FORMAL OBJECTION TO SSE RENEWABLES ON PROPOSALS FOR SHEPWAY ENERGY PARK FOLLOWING THE FIRST NON-STATUTORY PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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TO: Shepway Energy Park Consultation Team

We are writing to **formally object** to SSE Renewables' proposals for Shepway Energy Park including 200MW solar array and 400MW/800MWh BESS.

Hands Off Our Marsh is a Community Interest Company that represents the interests of communities across Romney Marsh who are affected directly or indirectly by proposed ground-mounted solar energy and battery storage infrastructure such as Shepway Energy Park, South Kent Energy Park and St Mary in the Marsh Solar Farm, as well as a potential new substation and several more NSIP proposals not yet in consultation.

Hands Off Our Marsh supports solar energy generation and battery storage plants on brownfield, industrial, contaminated or previously developed land, not on higher-quality agricultural land, as per government guidelines in NPS EN-3 and DESNZ's recent Solar Roadmap. We also support the development of new nuclear technology at Dungeness to meet the government's Net Zero goals and to significantly retain and even boost employment in the area after the decommissioning of the existing nuclear facility.

As at 20th July 2025, **1,554 people have signed our petition opposing the Shepway Energy Park proposal** indicating widespread local opposition to the inappropriate mass industrialisation of our unique landscape and green spaces.

Grounds for objection

In general, we argue that as SSE Renewables has no information regarding the location of a possible new NGET substation on Romney Marsh, it seems premature to even consider locating and designing such a project, especially knowing from their vast experience of wind generation schemes in other parts of the UK, just how disruptive and damaging NSIP proposals and schemes are on residents and communities from the moment they are made public for many many years. We especially question why a new 400kV substation is needed for a supposed 'temporary' solar and battery storage facility when there already exists an unused substation facility at Dungeness? This seems a vast waste of taxpayers' and energy consumers' money, especially given that NSIP solar

proposals are already hugely oversubscribed in the TEC register against the UK's actual solar generation needs and targets according to the government's CP2030 report.

We also question why there isn't a more joined up approach for loading these schemes among the 5-6 energy companies proposing projects on Romney Marsh? NESO's TEC Register lists 3 schemes by 3 companies for the area of Newchurch alone totalling 1840MW of solar, battery storage, wind and nuclear!! Plus there is already a smaller 16MW distribution-connection scheme going through FHDC LPA just outside Newchurch and directly bordering the south of Shepway Energy Park's proposed site 6.

Amongst the many, many concerns and questions of residents that HOOM has heard, below is a list of the key issues we want to raise.

Conflict with Folkestone & Hythe District Heritage Strategy (2019)

The project fundamentally conflicts with the Folkestone & Hythe District Heritage Strategy (2018), particularly Theme 1a (Landscape), which designates Romney Marsh as a "heritage asset of Outstanding Significance". The proposed Shepway Energy Park contradicts the strategy's core objectives for Heritage Management (sustaining and enhancing assets) and Place Shaping (using heritage to inform development). The industrial scale and character of the SSE development are incompatible with the "openness and wildness," "natural beauty," and distinctive heritage features (including medieval churches, wartime defenses, and agricultural patterns) that define Romney Marsh.

Romney Marsh is an irreplaceable historic landscape. The proposed Shepway Energy Park would inflict irreversible and fundamental harm to its unique character, visual amenity, and the setting of its numerous heritage assets, both designated and undesignated. The loss of such a distinctive and ancient landscape cannot be mitigated or compensated for.

Cumulative impact of this industrial scheme on Romney Marsh's character, identity and way of life

Cumulative impact is a policy and legal requirement for NSIP schemes as set out in NPSs, EIA Regulations and other Planning inspectorate Guidance. NSIP applicants are expected to assess the cumulative impact of their proposals alongside other existing and reasonably foreseeable schemes. We already have Nuclear Energy infrastructure on Romney Marsh, which we understand from our MP Tony Vaughan is likely to become the site for new nuclear technology in future. Romney Marsh also hosts an onshore wind farm at Little Cheyne Wind Farm. Low Carbon have proposed a 500MW/1500 acre solar and energy scheme at Old Romney, while Enviromena have applied for planning permission from FHDC for a small 16MW solar scheme that borders Site 6 of the SSE Renewables' proposal. There are a further 3-4 NSIP schemes outlined in the TEC register for Romney Marsh.

We strongly believe there is potential for this current 'solar rush' by energy speculators and developers to have an extremely detrimental effect on every aspect of Romney Marsh's life, character, people, heritage, environment and its nature. **We request that Cumulative Impact must be comprehensively addressed in SSE Renewables EIA.**

Romney Marsh's cultural and socio-economic heritage stretches back to at least the 12th century when the land first started to be drained for agricultural purposes. The nature of the Romney Marsh means that its cultural heritage is closely tied to the landscape, agricultural land use, economy, water management, settlement patterns and structures, as well as visual amenity. As a result, the detrimental impact on one of these aspects from a scheme of this scale will have a cumulatively detrimental impact on all the others, and thus they cannot be considered in isolation. **We insist that the EIA takes this into account.**

As documented by Natural England, the National Character Area of Romney Marsh is a "unique and sometimes forbidding area" with a "character all of its own". Its distinct local character and historical sense of place make it very different to any other in the UK and its residents are fiercely proud to call it the Fifth Continent. As parts of the Scoping Report allude to, Romney Marsh is renowned for its open landscape, historic settlement patterns, and sense of remoteness. We are concerned that the scale of this energy scheme would introduce extensive industrial infrastructure, permanently altering the remote, rural and historic identity of our area. Cumulative industrialisation of the landscape, as is being proposed, would have a detrimental impact on both residents and visitors who all value the area's cultural heritage. We believe the industrial infrastructure on the scale SSE Renewables proposes would disrupt our unique and traditional landscape, block or degrade important sightlines across the landscape, thus diminishing the visual and cultural connection residents and visitors have to Romney Marsh heritage. It would affect how our cultural heritage is experienced and understood by current and coming generations, creating lasting damage beyond the lifetime of the scheme. We are particularly concerned that the cumulative impact of this and other projects targeting the Newchurch area would also drive residents, businesses and visitors away, leaving lasting damage to the community. We therefore believe that a scheme of this scale and nature is wholly inappropriate for our area and **request that the EIA assesses the cumulative, interconnected long-term impacts the scheme would have on all aspects of life in the area**. **We also request the Residential Amenity Assessments are carried out for all sensitive residential and business receptors locating within and around the immediate sites as well as on the escarpment overlooking the Marsh.**

Soils and Agricultural Land

Romney Marsh consists of primarily Grade 1 and grade 2 agricultural land. The fields in site 1 and 2, for example, are growing peas, milling wheat and winter bird feed crops this year. These are currently grown in rotation with oil seed rape and beans across other years.

Various government policies and publications including the recent DESNZ's Solar Roadmap emphasize the need to protect the best and most versatile (BMV) land:

> *This Roadmap sets out how, alongside ground mount projects, we plan to drive forward deployment of solar across multifunctional uses of space such as rooftops, car parks and water bodies whilst maintaining planning protections for our best agricultural land. The planning system considers the impacts of development on food production and planning policy and guidance for England is clear that wherever possible, developers should utilise brownfield, industrial, contaminated, or previously developed land. Where the development of agricultural land is shown to be necessary, lower-quality land should be preferred to higher-quality land. If a solar project proposes to use any best and most versatile agricultural land, developers are required to justify using such land and design their projects to avoid, mitigate and where necessary, compensate for any impacts.*

In a letter to the Leader of the Folkestone & Hythe District Council dated 30 May, 2025 from the Minister for Energy Michael Shanks, he writes that "It is of course important that the Government strikes the balance between the need for increased clean energy and impacts on local communities" and that "We encourage the effective use of land by focusing large scale solar projects on previously developed and non-greenfield land…".

The Scoping Report does not address measures to seek alternative sites of lower quality land in the section on Alternatives Considered in Part 1, Chapter 3. Given the wealth of lower quality land across Kent in proximity to UKPN's transmission network and closer to NGET's existing substations, there is a need for an explanation as to why Newchurch was targeted, especially as there is no nearby substation and the project would require public investment into a new 400kV substation to meet the needs of what we are told is a temporary infrastructure, and thus arguably not a good or sustainable use of public funds.

We are aware that Kent County Council aim to make former landfill sites available for solar and BESS development which would seem a far better use of land. As there seems to be an alternative option available, we suggest that SSE Renewables seek to move their poised site to a more suitable location in line with the County Council's needs and strategies.

We also question the placing of BESS on high-grade BMV farm land. The amount of concrete foundations required to site the BESS in a Zone 3 (high risk) flood zone would indicate that returning the land back to arable farming in 20 or 40 years would be highly unfeasible and costly. The scheme's far higher BESS capacity versus installed solar generation capacity indicates higher reliance on BESS for arbitrage purposes than for storing solar energy - noting especially that the load capacity of solar panels in the UK averages per year only 10-11% of installed capacity. Therefore, it is arguably difficult to justify the removal of high grade BMV land out of food production in order to 'harvest the sun's power' for energy production when the main purpose is energy trading and 'grid balancing'. If arbitrage/grid balancing is the main purpose of the energy park, then arguably the park could be sited anywhere along the transmission grid, closer to an existing substation, preferably on poor quality, grade 4-5 land. The commercial purpose of the BESS does not justify removing prime food producing BMV land in the centre of Romney Marsh.

In addition, FHDC local policies and planning explicitly sets out to protect BMV land in the area, recognising that Romney Marsh's agricultural land is some of the most fertile in Kent. Policy CC6 in FHDC's Places and Policies Local Plan specifically states:

> '*The development of new solar farms, or the extension of existing solar farms, will only be acceptable where:*
>
> *10. The solar farm will not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.*

Furthermore, FHDC Policy HW3 regarding Development That Supports Healthy, Fulfilling and Active Lifestyles states:

> *To increase, create and safeguard opportunities for healthy, fulfilling and active lifestyles and to reduce the environmental impact of importing food, development proposals should:*
>
> *3. Not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) unless there is a compelling and overriding planning reason to do so and mitigation is provided through the provision of productive landscapes on-site or in the locality.*

FHDC Places and Policies Local Plan adopted September 2020 CC6.1 – Solar Farms - states that developments will only be acceptable if they do not cause an adverse impact on sensitive local landscapes or heritage assets. And Policy CC6.10 states that “The solar farm will not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land”. Clearly the proposed Shepway Energy Park fails to meet these two criteria.

The CPRE report, titled "Getting solar off the ground" (July 2025), argues for a "countryside-friendly approach to clean power" by advocating for a significant increase in rooftop solar installations and stricter limitations on ground-mounted solar developments, particularly on productive farmland. They state that nearly two-thirds (59%) of the land used by England's largest operational solar developments is productive farmland, with 31% being "best and most versatile" (BMV Grades 1-3a). This is despite planning policy encouraging the protection of productive farmland.

The CPRE report argues that deploying large-scale solar on productive land causes "considerable, and needless harm", particularly given the "untapped potential for rooftop solar" and also that such developments contribute to the "industrialisation effect" and erode rural character, especially when schemes are clustered. Poorly sited mega solar projects also risk public support for net zero goals, as communities often feel ignored.

CPRE recommends banning ground-mounted solar on Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land due to its scarcity, and calls for at least 60% of solar energy to come from rooftops, car parks, and brownfield sites. This aligns with the report's stance that a "clear alternative exists" to covering productive farmland. We would support these recommendations.

We request that any soil testing carried out as part of the EIA should be undertaken by a wholly independent government-approved organisation and include a history of crop types and yields for each site.

We understand from other community groups and academics such as Professor Michael Alder of the University of Essex that there are examples of consultancy companies carrying out soil testing for such purposes as solar scheme EIAs using outdated and inadequate metrics to in effect ‘downgrade’ BMV land to achieve a result that suit the developers’ needs and is not reflective of the reality of the crop yields achieved, as we have recently found with the St Mary in the Marsh solar farm proposal. We would like to point out that these metrics may well not be very accurate or consistent on our Marsh lands due to the high water table and may create very different results depending on the time of year they are carried out.

We also note that Natural England recommend auger boring to a depth of 1.2m. How will this boring process ensure that the activities do not damage existing water drainage pipes that sit around a metre beneath the soil surface and cross each of the land parcels?

SSE Renewables’ proposal states that sheep grazing may be carried out between the panels. However, the government guidance recommends that to reduce UK greenhouse gas emissions, UK consumers reduce consumption of meat - beef and lamb specifically - by up to 35%. Encouraging sheep grazing would seem to be contra to this climate policy recommendation and would therefore not be a sustainable form of agrovoltaic activity in the long term. We also understand that sheep grazing was stopped by the operating company after a few years at an existing Romney Marsh solar farm (Sycamore Solar Farm at Old Romney) as the company deemed it more cost-effective to mow the grass. There are no sheep grazing there any more. Until the UK follows in the steps of other countries that are seeking to combine solar energy generation with arable and horticultural farming, the use of BMV land cannot be justified.

Climate change, flood risk and water management

As the Scoping Report points out, the area optioned for the proposal is in flood risk zone 3. The area in question is below high tide levels and relies on a careful combination of sea defences, dykes and underground water drainage pipes to keep the water out. It has been managed in this way for centuries and the delicate balance between marsh and agricultural land has been successfully maintained. With the combined impacts of climate change relating to sea level rise, wind/storm surges, precipitation change and temperature change particularly, **we request that the In Combination Climate Impact Assessment (ICCI) is not scoped out**, despite the point made in the Planning Inspectorate's Scoping Opinion.

National Guidance and best practice for NSIPs require that all climate change variables are considered in the ICCI. Scoping them out risks underestimating the cumulative and in-combination effects on both the development and the wider Romney Marsh. We believe a development like this in conjunction with other similar developments proposed would risk severe cumulative impacts on the Romney Marsh landscape and environment resulting from future climate change effects, flooding and water management, wind storms and rainwater run off, to name but a few. The argument that these projects will contribute to mitigating climate change on Romney Marsh cannot be justified given the global nature of climate change, and the lack of action to reduce fossil fuel emissions in the major emitting countries like China, India, Indonesia, USA etc.

We also request that a comprehensive assessment is carried out of how drainage will be managed in and around large schemes like this by SSE, the Internal Drainage Board and the landowners/ farmers, especially given they are part of an intricate and ancient drainage system that stretches way beyond the proposed 5km ZoI boundary of the scheme as far as Hythe, Tenterden, Heathfield and Cliff End.

Ecology, Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Net Gain

The recent report 'Gridlock or Growth' from the ESNZ Select Committee raised serious concerns about the failure of energy developers to deliver ecological enhancements and landscape mitigations promised during the planning process. Given the huge amounts of mitigation that would be required to protect visual amenity and protect against glint and glare from receptors in the uplands / escarpment and on the Marsh itself, especially with heights ranging from 4.5-5m and up to 12.5m for the infrastructure, we do not believe that the project can replace the biodiversity it will destroy to construct the scheme, and then increase it again from the baseline up to a 10% minimum BNG for many many decades.

Moreover, residents at the consultation were variously told that many existing wildlife habitats on the Marsh such as ditches would be widened or moved and blackthorn hedge ripped out to facilitate the scheme. **We request that existing habitats and biodiversity are 100% maintained as they currently are and ecological enhancements are integrated and added into existing biodiversity**, rather than replacing it. **We also request all affected residents and relevant organisations and businesses are engaged heavily with the process to design strategies to protect existing biodiversity** and find appropriate ways to add to it.

Landscape and Visual Amenity

The proposed Shepway Energy Park poses significant adverse impacts on the landscape and visual amenity of the Romney Marsh and its surrounding areas, as already acknowledged within the Scoping Report. Based on this, we question why the project has even reached this stage given the recognition that it will have significant adverse impacts on the LVA.

The Romney Marsh is characterised as a "unique landscape with a strong sense of place," defined by its "flat, expansive, open landscape and limited vegetation cover". This distinctive character allows for "long views to features such as church towers that form landmarks on the horizon", with its landscape patterns reflecting centuries of historic land reclamation. To the north, the Greensand Escarpment, a "steeply rising scarp slope," offers "expansive, long-range views across Romney Marsh". The interrelationship between the Marsh and the Escarpment is identified as a "key characteristic of the LVIA Study Area". These inherent characteristics, coupled with local plan landscape designations, contribute to "higher landscape and visual baseline sensitivities".

The Scheme's proximity to the Kent Downs National Landscape (KDNL) is a critical factor. Although the Energy Park Site is not physically located within the KDNL, its northern edge (Site 4) lies immediately adjacent to the designation boundary. Within the LVIA Study Area, the KDNL encompasses the Greensand Escarpment and extends up to 1.5 km south into parts of Romney Marsh. National Landscapes are afforded the "highest levels of protection" for landscape conservation and enhancement, a principle enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Crucially, the Scheme is expected to lie within the "setting" of the KDNL. The KDNL Setting Position Statement explicitly clarifies that this setting "does not have a geographical border, but generally comprises land outside but visible from the designation, including Romney Marsh". Policy protection for the KDNL unequivocally "also applies to its setting", meaning impacts on the setting are legally significant.

SSE Renewables' and AECOM's own assessment predicts "temporary significant adverse landscape effects" during the construction phase, stemming from "alterations to surface vegetation, the presence of construction machinery and an associated reduction in tranquillity". These construction activities are also expected to result in "significant adverse visual effects" due to fundamental changes in the composition of views. During the operational phase, the Energy Park Site has the potential to cause "significant adverse landscape effects" through the "change in land use resulting from the presence and massing of the solar PV modules and associated structures". This will lead to "indirect landscape effects" from "perceptual changes in views, such as those from the National Landscape which may be associated with the setting". Furthermore, "significant adverse visual effects" are anticipated due to alterations in view composition within a predominantly rural landscape characterized by expansive panoramas.

Even with proposed mitigation measures, "significant residual landscape or visual effects may remain during operation beyond year 15". This persistence of harm is attributed to the "spatially extensive nature of the Scheme; sensitivities associated with both local landscape character designations and the National Landscape setting... and where mitigation such as hedgerows or species-rich pasture is not practical or appropriate". For receptors with elevated views, particularly from sensitive locations within the National Landscape, the development may appear "spatially extensive".

The legal and policy basis for objecting to impacts on the KDNL is clear, even if the development is not physically within its boundaries. The KDNL Setting Position Statement explicitly states the setting "does not have a geographical border, but generally comprises land outside but visible from the designation, including Romney Marsh". This establishes that the "highest levels of protection"

afforded to National Landscapes are extended to its setting, meaning that "perceptual, indirect changes" visible from the KDNL are legally significant impacts that must be weighed in the decision-making process. This should prevent SSE Renewables from disclaiming responsibility for impacts merely because the project is outside the formal designation.

Relevant national planning policies and statements that underscore these concerns include:

- **Overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy (EN-1) (Ref 9-3):** Section 5.10 explicitly addresses landscape and visual considerations, including National Landscapes, when assessing energy projects.
- **NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) (Ref 9-4):** Section 2.10, particularly paragraphs 2.10.93 to 2.10.101, details landscape, visual, and residential amenity considerations pertinent to solar photovoltaic generation.
- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Ref 9-6):** Paragraph 135 emphasizes developments that include appropriate and effective landscaping sympathetic to local character and setting; paragraph 187 advocates for contributing to and enhancing the natural and local environment; and paragraphs 190 and 191 specifically address National Landscapes and their setting.

The company's own assessment, through its classification of the baseline as highly sensitive and its prediction of "significant adverse effects," fundamentally undermines the suitability of the proposed site for a development of this scale, especially when there is no evidence that they have sought alternative sites on less sensitive land and landscapes. This is a critical admission, indicating that the project's impacts are not merely minor or localized, but are of a magnitude that should, by definition, trigger serious concerns under planning policy. This suggests that the inherent characteristics of the site are fundamentally incompatible with the proposed development.

Furthermore, the company's analysis reveals a fundamental dilemma regarding mitigation: "hedgerows along field or ditch boundaries are not considered to be a typical, contemporary feature of Romney Marsh," and their "wholesale introduction will compromise the key qualities of openness". This leads to the conclusion that "the provision of screening will therefore be a challenge in terms of providing appropriate mitigation of visual effects in such an open landscape". This demonstrates that the predicted "significant residual landscape or visual effects" are not merely a minor consequence but an unavoidable outcome of siting a large-scale solar farm in this specific type of open landscape. The project cannot be effectively "integrated into its landscape context" as required by local policy.

Noise and Vibration

The proposed Shepway Energy Park is predicted to generate significant adverse noise and vibration effects on sensitive receptors throughout its construction, operational and decommissioning phases.

The rural setting which the proposed Shepway Energy Park would sit within has very low existing background noise levels, meaning any additional noise from the development will be highly noticeable and disruptive, especially at night. Concerns exist regarding specific noise characteristics, such as tonal, impulsive, or intermittent sounds, which can be particularly intrusive.

The flat, open nature of Romney Marsh means that even low level noise travels extremely far. Voices of cyclists talking while travelling on the flat roads in some areas can be heard 0.5km away. The sound of the RHDC steam trains can also be heard in Newchurch, 4-5 miles from the source. The construction noise and vibration from, for example, traffic, piling, or impact driving for years

on end will create serious disturbance for many people from miles around on Romney Marsh, not just the communities directly affected. Furthermore, the cumulative hum of hundreds of inverters plus the substation once in operation will be easily heard by sensitive receptors and in surrounding villages.

The introduction of substantial noise and vibration from both temporary construction and long-term operational plant into a demonstrably rural and likely tranquil environment presents a direct conflict with the NPPF's objective to protect such areas. Even with mitigation, the sheer scale and duration of noise generation from an industrial energy park will fundamentally alter the acoustic character of the surrounding area, impacting the quality of life for nearby residents and recreational users, and potentially undermining the area's inherent tranquility.

During the **construction and decommissioning phases**, temporary noise and vibration effects are anticipated from "site preparation, plant installation, substation construction, cable laying, and vehicle movements" within the Energy Park Site boundary and along access routes. Construction traffic on public roads also has the potential to cause "temporary disturbance".

During the **operational phase**, potential noise effects are anticipated from "Energy Park plant (e.g. inverters, transformers, and the motors for the tracking PV module mounting structure), battery storage plant (e.g. cooling units, inverters, transformers), the on-site substations (e.g. transformers), and any associated vehicle movements". It is noted that solar PV modules, mounting structures, and cabling themselves will not produce operational noise emissions. However, **we request that operational vibration should not be scoped out of the EIA** given the nature of the Romney Marsh land.

The long-term, continuous nature of noise emissions from fixed operational plant, even if individually below peak construction levels, poses a significant and persistent amenity impact on sensitive receptors. Unlike temporary construction noise, this is a permanent change to the baseline acoustic environment for four decades. The cumulative effect of this continuous industrial hum in a rural setting, particularly during quieter evening and night-time periods where lower SOAELs apply, could lead to chronic annoyance and a measurable reduction in quality of life for nearby residents, potentially constituting a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Relevant legislation and policy frameworks governing noise and vibration should be adhered to including:

- **Control of Pollution Act (CoPA) 1974 (Ref 11-3):** Requires that Best Practicable Means (BPM) are adopted to control construction noise as far as reasonably practicable.
- **Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Ref 11-4):** Prescribes noise and vibration emitted from premises as a statutory nuisance if prejudicial to health or a nuisance.
- **Overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy (EN-1) (Ref 11-5):** Section 5.12 is relevant to the assessment of noise.
- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Ref 11-7):** Paragraph 187 states that planning policies and decisions should prevent new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by noise pollution. Paragraph 198 further describes that planning policies and decisions should ensure new development is appropriate for its location, considering likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions, and the natural environment, and the potential sensitivity of the site or wider area. Mitigation should reduce potential

adverse impacts to a minimum to avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life, and tranquil areas need to be identified and protected.

Glint and Glare

The proposed Shepway Energy Park has the potential for significant glint and glare effects on sensitive receptors, a concern acknowledged within SSE Renewables' Scoping Report. Glint is defined as a direct, specular reflection of the sun from the development, while glare is a continuous source of brightness from scattered lightwaves.

While solar panels are designed to absorb light, their inherent reflectivity in an open and flat landscape like Romney Marsh means that glint and glare are particularly pertinent issues, especially to sensitive receptors.

The characteristic "big skies" and expansive views of the Marsh amplify the potential for visual intrusion, making the assessment and mitigation of these effects crucial for the proposed Shepway Energy Park. The flat terrain and lack of significant visual obstructions (like hills or dense woodlands) mean that solar panels (especially at 5m in height) can be seen from much greater distances across the Marsh. This extends the potential range of glint and glare effects to a wider area and more receptors.

The expansive open skies of Romney Marsh are a key characteristic. The introduction of large, reflective surfaces like solar panels will significantly alter this dominant visual element, especially when glint and glare are present, creating a contrasting and potentially jarring visual feature.

As pointed out, Romney Marsh is valued for its sense of remoteness and tranquillity. The flashes and continuous brightness from solar panels would undermine this character, introducing an artificial and often distracting element into a largely natural and agricultural landscape.

The National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (NPS EN-3) (Ref 9-4) explicitly requires the assessment of potential impacts of glint and glare on "nearby homes and motorists". SSE Renewables' Scoping Report states that a "general consideration of the potential for glint and glare from the Scheme to cause significant effects to landscape and visual receptors will be provided".

The company's own acknowledgment that glint and glare have the "potential for a likely significant effect" on human receptors (residents and motorists) is a direct admission of potential harm. This is not merely a visual nuisance but can pose genuine safety risks to drivers, potentially causing temporary blinding or distraction, and can significantly impact the living conditions and amenity of nearby residents by creating intrusive bright flashes or continuous brightness. The necessity for a dedicated technical assessment and the consideration of anti-reflective coatings underscore the severity of this potential impact, which is a direct consequence of the project's scale and technology in an open landscape.

A separate, dedicated glint and glare assessment is planned to be included as a technical appendix to the ES. However, **we request that specific Glint and Glare Assessments should be carried out for all of the most sensitive receptors**, especially residential dwellers, businesses and road users at potential flash points.

We also request that the primary legislation and policy governing glint and glare effects is adhered to including:

- **NPS EN-3 Section 2.10 (Ref 16-39):** This section sets out government policy regarding the consideration of glint and glare in relation to solar photovoltaic generation impacts. It also advises on appropriate assessment methods and potential mitigation measures.

Transport and Access

The proposed Shepway Energy Park presents significant adverse impacts on transport and access, primarily through increased Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements, Abnormal Indivisible Loads (AILs), and unavoidable disruption to Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and local rural lanes.

Construction activities will necessitate "construction-related vehicle movements within the Energy Park Site boundary and along access routes". The transport of large components, such as PV modules, is anticipated to originate from local ports, utilizing both the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and local roads. An initial access feasibility assessment is planned to identify the most suitable routes for these components. However, the existing road network in the vicinity is characterized by its "rural nature," comprising "narrow rural roads". Many of these local roads "may be subject to restrictions (such as weight restrictions of below 7.5 tonnes or width of the vehicle restrictions as noted along Gigger's Green Road and Chapel Lane, etc)". Most of Wills Lane that runs between Site 1 and 2 which is earmarked for main access points to the land parcels to the west of the scheme is definitely not suitable for HGVs, as per the road signs on Newchurch Road. Normal cars even struggle along it, as admitted by SSE R's Project Manager, Haveer Dookhit, on a visit to residents at Oak Barn on Wills Lane.

The inherent mismatch between the scale and nature of construction traffic (HGVs, AILs) required for an NSIP and the existing narrow, restricted, and rural road network around Newchurch presents a significant and potentially unmitigable adverse impact on transport and access. Despite proposed "careful management of routing and timing", the physical constraints of the local roads would suggest that there would be significant disruption, delays, and safety concerns for local residents and road users. This indicates a fundamental incompatibility between the project's logistical demands and the existing infrastructure, rendering the local road network unsuitable for the proposed construction traffic. We expect that prolonged disruption and danger to drivers, cyclists, caravans and other users of the internal road networks of Romney Marsh for up to 3 years would also have an adverse impact on other areas of business such as tourism which is a major part of the Romney Marsh economy.

It would seem that in order for such a scheme to be feasible a large programme of road improvements, widening, repairing etc etc would need to take place, adding even more disruption and time to the construction phase. Are these costs something that SSE Renewables will factor into their budgets? The cost of improving and repairing roads to KCC's already cash-strapped Highways department, (and hence the taxpayer), as a result of the construction phase would arguably be prohibitive.

The site is also traversed by an "extensive network of public rights of way (PRoW) both within the Energy Park Site and across the surrounding area". Specific PRoW (e.g., AE632, HM198, HM199, HM196, HM197, HM195, HM185, HM183, HM155, HM175, HM154) either cross or are adjacent to the Energy Park Site boundary. Additionally, National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 2 runs along the boundary of Site 4 and through the Interconnecting Cable Corridor Search Area. This NCN is greatly used all year round by the thousands of cyclists that visit the Marsh every year.

Construction traffic movements on public roads would cause "temporary disturbance", and "temporary diversions of PRoWs during the construction phase" would probably need to be

implemented. The pervasive presence of PRoW and a National Cycle Route directly within the project footprint means that significant and prolonged disruption to public recreational access is unavoidable during the construction phase. This will negatively impact on the amenity of local residents and visitors who rely on these routes for walking and cycling. While diversions are proposed, they often lead to reduced accessibility, increased journey times, and diminished recreational experience, conflicting with planning policies that seek to protect and enhance public access and amenity.

We request that relevant legislation and policy frameworks addressing transport and access are adhered to including:

- **NPS EN-1 Section 5.14 (Ref 14-1):** Outlines planning policy for Traffic and Transport, including guidance on undertaking relevant parts of the EIA.
- **NPS EN-3 Section 2.10 (Ref 14-2):** Includes subsections on 'Construction including traffic and transport noise and vibration' and 'mitigations as a result of Construction including traffic and transport noise and vibration'.
- **NPPF Paragraphs 109-118 (Ref 14-4):** Sets out relevant NPPF requirements relating to Transport and Access.

Ground Conditions

The Shepway Energy Park Scheme faces significant challenges and risks concerning ground conditions. These include the shrink-swell character of the clay soils, the high water table (1 metre below ground level), historical land uses that introduce potential contamination, and the documented presence of Unexploded Ordnance (UXO).

The ground in parts of the area in question on Romney Marsh is subject to a great deal of movement, not just from shrink and swell of the clay soils. Many old buildings including those within the area of the proposed energy plant are subject to sinking or subsidence while newly constructed buildings have to be built on concrete rafts to sustain movement of the ground. **These factors should be thoroughly examined in the EIA** as we believe that the ground on Romney Marsh is extremely inappropriate for such energy projects of this scale.

In addition to unstable ground, a portion of the western area of the site was historically utilized as the Newchurch Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) during World War II, operating from July 1943 to September 1944. This temporary airfield included various industrial features such as runways, dispersal areas, blister hangars, tents, firing bays, a gun site, and a fuel store. These historical features represent potential sources of contamination, with likely contaminants of concern including metals, hydrocarbons (Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons (TPHs), Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)), Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), and asbestos-containing materials (ACM)/asbestos.

Additionally, the Orgarswick Refuse Tip, a historical landfill, is located a mere 155 meters east of the site. This landfill operated between 1938 and 1976, accepting a broad range of wastes including inert, industrial, commercial, household, and liquid sludge. This landfill is identified as a potential source of ground gas migration onto the site. The combination of a former WWII airfield and an adjacent historical landfill introduces a complex and multi-faceted ground contamination risk that far exceeds that of typical agricultural land. This is not a simple, single-source contamination issue but a layered problem involving various hazardous substances and potential ground gas migration. This complexity implies that remediation efforts will be extensive, costly, and potentially challenging, with a higher likelihood of unforeseen ground conditions and associated risks to human health and controlled waters during construction and operation, conflicting with the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Furthermore, due to the site's past use as the Newchurch ALG during WWII, there is a documented risk of Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). Crucially, "four V1 impacts have been mapped in the vicinity of the runways, with three of these located within the Energy Park Site". The presence of confirmed V1 bomb impacts directly within the site elevates the Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) risk from a general wartime possibility to a specific, high-hazard threat. This is not a theoretical risk but a documented one, necessitating significant safety protocols, specialist UXO clearance, and potentially costly delays during ground-breaking works. This poses a direct and severe risk to human health and safety during construction, and potentially long-term if any UXO remains undetected, which must be fully accounted for in the project's feasibility and risk management. As per CIRIA guidance, a "detailed UXO Risk Assessment" is required.

We request that the assessment of ground conditions and potential contamination adheres to the following key legislative drivers:

- **Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Part 2A) (Ref 16-42):** Provides the legislative framework for defining and assessing "contaminated land".
- **Water Resources Act 1991 (Ref 16-43) and the Water Resources Act 1991 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2009 (Ref 16-44):** Provide statutory protection to controlled waters and make unwarranted discharge an offense.
- **Water Act 2003 (Ref 16-45):** Added the pollution of controlled waters as a determinant of contaminated land and mandated the remediation of contamination.
- **Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 (Ref 16-47):** Aims to protect water bodies and prevent groundwater pollution.
- **Building Act 1984 (Ref 16-46), the Building Regulations 2010 (Ref 16-48), and The Building Regulations & c (Amendment) Regulations 2015 (Ref 16-49):** Provide legislative direction on structural and design aspects of development based on the geotechnical properties of the ground.

Other relevant legislation includes the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (Ref 16-50), Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 (Ref 16-51), Contaminated Land (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (Ref 16-52), Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) Regulations 2015 (Ref 16-53), Anti-Pollution Works Regulations 1999 (Ref 16-54), and The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (Ref 16-55).

We note that a Preliminary Risk Assessment (PRA) has been conducted to identify and evaluate potential land quality risks and development constraints, and to construct an initial Conceptual Site Model (CSM) to inform future ground investigation and design. The PRA concludes that the risk to the site from contaminated land ranges from very low to moderate, with the majority of risks being low to moderate/low. However, **we recommend further investigation, including a detailed UXO Risk Assessment and a geo-environmental ground investigation to assess potential pollutant linkages, support earthworks, and develop the scheme's design**. The ground investigation should be designed to assess the migration of ground gas from the historical landfill and potential contamination sources associated with the Newchurch ALG.

We also request that details of the backsheets to be used on the solar panels are fully assessed in the EIA as we understand that Flouropolymer type back sheets can leech cancerous chemicals into the ground which become ‘forever chemicals that do not break down naturally’. This could pose a risk not just to the ground on the site but to the wider ecology and soils of the Marsh, such as the Royal Military Canal. **We would like to see a full assessment of the risks to ground soils and**

ground water in the ZoI and beyond from different types of materials used within the solar panels and battery storage units.

Major Accidents and Disasters

The proposed Shepway Energy Park introduces a novel, high-consequence hazard into the rural landscape, specifically the fire risk associated with its large-scale Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) component.

The Scheme includes a substantial BESS with a capacity of circa 400MW/800MWh - far greater than is needed to store energy that can be generated from the solar panels. SSE Renewables explicitly acknowledges a "potential for fire as a result of the battery storage element of the Scheme". While the BESS is designed to incorporate automatic control, cooling, shutdown, and suppression systems to regulate temperatures and minimize fire risk, the very necessity of such elaborate safety measures underscores the inherent severity of this risk. We note a "Framework Battery Safety Management Plan (BSMP)" is to be developed to manage these potential risks.

A fire involving a BESS can have significant environmental consequences, including the release of toxic fumes into the atmosphere and the generation of contaminated firewater runoff, which could severely impact water quality across the whole Marsh and especially the Royal Military Canal. Such an event also poses a direct and immediate threat to human health and safety in the surrounding community due to potential explosions, toxic gas release, or the need for emergency response. Communities in the line of the prevailing south westerly wind on the escarpment will be at as much risk as those living down on the Marsh in and around Newchurch. This represents a new and complex risk profile for the area, which is a direct consequence of the project's technology choice and scale.

The health and environment risk aspects and fire risks associated with BESS have been “scoped out”. **We would argue that extensive and detailed considerations of fire and other serious risk associated with BESS should be “scoped in”**. There have been three major fires in BESS installations in 2025 in the UK already indicating this is not a rare occurrence. As these fires are impossible to extinguish, they give off fumes that are toxic to humans and wildlife, and can spread to adjacent units, detailed consideration of how such events would be managed within Kent Fire and Rescue Services’ abilities and resources should be central to the EIA.

We are also concerned about the ongoing effects that would result from a BESS fire. The water used to douse down and cool adjacent units will contain toxins and will inevitably drain into the watercourses and main sewers. All of these watercourses across the entire Romney Marsh are interconnected and pollution of them would be catastrophic for wildlife and possibly soil and livestock across the entire area.

The local fire brigade is not equipped to deal with BESS fires. On the Romney Marsh, we have volunteer firefighters who cannot always respond. Other more distant fire brigades (Ashford) would take around 20 minutes to access the site and the surrounding road network of narrow lanes presents an obstacle to access for fire fighting equipment.

As a result of these concerns, **we would argue that the EIA should “scope in” detailed considerations of the installation and use of the BESS units and should address these concerns**. We want to particularly draw attention to the amount of water that would be needed for cooling of adjacent units in case of a fire. With water resources already under pressure on the Marsh due to increased housing and unpredictable weather, where would the water be sourced from?

We request that the requirement to consider major accidents and disasters embedded in the EIA Regulations (Ref 16-85) is fully adhered to:

- **EIA Regulations (Ref 16-85):** Schedule 4, Part 5d mandates that the EIA include "a description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment resulting from the risks to human health, cultural heritage or the environment (for example due to accidents or disasters)". Furthermore, Schedule 4, Part 8 requires "a description of the expected significant adverse effects... deriving from the vulnerability of the development to risks of major accidents and/or disasters which are relevant to the project concerned".

Construction damage

We are concerned that construction will destroy the intricate, ancient system of drainage across the site, especially clay pipes. The drainage pipes lie at a relatively shallow level under the fields and drain excess ground water from the Marsh soils into the Royal Military Canal and into the sea. These pipes are integral to the lack of flooding across the Romney Marsh. If these get damaged, it is very likely that the area will flood. Any contamination from the construction phase or operational phase (such as leeching of contaminants from the panels and their frames or the battery storage) could also have a devastating impact on the aquatic life in the Canal which is regularly fished by anglers and is a habitat to large bird, amphibian, insect and flora species too.

We request that the wider RMC be included in the scope of the ZoI and a contamination impact assessment is carried out specifically for the RMC as part of the EIA.

Likewise we are concerned about the soil damage from compaction and the ability of water logged soil to return to the condition it is at presently.

Furthermore, the rural location of many properties mean that private and public water supplies, sewage and waste pipes, telegraph cables, underground electricity cables etc in the area could be severely impacted by the project. **The EIA should identify exactly where such pipes and cables run and demonstrate how they plan to redirect them to a safe and accessible location if they lie within or around the vicinity of the proposed energy scheme**.

In conclusion

We conclude that the **Shepway Energy Park proposal** is **incompatible** with established plans to protect **Romney Marsh**, which is a "heritage asset of Outstanding Significance" known for its "openness and wildness" and rich history as identified in the Folkestone & Hythe District Heritage Strategy. This proposed Scheme also goes against the **National Planning Policy Framework**, which emphasizes protecting "irreplaceable resources" and ensuring development improves, not harm, local character and landscapes.

Building a **1000-acre solar and battery farm** here would **permanently destroy** Romney Marsh's unique character, harm its historic sites, and undermine its tranquility. This is not minor harm; it's **substantial damage to an irreplaceable asset**.

While renewable energy is important, this project, in this specific location, **fails the test of sustainable development** because its negative environmental and heritage impacts clearly outweigh its benefits. Protecting Romney Marsh's unique heritage landscape **must come first**, so this proposal should be **halted**. The developers should find alternative, less damaging sites for this scale and type of renewable energy infrastructure.

Hands Off Our Marsh officially objects to the Shepway Energy Park development as it's currently planned, and we expect our concerns to be fully considered. **We particularly draw attention to the need for comprehensive Residential and Local Business Amenity Assessments, especially for all sensitive receptors in the immediate area of the proposed sites and on surrounding properties on the escarpment. The assessment should not only cover visual amenity but socio-economic, cultural, safety, and health and wellbeing assessments.**

General comments and feedback on the Consultation process and Scoping Report

Many residents have commented to us on how unhappy or disappointed they have been with the Consultation process.

Poor communication and stakeholder/receptor identification: Some residents and businesses directly impacted by the proposals did not receive adequate notice or information about the proposals or the consultation. SSE/AECOM clearly had not made an effort to identify and notify properties which would be most impacted despite getting information from the landowners about affected residents and businesses. Many residents living in close proximity to the boundaries of the proposed area did not even receive the 'flyer' notifying people of the consultation. There were also no regional or local media or social media efforts by SSE Renewables to advertise the proposals or the consultation. Most of the media coverage about the proposals was in fact generated by Hands Off Our Marsh.

Inconsistent information: Many residents felt that the Consultation process was unsystematic and questionable with different SSE/AECOM representatives offering completely ridiculous or contradictory answers to legitimate questions from residents. Everything from using 'deer fencing' to keep out the deer on the Marsh (there are no deer on the Marsh!) to 'moving and widening existing ditches/dykes and ripping out blackthorn hedges to lay pipes' while others were told that the ditches/dykes/hedges would not be touched or altered. Consultees were under the impression that SSE/AECOM representatives had never even visited the Marsh so had no understanding of the clear challenges with a large-scale proposal like this. And the information provided to Consultees at the in-person events was inconsistent. Many experienced energy and construction engineers who live on the Marsh and attended the consultations came out of the events astounded that such a project was even being considered on such unstable ground and with such poor and unsuitable road conditions for HGV traffic within the proposed areas and those leading to them. Many residents noted that the SSE representatives did not take notes at the events of points that were raised by them and questioned whether the consultation is in fact purely a tickbox exercise.

Misinformation and misrepresentation: It is clear from some of the images selected for use within the Scoping Report that AECOM have deliberately selected images taken around the sites that in fact misrepresent the actual area. For example, in Annex C, Photo 7 describes a barn and vehicles 'out of use'. The image is taken from a viewpoint from a section of a field behind the barn in question looking onto the back of the barn (not from the road or its frontage). It is clearly not representative of the whole barn which actually consists of an art studio and vintage vehicle storage. The photo was also taken from the field surrounded by site 1 that is not in fact included in the red

line boundary. The barn itself also lies in the area of site 1 that is not included in the red line boundary.

The imagery taken does not adequately show the true situation of properties, the character nor the state of Wills Lane. There are no images of the properties next door to the so called 'out of use' barn: for example, a newly constructed oak barn property with a creative studio, residential accommodation and a large established garden; a single storey property called The Hostel that used to be for farm workers but is now clearly occupied as a residence with several outbuildings; and the neighbouring Wills Farm farmhouse and its small farmstead land area. The Hostel and Oak Barn however can be seen in Photo 8 which only refers to a road between two energy park sites. Nearby on the same narrow lane there is a big industrial complex owned by BerryPlants Ltd (Photo 5). Travelling north from the Hostel the road narrows significantly and twists and turns greatly, sometimes as much as 90 degrees. It is in very poor condition with very few passing spaces. There are no images that show the true character of this rural lane which is signposted as Unsuitable for HGVs at the north end. This is the same lane that the proposed scheme seems to have marked as one of the main access routes in and out of site 1 and 2.

We also question the use of images of Brooker Farm and its light industrial buildings as this does not lie within the site and is located south of a substantial area of proposed ecological enhancement and mitigation so will not be as affected as those properties that will be surrounded on 3-4 sides by the scheme.

We also find a case of misinformation and misrepresentation on page 8 of the Public Consultation Brochure where, under Accessibility, they state that "the site is easy to access by road to enable the components of the project to be delivered." Any visit to the area and the parcel of land in question would clearly indicate that the site is clearly not easy to access and the roads are wholly unsuitable for the volume and size of the vehicles necessary for the construction.

Compulsory purchase and temporary possession powers

Many residents severely impacted by these proposals and those that are uncertain as to just how affected they might be are concerned about issues of CPO and TPO powers that many companies developing solar schemes like this submit as part of the DCO applications. This applies not just to the landowners but to residents who live in areas that will be extremely inaccessible and possibly even dangerous to live during construction and even afterwards, as well as those who live near the potential cabling areas. **We request to understand the exact scope of potential inclusion of CPO and TPO mechanisms in SSE Renewables plans before the company applies for the DCO**.

Community compensation: The community expects **a much more informative, communicative, honest and transparent approach in future consultation processes** and that SSE Renewables lives up to, and indeed exceeds its claim, to want to be good neighbours. People's lives are in the balance. Residents will find it hard to sell their properties for the next 5-8 years due to uncertainty and then possible disruption. People's pensions are tied up in their properties. This will leave them severely out of pocket. **We demand that SSE Renewables compensates all businesses and residents appropriately just as they are doing the landowners** in the generous terms they have agreed in the lease options. **We also request a generous, preferably in-kind, community fund for the lifetime of the project including decommissioning**, as has been the case with Dungeness power station. For example, if we have to have our tranquil rural and green environment ruined by industrial energy infrastructure, could an area of the scheme be set aside to provide free or

subsidised electricity to all the villages and properties affected, or solar panels donated and installed on the roofs or in the gardens of all properties in the area, or other embedded energy infrastructure provided?

Hands Off Our Marsh officially object to the Shepway Energy Park development as it's currently planned, and expect our concerns to be fully considered in the interests of the safety, wellbeing, health, socio-economic and cultural rights of the Romney Marsh communities it represents.

Amanda Farrant and Kim Gowing,
On behalf of Hands Off Our Marsh

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