

This Report will be made public on 23 September 2025



Report Number **A/25/15**

To: Council
Date: 1 October 2025
Status: Non - executive decision
Responsible Officer: Susan Priest, Chief Executive

SUBJECT: PETITION – STOP INDUSTRIAL SCALE SOLAR SPRAWL ON ROMNEY MARSH

SUMMARY: An E-petition titled “Stop industrial-scale solar sprawl on Romney Marsh” has been received and has a total of 414 signatures. As per the petitions scheme, set out in part 4 of the constitution, petitions which receive more than 250 signatures can be presented to a meeting of Full Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report A/25/15.
2. To consider the options set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 An E-petition was submitted by Amanda Farrant, on 2 July 2025. The petition received 414 signatures.

1.2 Details of the E-petition are shown below:

Title: Stop industrial-scale solar sprawl on Romney Marsh

Statement:

We the undersigned petition the council to oppose the spread of oversized solar and battery storage NSIP schemes on Romney Marsh's prime agricultural crop-producing land.

Justification:

Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land on Romney Marsh is being targeted by at least 6 energy development and investment companies hoping to develop industrial-scale solar energy and battery storage projects that could remove up to 5000 acres of good arable land from the UK's domestic food production - equivalent to removing 25 family farms from the agricultural industry.

Grade 1 and 2 farm land accounts for just 17% of agricultural land in the UK. Government policies advise that 'wherever possible developers should utilise brownfield, industrial, contaminated, or previously developed land,' and 'where the development of agricultural land is shown to be necessary, lower-quality land should be preferred to higher-quality land.'

Most farm land on Romney Marsh is grade 1 or 2. Yet investors and developers are openly targeting grade 1 and 2 land for the proposed schemes that have been publicly consulted on so far with no evidence of seeking alternative sites.

Two NSIP proposals that have been announced indicate the installation of hundreds of thousands of solar panels up to 5m high and huge battery storage infrastructure between 4-12m high. Residents are concerned that the number of oversized solar and battery storage schemes on Romney Marsh not only threaten the unique rural character area, the ecology and the economy of Romney Marsh but, if sited in high risk flood zone 3 as many are proposed, could pose a danger to local residents. Unextinguishable fires in large-scale lithium ion battery systems also pose a risk to life due to the toxic gases that can be emitted through thermal runaway.

Residents are also concerned that the vast schemes threaten the setting of at least 4 of Romney Marsh's historical churches and church ruins at Old Romney, Hope All Saints, Midley and Eastbridge.

With 4 companies scoping industrial energy projects in the Newchurch area alone, this small village could soon turn into a giant energy plant which will destroy the spectacular views across the Marsh from the escarpment and the Kent Downs National Landscape area - views which leisure, tourism and events businesses in the area depend on to attract customers and visitors.

These energy projects provide little long-term employment opportunities in an area with already few opportunities for the younger generations. An abundance of oversized energy projects on farm land could mean farming knowledge and skills are not passed on to future generations. It could also mean non-farming employment becomes increasingly scarce, risking a future exodus of working-age people from Romney Marsh.

We support new nuclear technology solutions for Dungeness, and we support solar generation and safe battery storage schemes on unproductive land, rooftops, brownfield and former landfill sites.

1.3 The petition was submitted by a resident of the district and is valid.

2. Background

2.1. Members will be aware of developer interest for solar farm projects in the Romney Marsh area. The following link provides details of current projects within the District - [Solar projects in the Folkestone & Hythe district | Folkestone & Hythe District Council](#)

2.2. Of the four proposals currently being advanced one is an application to the District Council and three will be applications to the Secretary of State.

2.3. A planning application (25/0542/FH) has been submitted for a solar farm at St Mary's Road with a capacity to produce 16MW of power. This is currently under consideration by the Council and will be determined by the Planning and Licensing Committee.

2.4. The remaining solar projects:

- A. South Kent Energy Park,
- B. Shepway Energy Park and
- C. South Brooks Solar Farm

are large scale facilities that would be capable of delivering / storing between 200MW and 500MW of electricity. Due to the scale and output of these proposals, they are classified as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP), and are submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for assessment and examination, with the final decision being made by the Secretary of State.

2.5. Prior to submission of an NSIP, an applicant must carry out wide-ranging consultation with the local community. An initial first phase of engagement with the local community has been undertaken by the developers for South Kent Energy Park and Shepway Energy Park, with further engagement promised. The first phase of engagement for the South Brooks Solar Farm is due to commence on 18th September 2025.

2.6. The District Council is a consultee in the process and classed as a "host authority". Other than an EIA scoping response for the Shepway Energy Park, the Council has not yet received any statutory consultations on the projects but will be expected (by Government) to work proactively with the

developers for each project, including the adequacy of consultation and the drafting of statements of common ground, and principal areas of disagreement. Following the submission of an NSIP application, the Council can submit “relevant representations” to set out its formal position on the proposals. This is known as the examination stage. The Council’s formal position will be determined by the Planning and Licensing Committee.

- 2.7. The Council can also attend subsequent Hearings as part of the examination and register to speak in support of its formal position.
- 2.8. The Council can refer to relevant policies within its development plans. However, the Planning Inspectorate as the Examining Authority must make recommendations in accordance with the government’s National Policy Statements (NPA’s) except in specified circumstances. As a result Officers will prepare a recommendation which assesses the proposals against both Local and National Policies.
- 2.9. Due to the extent of outstanding work and further consultations and engagement required, the estimated timescales for submission of an NSIP application to the Planning Inspectorate is currently between Autumn 2026 and Spring 2027 for the three projects.

3. POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO THE PETITION

- 3.1. In line with the Petitions Scheme set out in part of 4 of the constitution, Members should consider the petition and make one of the following decisions shown below:
 - a) Note the petition and take no further action;
 - b) Refer the petition to the Cabinet or the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as the case may be, for their observations before deciding whether to examine the issues raised by the petition;
 - c) Agree to examine the issues raised by the petition, by debate, at the meeting or a future meeting;
 - d) Agree to examine the issues raised by the petition, as part of a future scrutiny programme.

4. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

4.1. Legal Officer’s Comments (NM)

Any legal issues are covered in the main body of the report.

4.2. Finance Officer’s Comments (JGS)

There are no finance implications to this report and further resource implications are unclear at the current stage of the petition.

4.3. Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

There are no equality or diversity issues arising as a result of the report.

5. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting.

Jemma West, Democratic Services Team Leader

Phone: 01303 853 369

Email: Jemma.west@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report: None.