

CPRE Kent response to South Brooks Solar Farm Phase Two consultation

Date: 15th July 2026

Application reference: EN0110027

Site address: Land near Lydd, New Romney, Greatstone and Dungeness, Kent and East Sussex, connecting to National Grid Dungeness Substation

Proposal: Construction, operation and decommissioning of an approximately 500 MW solar photovoltaic generating station with battery energy storage, substation(s), underground grid connection cabling and associated works

We are CPRE Kent, the countryside charity. Founded in 1926, CPRE is one of the country's longest established and most respected environmental charities. CPRE Kent is the largest of the CPRE county branches. We represent 1,061 individual members across the county, together with 131 parish councils.

Our vision is of a beautiful and thriving countryside that enriches all our lives and is valued by everyone. Our mission is to promote, enhance and protect that countryside.

CPRE Kent's overarching position

CPRE Kent is strongly of the view that South Brooks must not proceed in its current form. It should be paused and reconsidered as part of a proper Romney Marsh-wide energy infrastructure assessment, informed by the emerging Strategic Spatial Energy Plan. It should not be being treated as a standalone solar project when Romney Marsh and Dungeness are now facing a cluster of NSIP-scale energy proposals.

While CPRE Kent supports the transition to net zero and the delivery of renewable energy in the right places, this does not justify the piecemeal consenting of very large solar and battery schemes in sensitive countryside without a clear, plan-led spatial framework for where such development should go and how cumulative impacts will be managed.

Romney Marsh and Dungeness are already facing an exceptional concentration of NSIP-scale energy proposals. South Brooks is itself a very large and fragmented scheme, spread across multiple land parcels, with grid connection and interconnecting cable routes over a site of approximately 1,208ha, the majority of which is Best and Most Versatile agricultural land. This fragmented layout increases the scheme's overall harm by extending infrastructure, construction activity, cable routes and mitigation pressures across a much wider area.

In the absence of an energy infrastructure masterplan or similar for Romney Marsh, individual DCO decisions risk cumulatively reshaping this distinctive historic landscape before the right location, scale and pattern of energy development have been properly tested. That risk is compounded at the national scale by the absence of the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP). CPRE Kent currently considers that major ground-mounted solar schemes over 30MW should not proceed ahead of the SSEP because decisions of this scale should be made within a clear national and local spatial framework, not through piecemeal DCO applications. South Brooks is far above that

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threshold and should not be treated as strategically justified simply because it has a grid connection at Dungeness.

CPRE Kent recognises that South Brooks remains at pre-application stage and that further survey work and assessment will be required before any DCO application is submitted. However, the critical issue is whether that emerging evidence genuinely shapes the scheme or is just used to justify a layout that has already been substantially fixed. The applicant must therefore demonstrate that a less harmful and less fragmented layout has been properly tested, and CPRE Kent will continue to press for a Romney Marsh-wide approach to energy infrastructure, landscape, ecology, agricultural land, grid connection, mitigation and cumulative impact before any DCO application is submitted or determined.

Accordingly, CPRE Kent strongly objects to the current scheme.

Summary of CPRE Kent's key concerns

Without prejudice to CPRE Kent's in-principle objection to the scheme, the comments below set out the minimum changes needed to reduce harm if the applicant continues to progress a DCO application and should not be read as support for the proposal.

CPRE Kent objects to the current form of the proposals on the following grounds:

- 1. Cumulative Impact.** South Brooks should not be assessed as a standalone solar project with a conventional project-by-project cumulative effects exercise. It must be tested against the emerging concentration of NSIP-scale energy infrastructure across Romney Marsh and Dungeness.
- 2. Fragmented Layout.** South Brooks is spread across multiple land parcels, with grid connection infrastructure and interconnecting cable routes over a site of approximately 1,208ha. The applicant should demonstrate whether the same energy and grid objectives could be achieved with a more compact layout, and the extent to which South Brooks C, then South Brooks B, then South Brooks D would reduce ecological, landscape, cable route, construction and mitigation impacts. At the very least, we strongly consider that this is a reasonable alternative that should be tested.
- 3. Ecological Impact.** The HRA, biodiversity and Functionally Linked Land evidence must shape the final layout. CPRE Kent is particularly concerned that land now shown for development may later prove necessary for avoidance, mitigation or compensation, including for qualifying bird species, Functionally Linked Land and farmland birds such as skylark. The applicant should not submit a DCO application until the bird survey and HRA evidence have been completed.
- 4. Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.** The applicant has not yet shown that extensive use of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land is necessary. The ES must explain why poorer-quality land, brownfield land, rooftop solar and less sensitive alternatives cannot make a greater contribution, and whether removal of the most harmful parcels would reduce the loss or operational sterilisation of Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3a land.
- 5. Landscape Impact.** Romney Marsh should be treated as a highly sensitive historic, open and visitor landscape. The ES must assess the long-term change from rural marsh to energy landscape, including effects on residents, PRoW users, rural lanes, heritage setting, the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway and routes towards Dungeness. Future planting and permissive paths are not a substitute for testing a less harmful layout and assessing impacts in combination with other major energy projects.

6. **BESS Location.** The BESS, substation, compounds and cable routes require transparent environmental optioneering. These elements must not be treated as secondary engineering details. They may be central to the scheme's landscape, ecological, drainage, construction and safety impacts. CPRE Kent's current position is that South Brooks C should not host the BESS or main substation infrastructure unless the applicant can demonstrate that it is environmentally preferable to South Brooks A.
7. **Drainage Impact.** South Brooks sits in a low-lying engineered marsh landscape where water and drainage are central constraints. The applicant's own hydrology webinar confirmed that further modelling, drainage surveys and work with the Environment Agency, LLFAs and Romney Marsh Internal Drainage Board remain outstanding. The ES must test whether a less fragmented layout would reduce cable routes, watercourse crossings and drainage impacts, and must include a Romney Marsh-specific drainage, flood-risk and groundwater strategy before any DCO application is submitted.
8. **Amenity and Residual Impacts.** Amenity harm should not be assessed as separate traffic, noise, landscape, heritage and socio-economic issues. Residents, visitors, businesses and PRoW users would experience South Brooks as a combined change to the character, tranquillity and visitor experience of Romney Marsh. The ES must assess these residual effects in combination with Shepway Energy Park, South Kent Energy Park and other major proposals, and South Brooks should not proceed ahead of proper Romney Marsh-wide masterplanning and the SSEP.

CPRE Kent also notes the concerns identified by Folkestone and Hythe District Council in its committee report on the statutory consultation. These reinforce the need for the applicant to address a wider set of unresolved matters before submission, including built heritage, LVIA methodology, construction phasing, future planning implications for New Romney, farm holding and supply chain impacts, tourism, operational noise, glint and glare, and local employment and skills. None of these matters should be left to post-consent detail or treated as separate technical issues. They all form part of the wider question of whether Romney Marsh can accommodate this scale and concentration of energy infrastructure without unacceptable cumulative harm.

CPRE Kent's detailed comments:

1. Cumulative Impact

CPRE Kent accepts that EN-1 establishes an urgent need for new nationally significant energy infrastructure and the current 2025 EN-1 gives substantial weight to that need. However, that does not disapply environmental assessment duties, the mitigation hierarchy, the Habitats Regulations, the EIA Regulations or the requirement for the Secretary of State to be properly informed about residual and cumulative harm. EN-3 specifically recognises that utility-scale solar farms are large sites with potentially significant zones of visual influence and expects cumulative landscape and visual impact to be considered.

South Brooks is one of a cluster of major energy proposals affecting Romney Marsh and the Dungeness area. We are therefore not surprised that the Planning Inspectorate has already identified a weakness in the Scoping Report's cumulative approach. Its Scoping Opinion states that the cumulative effects methodology was inconsistent, that no methodology was provided for intra- and inter-cumulative effects, and that the ES should set out a clear methodology agreed with relevant consultation bodies. It also states that cumulative schemes should be considered in line with the relevant tiers and that the applicant should seek agreement with the LPAs

on the long and short lists. We cannot, however, see that any of these points have yet been addressed within the consultation materials.

Given the unique circumstances of Romney Marsh, the applicant should go beyond a conventional project-by-project cumulative effects exercise undertaken separately within each technical chapter. The Marsh is a single, highly sensitive landscape, ecological, hydrological and agricultural system now facing a cluster of major energy and infrastructure proposals. The applicant should therefore prepare a dedicated Romney Marsh Cumulative Impact Strategy, or equivalent Joint Report on Interrelationships, before submission. This should assess South Brooks alongside Shepway Energy Park, South Kent Energy Park, relevant Dungeness and Lydd infrastructure, Lydd Airport permissions and any other major solar, grid, battery, transport or tourism schemes capable of interacting with South Brooks.

Where details of other NSIPs are incomplete, they should not simply be screened out. The applicant should apply reasonable worst-case assumptions, consistent with the Rochdale Envelope approach, and clearly explain the assumptions used. The applicant should not submit the DCO until it has published a full cumulative methodology, agreed the cumulative development list with the host authorities and statutory bodies, addressed in-combination HRA effects, and shown how cumulative effects have altered the design, phasing, cable routes, BESS/substation location, access strategy and mitigation package.

2. Fragmented Layout.

CPRE Kent is strongly of the view that the scheme's fragmented layout exacerbates and creates avoidable harm. It increases the need for connecting infrastructure, spreads construction activity across a wider part of the Marsh and may place pressure on land that could be needed for ecological mitigation rather than solar arrays or associated infrastructure.

CPRE Kent also notes the serious concern being raised by FHDC regarding Parcels B and C. Specifically, with these parcels on the edge of New Romney, a 60-year solar consent in this location could narrow future choices for the town and for Romney Marsh. This is before the Local Plan, any future Spatial Development Strategy and the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan have tested the right long-term pattern of growth, energy infrastructure, landscape protection and environmental mitigation. This reinforces CPRE Kent's central point that South Brooks should not be consented in isolation, or in its current fragmented form, ahead of proper Romney Marsh-wide masterplanning.

The ES should therefore test, as reasonable alternatives, layouts that exclude or substantially reduce each of the additional parcels both individually and in combination. At a minimum, this should include alternatives excluding South Brooks C, South Brooks B and South Brooks D separately, and alternatives excluding South Brooks C together with South Brooks B and/or South Brooks D. The purpose of that exercise should be to identify whether the Project's energy and grid objectives could be met in a less fragmented and less harmful form.

CPRE Kent considers that this alternatives assessment should compare the effects of each alternative on ecology and Functionally Linked Land, landscape and visual impact, BMV land, cable routing, construction disturbance, drainage, heritage, PRow and mitigation land. On the evidence currently available, CPRE Kent considers that removal or substantial reduction of South Brooks C should be tested first, followed by South Brooks B and then South Brooks D. At the very least, the BESS and main substation infrastructure should not be located in South Brooks C unless the applicant can demonstrate that this is environmentally preferable to the alternative location in South Brooks A.

3. Ecological Impact

South Brooks sits within the ecological setting of Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, one of the most sensitive and distinctive ecological landscapes in southern England. The PEIR records that the Project is within the zone of influence of the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA and Ramsar site and Dungeness SAC, and that the SPA is notified for important wintering bird populations including Bewick's swan, shoveler, hen harrier, golden plover and the overall waterbird assemblage.

CPRE Kent recognises that the Project remains at pre-application stage and that ecological survey work is continuing. While we accept that this is to a degree unavoidable given the proposed timetable of the application, we are nonetheless significantly concerned as to whether the final DCO design, including the parcel layout, BESS/substation location, cable routing, construction phasing and mitigation land, will be genuinely shaped by the completed ecological and HRA evidence, rather than being justified after the main layout has effectively been fixed.

Bird species

The current material already demonstrates that this is a highly sensitive ecological baseline. The PEIR records more than 29,000 desk-study records of 107 notable bird species within the Study Area, including 67 Schedule 1 species, 53 Birds of Conservation Concern Red List species and 26 Amber List species. It also records 88 bird species during 2025 breeding bird surveys, of which 55 showed territorial behaviour associated with potential breeding attempts. Species potentially nesting within the Site include Red-listed lapwing, skylark, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow and yellowhammer.

The wintering bird evidence is particularly important. The PEIR records SPA feature species within the Site during the winter period, including peak counts of 28 Bewick's swans, one hen harrier and 2,900 golden plover, together with overall waterbird assemblage features. CPRE Kent is concerned that land currently treated as developable may, on the completed winter bird evidence, prove to have greater functional importance for SPA species than is currently assumed. The 2,900 golden plover peak count does not itself establish SPA designation status, but it raises a clear Functionally Linked Land issue and is too significant to be treated as marginal. Further survey evidence, in-combination displacement and proposed habitat enhancement may all increase the amount of land that must be retained or managed for wintering birds rather than developed for solar arrays.

CPRE Kent welcomes the applicant's decision to provide a technical webinar on ecology, which helped clarify several matters in the PEIR. However, the webinar also confirmed that the wintering bird baseline remains incomplete. The applicant's ecologist accepted that the PEIR does not yet fully quantify winter bird use and that this will be addressed in the ES, with another winter survey season still to complete. The PEIR separately confirms that further winter bird surveys between September 2026 and March 2027 will be undertaken. CPRE Kent therefore considers that the current layout must remain genuinely open to change, including the removal of land from solar development where the completed evidence shows that it is needed for Functionally Linked Land, avoidance, mitigation or compensation. Accordingly, it is our strong view that the applicant should not submit a DCO application on a final ecological layout until the outstanding bird data have been analysed, shared with Natural England and the host authorities, and used to test whether more land must be kept out of development.

This point is central to CPRE Kent's concern about the fragmented layout. If additional land is needed for FLL, wintering birds, lapwing, skylark, yellow wagtail, invertebrates, bats or wider ecological connectivity, then land currently shown for development may need to be removed from the scheme. The applicant should therefore

test a materially less harmful layout, including removal or substantial reduction of the most problematic parcels, rather than assuming that all currently proposed developable areas can remain and that mitigation can be fitted around them.

Bats

The PEIR records 8,055 non-roosting and 3,608 roosting bat records within the survey area over the last 10 years, with the field surveys recording a minimum of eight bat species or species groups. Activity occurs across the Site and is strongly associated with hedgerows, drainage channels and treelines, which are key foraging and commuting routes. Given the scale of the Project, including fencing, lighting, access tracks, construction activity, cable works and vegetation management, the ES must assess the loss, disturbance and fragmentation of those routes across the whole Site and cable corridors.

CPRE Kent is not satisfied that the outline management plans yet provide sufficient certainty. Given the ecological sensitivity of the Site, the starting point must be avoidance, not reliance on later management plans to mitigate harm after the layout has been fixed. The oCEMP remains an early consultation document, the detailed CEMP will follow later, and operational and decommissioning mitigation will be addressed separately. For a construction phase of up to 48 months across a sensitive landscape, broad commitments to future management plans are not enough. The applicant must show now how the mitigation hierarchy has shaped the layout, cable routes, compounds, lighting, vegetation retention and construction sequencing.

Reptiles

The PEIR records desk-study records of common lizard and grass snake and acknowledges that potentially suitable habitat is available across the Site, particularly in rough grassland close to scrub and riparian habitats. Despite this, no reptile surveys have been undertaken on the basis the applicant considers there to be limited potential impacts and that precautionary working method statements would be used. Despite this, we also note that, within the ecology webinar, the applicant's ecologist accepted reptile exclusion fencing was likely in discrete construction areas where suitable habitat is affected, though also accepted that the locations of those construction areas are not yet known.

CPRE Kent considers this too uncertain. If reptile surveys are not undertaken, the ES must provide a robust, Natural England-agreed justification and a fully secured precautionary method, including monitoring, exclusion, habitat retention and adaptive measures.

Coastal vegetated shingle

For CPRE Kent, a key concern is that the scheme's fragmented layout may increase the extent and complexity of cable routing, while the final cable alignment and installation methodology remain uncertain. This creates a further unresolved risk to the highly distinctive and sensitive Dungeness shingle habitats. The PEIR states that cable route options may cross coastal vegetated shingle within the Dungeness SAC and the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA/Ramsar. It also accepts that vegetated shingle can have long establishment periods and that disturbance could affect ecological features beyond the operational lifetime of the Project. This is a unique, fragile and difficult-to-restore habitat. CPRE Kent is concerned that the fragmented layout may increase the extent and complexity of cable routing, access and construction works through precisely the habitats where avoidance should be the starting point under the mitigation hierarchy.

The oLEMP includes some basic principles for protected shingle, including limiting works to a defined cable corridor, storing excavated shingle separately, reinstating the correct stratigraphic order and undertaking post-construction monitoring. However, those principles do not yet resolve the central concern. The final cable alignment, working width, construction method, timing, access arrangements and restoration specification remain uncertain. The applicant must therefore demonstrate that the chosen cable route is the least harmful ecological option, that a less fragmented layout has been tested as a means of avoiding or reducing shingle impacts, and that any works affecting vegetated shingle or designated habitat are avoided unless there is no less harmful alternative agreed with Natural England and other relevant bodies.

Ecological Impact conclusions

CPRE Kent therefore asks the applicant to confirm, before submission of any DCO application, that:

- all non-breeding bird, winter bird, passage bird, lapwing, skylark, bat, reptile, GCN, aquatic invertebrate, macrophyte, fish habitat, riparian mammal and river condition evidence needed for the ES and HRA has been completed, analysed and made available for scrutiny;
- the HRA and Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment have been prepared on the basis of the completed survey evidence, including FLL and in-combination effects with other Romney Marsh energy proposals;
- the final layout has been amended in response to that evidence, including a transparent assessment of whether further land must be removed from development and safeguarded for mitigation or compensation;
- the BESS, substation, compounds, access routes and cable routes have been subject to genuine environmental optioneering;
- cable routes through designated sites, vegetated shingle, ditches and other sensitive habitats have been avoided wherever possible, and any unavoidable works are supported by route-specific method statements, restoration specifications, monitoring triggers and enforceable DCO requirements.

Until that work is complete, CPRE Kent considers that the applicant has not shown that the current layout is ecologically acceptable. In particular, the applicant has not yet demonstrated that sufficient mitigation land has been safeguarded, that FLL impacts can be avoided or mitigated, or that the fragmented layout has not increased avoidable ecological harm. The Secretary of State should not be asked to rely on HRA or biodiversity conclusions unless they are based on the full survey baseline, a Natural England-reviewed assessment and a final layout demonstrably shaped by the mitigation hierarchy.

4. Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

The applicant's PEIR states that the Site comprises approximately 1,208ha, predominantly arable land, the majority of which remains in agricultural use. Preliminary ALC survey work has so far covered 812ha of the Site and identifies the surveyed land as 1% Grade 1, 51% Grade 2, 32% Grade 3a, 15% Grade 3b and 1% Grade 4. On that basis, approximately 84% of the surveyed area is Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, although the applicant states that further survey work remains outstanding and that the ALC data is currently predictive.

EN-3 states that land type should not be a predominating factor, but applicants should, where possible, use suitable previously developed, brownfield, contaminated and industrial land. Where use of agricultural land has

been shown to be necessary, poorer-quality land should be preferred to higher-quality land, avoiding BMV agricultural land where possible. EN-3 also expects applicants to explain their choice of site, noting the preference for brownfield, industrial and low- or medium-grade agricultural land.

That policy context matters because South Brooks is a mega solar scheme on a very large area of productive farmland at a time when Romney Marsh is already facing an exceptional concentration of energy infrastructure proposals. CPRE Kent supports renewable energy, but this is precisely why major ground-mounted solar should be planned through a roof-first, land-use-led and spatially coordinated approach, not advanced through piecemeal DCO applications before the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan has been published. CPRE's July 2025 report, *Getting solar off the ground*¹, shows why those concerns apply directly here: it found that almost two-thirds of land used by operational large-scale solar is productive farmland, including 31% BMV land, while rooftop solar, car parks and brownfield sites could deliver up to 117GW by 2050 and CPRE is calling for at least 60% of installed solar to be on rooftops by 2035.

The current material does not yet show that the applicant has followed that approach. It does not provide a complete site-wide ALC baseline, a grade-by-grade schedule of temporary and permanent land-take, or an alternatives assessment that has genuinely tested avoidance of the highest-quality land. The ES must quantify, by grade, all land required for panels, BESS, substations, compounds, access tracks, underground cables, drainage works, mitigation, soil stockpiles and decommissioning. It must explain why any Grade 1, Grade 2 or Grade 3a land is necessary, why lower-grade, brownfield, rooftop or less sensitive options cannot make a greater contribution, and how the layout has minimised both permanent loss and long-term operational sterilisation of BMV soils.

The proposed 60-year operational period is also material. Even if the land could in principle be returned to agriculture after decommissioning, it would be removed from productive use for two generations and for much longer than the 40-year period described in EN-3 as typical. The ES must therefore assess not only the total hectares of BMV land affected, but the duration of that loss, cumulative loss with other Romney Marsh solar schemes, impacts on farm holding viability and retained land parcels, and wider effects on the local agricultural supply chain.

CPRE Kent therefore considers that the DCO should not be submitted until the full ALC survey, including cable corridors and hard infrastructure areas, has been completed and used to refine the layout. The applicant should also publish a BMV avoidance and minimisation schedule showing how hard infrastructure, compounds, access routes and stockpiles have been directed to the lowest-quality land wherever possible.

5. Landscape Impact

CPRE Kent notes the applicant already accepts potential significant adverse effects across multiple landscape character areas, including Brookland Farms, Dungeness Shingle and Walland Marsh Farmlands. This includes significant effects for residents, PRoW users and visitors, particularly in the years immediately following completion before new planting matures. The Landscape and Visual chapter of the PIER also acknowledges that, although most operational effects may be reversible, they would be long-term, and that decommissioning may give rise to significant adverse effects similar to construction.

¹ <https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Getting-solar-off-the-ground.pdf>

CPRE Kent considers the Romney Marsh should be treated as a landscape of heightened sensitivity. The value of Romney Marsh lies in the way its openness, long horizons, big skies and historic drainage patterns combine to create a distinctive landscape. Its rural lanes, coastal shingle, heritage assets, PRoW network, visitor routes towards Dungeness and the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway all contribute to that wider experience. It is this overall experience, not any single feature, that draws people to the area and requires a more sensitive assessment.

The ES must therefore assess the in-combination effect of South Brooks, South Kent Energy Park, Shepway Energy Park and other Dungeness and Lydd infrastructure on Romney Marsh as a historic landscape and visitor destination, not simply as separate visual receptors within separate technical chapters.

CPRE Kent is concerned that while future planting may reduce some filtered views over time, it cannot remove the fundamental change from an open rural and coastal-marsh landscape to a large-scale energy landscape. New permissive paths may provide some local recreational benefit, but they are not a substitute for avoiding harm to existing PRoW users, landscape character, tranquillity, rural lanes, heritage setting and the wider recreational experience of Romney Marsh and Dungeness.

The ES should include a full GLVIA3-compliant LVIA, verified photomontages and clear Year 0, Year 1, Year 15 and decommissioning assessments. It should separately identify unmitigated effects, effects with embedded mitigation and residual effects. It should not treat planting as a reason to understate initial harm, especially given the exposed conditions of the Marsh. The ES should also include a clear PRoW, visitor and recreational-access strategy covering existing routes, rural lanes, the King Charles III England Coast Path context, the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, Dungeness visitor attractions and the experience of visitors moving through the wider Marsh landscape.

The LVIA and heritage assessment must also be properly joined up. CPRE Kent notes FHDC's concern that the LVIA study area should start at 5km, not 2km, given the height and visibility of the substation and other infrastructure, and that viewpoints, visualisations, receptors and cumulative schemes should be agreed with the host authorities before submission. The heritage assessment should use the same visual evidence, including ZTVs and verified views, and should follow Historic England's GPA3 approach to setting. It should assess impacts on conservation areas and key heritage assets, including New Romney, Old Romney, Lydd, Dungeness, All Saints Church Lydd, St Nicholas New Romney, the Dungeness lighthouses, the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, Old Tomms and the ruins of Midley Church.

Given the scale and concentration of energy proposals now emerging across Romney Marsh and Dungeness, CPRE Kent considers that South Brooks should not proceed in isolation ahead of a proper strategic framework. A Romney Marsh energy and landscape masterplan, informed by the forthcoming Strategic Spatial Energy Plan, is needed to decide whether this level of energy infrastructure can be accommodated at all, and if so where it would cause the least harm. Until that strategic work has been done, the applicant should be required to test a materially less harmful layout, including removal or substantial reduction of South Brooks C, then South Brooks B, then South Brooks D, before any DCO application is submitted.

6. BESS Location

As confirmed with the PEIR and at the consultation event/BESS safety webinar, the location of the BESS at either South Brooks A or South Brooks C remains open and undecided. This choice, however, has major implications for landscape, noise, residential amenity, fire-water runoff, groundwater, drainage, construction traffic, emergency access, BMV land and decommissioning. This is amplified by the clear level of concern from residents in and around Lydd, including those expressed at the webinar.

On the information currently available, CPRE Kent considers that South Brooks A appears preferable to South Brooks C for any BESS and main substation infrastructure. South Brooks C is closer to Lydd, Greatstone, Dunes Road, the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway and sensitive visitor routes towards Dungeness. Locating the BESS and substation there would also reinforce the fragmented layout of the scheme and make it harder to justify retaining South Brooks C as part of the developable area.

CPRE Kent does not support development in South Brooks A. However, if the applicant continues to pursue a BESS and substation within the scheme, it should explain why South Brooks C remains in contention at all. The ES should include a clear side-by-side comparison of the South Brooks A and South Brooks C options, covering landscape, visual impact, ecology, Functionally Linked Land, groundwater, flood risk, fire-water management, emergency access, residential amenity, construction effects and BMV land.

This point also links directly to CPRE Kent's wider concern about the fragmented layout. The ES should test removal or substantial reduction of South Brooks C as a reasonable alternative, both on its own and alongside changes to South Brooks B and South Brooks D. Unless the applicant can show that South Brooks C is environmentally preferable to South Brooks A, the BESS and main substation should not be located in South Brooks C.

There is considerable disquiet locally about the proximity of a BESS in South Brooks C to people's houses. While we acknowledge the applicant's work in modelling the dispersion of toxic gases, anxiety remains and adds significantly to the blight imposed on the area by the proposals. If a BESS is to be incorporated, it must be located so as to cause the least potential harm, based on the precautionary principle, not merely where a paper exercise has shown it to be 'acceptable'.

7. Drainage Impact

South Brooks sits within a low-lying, engineered marsh landscape where water, drainage and groundwater are central constraints rather than secondary technical matters. The Scoping Report identifies a network of drains and field ditches within the Site, three statutory main rivers within and in proximity to the Site boundary, and that approximately 72.6% of the Site boundary is within Flood Zones 2 and 3.

CPRE Kent welcomes the applicant's hydrology webinar, which confirmed the need for further hydraulic modelling, updated tidal modelling, further drainage surveys and landowner engagement. It also confirmed the continued need for work with the Environment Agency, LLFAs and the Romney Marsh Internal Drainage Board, and further assessment of water supply, watercourse crossings, agricultural drainage and water quality. It, however, also seemed to imply that impacts from cable trenches on existing land drainage would be dealt with post-consent via management plans, and that cumulative drainage modelling with neighbouring solar schemes had not yet been clearly resolved.

As such, we do not consider this good enough for a scheme of this scale and duration. Again, we are particularly concerned that the fragmented layout may increase the number of cable routes, access tracks, construction areas, watercourse crossings and drainage interventions across the Marsh. The ES should therefore test whether a less fragmented layout would reduce flood risk, groundwater, drainage and water quality impacts, including through removal or substantial reduction of South Brooks C, then South Brooks B and then South Brooks D. The BESS and substation should also be located away from the most sensitive water receptors, with fire-water (cooling water) containment, groundwater protection and emergency access fixed before submission.

The recent One Earth Solar Farm decision shows why flood risk must be resolved before submission, not left to post-consent detail. Although the Secretary of State ultimately granted consent, the Examining Authority treated weaknesses in the sequential approach and flood-sensitive infrastructure as serious concerns. South Brooks must therefore show from the outset that lower-risk locations and less fragmented layouts have been tested, and that BESS, substation, access, fire-water containment, flood storage and emergency response arrangements would remain safe during flood and fire events

The ES should also not assume that standard solar drainage measures will be adequate on Romney Marsh. The applicant should prepare a Romney Marsh drainage, flood-risk and groundwater strategy before DCO submission, agreed with the Environment Agency, the relevant Internal Drainage Board, the LLFAs, host authorities and Natural England. This should include updated flood modelling, climate-change allowances, a field-drainage baseline, a ditch and watercourse crossing schedule, SPZ and groundwater risk assessment, HDD breakout plan, fire-water management plan, construction winter-working controls and a decommissioning water-environment assessment.

The proposals must also detail the arrangements for cleaning the solar panels: frequency, water quantity and quality used and demonstration of the availability of water supply for this and other purposes and the effect on supplies to homes and businesses in the area. Again the cumulative impact needs to be quantified.

8. Amenity and Residual Impacts

The applicant should not assess amenity impacts as a series of separate technical issues. For local residents, businesses, visitors and PRow users, the effect of South Brooks would be experienced in combination through traffic, noise, construction activity, visual change, loss of openness, disruption to rural lanes, impacts on heritage setting and changes to the visitor experience. That combined effect is the real amenity issue.

The transport webinar identified community concerns about construction traffic, minor rural roads, Hammond's Corner, local paths and "traffic chaos" from South Brooks and other schemes in the area. It also identified a peak construction month of about 472 daily vehicle movements, including 242 HGV trips, and an 87.1% increase in HGV traffic on the B2075 near the South Brooks C access. The noise chapter records low existing background noise levels, with particularly quiet night-time conditions away from roads and settlements. In that context, even limited additional noise, traffic and lighting may be more noticeable than in a less tranquil location.

The socioeconomics material also recognises that PRow amenity, tourism, visitor attractions and hospitality businesses are relevant receptors. It records community concerns that visual impacts on South Brooks B and E could deter tourists, that South Brooks C is close to the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, and that the solar array may be experienced as industrial and harmful to businesses reliant on open space. The applicant's proposed mitigation and design changes do not remove the need to assess the effect on Romney Marsh as a visitor landscape.

CPRE Kent is particularly concerned that the applicant may understate residual amenity harm by treating each topic separately and then relying on management plans, planting, access measures or traffic controls to reduce impacts within each chapter. That would not show the true position. A resident near Lydd, a visitor travelling towards Dungeness, a business dependent on the Marsh landscape or a walker using local PRow would not experience the scheme as separate landscape, transport, noise, heritage and socioeconomic effects. They would experience the combined change to the character and tranquillity of the unique Romney Marsh landscape.

This concern is much greater because South Brooks is not the only major energy proposal affecting Romney Marsh. The ES must assess amenity and residual effects in combination with Shepway Energy Park, South Kent Energy Park, Dungeness and Lydd infrastructure, Lydd Airport permissions and other relevant solar, battery, grid, transport and tourism-related proposals. It should consider overlapping construction periods, shared road corridors, cumulative PRow disruption, repeated visual exposure, visitor perception, night-time noise and lighting, emergency access and the progressive industrialisation of the historic Marsh landscape.

CPRE Kent therefore considers that the applicant should prepare a clear residual amenity and in-combination effects assessment before any DCO application is submitted. This should bring together landscape, transport, noise, heritage, socioeconomics, public access, tourism and community impacts in one place. It should explain what the residual effect would be on Romney Marsh as lived in, worked in and visited, not simply whether each technical chapter can reduce its own effects below a significance threshold.

For the same reason, CPRE Kent considers that South Brooks should not proceed ahead of proper Romney Marsh-wide masterplanning and the publication of the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan. Without that wider framework, individual projects risk being assessed one by one while the combined effect on local amenity, tourism, tranquillity, heritage setting and community character is only understood after the harm has already been locked in.

Conclusion and Headline Asks

In view of all the above, CPRE Kent is strongly of the view South Brooks must not proceed in its current form. It should be paused and reconsidered as part of a proper Romney Marsh-wide energy infrastructure assessment, informed by the emerging Strategic Spatial Energy Plan. The Secretary of State should not consider South Brooks as a standalone solar project when Romney Marsh and Dungeness are now facing a cluster of NSIP-scale energy proposals.

If the applicant continues to progress the scheme, CPRE Kent asks that the following work is completed before any DCO application is submitted.

- 1. Cumulative Impact.** Prepare a Romney Marsh-wide cumulative impact assessment covering all major energy and infrastructure schemes before submission.
- 2. Less Harmful Layout.** Test a less fragmented layout, including removal or substantial reduction of South Brooks C first, then South Brooks B and South Brooks D.
- 3. Ecology.** Do not submit the DCO until the bird survey, HRA and Functionally Linked Land evidence is complete and has shaped the layout.
- 4. BMV Agricultural Land.** Publish the full ALC survey and show how loss of Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3a land has been avoided or reduced.

5. **BESS Location.** Publish clear environmental optioneering and do not locate the BESS or main substation in South Brooks C unless it is shown to be the least harmful option.
6. **Landscape Impact.** Assess the combined effect on residents, PRoW users, visitors, tourism and the wider Romney Marsh landscape.
7. **Drainage.** Prepare a Romney Marsh-specific drainage, groundwater, flood-risk and decommissioning strategy, agreed with the Environment Agency, the relevant Internal Drainage Board, LLFAs, host authorities and Natural England.
8. **Reconsultation.** Reconsult the public, statutory bodies and host authorities on any materially revised layout, cumulative methodology, HRA evidence, BESS and cable route optioneering, or mitigation package before submitting a DCO application.

Overall, if this project is to proceed, this consultation must be treated as a genuine opportunity to reshape the Project before it is fixed for DCO submission. The current PEIR does not yet justify submission in early or spring 2027. Too much of the evidence remains incomplete, including the bird surveys, HRA, Functionally Linked Land assessment, ALC survey, cumulative effects work, hydrology and drainage work, landscape assessment and design optioneering.