



The countryside charity
North and East Yorkshire

PO Box 189
York
YO7 9BL

www.cpreney.org.uk

Tel: 07983 088120
Email: info@cpreney.org.uk

Branch Chair
Mrs Jan Arger

Authority: North Yorkshire Council (Richmond)

Type of consultation: Planning Consultation

Full details of application/consultation: ZD25/00369/FULL - Full planning permission for installation of a ground-mounted solar farm with associated access, infrastructure, engineering works, and landscaping

At land: At East Appleton Farm, East Appleton, Richmond

Type of response: Objection

Date of Submission: 13th August 2025

All responses or queries relating to this submission should be directed to the Secretary for the Trustees at the contact details shown above on this frontispiece.

All CPRE North and East Yorkshire comments are prepared by the charity using professional planners whose research and recommendations form the basis of this response in line with national CPRE policies.

External planning consultant used in this response:



KVA Planning Consultancy
Katie Atkinson, BA (Hons), Dip TP, MA
MRTPI
www.kvaplaning.co.uk

Comment

CPRE North and East Yorkshire ('CPRENEY') welcomes the opportunity to comment on an application for the installation of a ground-mounted solar farm with associated access, infrastructure, engineering works, and landscaping, at land at Appleton Farm, East Appleton, Richmond. The application was submitted to North Yorkshire Council ('the Council') and sits within the former Richmondshire district, on behalf of Mr Mark Harding ('the applicant').

The applicant seeks permission for an 80.53 acre ground mounter solar farm for a period of 40 years at land to the west of Catterick Lane immediately southeast of Tunstall, circa 2miles east of Scotton and 2 miles west of Catterick village.

The proposed site is in agricultural usage, divided into 4 fields bound by hedgerows with occasional trees. The wider environment is agricultural, however, an existing solar farm is located immediately adjacent to the north-east boundary.

Vehicular access is available via an unnamed road leading from Strike Lane at its western boundary and a second access is taken at the northeast boundary from an unnamed track connecting to Catterick Lane.

A Public Right of Way ('PROW') (ref: 20.2/8/1) crosses the site at its eastern extent and a further PROW (ref: 20.2/5/2) runs adjacent to the southwest boundary of the site.

The closest residential property to the site is 'Low Pasture' which is located at the site's southern boundary and a second farmstead 'Hollin Farm' is located circa 200m from the western boundary.

The proposal lies in flood zone 1 therefore is not at risk of flooding, however, there are small areas of increased surface water risk and the applicant has provided a flood risk assessment to consider these impacts.

The proposed site is not within a designated landscape nor an area covered by ecological designations.

The site does not contain and is not adjacent to any heritage assets, however, there are several within a 2km radius of the site including the potential for archaeological assets.

The applicant has prepared an Agricultural Land Classification Report alongside the proposal which states that the site comprises 100% Grade 4 agricultural land.

Having considered the submitted documents, CPRENEY objects to the principle of development at this location on the following grounds:

- The significant loss of agricultural land and impact on soils;
- 40 Years is not considered 'temporary' development as suggested in recent case law;
- The detrimental impact on the setting of Richmond, (the gateway town to the Yorkshire Dales National Park);
- The detrimental impact on users of the PROW network;
- The proposals are contrary to local and national planning policy including material considerations such as the National Policy Statement in January 2024 and the Written Ministerial Statement of May 2024.

Planning Context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that an application should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material planning considerations indicate

otherwise. The planning system should contribute to achieving sustainable development. The National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') (2024) aims to deliver sustainable development through the implementation of its policies. Paragraph 11 states that for decision making this means:

- c) *'approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
- d) *where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:*
 - i. *The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
 - ii. *Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.'*

Paragraph 232 of the NPPF clarifies that existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to the publication of the Framework. Weight should be given to them according to their consistency with the NPPF. (The closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that should be attributed).

The Development Plan relevant to this application consists of:

- The Richmondshire Local Plan 2012-28 Core Strategy (2014); and
- Saved Policy 23 of the Richmondshire Local Plan 1999-2006.

Since becoming a unitary Local Authority, the Council has committed to commencing a new single Local Plan, for which a Call for Sites has recently been issued. As such, due to the early stages of plan preparation, the previous Richmondshire District Council ('RDC') Local Plan ('LP') documents must be afforded full weight in the determination of this application, alongside the saved Policy mentioned above and other material considerations as necessary, including the most up-to-date NPPF.

For clarity, CPRENEY do not object to the generation of renewable energy by solar arrays and consider that the generation and supply of low carbon energy will be core to achieving the UK goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 or earlier. This will require a transformation of our energy system over the next 20–30 years. The scale and immediacy of the threat to the climate and our countryside means that change is necessary.

The current model of renewable energy development has resulted in some poor outcomes for landscapes, the environment, and rural communities. CPRENEY wants to change this and believes it is possible to achieve net-zero transition, including the introduction of new solar developments, in harmony with our wider environmental and social objectives.

This means taking a strategic planning approach to development of renewable energy assets at the local level and ensuring that local communities are empowered to help shape their local energy response. CPRENEY will, therefore, only support solar developments which:

- minimise impacts on landscapes, tranquility and heritage, through appropriately scaled development;
- minimise the impacts on the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land;
- bring net benefits to biodiversity;

- benefit the rural economy; and
- are supported or owned by local communities.

Furthermore, CPRENEY consider that renewable energy generation and climate change mitigation must be maximised within urban areas, including the retrofitting of existing stock, on land and rooftops of industrial and commercial estates and priority given to using previously developed land in line with CPREs 'brownfield first' policy. All new buildings (of any type) should have solar and / or other appropriate energy generation and efficiency measures incorporated into their design and build as standard.

The proposal subject to this application is situated on circa 80.53 acres of greenfield land currently used for arable farming, therefore, is not in line with the 'brownfield first' policy. The applicants commissioned an Agricultural Land Quality Assessment which concluded that 100% of land across the site has been categorised as Grade 4 in the Agricultural Land Classification which is described as 'fair' quality BMV land. Paragraph 187b of the NPPF states that planning decisions should amongst other things '*...recognize the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.*'

Footnote 65 of the NPPF states '*Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary area of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality*'. Annex 2 of the framework provides a glossary of terms and confirms that "best and most versatile agricultural land" is land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification. Whilst the applicant has avoided Grade 3 and above quality land in this case, the fact remains that the site is of a significant scale and as such CPRENEY consider that 'brownfield and a roof-top first approach' would be better suited to this kind of development. Furthermore, the site has clearly been used for arable farming and as such, the land must have some level of value to the applicant in such a capacity for it to have been previously used for this purpose.

Maintaining agricultural capacity to deliver significant levels of domestic food production is critical. This must be achieved in the context of addressing and adapting to climate change, reversing the loss of nature and meeting increasing demands on land for other social goods — not least affordable housing and renewable energy. CPRENEY believe that with enough previously developed 'brownfield' land to provide 1.2 million homes, and south-facing rooftops that could meet much of our energy needs, we have a chance to tackle the climate, housing and cost-of-living crises without sacrificing our farmland.

This concern seems to be recognised and shared via The DEFRA UK Food Security Report 2024 sets out clearly that "*the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and water insecurity both at home and abroad remain pressing risks to food security. They drive volatility in the present and put sustainability and resilience of food production at risk over the longer term. These risks are also now interacting with heightened geopolitical tensions. Labour shortages in key sectors at home are also a continuing stress factor affecting domestic food production.*"

Paragraph 7.4.15 of the applicant's Planning Statement relies on the fact that this is a 'temporary' development over a period of 40 years to justify the fact that such a large extent of agricultural land is needed, setting out that "*The solar development is proposed for a temporary 40-year period and unlike other forms of development such as residential or industrial, a key aspect is that it is wholly reversible.*"

CPRENEY argue that whilst the proposed development is reversible, 40-years cannot be justified as 'temporary.'

This is entirely in line with the findings of an Inspector who upheld a refusal of permission for a solar power station in the green belt (APP/A1910/W/23/3317818) Whilst this application is not within green belt land the principle of his finding of paragraph 19 is relevant to the determination of this application. "*I do not find this argument to be persuasive in terms of reducing the effect on Green Belt openness. Although the proposal is for a*

limited period, the length of that period is very substantial. But even more importantly, the fundamental aim of national Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. With that well established policy background it cannot be right that the fact that approval is sought for a 40 year period is accorded more than very limited weight in favour of the scheme in relation not the loss of openness. To do so would go against the concept of permanence" (My emphasis).

CPRENEY understand that this is an unprecedented and challenging period of time for farmers, and the benefits of a solar farm can be attractive, especially over a 40-year period. However, as set out in a recent Welsh planning appeal relating to a solar farm at Blackberry Lane (DNS/3245065) there is no guarantee that even ground mounter solar panels, will actually result in the reclamation of good quality land at the end of their lifespan and can in fact harm the soils rendering it of lesser grade and value.

The NPPF clearly directs Local Planning Authorities making decisions about the natural and local environment to:

- protect and enhance landscapes, biodiversity, geology and soils
- recognise soils as a natural capital asset that provide important ecosystem services
- consider the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land, and try to use areas of poorer quality land instead of higher quality land
- prevent soil, air, water, or noise pollution, or land instability from new and existing development

LP Policy CP2 supports renewable energy developments stating that they '*must address landscape and visual impact on the local community.*' Policy CP3 takes this approach further requiring development to '*promote the character and quality of the local landscape [...] and the distinctive character of townscape and setting of settlements.*' Policy CP4 sets out that development should be of '*an appropriate scale and nature and not impact adversely on the character of a settlement or landscape*' and Policy CP8 sets out that development must not conflict with '*landscape character, amenity and development.*'

The solar panels will be ground mounted, alongside a deer-proof security fence, ancillary buildings, infrastructure, and numerous CCTV poles which will be implemented along the boundary of both sites and sited adjacent to screening planting (and gapping up) of hedgerows – to be maintained at a minimum of 3m in height. The applicants own LVIA admits that it will have a high degree of visual impact on the surrounding area which, with mitigation, will reduce to a medium impact between 5-10 years - if all goes well.

CPRENEY are concerned about the detrimental impact on the landscape as a result of the proposed development individually and in-combination with the adjacent scheme, which has also been extended and a further scheme approved only 4 miles to the northwest. Particularly the impact that the site will have on the tranquillity of the immediate and surrounding landscape. As this is a predominantly rural area, the proposed development will constitute a detrimental impact on the rural landscape and as such CPRENEY strongly object to the proposal.

Should this application be approved, then alongside other solar developments which have already gained planning permission in the immediate vicinity of the site, the total area covered by solar farms, according to corresponding documents within the public domain, would exceed 310 acres of land that was in agricultural land. This scale of development would create an overwhelming and incongruous industrial presence in the rural landscape, significantly altering the landscape character.

Within the May 2024 WMS, the Energy Secretary stated '*While the total area of agricultural land used for solar is very small, and even in the most ambitious scenarios would still occupy less than 1% of the UK's agricultural land, we are increasingly seeing geographical clustering of proposed solar developments in some*

rural areas, such as in Lincolnshire. When considering whether planning consent should be granted for solar development it is important to consider not just the impacts of individual proposals, but also whether there are cumulative impacts where several proposals come forward in the same locality.'

CPRENEY are disappointed that the Council did not require an EIA to be submitted with the proposals following the applicants screening request in 2024, especially when considering the cumulative impact on this vulnerable landscape to multiple solar farms in the setting of Richmond – the gateway historic town to the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Furthermore, CPRENEY are aware that there are several well-used PROWs within very close proximity to the site. These PROWs provide ready access to the countryside which provide important benefits to both physical and mental health. CPRENEY are concerned that both individually and in-combination with other schemes, users of these PROWs will be deterred from using the network to access the countryside by the significant upheaval to the landscape during construction and furthermore during the operational period lasting some 40 years.

Conclusion

CPRENEY welcomes the opportunity to comment on an application for the installation of a ground-mounted solar farm with a generating capacity of 23.5MW with associated access, infrastructure, engineering works, and landscaping for a period of 40 years, at land at Appleton Farm, East Appleton, Richmond.

CPRENEY object to the proposals as set out above. The proposed development is contrary to several local and national planning policies and therefore, CPRENEY respectfully ask that this proposal be refused.

CPRENEY recognise the need to transition away from fossil fuels towards a renewable and clean energy generation mix, including solar, to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 or earlier. In some circumstances it is recognised that ground mounted solar arrays can be well screened and mitigated appropriately. However, in general, CPRENEY do not consider that large-scale solar farms are appropriate in the open countryside on greenfield sites, especially on BMV land. CPRE considers that sufficient south facing rooftops and brownfield sites exist to produce renewable energy from solar without the need for encroaching onto agricultural land which is essential for food security.

CPRENEY reserves the right to comment further should any additional information be submitted in support of the proposal.