Solar Farm at Hastings Country Park – Questions from [redacted]

The revenue at risk from using those fields if we can't mount panels to allow sheep grazing (which is certainly the ambition) because we can't let the fields any more.

GP05 (field directly adjacent to Fairlight Place) 6.97ha Improved grassland field (botanically species poor), gently sloping north to south, managed by grazing. (note income isn't derived from grazing sheep but as it is not in HLS it is a field that can be used flexibly to aid the grazing management across the site where restriction apply)

Income for the field is derived from the Basic Payment Scheme. The field currently contributes to the eligible area under the scheme. Fields with solar panels are not eligible under the scheme. Based on 2017 payment rate of ~£231/ha (calculated in euros so subject to exchange rate changes) this equates to £1610.07 annual loss.

GP08 (field directly south of the Farm) 3.20ha Improved grassland (botanically species poor), gently sloping north to south, managed by grazing. (Note as above, income is not derived from grazing)

Income for the field is derived from the Basic Payment Scheme. The field currently contributes to the eligible area under the scheme. Fields with solar panels are not eligible under the scheme. Based on 2017 payment rate of ~£231/ha (calculated in euros so subject to exchange rate changes) this equates to £739.20 annual loss.

Income from Higher Level Stewardship agreement. As fields with solar panels are not permitted under HLS the field would have to be removed from the agreement. The agreement is for 10years starting in 2013, payments already received for this field in previous years would have to be paid back (reclaimed). This equates to an annual loss of £416.

HLS reclaim for past years payments **£2080** (plus interest)

Estimated Total annual loss for both fields **£2765.27**

Other financial considerations.
If continue to graze with sheep (preferred management), the fields are likely to be less productive in terms of grass growth due to the shading. In addition, welfare checks will be costlier due to the extra time needed to check all the sheep each day they are in the fields, as the solar panel structures will obstruct the view. There would also be a need to check the panels regularly for damage either form the sheep or public (note there are no footpaths or open access in either field but there is always the possibility of the public entering the fields).
If grazing isn't an option, an alternative method of management will need to be put in place i.e. mowing, weed management. Consideration would have to be given to the impact of these fields no longer being available for grazing.

The above will have implication on the land management costs and I suggest an allowance is made for additional management costs but without speaking to the grazier and Murray I can't estimate this.

The top benefits (as you see it from a land management perspective) that could be derived from putting ground mounted solar in those fields.

I don't think there are any direct benefits in terms of the land management.

Field selection - both fields were assessed as botanically poor in 2013, although an updated assessment would be needed, I would expect the botanical interest to still be poor. Impact in terms botanical diversity is likely to be very minimal.

Benefits in terms of the locations of the fields.
No direct public access.
Not highly visible.
Bordered by trees and hedgerows.

Regarding benefits for Hastings Country Park, there has been an objective in the Management Plan for a number of years to have a renewable energy source to supply the electricity needs of the farm. If the installation of the solar panels in the fields enabled solar panels to be erected at the farm, then this could fulfil that objective.

If the solar mounting is ballasted, there should be no damage to any potential archaeology and the fields could be ready reverted back into their original state on removal.

Although the fields themselves are of limited botanical interest they are set in an area of significant wildlife value and there are a number of opportunities for mitigation. For example, wild flower enrichment of the adjacent fields to improve foraging habitat for invertebrates / birds / small mammals/ bats, funding for additional surveys to aid site understanding.

The top risks (as you see it from a land management perspective) that could be derived from putting ground mounted solar in those fields.

Both fields are adjacent / close to nationally and internationally designated sites.

GP05
Distance from **S**ite of **S**pecial **S**cientific **I**nterest boundary - directly adjacent to unit 10 (SE boundary)
Special **A**rea of **C**onservation boundary - as SSSI
Special **P**rotection **A**rea boundary – 540m

GP08
Distance from **S**ite of **S**pecial **S**cientific **I**nterest boundary - directly adjacent to unit 10 (SE boundary)
Special **A**rea of **C**onservation boundary - as SSSI
Special **P**rotection **A**rea boundary – 440m

Both within High Weald AONB and Local Nature Reserve Designation.

Many birds forage/hunt and nest in Hastings Country Park and a number of bird species are mentioned in the designations. A wide range of insects are present in the park and bats have been recorded. As you are aware, due to the proximity to designated sites, Natural England will have to be consulted and this is usually done at the pre-planning stage (note this is a charged service) to identify significant issues before planning.

Natural England published document '**Evidence review of the impact of solar farms on birds, bats and general ecology 2016 (NEER012)'** in March 2017. The document looked at available evidence regarding birds, bats and general ecology and the impact of solar panels. It concludes that there isn't sufficient evidence to confirm either a positive or negative impact and that research into the impact of solar panels is urgently needed.

The impacts of glare from the panels on wildlife seems to be the key area requiring greater understanding. Have you been given any information on this by the solar company?

Consideration will need to be given to sound pollution (I have read panels can cause a wind tunnel sound effect.) Again, seems to be a lack of evidence regarding the impact this could have on wildlife.

Design will need to ensure runoff doesn't cause gullying of rain water which could run into the ghyll on the SSSI/SAC.

Loss of the fields as grazing areas would impact grazing of the rest of the country park by reducing the flexibility of the grazing management.