essex Climate Action Commission](#) (ECAC) in response to national requirements to reduce carbon emissions. The purpose of the Commission includes reducing the carbon footprint of ECC to make Essex a net zero County by 2050, mitigate the effects of climate change, and to explore how we attract investment in natural capital and low carbon growth, including renewable energy. As part of ECC's commitment, proposals to increase the amount of renewable energy generated in Essex that will help to reduce carbon emissions from the electricity grid, whilst also mitigating negative impacts, and maximising positive environmental and socioeconomic impacts are generally welcomed. The ECAC has recommended that '*Essex produces enough renewable energy within the county to meet its own needs by 2040*', with the commission seeing a critical role in this for large scale solar production but "*on available land without unduly compromising agricultural land*". The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG):

'Planning for renewable and low carbon energy' provides specific planning guidance relating to large scale ground-mounted solar farms including the need to make effective use of land by focussing large scale solar farms on previously developed and non-agricultural land, provided that it is not of high environmental value. Similarly ECC's position is that solar farms should initially sought to be sited on brownfield, non-agricultural land that is of lower agricultural class (grading of 3b or lower) in order to preserve best and most versatile land for agricultural use. On this basis with regards this proposal and the proposed site being predominantly on grades 2 and 3a agricultural land, ECC cannot support proposals that impact on higher quality land unless the adverse effect of this can be effectively mitigated.

ECC have published, which have been prepared in collaboration with Essex Local Planning Authorities, a set of '[solar farm guiding principles](#)' on ground-mounted solar photovoltaic farms to encourage the highest standards of solar farms. These sit within the Essex Design Guide and can be referred to by Local Authority Officers in preparation of SPDs and other policy documents; referred to as a material consideration in the determination of planning

applications and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). These principles can also be used by developers of solar farms within Essex to inform their plans and proposals. Notwithstanding the above comments on land use, ECC would make the following additional comments on the proposed development which are drawn from the principles;

Neighbouring communities may be impacted by the development and as such it is important that local communities can realise the benefits associated with the project throughout its lifetime through a “community led locality benefit” approach. Developer-led renewable energy infrastructure generation should make a financial or other contribution to the locality, led by the community. The expectation would normally be an opportunity for part community ownership and/or an ongoing community benefit fund that allows local residents to directly benefit from the development and keep more of the value generated by the development in the local economy. As a result of the recommendations made from the ECAC, it is expected that all large-scale renewable energy developments in Essex should include an element of community ownership. We would welcome further details on local benefits from the development.

Yours sincerely,
Kayra Salih,
Energy Efficiency Officer

Team: Energy & Low Carbon
Service: Environment & Climate Action
Essex County Council

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