

20/01658/EIA

Screening Opinion for Development of a Solar Photovoltaic Farm and Associated Infrastructure on Land at Chosley Farm, Bidden Road, North Warnborough, RG29 1BW

Comment by Whitewater Valley Preservation Society

Introduction

The Whitewater Valley Preservation Society was formed in 1980 with the specific aim of fighting unacceptable development proposals which founder members felt posed a significant threat to the health of the valley and the river.

The Society has set itself the objective of trying to protect the Whitewater Valley and the river from its source at Bidden to its confluence with the Blackwater, representing approximately nine miles of chalk stream. We represent some 200 riparian owners, residents and supporters of the Valley.

The Whitewater Valley Preservation Society comments on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion application are as follows:-

1. Visual and landscape impacts are a key consideration

The development will have a significant detrimental effect on the character and setting of the countryside - by virtue of its siting, size and prominence in the landscape (NPPF para 109).

2. Ecology and Biodiversity impacts are a key consideration

The screening opinion covering letter incorrectly states this development will be alongside the River Blackwater. It is ignorant that the development will in fact be alongside the River Whitewater (as clearly shown in the Location Plan provided), the source of which arises along Bidden Road at Bidden Farm.

The River Whitewater is a chalkstream, a rare and precious environment. England is home to 85% of the world's chalk streams, mainly located in the south-east, particularly in Hampshire. These precious and unique freshwater landscapes and ecosystems are at risk.

The River Whitewater is a Site of Interest to Nature Conservation (SINC) throughout its length and includes stretches of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), including the Greywell Fen SSSI.

According to the findings of the Environment Agency, the River Whitewater is currently failing to meet 'Good Ecological Status' as required under the Water Framework Directive.

3. Public Rights of Way are a key consideration

According to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF para 98) public rights of way and access should be protected and enhanced with opportunities sought to provide better facilities for users.

This development seeks to enclose and therefore restrict current opportunities to provide better facilities for users. It clearly fails to protect and enhance public rights of way and access.

4. Flooding impact assessment is a key consideration

Whilst the site itself may be in Flood Risk Zone 1, during heavy rainstorms this currently agricultural land already discharges rainwater at a rate that results in surface water flooding down North Warnborough Street and Hook Road. This frequently results in overwhelming the sewage pumping station in North Warnborough, giving rise to raw sewage flooding back into the River Whitewater and Basingstoke Canal (SINCs and SSSIs as noted above) and flooding properties, including listed buildings, at Mill Corner.

Local planning authorities and water companies are fully aware of this issue, which can only worsen with increasing severe weather events predicted as a result of climate change. Therefore the flood impact assessment should examine the increased runoff that will result from an extensive surface area of non-porous development on this land upstream, combined with adjustment for climate change.