

Kingsway Solar Community Action Group

Report for Residents and Concerned Parties

This report aims to address the concerns and questions raised by our community regarding the proposed solar farm development. As a community action group, our goal is to provide clear, objective information and facilitate a productive dialogue between residents and developers. We recognise the importance of renewable energy in addressing climate goals, but we also understand the potential impacts that large-scale projects can have on our landscape, agricultural land, and quality of life.

In this report, we present key areas of concern—such as proximity to residential areas, visual impact, agricultural land use, and the consultation process itself. Our intention is to ensure that these issues are considered thoughtfully and that community voices are genuinely heard. By posing specific questions and seeking transparency from developers, we aim to foster an open, constructive process that balances the benefits of renewable energy with the well-being and interests of our community.

Background:

Concerns are growing over the rapid increase in solar farm developments across the UK. There is a lack of cohesive national policy to guide their placement, cumulative environmental impact, and integration with other energy infrastructure. The current approach is often seen as piecemeal, where planning decisions are made without adequate consideration of the broader impacts on the landscape, biodiversity, and rural communities.

Concerns:

Without a national framework to assess the cumulative impact of solar farms, decisions on individual projects are made in isolation. This fragmented approach risks saturating certain regions with solar developments, leading to potential overuse of land and affecting local ecosystems, particularly in rural and agricultural areas. A national strategy could help identify optimal areas for solar farms based on factors like sunlight availability, existing infrastructure, and minimal environmental impact.

Solar farms can cover extensive areas and, when concentrated in certain regions, alter natural landscapes, reduce biodiversity, and interfere with agricultural land use. The absence of a national policy means there's limited oversight on whether these impacts are being mitigated across multiple projects, potentially leading to widespread habitat disruption without adequate compensatory measures. This concern also extends to visual impacts, as clusters of large solar arrays can change the character of rural areas.

In some cases, solar farms are established on high-quality farmland, reducing the area available for food production and potentially impacting the UK's food security. While solar energy is essential for reaching net-zero goals, there is a balance to be struck between renewable energy development and protecting productive land. A national policy could

prioritise the use of lower-quality land or integrate solar farms into brownfield sites to avoid displacing valuable agricultural areas.

Communities such as Balsham, West Wrating, Weston Colville, Willingham Green, and Carlton, have limited say in the approval of local solar farms, particularly when these projects are approved without broader consideration. A national approach could enable communities to participate in consultations more effectively and would consider the socio-economic impacts of numerous clustered-together but independent projects on rural areas, property values, and local industries. The current approach to consultation raises grave concerns.

The Kingsway Solar Community Action Group stands among many communities across the UK who are voicing concerns about the piecemeal approach to solar farm developments. Groups like the UK Solar Alliance¹, the Claydons Solar Action Group², Say No to Sunnica³, the 7000 Acres Group⁴, and the Potterne Solar Action Group⁵ represent thousands of residents similarly concerned about the uncoordinated spread of large-scale solar projects on greenfield and agricultural lands. These groups collectively advocate for a more strategic, cohesive planning framework that balances the need for renewable energy with the preservation of local landscapes, agricultural viability, and community well-being. Our combined voices highlight the widespread desire for a national land-use strategy to guide sustainable energy development, ensuring projects like Kingsway are not assessed in isolation but rather within a thoughtful, regionally balanced plan that addresses local impacts and cumulative effects.

A cohesive approach would enable the UK to expand its renewable energy capacity while minimising unintended consequences and ensuring that solar farm projects are aligned with wider environmental and economic objectives. In the absence of a National Framework, Kingsway Solar Community Action Group would raise the following concerns and questions.

1. Environmental Impact and Biodiversity

Background:

“To achieve the UK Government’s commitment to ‘net-zero’ carbon emissions by 2050, projects such as Kingsway Solar Farm are needed to help provide cleaner sources of energy. If approved, Kingsway Solar Farm would make a significant contribution to energy security in the U.K. providing energy to up to 175,000 homes.”⁶

¹ UK Solar Alliance (2024) Available at: <https://www.uksolaralliance.org/>

² Claydons Solar Action Group (2024) Available at: <https://claydonssolaractiongroup.co.uk/>

³ ‘Say No to Sunnica’ (2024) Available at: <https://www.saynotosunnica.com/>

⁴ 7000 Acres Group (2024) Available at: <https://www.7000acres.co.uk/>

⁵ CPRE Wiltshire (2024, ‘Save One Tree Hill from solar farm development’ Available at: <https://www.cprewiltshire.org.uk/news/save-one-tree-hill-solar-farm-from-development/>

⁶ Kingsway Solar Farm Proposal <https://kingswaysolarfarm.co.uk/proposals/>

Concerns:

Large solar farms, such as the proposed Kingsway Solar Farm, often require extensive land, which can disrupt local ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and take over agricultural land that could support food security. These effects contradict other sustainability goals by potentially damaging habitats and displacing wildlife.

While it is suggested that solar farms can sometimes enhance biodiversity through managed planting around panels the data supporting this is limited.⁷ They can also disrupt local ecosystems and wildlife habitats, particularly if not properly planned. There are concerns about potential negative impacts on local flora and fauna and whether these projects account for local biodiversity needs.

The local area is home to populations of, for example, hares (protected in closed season), skylarks, yellowhammers and linnets (all on the red list⁸). Deer currently range freely across the entire proposed area. Free movement of larger mammals (including hares, badgers and deer) would be compromised by security fencing. Best practice guidance encourages enhancements for biodiversity and recommends ecological assessments to protect habitats and species. These need to be conducted by specialists, and the findings published. All of the studies published to date are for smaller solar farms (under 50 MW) and there is no experience of the impact of installations of this scale.

With the very large area of land under consideration, there is a major risk of fragmenting habitats, and instead the opportunity should be taken to plan for linking important wildlife sites (particularly woodland) and providing good wildlife corridors, outside any security fencing.

We are aware of the solar park at Great Wilbraham, which shows very little sign of increased biodiversity. Indeed during last summer the grass looked as if it might have been treated with biocide. Assurances are needed that a long-term plan for monitoring, management, and reporting will be established for the entire lifespan of the solar farm, in line with RSPB guidance⁹, which recommends implementing a habitat management plan.

Assurances are needed to protect local woodlands, which must remain undisturbed, and to create wildlife corridors—potentially within a buffer zone—that link existing biodiversity areas to support future ecological restoration. Additionally, the projected construction phase, spanning multiple seasons, poses a particularly disruptive risk to wildlife, likely more than the long-term operation phase. A comprehensive plan to manage the impact during construction is essential to protect local biodiversity and ensure responsible development.

Questions:

- Has a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) been conducted? If so, what key findings were noted regarding impacts on local wildlife?
- Has/will the EIA address the construction phase?
- If an EIA has been conducted, who was this conducted by?

⁷ H Blaydes et al (2024) On-site floral resources and surrounding landscape characteristics impact pollinator biodiversity at solar parks. Available at:

<https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/2688-8319.12307>

⁸ Birds of Conservation Concern 5 <https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/birds-conservation-concern>

⁹ RSPB (2024), *Bird use on solar farms, final results*. Available at:

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/science/posts/bird-use-on-solar-farms-final-results>

- How will the project mitigate disruption to protected species, such as those mentioned above?
- What specific measures will be implemented to protect local wildlife and maintain biodiversity on and around the solar farm site?
- Will the project include habitat creation or enhancement to offset any potential biodiversity losses?
- How will wildlife corridors be protected and / or enhanced?
- Will existing hedges, trees, and woodlands be preserved, or will they be removed for development?
- How will disruption of wildlife be managed during the construction phase?

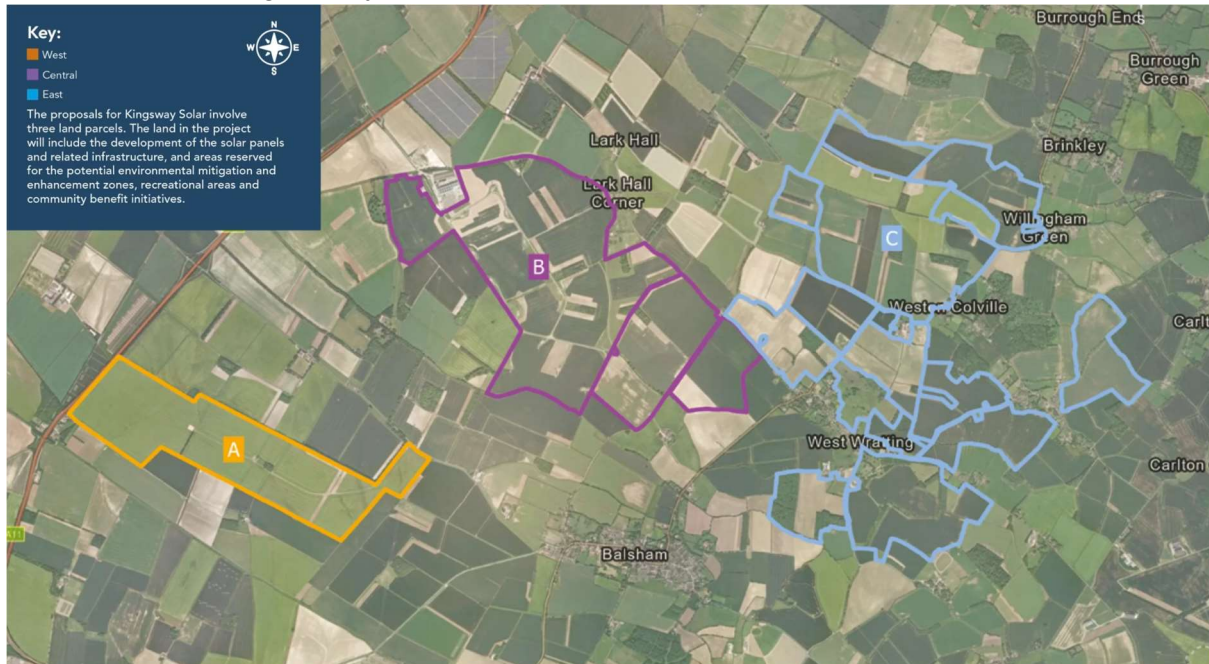
2. Proximity to Residential Areas

Background:

Proximity to residential areas and the visual impact of solar farms and noise from BESS are important considerations in the planning and development process. Solar farms can cover significant areas of land, and the change in the local landscape visible from nearby homes may alter the character of rural communities. Thoughtful siting, along with the use of natural screening methods, such as planting hedgerows or trees, can help to reduce the visual impact for nearby residents. This approach not only helps blend the solar farm into the surrounding environment but also respects the aesthetic and recreational value of rural landscapes. In addition to concerns about visual impact, noise pollution from battery energy storage systems (BESS) is an issue. Ensuring that these projects are set at a reasonable distance from residential areas, and incorporating community feedback into design decisions, can help balance the need for renewable energy infrastructure with the preservation of local scenery and residents' quality of life.

The proposed 1,500-hectare solar farm will bring development in close proximity to residents' homes in our rural communities. In particular, Plot C looks to engulf Weston

Colville, encroaching directly on its boundaries:



Source: Kingsway Solar Farm, <https://kingswaysolarfarm.co.uk/proposals/>

Concerns:

There is concern that the close proximity of these solar farms to residential areas may impact the quality of life for nearby residents. When solar installations are located near homes, they can significantly alter the view, replacing open landscapes with large, uniform rows of solar panels. This change in scenery can diminish the rural or natural character of the area, which many residents value and enjoy. Noise pollution from battery energy storage systems (BESS) may also adversely impact quality of life. Additionally, the construction and maintenance activities associated with solar farms may bring increased traffic, noise, and disruption to quiet neighbourhoods, especially during the installation phase. Close proximity may also raise worries about property values and the overall attractiveness of residential areas for potential buyers. Those wishing to sell their property may be concerned that the construction phase will turn-off potential buyers.

Questions:

- What is the minimum distance between the solar farm boundary and the nearest residential property?
- How was this distance determined, and were community concerns considered in this decision?
- Has a glint or glare assessment been conducted to assess potential effects on nearby residences and public spaces?
- Will the panels have an anti-reflective coating to reduce potential glare for nearby residents?
- What is the minimum distance between BESS and the nearest residential property?
- How was this distance determined, and were community concerns considered in this decision?
- Has a noise impact assessment been carried out?

- What plans are in place to manage noise pollution during both the construction and maintenance phases?
- Has there been an assessment of low-level but constant noise/hum during the operational phase?
- What specific measures are being taken to minimise the visual impact from nearby homes (e.g., planting hedgerows, installing fencing)?
- Will there be any additional landscaping to help blend the solar farm into the natural environment?
- How long will it take for visual screening (such as hedges or trees) to fully mature and provide coverage?
- What will be the maximum height of the solar panels, and are they designed to minimise visibility from nearby properties?
- What is the estimated timeline for construction, and how will traffic be managed to minimise disruption?
- What times will construction activities occur, and how will noise and mud or dust be controlled during this phase?
- What kind of maintenance activities will take place, and how often?
- Will maintenance or operational activities generate noise, and if so, how will noise levels be managed?
- How will community feedback be incorporated into the proposed siting process?
- Will there be ongoing opportunities for residents to provide input on the project (before, during *and* after)?
- Will potential impacts on property values in the surrounding area been assessed?
- Is there any plan for compensating homeowners if their property values are negatively impacted?
- What is the expected lifespan of the solar farm, and what will happen to the site once it is no longer operational?
- Will the land be restored to its original condition after decommissioning, and who will bear the responsibility and costs?
- How will promises relating to decommissioning be underwritten (financially and as a legal requirement)?

3. Agricultural and Land Use Concerns

Background:

Large-scale solar farms often require vast tracts of land, which may overlap with areas traditionally used for agriculture or other valuable land uses. In the UK, there is growing debate over whether using high-quality agricultural land for renewable energy projects is sustainable, especially given the need to ensure long-term food security and the preservation of rural landscapes. While solar farms support renewable energy goals, they can alter the primary use and productivity of the land, raising important questions about the balance between renewable energy development and agricultural needs.

Furthermore, once land is developed for industrial purposes, such as solar farms, it can be reclassified as brownfield. This reclassification makes it more susceptible to future development pressures, including housing. The UK government has actively promoted the

regeneration of brownfield sites for housing to meet national housing targets.¹⁰ The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages the use of previously developed land (brownfield) for new housing developments.¹¹ This policy aims to protect greenfield sites by focusing development on land that has already been utilised for industrial or commercial purposes. Consequently, land that has hosted solar farms may be considered suitable for housing once the solar infrastructure is decommissioned. Instances exist where land initially used for renewable energy projects has been proposed for housing development after the project's end. For example, the North West Cambridge development transformed former agricultural land into a mixed-use urban area, including housing, after its initial use for university purposes.¹² These points highlight the potential trajectory of land from agricultural use to solar farm development and eventually to housing, underscoring the importance of clear land restoration plans post-development to preserve agricultural land and prevent unintended reclassification.

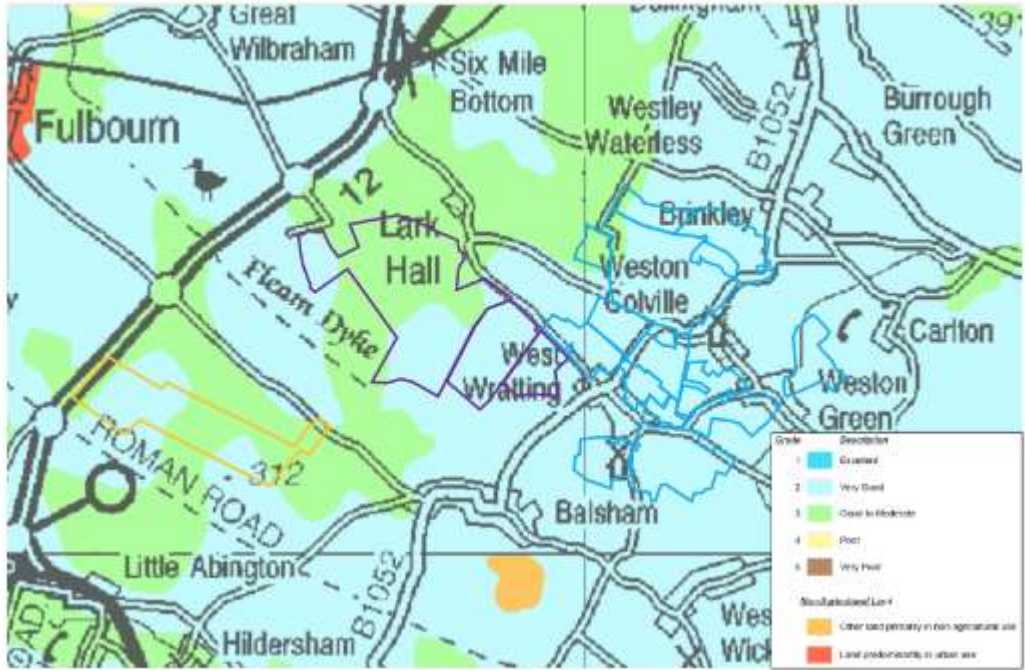
Natural England classifies agricultural land in the UK based on its quality and potential productivity using the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system. This system rates land from Grade 1 to Grade 5, with Grade 1 being the highest quality and most versatile, and Grade 5 being the least suitable for agriculture. Grades 1, 2, and 3a are collectively classified as "Best and Most Versatile" (BMV) land, which means this land is highly productive and capable of supporting a wide variety of crops. BMV land is considered a valuable resource for food production, and its protection is prioritised to ensure agricultural sustainability and food security. Natural England advises that development on BMV land should be minimised, encouraging alternative uses on lower-grade land where possible.

The proposed land is likely to be classified as Grade 3 'Good to moderate' or Grade 2 'Very good':

¹⁰ GOV.UK (2024) 'Thousands of new homes to be built on regenerated brownfield land' Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-new-homes-to-be-built-on-regenerated-brownfield-land>

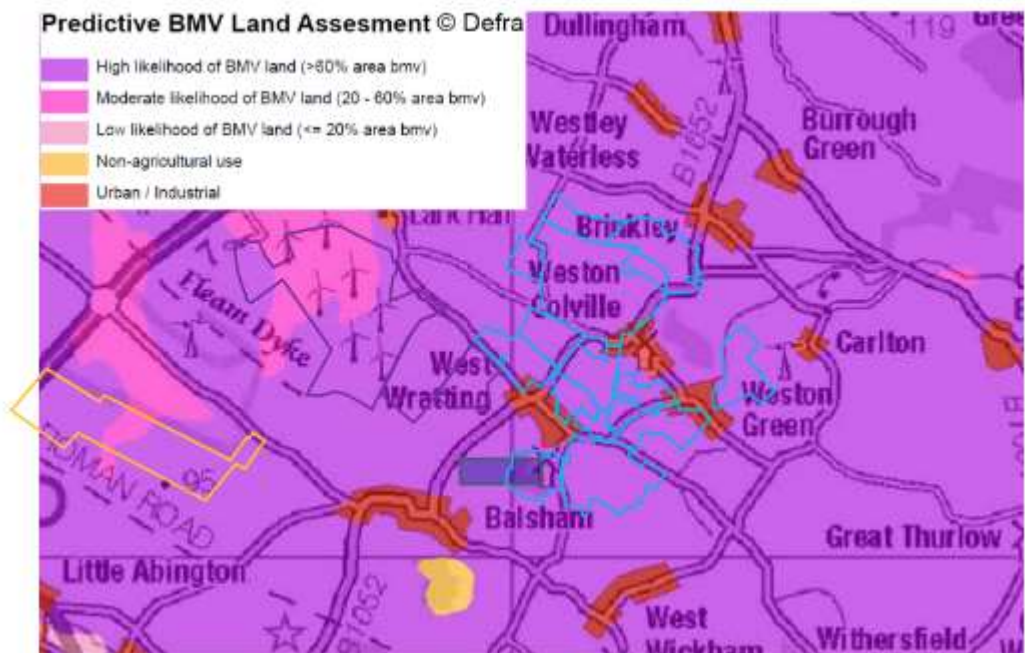
¹¹ Searchland (2024) 'Brownfield land: what is it, and why does it matter for planning?' Available at: <https://searchland.co.uk/blog/brownfield-land-what-is-it-and-why-does-it-matter-for-planning>

¹² Eddington (2024) 'Our vision' Available at: <https://eddingon-cambridge.co.uk/about-us/our-vision-and-history>



Source: Natural England¹³

Natural England are also most likely to grade the proposed land as 'Best Most Versatile (BMV)' which comprises 1, 2, and 3a land:



Source: Natural England¹⁴

¹³ Natural England (2024) *Agricultural Land Classification map Eastern Region (ALC008)* Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/127056?category=5954148537204736>

¹⁴ Natural England (2024), *Likelihood of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land - Strategic scale map Eastern Region (ALC020)* Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6205542189498368?category=5208993007403008>

Concerns:

There is a concern that using productive, high-grade farmland for solar farms reduces the land available for agriculture, which could impact food production and rural economies. This is particularly relevant as the UK strives to maintain self-sufficiency in food production and reduce reliance on imports.

Solar panels can alter the soil environment, affecting its quality and ecosystem. Reduced sunlight and changes in rainfall distribution on the land may impact soil health over time, and compaction from construction and maintenance vehicles can further degrade the soil. These changes could affect the land's ability to return to agricultural use once the solar farm is decommissioned.

Members of our community rely on agriculture as an economic mainstay, and converting farmland to solar farms could reduce local employment opportunities associated with farming. There are concerns that a decrease in agricultural activity could affect the wider rural economy, with fewer jobs and services supporting agriculture.

An additional concern is the long-term future of the land once its use as a solar farm ends, particularly the risk that it may transition into a brownfield site, paving the way for housing or other types of development. Solar farms typically involve significant alterations to the land, including soil compaction, installation of concrete foundations, and possible contamination, which can leave the land less viable for agricultural use. This potential degradation raises the likelihood that the land will not be returned to its original state, making it more susceptible to reclassification as brownfield, which is often prioritised for housing developments. Given the pressure on rural areas to meet housing demands, there is a valid concern that productive farmland initially earmarked for renewable energy may later be converted into residential sites, permanently altering the rural landscape and removing valuable agricultural land from use. This prospect conflicts with long-term commitments to food security and agricultural sustainability, underscoring the need for a clear, enforceable plan for land restoration and protection post-solar development.

Questions:

- What criteria were used to select the land for the solar farm, and was the agricultural grade of the land considered?
- Is there a plan to prioritise lower-quality land for the project to minimise impacts on productive farmland? Does lower quality land exist within the proposed area?
- Has an assessment been conducted on how the solar farm might impact soil quality over time?
- Will there be regular soil health monitoring during the project's lifespan, and what steps will be taken to protect soil quality?
- What plans are in place to ensure the land can return to agricultural use after decommissioning?
- How will the loss of agricultural land be mitigated, and is there a plan to support local farm workers affected by the project?
- Is there a commitment to preserving a portion of the land for continued agricultural use alongside the solar panels?
- How does the project plan to support local employment and the economy, particularly for workers who may be displaced by reduced agricultural activity?
- Will there be any direct benefits for local farmers or agricultural businesses as a result of the solar farm?

- Were local farmers and agricultural stakeholders consulted in the planning process, and if so, how has their input shaped the project?
- Will there be ongoing opportunities for local agricultural stakeholders to provide feedback and stay involved?
- How has the developer justified using this productive land over less valuable alternatives?
- How has the cumulative impact of multiple solar farms in South Cambridgeshire been considered?
- What is the expected lifespan of the solar farm, and what will happen to the site once it is no longer operational?
- If the land will be restored to its original condition after decommissioning, who will bear the responsibility and costs?
- What steps will be taken to prevent the land from being reclassified as brownfield upon decommissioning, potentially making it a candidate for housing or other types of development?
- Will the developer commit to legally binding agreements or covenants to ensure that the land returns to agricultural use rather than being reclassified for residential or commercial development or as brownfield in the future?
- Will the developer consult with local planning authorities on measures to ensure the land will not transition into a brownfield classification post-project? What assurances can be given that future land use will align with community and agricultural needs?
- If restoration to agricultural land is deemed infeasible at the end of the solar farm's lifespan, what other land use options does the developer anticipate, and how will the community be consulted about any alternative proposals?
- What specific measures will protect water resources, particularly runoff and groundwater during construction and operation?
- How will the project address potential soil degradation and prevent harm to agricultural land quality?

4. Community Consultation and Engagement

Background:

In the planning and development of large-scale solar farms, community consultation is a crucial step intended to engage local residents, gather feedback, and address potential concerns. By law, developers are required to conduct public consultations to inform and involve those affected by the project, ensuring that community views are considered before decisions are finalised. This process aims to provide transparency and build trust by allowing residents to understand the project's potential impacts and share their input. Effective consultation can help align the goals of developers with the priorities of the local community, fostering a balanced approach to renewable energy development that respects local perspectives.

Concerns:

As a community action group, we are concerned that the consultation process surrounding the proposed solar farm development may be little more than a tick-box exercise, failing to genuinely consider the views and concerns of local residents. While developers may hold

public meetings or distribute surveys, there is a growing sense that these consultations are conducted simply to fulfil regulatory requirements rather than to actively listen to and address community input.

Local voices must play a meaningful role in decisions that affect our environment, landscape, and quality of life. Yet, without transparency and a commitment to respond to feedback, consultations risk becoming superficial—merely paying lip service to the idea of community engagement. We believe that developers and local authorities have a duty to take our concerns seriously, providing clear evidence of how our feedback has influenced project plans or been factored into any decision-making. True consultation should be a two-way dialogue, with ongoing engagement and accountability, rather than a one-off formality that leaves residents feeling overlooked and disregarded.

Questions:

- What is the primary goal of the consultation process for this project? Is community input genuinely considered, or is consultation simply a statutory requirement?
- How does this consultation differ from previous projects to ensure it is not just a tick-box exercise?
- We note that no feedback has been invited on BESS. Was this an oversight?
- How will the feedback gathered from the community be incorporated into the final plans for the solar farm?
- Can/will you provide examples of any changes made to the project design or scope as a result of community input?
- Will you publish a summary of all community feedback received, and provide explanations on how each concern was addressed?
- How will you inform the community of any changes or decisions made in response to our feedback?
- Who is responsible for making the final decisions on community feedback, and what criteria do they use to evaluate community concerns?
- Is there an independent review process to ensure that community views are fairly considered?
- Will there be additional rounds of consultation or opportunities for ongoing community input throughout the project's development?
- Will there be additional rounds of consultation or opportunities for ongoing community input throughout the project's lifespan?
- If residents have concerns after the initial consultation, what mechanisms are in place for them to voice these concerns and seek updates?
- Do you have examples from past projects where community input led to significant project adjustments or reconsiderations?
- How has feedback from communities impacted other similar projects your team has developed?
- How will you measure the success of this consultation process? Are there specific benchmarks or indicators to ensure meaningful community involvement?
- What steps are in place to ensure community members feel their input has been valued and taken seriously?
- What is your commitment to addressing concerns raised by local residents, even if they result in challenging or altering project plans?
- How will you demonstrate that community concerns are taken as seriously as other aspects of the development process, such as regulatory or financial considerations?
- How will feedback from this consultation impact project planning?

- How will the developer address quality-of-life concerns for residents near the proposed solar farm?
- What is the construction timeline?
- Will there be a dedicated community liaison throughout the project?
- Are there sufficient staffing resources at Kingsway to respond to concerns in a timely manner? Responses from enquiries@kingswaysolar.co.uk have generally been very slow to date.

5. Alternative Site Considerations

Background:

The Kingsway solar farm proposal is part of a broader trend in solar development across East Anglia, where several large-scale projects are already planned or underway. The Climate Change Committee estimates that achieving net-zero goals will require 0.6% of UK land to be allocated to solar energy, underscoring the need for a carefully managed national strategy. The forthcoming National Land Use Framework¹⁵ is expected to guide this process, providing a coordinated approach to land use for renewable energy. In this context, proposals like Kingsway should ideally be assessed alongside other regional projects to ensure the optimal use of land and minimal impact on communities. Transparency from developers, including Downing LLP, regarding all sites under consideration would further support this goal, helping both communities and policymakers understand the landscape of solar developments in the area.

Additionally, the UK's renewable energy sector is facing a substantial backlog, with approximately 700 GW of projects awaiting¹⁶ grid connection due to infrastructure constraints. This overcapacity highlights the need for developers to justify individual projects like Kingsway within the national and regional pipeline. Understanding how Kingsway fits into a cohesive strategy is essential, particularly given the current network capacity in East Anglia and the potential strain from additional large projects.

Concerns:

Given the extensive experience with smaller solar farms, which often have strong business cases and manageable community impacts, the choice to develop a large-scale project like Kingsway raises several concerns. Smaller projects typically allow for easier implementation of mitigation measures, which have been well-studied and refined over time. Without a clear, demonstrable advantage over these smaller developments, the decision to pursue a large-scale solar farm appears motivated by profitability. This focus on scale could adversely affect local residents, who may experience a decline in quality of life due to the project's increased visual and environmental footprint.

¹⁵ https://www.the-ies.org/sites/default/files/policy/land_use_framework_briefing_parliamentary_forward_view.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cly4kwep3kwo>

Questions:

- What alternative sites were considered, and why was this site chosen?
- Has the developer explored siting the solar farm closer to industrial areas with existing infrastructure?
- Would the developer consider scaling down the project to reduce impact on residential areas?

6. Flood Risk and Water Management

Background:

Solar farms may alter drainage and increase flood risks¹⁷¹⁸, although the impact can be reduced with a proper management strategy. The increase in hard surface area can lead to greater volumes of runoff into drainage ditches. The design of the panel spacing needs to take into account these changed water flows and how this may affect the local drainage system. The Cambridge area relies heavily on the chalk aquifer for its water supply. It is essential that the development does not reduce the amount of water which soaks into the aquifer. The design of the solar farm and BESS must ensure that there is not a risk contaminating water courses or the aquifer.

Concerns:

There is already a well-known issue of localised flooding in some parts of the proposed area, and mitigation in these places will require particular attention.

The chalk aquifer is of critical importance to the local water supply, and must be protected.

Questions:

- How will the developer manage increased water runoff, especially in areas with seasonal waterlogging or flooding?
- What flood risk assessments have been conducted, and what measures are in place to prevent adverse effects on local water quality?
- What provisions will be made to protect the chalk aquifer from pollutants?
- What provisions will be made to ensure that rainfall is absorbed into the aquifer and not diverted into drainage schemes?

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https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/44/planning/1096/solar_farm_development_flood_guidance

e

18 <https://www.nrel.gov/solar/market-research-analysis/pv-smart.html>

7. Long-Term Viability and Maintenance

Background:

Solar farms require maintenance and management of the technical equipment and infrastructure for safe and economic operation, and also the land they occupy for management of the local ecology and amenity. This will require a number of access points to the site, and increased traffic in the area throughout the life of the project.

We discuss the need for long-term biodiversity management and monitoring plan in 'Environmental Impact and Biodiversity'. We would stress that this operational activity should be given the same weight and importance as the technical and infrastructure maintenance regime.

Concerns:

The increase in traffic during operation will add to traffic through the villages, and also travel through the many narrow (some single track) roads. Given the dispersed nature of the proposal this may result in numerous access points that currently do not have adequate road infrastructure to cope with either construction or operational traffic. BESS will need very good and reliable access for emergency services.

Questions:

- What is the projected operational lifespan of the solar farm, and what are the likely uses of the land post decommissioning?
- How many site access points will there be and what sort of traffic type and frequency can be expected?
- Will local roads be altered and/or improved to achieve good access?
- Will biodiversity, amenity and land management be given equal status with technical maintenance?
- Are financial provisions in place to guarantee site restoration after the project's life?
- Are legal provisions in place to guarantee site restoration after the project's life?

8. Economic and Regional Impact

Background:

The transition to a net-zero economy brings the potential for economic growth and job creation, with projects like this solar farm promising new opportunities. However, such large-scale developments also change the economic landscape for local communities, particularly in rural areas where traditional employment is heavily tied to agriculture. This shift may create a need for reskilling and upskilling within the region, but it remains uncertain whether local communities will benefit directly from the new jobs, or if specialised roles will primarily be filled by workers from outside the area.

In addition to the potential for agricultural job losses, property values are a significant economic concern for nearby residents. The installation of large solar panels and ancillary equipment close to residential areas may lead to decreased property values, impacting individual financial security and the broader village economy. This potential for reduced house values, along with a long-term lock on the land beneath the solar farm, raises questions about both immediate economic impacts and the future use of the land after decommissioning. For instance, if the land were to be reclassified as brownfield, it might later become available for residential or commercial development, further altering the community's character and economy.

Concerns:

The solar farm project could have a range of impacts on the village economy, local tourism, property values, and agriculture. Replacing agricultural land with solar infrastructure may lead to job losses in farming, while the specialised jobs created by the project may not necessarily go to local residents if skills are imported from outside the area. This shift could result in a net negative effect on the local economy and diminish traditional employment opportunities. Additionally, the project's impact on land values, along with the long-term lock on the land under the solar farm, may influence property values, especially for those in close proximity to solar panels and related equipment.

Questions:

- How will the project address its cumulative economic impact on the villages?
- What job and training opportunities will be provided to the local community (whether in technical maintenance or biodiversity management and monitoring, or other opportunities).
- What commitments are being made to support and reinvest in the local economy, and will there be tangible benefits for the local community?
- What measures will ensure that job and training opportunities created by this project are available to local residents, including roles in technical maintenance, biodiversity management, and monitoring?
- How will the developer address potential reductions in local employment and revenue from the agricultural sector due to the conversion of farmland to solar use?
- How will the developer protect local property values, especially for homes in close proximity to the solar farm?
- What investments will be made in developing new green infrastructure, such as cycle paths, improved public transport links to reduce car dependence, subsidised access to upgraded home insulation, green heating solutions, domestic solar installations, and electric vehicle schemes?

9. Loss of Amenity

Background:

The proposed solar farm raises important questions about balancing renewable energy objectives with preserving local amenities, particularly public footpaths and the landscape's visual character. In England, public footpaths and byways are legally protected under the

Highways Act 1980, which establishes the public's right to access these routes without obstruction. These footpaths offer essential recreational space, supporting physical activity and well-being by providing accessible, natural settings for exercise and relaxation.¹⁹ According to FootpathMap data (see below), multiple footpaths and bridleways could be affected by the proposed development. Given their role in enhancing community well-being and their legal status, any changes to these paths must be carefully managed to uphold public rights and ensure continued access.

Concerns:

The proposed solar farm raises serious concerns about the loss of amenity for residents and visitors, particularly with regard to access to public footpaths and the visual impact on the landscape. Public footpaths provide essential recreational space, contributing to the health and well-being of the community by promoting physical activity and offering a natural setting for relaxation.



Source: Footpaths / byways affected - taken from FootpathMap

The development threatens to obstruct or divert these paths, reducing accessibility to cherished open spaces and interrupting well-established routes. There are concerns regarding the infringement of legal protection and management of these rights of way.

Additionally, the visual intrusion of a large-scale solar installation would fundamentally alter the character of the area, replacing scenic views with rows of industrial structures. Alternatively, once open paths will run between high hedges. These changes could diminish the enjoyment of the landscape for both residents and visitors, impacting mental well-being by removing access to green, open spaces that are vital for stress relief and connection to nature. It is crucial that these concerns are addressed to preserve both the physical and mental health benefits these natural amenities provide.

¹⁹ Open Spaces Society (2024) 'Rights of Way / Footpaths' Available at: <https://www.oss.org.uk/what-do-we-fight-for/footpaths-rights-of-way/>

Questions:

- How will the project impact public rights of way, footpaths, and bridleways? Will there be closures or diversions?
- Will any proposed changes be compliant with statutory protections under the Highways Act 1980, ensuring paths remain legally accessible?
- What steps will ensure the safety and accessibility of these paths during and after construction? How will the developer adhere to legal requirements to maintain unrestricted public access?
- What type and height of fencing are proposed along public rights of way, and what will be the minimum width of paths to ensure they remain accessible and comfortable for public use?
- Will the project include plans to enhance recreational spaces, such as additional walking or cycling paths, and how will these integrate with buffer zones, biodiversity corridors, and connections between villages?
- Are there plans to develop green infrastructure within the project area to support sustainable access and provide amenities for community use?
- What measures will be implemented to minimise visual intrusion along public rights of way, particularly from structures and fencing? Are there landscaping or screening plans that align with countryside protection guidelines to maintain the area's natural character?

10. Disruption During Construction

Background:

The Kingsway solar farm project involves the installation of approximately 1.25 million solar panels, along with battery storage units and various ancillary equipment. This substantial undertaking will require a lengthy, intensive construction phase, during which there will be a significant increase in heavy vehicle traffic in the area, including a range of large construction vehicles not typically seen on local roads. This heightened traffic load is likely to put pressure on the local road network, potentially leading to congestion and impacting road quality.

In addition to traffic, construction activities are expected to generate significant noise, including sounds from heavy machinery, impact, and vibration. Noise can disrupt daily life for residents, especially those near the construction site, as well as disturb the open, quiet nature of the surrounding landscape. The project may also involve construction lighting, creating concerns about potential light pollution in rural areas where ambient lighting is minimal. These factors combined could create a challenging environment for residents and may impact the quality of life in nearby communities.

Concerns:

While the local community is accustomed to seasonal farm traffic, construction-related vehicle movement will be both more frequent and diverse in nature, potentially affecting road safety, causing congestion, and impacting the integrity of local roads. This could restrict

residents' freedom of movement and create hazards on roads not designed to handle such sustained, heavy vehicle loads.

The noise generated during construction presents another concern. Beyond the usual traffic sounds, there will likely be impact noise, vibrations, and other industrial sounds associated with large-scale construction, which could affect residents across a wide area due to the openness of the landscape. The potential for light pollution from construction site lighting may further disrupt the area, particularly during early morning or late evening hours when construction activities extend outside normal daylight.

The disruption to wildlife during construction could result in critical species (such as skylarks) being excluded for one or more seasons, making their recovery unlikely or at least very difficult.

Questions:

- What is the anticipated duration of the construction phase, including any planned seasonal breaks or downtime?
- What are the sources and expected duration of noise during construction, and what measures will be taken to reduce disruption?
- Will construction site lighting be used, and if so, will it be turned off at night to minimise light pollution?
- Will any local roads be temporarily closed or restricted during construction, and how will residents be informed of these changes to minimise inconvenience?
- How many access points to the site are planned, and will any new roads be built or existing ones upgraded to support construction traffic?
- What are the planned working hours during construction, and will there be restrictions to limit noise and activity during early mornings, evenings, and weekends?
- What traffic management plans are in place to prevent congestion, maintain road safety, and protect the condition of local roads during the construction phase?
- What measures are planned to repair any damage to roads, verges, or other local infrastructure resulting from construction activities?
- How will disruption to wildlife be managed? (With reference to individual species.)

11. Battery storage and other technical infrastructure

Background:

According to Kingsway: *“With the co-location of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), Kingsway will be able to provide ancillary services to help stabilise the local and national grid network. The addition of the BESS will also allow Kingsway to efficiently use the solar energy, storing surplus energy at points of low demand, releasing it when needed.”* (Source: Kingsway Solar Farm Proposal <https://kingswaysolarfarm.co.uk/proposals/>)

Concerns:

Battery storage has become a key component of large solar farms. Lithium-ion batteries are known to have inherent risk that can lead to catastrophic failure and hard-to-manage fires. EPRI in the US has recorded 72 grid-scale battery failure events in the period 2011-2023,

with one of these in the UK.²⁰ As the number of installations in the UK increases this failure rate will increase in the country. Battery storage fires require copious quantities of water to contain them, and a full fire safety plan should indicate how this water, likely to be contaminated with chemicals from the batteries, will be contained²¹. It should also detail what risks are posed by the proximity of battery storage units to residential properties. Inverters and transformers also carry some risk, and these should also be explained to the residents.

These pieces of equipment generate noise, and a noise mitigation strategy should be put in place.

Solar farms also have security lighting which can add to light pollution for the area. This could greatly impact the well-being of residents who value dark skies at night. Such lighting also has detrimental impacts on nocturnal fauna which needs to be taken into account.

Questions:

- How many battery containers will there be, and how will these be placed throughout the solar farm?
- Where are the inverters and transformers planned in relation to residential areas, and what are the plans for visual mitigations?
- What noise mitigation measures will be in place?
- Have the local fire service been consulted, and have their recommendations been accepted?
- What provision will be made to contain water used to extinguish any fires, to prevent contamination of land, watercourses and the chalk aquifer?

12. Mitigations

Background:

While the concerns raised above could be fully resolved only by halting the Kingsway development, if the project is approved, we urge Kingsway to implement extensive mitigations. This large-scale solar project poses significant risks to the local community, landscape, and environment, including the loss of natural views, disruption to public footpaths, potential harm to biodiversity, and increased noise and light pollution. These impacts run counter to the character and needs of the community, who have a vested interest in preserving their rural environment and ensuring minimal disruption to their quality of life.

If the development does proceed, Kingsway must demonstrate a genuine commitment to reducing these impacts by incorporating robust mitigations. These mitigations should reflect the priorities of local residents, ensuring that their rights, the landscape, and environmental

²⁰ EPRI (2024) 'Insights from EPRI's Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) Failure Incident Database: Analysis of Failure Root Cause' Available at: <https://www.epri.com/research/products/000000003002030360>

²¹ INFACTNI – Written evidence (BAT0001) Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/23583/pdf/>

integrity are respected. The following sections outline the key actions and commitments the community requests from Kingsway to address these issues and to offer a degree of protection for both community interests and environmental values.

Concerns:

Without specific mitigations, the Kingsway development could lead to several challenges for the local community, including visual intrusion, reduced access to public spaces, noise, and environmental degradation. There are also concerns about the long-term impact on the landscape, the disturbance of wildlife habitats, and potential conflicts during the construction phase. Effective mitigations are essential to address these issues proactively, ensuring the development respects the local area and provides lasting benefits for the community.

Questions:

If the development is approved, how will the developer consider the following suggested mitigations? Would the developer actively involve the community in their implementation, as well as in any additional measures that may arise throughout the course of the development?

- Landscaping and screening
 - Comprehensive landscaping that includes tree and hedge planting to screen the development from surrounding homes and public spaces. This should be strategically placed to blend with the existing landscape and reduce visual intrusion.
 - A commitment to maintaining and regularly reviewing this screening throughout the life of the project (at Kingsway's expense) to ensure it remains effective, and does not (for example) encroach on footpath width.
- Siting and glint and glare reduction
 - Panels, battery storage units, and other infrastructure should be positioned at a considerable distance from residential properties, public rights of way, and public spaces to reduce visual and noise impact.
 - Implementation of a glint and glare reduction scheme to minimise reflection effects for nearby homes, roads, and footpaths, ensuring compliance with industry standards.
- Public footpaths and rights of way
 - Assurance of a minimum width for footpaths within or around the development, along with suitable hedging to maintain privacy and natural aesthetics for walkers.
 - A clear commitment to upholding the legal protection of all public footpaths and byways under the Highways Act 1980, ensuring that they remain open, accessible, and enjoyable for the community.
- Lighting plan
 - A lighting plan that restricts lighting to essential areas and minimises brightness to prevent light pollution. Lighting should be turned off at night unless absolutely necessary, and any light sources should be directed away from residential properties.
- Construction impact mitigation

- A noise management plan that includes regular monitoring during construction to minimise impact, particularly for residents nearest the site. Consideration should be given to limiting construction activities to designated hours, avoiding early mornings, late evenings, and weekends.
- Traffic management measures to regulate construction vehicles, prevent congestion, and protect the condition of local roads. Any damage caused to roads or verges during construction should be promptly repaired, and residents should be informed of any potential disruptions in advance.
- A plan to manage disruption to wildlife and habitats during construction.
- Wildlife and Biodiversity
 - Establishment of biodiversity corridors, potentially within buffer zones, to connect existing woodland and wildlife areas, preserving local biodiversity and supporting wildlife movement around the site.
 - A habitat management and monitoring plan in line with RSPB guidance for example, including ongoing biodiversity assessments and measures to enhance local flora and fauna over the project's lifetime.
- Dispute resolution mechanism
 - Implementation of a clear, accessible problem resolution mechanism for residents to report issues as they arise, ensuring that concerns are promptly addressed by Kingsway with transparent communication and swift corrective action where necessary.
- Long-Term commitment to land restoration
 - A binding plan for the restoration of the land to its original or an agreed-upon condition at the end of the project's life, ensuring its suitability for agricultural and community use. This plan should include financial provisions for decommissioning to prevent the land from becoming an unproductive brownfield site.

13. Benefits to community

Background:

The Kingsway solar farm project represents a long-term change to the local environment and community, with impacts that will be felt for generations. Given the scale of the development, it is appropriate for Kingsway to offer compensatory benefits that directly address the needs and priorities of the local population. While one-time contributions to the parish council are typical, this approach alone may not provide sufficient benefit or be responsive to evolving community needs over the project's lifespan.

A forward-thinking approach could include both an initial capital provision to compensate for immediate loss of amenity and an ongoing, inflation-proofed fund tied to a percentage of the project's income, ensuring that future generations benefit as well. This fund should be directed and managed by the local community, allowing residents to have a say in its allocation and ensuring that it is used for projects that genuinely benefit the area.

Concerns:

There are concerns that Kingsway may seek to offer minimal concessions or funds that may not adequately address the project's impacts on residents' daily lives, property values, and environmental quality. Without a substantial, community-directed plan, many benefits may only reach wealthier individuals (e.g., investment opportunities or discounted solar panels for homeowners). To truly support all impacted residents, the community requires a mix of upfront and ongoing provisions that address a range of needs, from discounted electricity and improvements to local infrastructure to recreational and environmental enhancements.

Additional areas of concern include the need for improvements to local drainage to mitigate both existing and development-induced flooding, as well as the creation of new footpaths and cycle routes that could connect local villages and provide safe, off-road routes to nearby areas. Meaningful compensations, such as support for property value impacts and measures that enhance public access and connectivity, would go beyond token gestures to genuinely address the community's long-term needs.

Questions:

- What financial incentives or compensations will Kingsway offer to residents heavily impacted by the solar farm, and how will these be structured to provide ongoing benefit?
- Will a community fund be established to support local projects or infrastructure improvements, and who will oversee its management to ensure that it reflects community priorities?
- Is there a plan for an inflation-proofed fund tied to a percentage of the project's income, managed by the community, to address future needs that may arise over the lifetime of the development?
- Will local residents have opportunities to invest in the solar farm or share in its financial returns, and what specific terms will be available to make this accessible to a broad range of residents?
- Will Kingsway offer discounted solar panels, green energy schemes, or other renewable energy benefits to local residents, and if so, how will these options be made available to ensure wide accessibility?
- Is there a plan to offer discounted electricity rates to residents impacted by the solar farm?
- What specific plans are in place to improve local drainage to prevent seasonal and flash flooding, both within and outside of the development's boundaries?
- Will there be new or upgraded footpaths and cycle routes, potentially including safe, off-road paths connecting local villages and into Cambridge?
- Will Kingsway offer compensation for any potential reductions in property value for homes located near the solar farm or battery storage areas?

Conclusion

The Kingsway solar farm proposal, while aimed at supporting renewable energy targets, presents significant concerns for the local community around environmental impacts, visual and noise disturbances, potential economic effects, and the long-term future of the land. This report has thoroughly outlined these issues and stresses that, although we recognise the importance of sustainable energy, developments like Kingsway must be carefully balanced with the well-being of the community, the preservation of the environment, and the protection of agricultural land.

If the project proceeds, the Kingsway Solar Community Action Group requests that developers implement comprehensive mitigations, engage in transparent and meaningful consultation with the community, and provide compensatory benefits that address the specific needs and priorities of residents. These should include establishing a community-managed fund, implementing protections for biodiversity and local ecosystems, addressing visual impacts, and ensuring that the land is restored to its original use once decommissioned.

Ultimately, the Kingsway project could set a benchmark for how renewable energy projects can coexist harmoniously with local communities, safeguarding quality of life, ecological health, and the rural landscape. By addressing the concerns raised in this report, Kingsway can demonstrate its commitment to responsible, community-centred development.

Finally, we urge the government to establish a comprehensive national framework for solar farm developments, recognising the widespread concerns of communities across the country facing similar projects. The growing number of large-scale solar sites and the collective action of various community groups underscore the need for a coordinated approach that balances renewable energy goals with environmental preservation, local livelihoods, and quality of life. A national framework would ensure that these developments are carefully sited, consider cumulative impacts, and include robust guidelines for community involvement, environmental protections, and fair compensations. By providing clear, consistent standards, the government can help communities and developers alike to achieve sustainable energy solutions that respect both the needs of local residents and the long-term health of rural landscapes across the UK.